



## Joseph Welsh Elementary School



### SNAPSHOT

#### BACKGROUND

K-5 Elementary School in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada.

Teachers: 17 plus admin. and support staff  
Students (2010): 351

Date of study: 2006-2010

#### KEY CHALLENGE

To move an already good school to become a great school

#### SOLUTION STRATEGY

Adopt The Leader in Me/7 Habits philosophy and implement it throughout the entire school community

#### RESULTS

68% reduction in discipline problems  
100% of students meeting English standard  
2% of students not meeting Math standard compared to 12% before Leader in Me

### Background

In April 2007, Joseph Welsh Elementary School in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada launched The Leader in Me\* training for all members of its staff plus a dozen parents from the School Council and staff members from neighboring schools. Teaching the course was Muriel Summers, principal of A.B. Coombs Elementary School, in North Carolina, USA, a school noted for its passionate application of The Leader in Me philosophy. By September 2007, all members of staff were trained and ready to implement the program in their classrooms.

As of 2009, Joseph Welsh was teaching 351 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Seventeen teachers plus support staff were on the payroll making for a student/teacher ratio of approximately 1:20. Established in 1960, the school has always been known as a highly achieving school with strong parental and community support. When Principal Mike Fritz decided to

\*At the time called simply the 7 Habits.

adopt the leadership theme and the *7 Habits* concepts, he knew he was launching something that could potentially motivate an already good staff to become a great staff. The school adopted the phrase, “Leaders for Life” as its vision and proceeded to inculcate the new philosophy into all members of the school community.



Mike Fritz believed that The Leader in Me training was just what he needed for his school, and he implemented the program fully. A sign at the entrance to the building makes it clear that Joseph Welsh is a *7 Habits*/Leader in Me school. Hallways are named for the *7 Habits*, and every open space “yells out *7 Habits*” with quotations, murals, paintings, banners, and core values and vision posters. The school website, school clothing, official letterhead, and even meeting agendas all proclaim the schools adherence to the Leader in Me philosophy. Every Fall, all new staff take *7 Habits* training (Signature Series) taught by Principal Mike Fritz and another teacher. During the summers, staff are assigned to read material connected with the *7 Habits* as part of their professional development, and it appears that The Leader in Me/ *7 Habits* philosophy is used by every teacher in every class.

In May 2009 and again in January 2010, the school opened a Leader in Me Leadership Day to the public. Over 150 people attended, some from as far away as Nova Scotia. Sean Covey of FranklinCovey was the keynote speaker in 2009. Information meetings for parents about The Leader in Me were held in February 2010.

Principal Fritz claims that his school is “all in” when it comes to The Leader in Me. He makes it clear that every teacher in every classroom must be conversant with and use the *7 Habits* whenever appropriate. Indeed, to quote Principal Fritz, the Habits are “ubiquitous” at Joseph Welsh, a fact confirmed by Red Deer School Superintendent Don Falk who, upon visiting the school, found that students, not just teachers, were able to name and show they understood the Habits. In a May 2008 survey, 94 percent of students said they knew most of the *7 Habits*, and 92 percent said they used them in their school life.

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It is possible that when a school adopts The Leader in Me, some teachers may not fully catch the vision. They may believe that as long as some or most of the teachers are implementing the approach, they themselves are free not to use the Habits in their own classroom. Such was the case with one teacher interviewed by Center for Advanced Research staff. He said the teacher across the hall used the Habits but he did not. Principal Fritz claims that no teacher in his school would ever give a response like that because everyone understands and uses the Habits on a regular basis.

If there is any school, then, that should be producing measurable differences in school atmosphere and student performance, it should be Joseph Welsh. Is that the case?

Joseph Welsh also maintains disciplinary data, and it is to those we turn first.

