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Executive Summary

In the spring of 2014, the Community Building Institute (CBI) worked with Pleasant Ridge Montessori (PRM) administration, parents and caregivers, and community stakeholders to identify priorities and action steps for the Community Learning Center and after school provider.

Based on feedback from surveys, focus groups, open houses, and committee meetings, the following school and community priorities were identified, with goals and action steps outlined for each within the report:

**SCHOOL PRIORITIES:**
- After School Program
- Athletics
- Science and engineering (STEM)

**COMMUNITY PRIORITIES:**
- Pleasant Ridge Library
- Recreation Center
- Kennedy Heights Art Center

**ADDED PRIORITY:**
- Communication

The committee also identified criteria for selecting the best after school provider for PRM:

- A full understanding of the enrollment capacity (number of students to be admitted) and clarity on the process for enrollment
- Alignment with the PRM positive school culture which should follow into the after school program
- Clear communication about lesson plans
- Communication with parents on a regular basis – a monthly newsletter, other communication should be discussed
- An understanding of how quiet time and alone time will be provided for students when it is appropriate
- Parents want the opportunity to know the staff and have regular communication with them

This process recognizes that there are many opportunities for making PRM the best that it can be but that to accomplish the goals identified by parents, volunteers, and teachers, everyone involved must be focused on priorities during the 2014-2015 school year.
Process

In the spring of 2014, the Community Building Institute (CBI) worked with Pleasant Ridge Montessori (PRM) administration, parents and caregivers, and community stakeholders to identify priorities and action steps for the Community Learning Center and after school provider. Parents were engaged throughout the process in focus groups, committee meetings, open houses, and surveys used to establish key priority areas for the 2014-2015 school year and beyond. School administration and community stakeholders also offered feedback on priorities and recommendations.

This report will outline the PRM engagement process and recommendations for priorities that were identified during the process. The key components of the engagement strategy include the following:

- Surveys and focus groups with parents, teachers, and volunteers to understand existing activities and programs and future needs
- Asset inventory of assets within the school and in the community
- Meetings with parents, school principal and teachers, and community stakeholders to establish priorities and recommendations

This process is intended to directly inform decisions made for the 2014-2015 school year. The seven priorities identified, and progress made in each area, should be revisited regularly and updated as needed moving beyond the 2014-2015 school year.
Surveys, Meetings, & Interviews

Three separate surveys captured feedback from parents, teachers, and PRM volunteers. Surveys were available online and in hard-copy. Surveys were collected at the pick-up line and at after school pick-up on several occasions.

The following questions were asked in the parent surveys and are representative of questions asked on the teacher and volunteer surveys:

- What kind of activities are most helpful to your child?
- Where do you access activities and programs now?
- How important is cost, activity schedule, location, and how activities support learning and child development in selecting child care activities for your child?
- Do you pay for activities and programs for your child?
- To what degree does the cost of activities and programs determine whether or not your child participates in them?
- Who are the people and places in your community that support your children?
- Are there places or people in the community that the school should connect with that would benefit your child?
- What could Pleasant Ridge Montessori do, or do more of, to support your child?

124 total surveys were collected: 93 parent surveys, 25 teacher surveys, and 6 volunteer surveys.

PARENT SURVEY SUMMARY

Who are the families that completed the survey?

Most parents responding to the survey had one or two children enrolled at PRM (51% and 45% respectively). A little more than half of parents had children enrolled in the 3-6 Classroom (54%) and 6-9 Classroom (55%). About a quarter of parents had children in the 9-12 Classroom (24%). Nearly half of parents reported that their child had attended a school other than PRM (46%). Most families lived in Pleasant Ridge (60%), followed by Amberly Village (13%), and Golf Manor (10%), and Kennedy Heights (7%). About 10% lived in a community other than those listed above (Price Hill, Bond Hill, Madisonville, etc.).
What activities are most helpful for children?