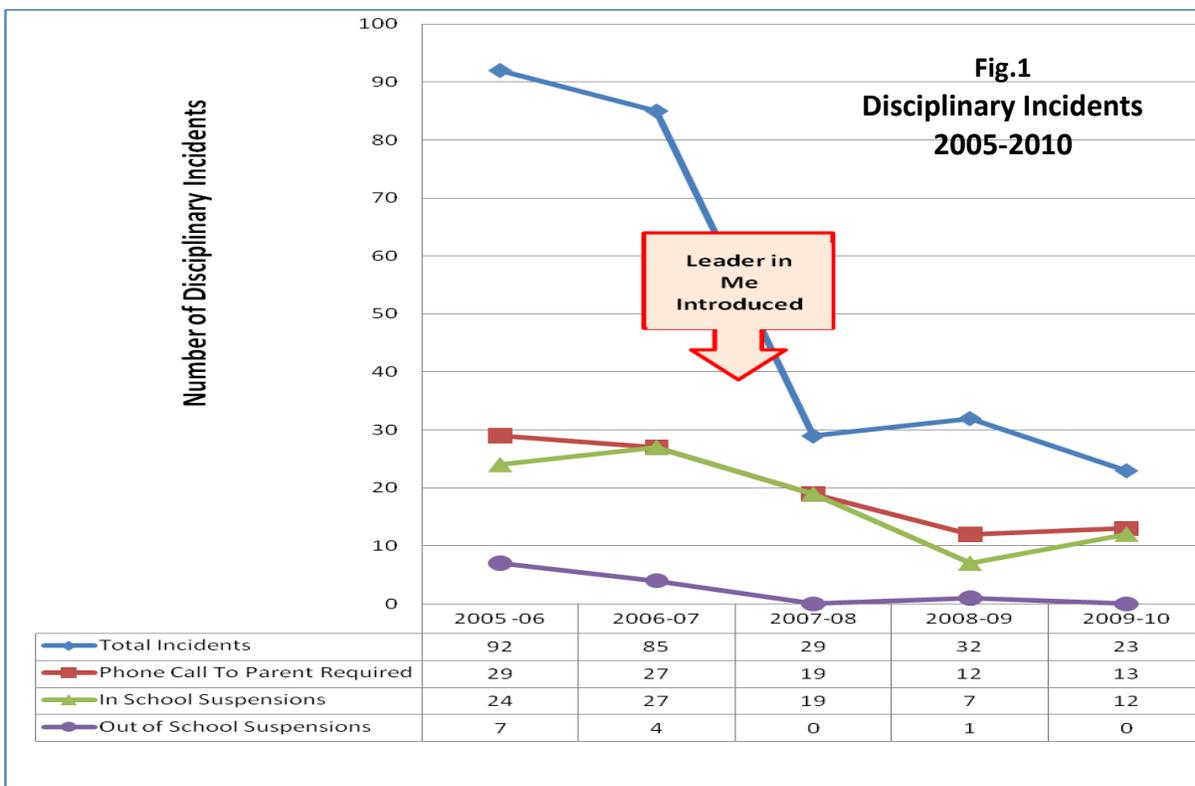
### Discipline at Joseph Welsh

In 2010, the Center for Advanced Research at FranklinCovey began investigating the impact, if any, of The Leader in Me program on a range of customary school outcomes at Joseph Welsh.

Figure 1 shows changes in disciplinary referrals two years before and three years after The Leader in Me was introduced to the school. For the two years before, the number of annual disciplinary referrals averaged 88.5. Referrals after The Leader in Me have been reduced to a yearly average of 28—a 68 percent reduction in overall disciplinary referrals.

Fortunately, the school keeps excellent records on a variety of achievement measures, and Alberta Education conducts an Accountability Pillar Survey each May of students, parents, and staff. The school made the findings available to the Center for analysis. Included in the 16 measures surveyed and/or reported are 9 which are relevant to Joseph Welsh Elementary namely, student performance on standardized tests, level of parental involvement in the school, school safety, school improvement, education quality, and other similar measures.

Before The Leader in Me, the combined in-school and out-of-school suspensions averaged 31; after The Leader in Me, the same category averaged 13—a 58 percent reduction in suspensions. Since the implementation of The Leader in Me, there has been only one out of school suspension in three years, whereas before there were between five to six per year.