The following sampling of responses were given for the open-ended question “What kinds of activities are most helpful for your child? Activities could include after school programs, in school enrichment, or summer activities.”:

- After school program
- Sports/athletics
- Outdoor activities
- Gifted/enrichment activities
- Special after school activities (pottery, Hog Jog, Webby dance)
- Tutoring
- Reading and homework time
- Summer camp
- Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts
- Foreign languages
- Science programming (Mad Science)
- Green team, gardening

What factors are most important when selecting activities?

We asked parents to rank how important cost, activity schedule, location, and activities that support learning and child development were on a scale from not important to very important (answer options: not important, not very important, neutral, somewhat important, very important). Nearly all parents felt that the quality of activities (“activities that support learning and child development are offered”) was an important factor in selecting activities (94% said it was “somewhat important” or “very important”).

Parents also rated cost (84%), activity schedule (85%), and location (84%) as important (percentage represents those that responded “somewhat important” or “very important”).

More than half of parents paid for all activities (54%) while more than one-third paid for some activities (37%).

We also asked whether the cost of activities and programs determines whether or not a child can participate in the activity or program. Nearly half said that cost does somewhat determine participation (48%) while nearly one-quarter said cost definitely does determine participation (25%).

Where are activities and programs located?

We asked where parents accessed programs and activities, allowing parents to choose more than one option. Parents gave the following responses:

- Pleasant Ridge Montessori (79%)
- Other (35%) (write-in responses included churches, other recreation centers and YMCAs, martial arts and studios, zoo, private music lessons)
- Norwood YMCA (23%)
- Pleasant Ridge Recreation Center (20%)
- Mayerson JCC (18%)
Who are the people and places in the community that support children?

Many of the responses to this question were similar to those for the question regarding activity and program location. The following sampling of responses were given to the open-ended question:

- YMCA and Mayerson JCC
- Neighbors, friends, and family
- Recreation centers and parks
- After school program
- Churches
- Sitters and day care providers
- Sports teams and coaches
- Summer camps

What could Pleasant Ridge Montessori do, or do more of, to support your child?

This question asked what PRM could do more of to support children directly but also what community connections PRM might explore that would benefit children. The following sampling of responses were given to the open-ended question:

- Explore partnerships with nearby schools and churches
- Give more notice time for events
- More after school clubs or activities directly after school that are affordable or income-based (more activities on site, arts, music, foreign language, science, math, Montessori-focused activities, etc.)
- Partner with parks and recreation centers
- More in-school enrichment (bring more professionals from community into classroom, science and math)
- Create a better system to allow for some diversity of programming
- Expand summer camp and sports for preschoolers
- Tap parents and community to bring resources to the school
- Downtime during after school activities
- Better Montessori homework support in after school programming
- More activities outside, in the garden

TEACHER SURVEY SUMMARY

What activities are most helpful for children?

The following sampling of responses from teachers were given for the open-ended question “What kinds of activities are most helpful for your children in your classroom? Activities could include after school programs, in school enrichment, or summer activities.”:

- Activities that extend learning beyond classroom
- Opportunities to get outside and release energy
- Field experience around the city
- Programs that are accessible to all students
- Tutoring and homework help
- Summer enrichment and summer bridge activities
• Adopt-a-Book
• In-school enrichment activities, presentations by guest speakers
• Hands-on and/or movement oriented learning
• Garden
• After school program

Who are the people and places in the community that support children?

Teachers responses were largely consistent with parent answers to this question. Parents added churches, sports teams and coaches, and summer camps. Teachers added Whiz Kids. The following sampling of responses from teachers were given to the open-ended question:

• YMCA and Mayerson JCC
• Neighbors, friends, and family
• Recreation centers and parks
• After school program
• Sitters and day care providers
• Whiz Kids

What could Pleasant Ridge Montessori do, or do more of, to support children?

This question asked what PRM could do more of to support children directly but also what community connections PRM might explore that would benefit children. The following sampling of responses from teachers were given to the open-ended question:

• More after school tutoring and homework support (with materials provided by PRM)
• More technology education for children to meet demands of online testing
• Volunteers from the community to read with or listen to children read
• Integrate enrichment activities
• Parent education
• Recipe for Reading training for volunteers and Orton Gillingham training for teachers (Phonemic Awareness)
• Connection to the arts (Taft, Cincinnati Art Museum)
• Sports activities so kids get exercise and stay fit
• Mentoring program
• Transportation to programs
• Bring real life models of math, literature, and cultural events into the school in classroom sized groups
• More mental health services for children

What are the challenges you see in connecting children with activities and programs?

We asked parents to rank the importance of a number of factors when selecting programs. We also wanted to understand what teachers perceive as the barriers to activity and program access. Teachers gave the following responses:

• Meeting the wide range of children’s needs
• Transportation
VOLUNTEER SURVEY SUMMARY

What activities are most helpful for children?

The following sampling of responses from volunteers were given for the open-ended question “What kinds of activities are most helpful for your children you work with as a volunteer? Activities could include after school programs, in school enrichment, or summer activities.”:

- After school program
- Summer programs
- Reading
- Field trips
- Garden, connection to nature
- Tutoring

What could Pleasant Ridge Montessori do, or do more of, to support children?

This question asked what PRM could do more of to support children directly but also what community connections PRM might explore that would benefit children. The following sampling of responses from volunteers were given to the open-ended question:

- Reach out to more of the community
- After school and summer programs
- Bring the world to the classroom (examples: Zoo, Observatory)
- More individual attention for students

What are the challenges you see in connecting children with activities and programs?

We asked parents to rank the importance of a number of factors when selecting programs. We also wanted to understand what volunteers perceive as the barriers to activity and program access. Volunteers gave the following responses:

- Attention span
- Mixing of age groups
- General interest in activities

Who are the people and places in the community that support children?

Volunteer responses were consistent with parent and teacher answers but they also included gardening and nature activities. The following sampling of responses from volunteers were given to the open-ended question:

- Mayerson JCC
- Church
- Recreation center
- Churches
- After school Program
- Civic Garden Center, Community Garden program, Mill Creek Restoration
• Large number of children in after school activities makes it difficult to run an effective and safe program
• Cost
• Volunteers
• Time
• Focus on tests
• Space in building
• Finding the right fit for programs that most benefit the children
• Pairing volunteers with teachers who really want their assistance

MEETINGS & INTERVIEWS

CBI held focus groups and open houses to understand the priorities of parents, teachers, and community stakeholders. Meetings were held at PRM. Open houses were held during Cincy After School pick-up.

Parent Feedback

Several themes emerged from interviews held with parents:

• Communication between the school and parents was critical. Parents expressed a need for effective and timely communication about activities and programs that were available for their children.
• Space in the school building and on school grounds was perceived by parents to be at a premium. Parents expressed a desire for their children to spend more time outside and in the garden, both during and after the school day.

• Parents wanted a range of activities, both on-site and off-site. They wanted to see more enrichment activities, science programming, better coordination/timing of activities, better tutoring/homework help consistent with the Montessori model, and service learning opportunities.
• Parents wanted to see the school used as a community-building vehicle within the community. They wanted to see more opportunities for the community to come in and use the building and thought that school events could be used to bring people of different backgrounds together.
• Some parents expressed a desire for more parent education on Montessori techniques and values.

Teacher Feedback

The following themes emerged from the teacher focus group:

• The role of the Community Learning Center (CLC) should be to bridge the gap between the school and the community. The school should be open to everyone and everyone should feel welcome. The school could offer adult education to community members and parenting classes and skills for parents of children at PRM. Ultimately, the CLC coordinator should help navigate after school providers and represent all voices.
• Teachers expressed the need for children to have a break or some down time between the school day and after school programming.

• Teachers thought children needed a number of skills to make them successful, both in and out of school: life skills, technology skills, social and emotional development, and opportunities for physical activity.

• Teachers believed that all students, regardless of income or background, should be able to participate in activities.
A committee of parents, school representatives, and volunteers took feedback from surveys and focus groups, identified school and community assets, prioritized those assets, and then identified goals and action steps.