Thus, the data support the assertion that discipline at Joseph Welsh has improved dramatically since the advent of The Leader in Me program. Commenting on the improved environment is the school secretary who wrote in April 2010, “I have worked as a school secretary in Red Deer Public School District for 30 years, 11 of them at Joseph Welsh School. One of the things that most impressed me about incorporating the ‘7 Habits of Highly Effective People’ into our Character Education program was the decrease in the number of students being sent to the office for various negative reasons. I used to feel more like a ‘babysitter’ than a secretary. After incorporating the 7 Habits, we still have students coming to the office but on a much more positive note, i.e. sharing stories and accomplishments, receiving Striving for Excellence

Awards, or sometimes just to talk or share a hug. I’m sure that each of the 7 Habits has inspired students and staff, as well as parents, to take responsibility for their actions and truly care about each other and our world. The entire school exudes a totally different atmosphere of safety, caring and love.”

### Academic Performance at Joseph Welsh

What about student academic performance on standardized Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT)? As noted above, Joseph Welsh has always been a high-performing school. In 2005, for example, only 5.7 percent of the students were below standard on English tests. But after The Leader in Me, the percentage dropped to 1.9 percent in 2008 and to zero in 2009 (Figure 2).

**Fig. 2**  
**English Performance**  
**% Below Standard**

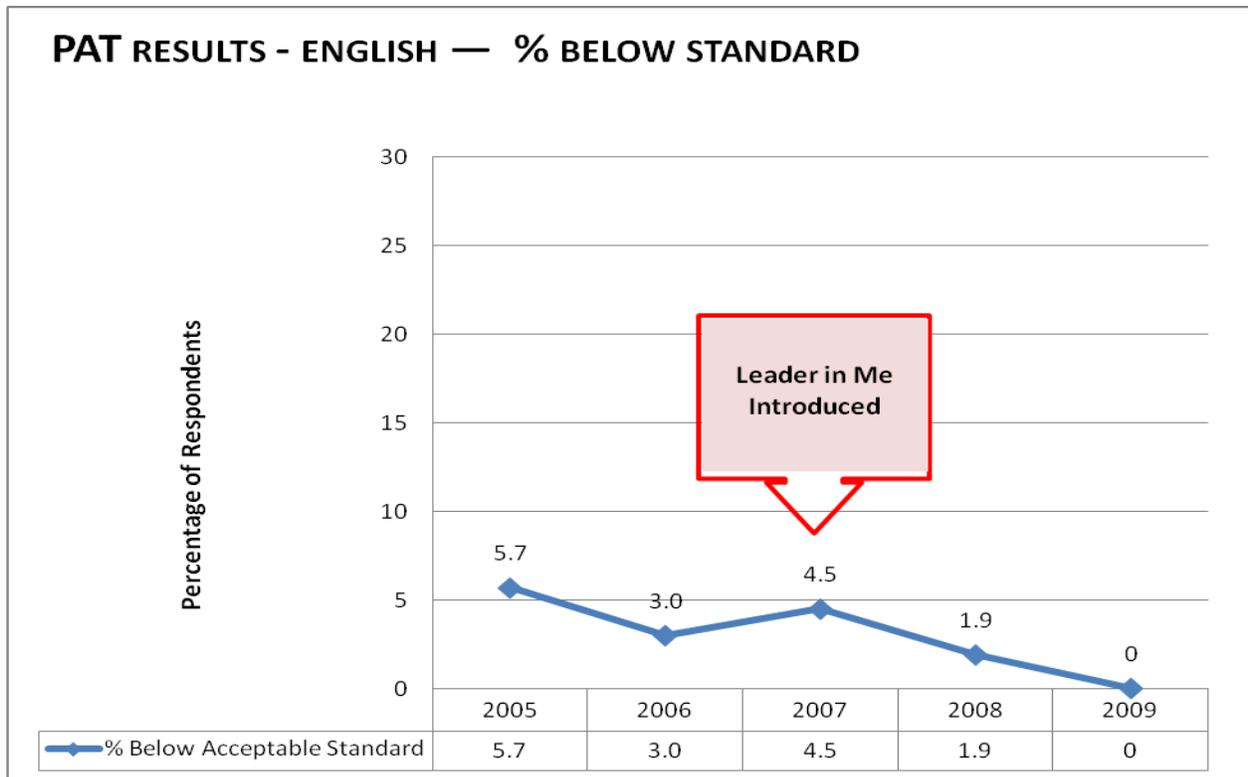


Figure 3 shows the same data from the flip-side: the percentage of students who achieved at the acceptable standard (trending upward to 100% in 2009), and it also shows the percentage of students who achieved a standard of excellence (up after The Leader in Me introduced and then slightly and inexplicably down in 2009).