Based on the feedback from surveys, focus groups, and open houses, the committee identified the following school and community assets:

**SCHOOL ASSETS:**

- After School Program
- Science and engineering (STEM)
- Montessori focus
- Arts and culture
- Garden
- Athletics

**COMMUNITY ASSETS:**

- Pleasant Ridge Library
- Kennedy Heights Art Center
- Presbyterian Church
- Nativity (other schools)
- Recreation Center
- Businesses
- Community residents

Parents at the Cincy After School pick-up were invited to vote for their top three priorities for both School Assets and Community Assets. The After School Program and Athletics received the most votes for School Assets while the Pleasant Ridge Library, Kennedy Heights Art Center, and the Recreation Center received the top three votes for Community Assets.

In addition to assets, the committee identified the following gaps or challenges within the school:

**GAPS:**

- Mental health
- Health care
- Life skills
- Parenting support
- Communication
School Assets

- Cincy Afterschool
- Science/engineering (STEM)
- Montessori focus
- Arts + culture
- Garden
- Athletics

Community Assets

- Pleasant Ridge Library
- Kennedy Heights Art Center
- Presbyterian Church
- Nativity (other schools)
- Recreation Center
- Residents from community
- Businesses

Photos: PRM Open House Priority Vote, March 2014
Recommendations

Recommendations include goals and action steps for the priorities identified by the committee. The following priorities were selected based on feedback from surveys, meetings, and committee consensus:

**SCHOOL PRIORITIES:**
- After School Program
- Athletics
- Science and engineering (STEM)

**COMMUNITY PRIORITIES:**
- Pleasant Ridge Library
- Recreation Center
- Kennedy Heights Art Center

**ADDED PRIORITY:**
- Communication

The three School Assets and three Community Assets selected as priorities by the committee are consistent with votes from the After School Open House.

Recommendations for each priority include the following information:
- Goal
- Action Steps
- Owner (including volunteer owner)
- Partners
- Timeline
- CLC/RC (Community Learning Center/Resource Coordinator)
- Other Info

Recommendations were developed by the committee in March and April of 2014 for the 2014-2015 school year. The seven priorities identified, and progress made in each area, should be revisited regularly and updated as needed moving beyond the 2014-2015 school year.
PRIORITY: AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

Make sure the process for after school program enrollment is clear. The after school program should be aligned with PRM. Build a win/win relationship in first year in order for the relationship to continue. Parents should feel more connected to the teachers and staff. How can we accommodate more children?

Goal:

Improve alignment between after school programming and PRM positive school culture. Increase after school enrollment.

Action Steps:

- Flexibility – Have a parent, Resource Coordinator and after school director meet monthly to make any necessary adjustments
- Spring, Summer, and Fall mailer with enrollment and program details – include all of the other options (i.e. Norwood YMCA, JCC, PR Rec Center)
- Communication – Calendar, lesson plans, newsletter
- Look into other space options (Presbyterian Church)
- Also, need to create “quiet area” for children to regroup and discipline in after school should align with PRMs positive school culture

Owner:

Principal, Resource Coordinator, Director of A.S. Program and a PTO parent rep; Volunteers: Carrie Beidelman and Julie Nipper

Partners:

Involved: PTO, A.S. Director, Resource Coordinator

Help: Coordinate enrichment programs with community partners and parents who have been identified as having skills that our children want and need

Partners: Coordinate with community assets group who have identified local partners

Responsibility: Communicate as a team about children and communicate strategies to parents

Timeline:

Immediately following the selection of the CLC and after school program. Communication needs to be sent by the Resource Coordinator and the After School Director

CLC/RC:

Coordination, observation, guidance, revisiting programs if necessary – very close relationship with the After School Director

Other Info:

The team needs to be ready and willing to work together and very quickly at that.
PRIORITY: ATHLETICS

Includes health and wellness, team building, community recognition, school community cohesiveness, Hog Jog, basketball, baseball, soccer, Girls on the Run, jump rope group

Goal:

Increase participation of PRM students by 15% per year.

Action Steps:

Research:

- What percent of student participation is the norm? i.e. North Avondale, Sands, Nativity, Mt. Washington
- What percent of PRM students participate now? In what?
- Age
- Demographics
- Embrace and grew Boosters
- Try to increase parent participation as coach (grow coaching staff)
- Breadth vs Depth?