**Fig. 3**  
**English Performance**  
**Excellence Standard**

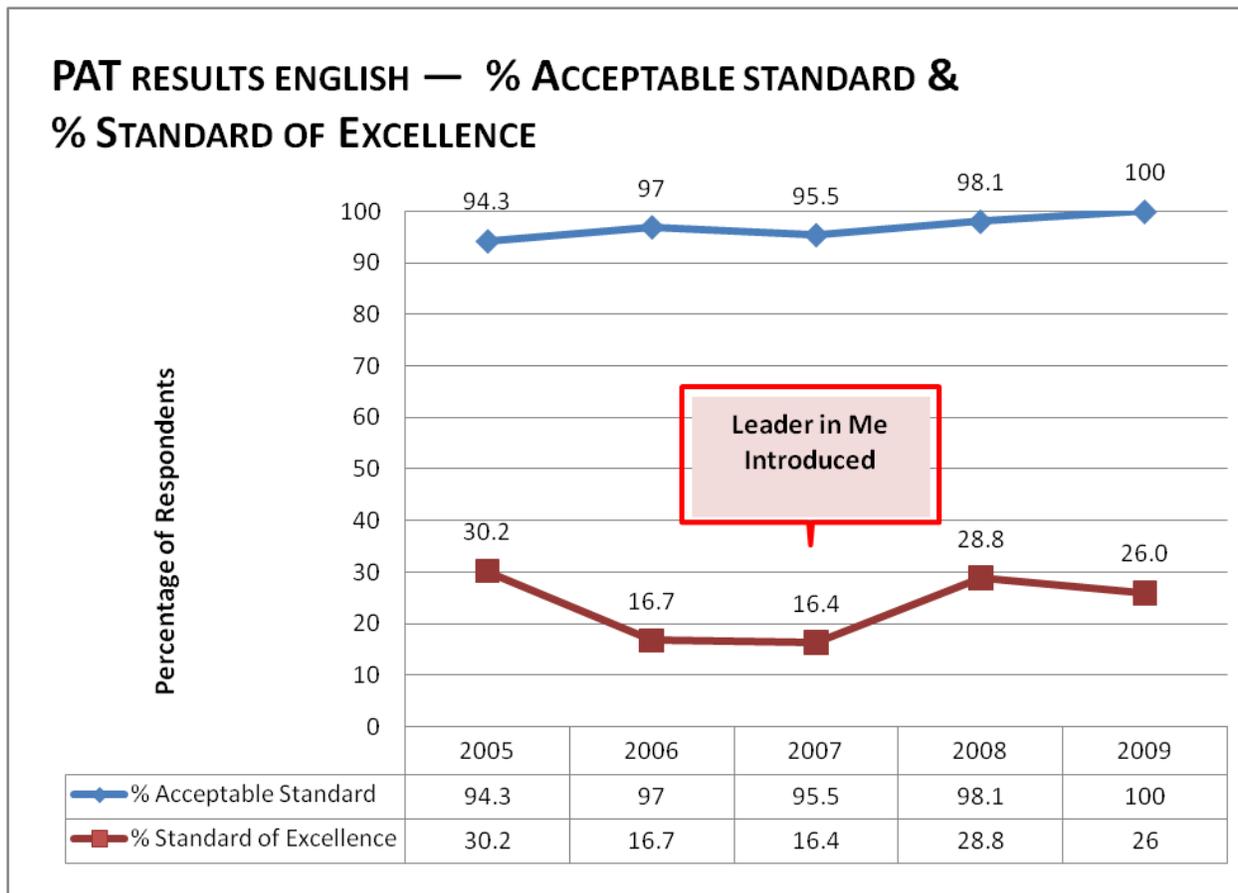


Figure 4 shows student academic performance on the Provincial Achievement Test in mathematics. It shows the percentage of students who did not achieve at least the acceptable standard. Note that since 2007 when The Leader in Me was introduced, the percentage of students not achieve at an acceptable level has dropped substantially. In 2010 only 2 percent of students failed to meet the math standard compared to nearly 12 percent when The Leader in Me was adopted.

**Fig. 4**  
**Math Performance**  
**Acceptable Standard**

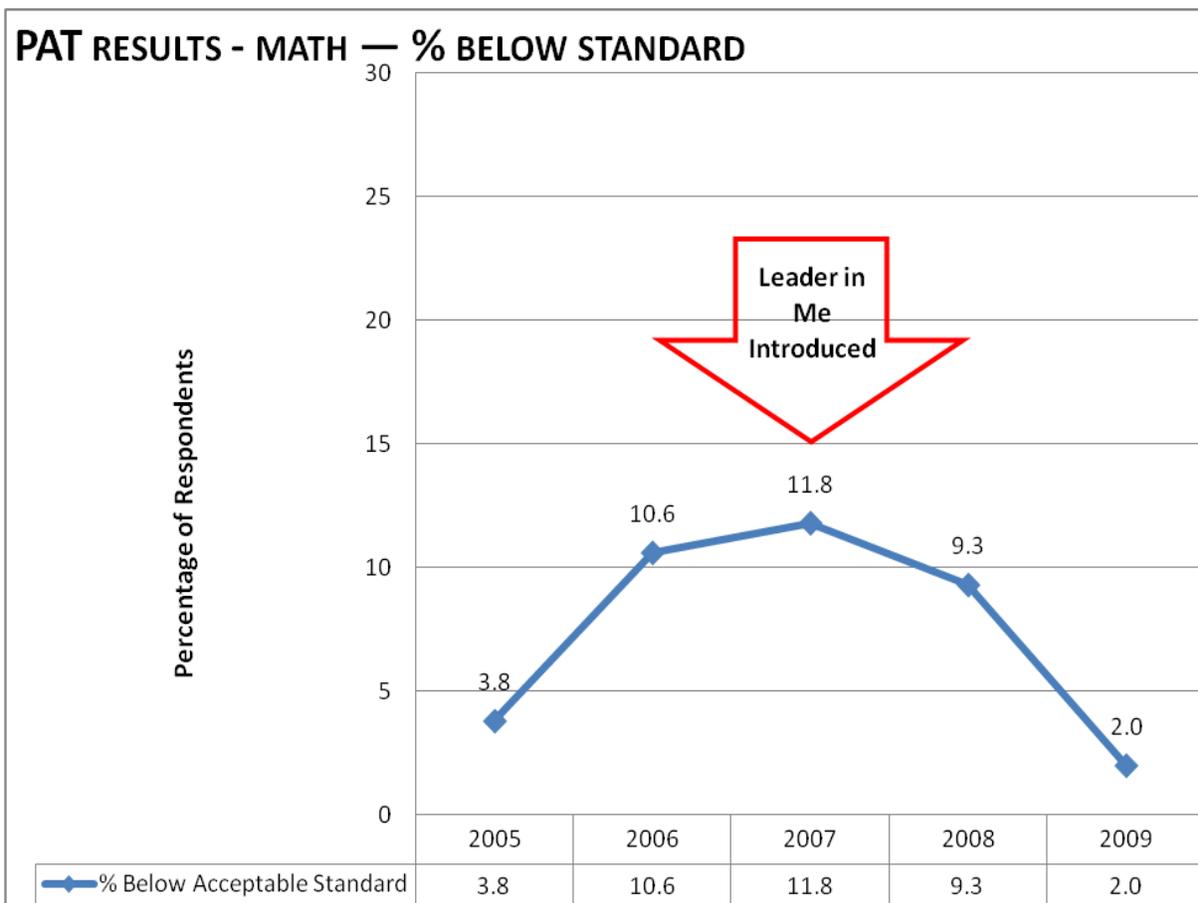
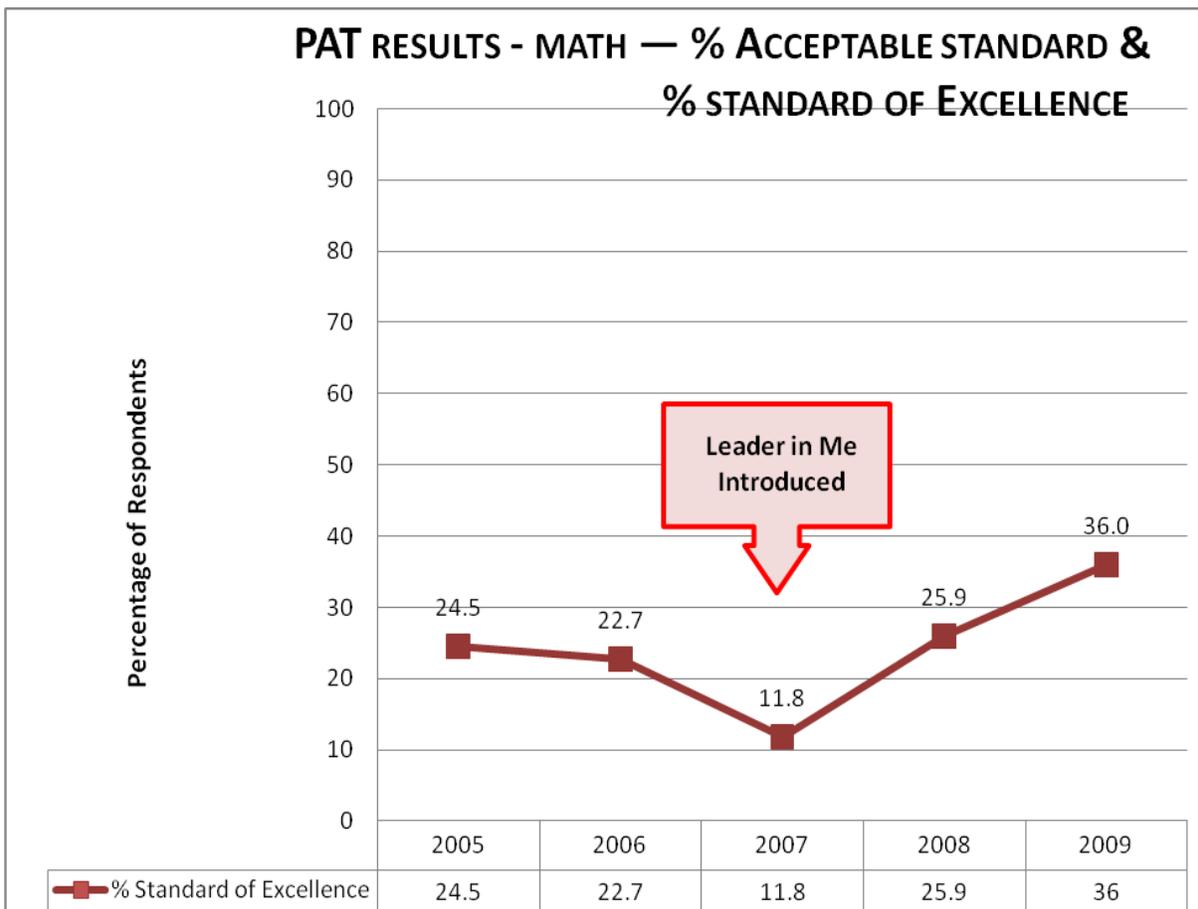


Figure 5 shows the percentage of students achieving at the “standard of excellence” level in mathematics from 2005 to 2009. Note that when The Leader in Me was introduced in 2007, nearly 12 percent of student were achieving at the “excellence” level. By 2009, 36 percent were achieving at the “excellence” level and that what had been a declining, negative trend had been reversed.

**Fig. 5**  
**Math Performance**  
**Excellence Standard**



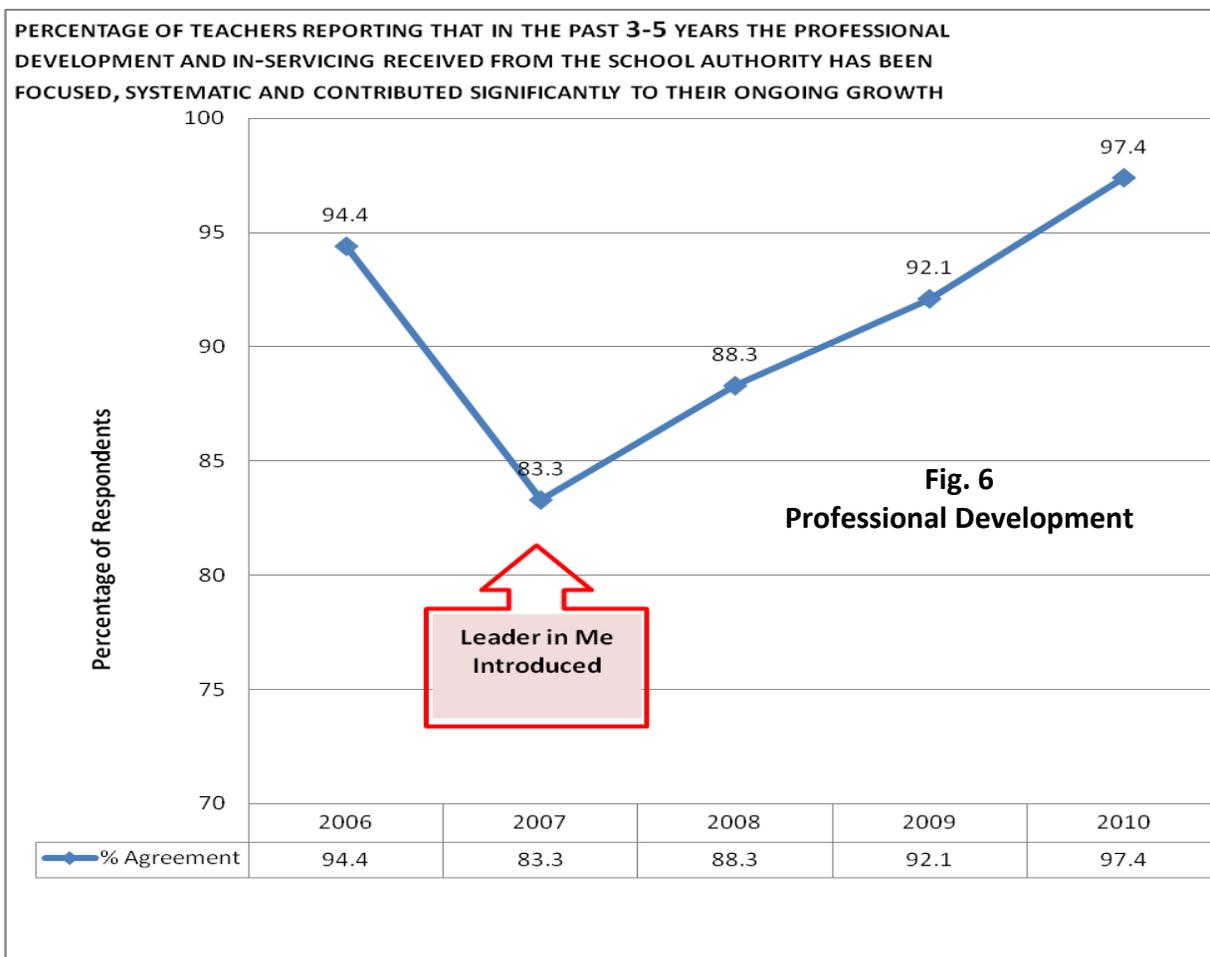
Thus far in this study, we have found a school that, since the introduction of the Leadership theme, has had far fewer disciplinary incidents and has reversed downward trends in English and math achievement tests, even to the extent that 100 percent of the students are performing English at the acceptable standard and 36 percent are performing math at the excellence standard.

### School Atmosphere: Teachers

But what about the atmosphere of the school? Has it become intensely competitive and stressful for the teachers? Are parents pleased with what they see and with their level of involvement in the school? And, most importantly, what do students say about their educational lives at Joseph Welsh? Let us turn to these questions.

First, the teachers. With new concepts of leadership to introduce into their lessons on top of other things they are required to teach, would it not be the case that teachers might feel unprepared? That is not the case. Figure 6 shows that teachers seem to applaud the professional preparation they are receiving as teachers at Joseph Welsh:

What do parents and teachers think about the content of the curriculum as it relates to developing life skills? Figure 7 shows that, as of 2010, 100 percent of parents and teachers agreed that what the students are learning at Joseph Welsh will make them successful in the world of work. Notice that before the Leadership theme was introduced, only 69 percent felt this way about Joseph Welsh.



Teachers had other positive things to say about Joseph Welsh. For instance, 68 percent of them felt that the quality of education at the school had improved. This compared to 61 percent who felt that way the year before The Leader in Me was introduced. Of significance is that after one full year of using The Leader in Me, 95 percent of teachers said the quality of education had improved compared to the previous year. 100 percent of grade 4 teachers felt that way after one full year of The Leader in Me compared to only 33 percent the year before The Leader in Me was launched.

### School Atmosphere: Students

Do students feel the same way about Joseph Welsh? Is Joseph Welsh a comfortable place for them? The surveys of students in grade 4 from 2006 to 2010 reveal the following:

79 percent of grade 4 students in 2010 reported that most students followed the school rules; this compared to only 67 percent who felt that way in 2006, the year before The Leader in Me was introduced.

87 percent of grade 4 students in 2010 and 88 percent of students in 2009 reported that most students helped each other at school; this compared to only 70 percent who felt that way in 2006, the year before The Leader in Me was introduced.

79 percent of grade 4 students in 2010 reported that students respect each other at school; this compared to 74 percent who felt that way in 2006, the year before The Leader in Me was introduced.

### School Atmosphere: Parents

Parents too seem quite satisfied with how Joseph Welsh is conducting the business of educating their children. For example:

85 percent of parents in 2010 were satisfied with their involvement with the educational decisions regarding their children; this compares to 81 percent in the year before the Leader in Me was introduced.

94 percent of parents in 2010 were satisfied with the opportunities they had to be involved at the school; this compared to 89 percent in the year before The Leader in Me was introduced.

53 percent of parents in 2010 said the quality of education at Joseph Welsh had improved compared to 44 percent who felt that way the year before The Leader in Me was introduced.

In addition to these findings, we report below the results of other surveys taken in 2008 and 2009:

Teachers: 100 percent said that the *7 Habits* helped them in teaching students the principles they needed in their daily lives.

Parents: 97 percent wanted to see the *7 Habits* program continue at the school.

Students: 95 percent said they got chances to be leaders in the classroom or school.

## Commentary on the Results

We are extremely impressed by the discipline, academic performance, and other school results reported here. But as much as we would like to, it is not possible to claim that the improvement in discipline, student performance in English and math, and teacher, student, and parent satisfaction with the school is the direct result of The Leader in Me. We do not have proof of causality here. But we do have correlations in the expected direction. That is, after The Leader in Me was introduced, discipline improved, student performance improved, and teacher, student, and parent satisfaction went up. It is possible that others factors caused the improvement; we have not controlled for other influences on the results reported above.

However, those “on the ground” at Joseph Welsh such as Principal Mike Fritz believe that the improvements are the result of The Leader in Me process; as they see it, the process provided

teachers and administrators with the tools needed to move an already good school to the level of a great school. If Mike Fritz is correct, we could hypothesize that there would be a much larger number of successful principals if they adopted the process Joseph Welsh uses. ■

## Sources

Government of Alberta, Canada, Accountability Pillar Survey, March 30, 2010

Communication from Mike Fritz, June 28, 2010

Joseph Welsh Elementary School Website, accessed July 15, 2010

Stephen R. Covey, *The Leader in Me*, Simon and Schuster, 2008: 128-130

The primary surveys reported here were conducted by Schollie Research and Consulting