Owner:

Boosters; Volunteer: Julie Wijesooriya

Partners:

- Hank Ray, Niro W. (Boosters)
- Try to pull in new partners for fresh energy
- Companies to sponsor teams (LaRosa’s, Hilton Davis)
- Rec Center, Norwood Y, After School program
- Universities – XU (other schools have college coaches), UC (others?)
- Young Professional groups (legal, accounting)
- PTO Foundation

Timeline:

Survey to parents by end of May

Plan for 15% increase by Sept 15, 2014

CLC/RC:

After School program would help identify and coordinate volunteers in 2:00 – 6:00 time frame

Logistics of scheduling the sports (Connecting “owner” to potential partners and facilitating conversation

Other Info:

Find the “owner” within the Boosters who will commit to the follow through. Growing Boosters to be stronger.
PRIORITY: STEM

Goal:
1 year goal: Increase exposure and engagement to STEM fields in order to increase assessment results in Math & Science.

Action Steps:
1. Maximize use of technology for all students
2. Computer lab “special” – Easy Tech – already purchased by district, scheduled next year for all classes
3. Schedule time for equal access for teachers in the computer lab
4. Offer Professional Development to staff for all technology (computers, document cameras, etc.)
5. Bring in real world professionals from STEM fields during and after school day
6. Bring in programs/partnerships/ opportunities for STEM during and after school day

Owner:
1 – ILT & Tech Coordinator
2 & 3 – ILT
4 – Primax consultant & Jenny
5 – ILT School Resource Coordinator
6 – ILT School Resource Coordinator

Volunteer: Julie Wijesooriya

Partners:
- NIOSH (Christine West), Doug Kemper, Brian Busse
- HIVE 13
- Partnership in Innovation for Education (Mary Schlueter)
- Messer (Tracy Redding – Rico Rice)
- UC Medical Center
- GE & P & G
- IMAGO
- Working/retired people in the community

Timeline:
1, 2, 3 – Summer/August
4 – Sit down – Jenny & Brent (Primax). PD plan created in May to be implemented next year
5, 6 – Research and reaching out in summer with implementation to begin in August

CLC/RC:
1, 2, 3, 4 – Collaborating with ILT
5, 6 – Research, schedule, coordinating & facilitating meetings,

Other Info:
For 2014 - 2015:
- After Care Provider
- Lead Agency
- Resource Coordinator
**PRIORITY: PLEASANT RIDGE LIBRARY**

**Goal:**
Increase children’s access to books and enthusiasm about reading by encouraging teachers to make use of classroom collections, encouraging children to get a library card and use it, teaching children to put a book on hold/renew books (helps with keyboarding skills), and complete book reports.

**Action Steps:**
- Invite library to staff meeting to tell about classroom collections and sign up at the meeting.
- Sharing of book use ideas
- Listening to book on tape, following along – writing book report
- Search techniques for books
- Keyboarding (after school help in PRM media center)
- Library card sign up
- Summer reading program

**Owner:**
Resources Coordinator in conjunction w/ PR librarians; Volunteer: Mary Leonard

**Partners:**
- Book clubs – (parent run?)
- Partner with after school?
- Community members
- Possible room parents for class, library collection duties

**Timeline:**
This spring: Align summer reading program with summer homework
Over summer: Talk with librarians to schedule their talking with teachers at staff meeting
As needed through year: Skills teaching

**CLC/RC:**
Contacting/communicating with librarians

**Other Info:**
What resources library has to offer
Additional resources available throughout library system
**PRIORITY:**
**RECREATION CENTER**

**Goal:**
Build a stronger relationship during and after After School Program (combination of space use, create more community activities, involve more PRM students in CRC summer activities) and summer programs.

**Action Steps:**
1. Reach out to coordinators of their After School Program
2. Research the uses available at Rec Center (basketball in gym, tumbling, etc.)
3. Add Rec Center events to website calendar
4. Request that they advertise our events
5. Coordinate – expand events for both locations (Halloween Trunk or Treating)

**Owner:**
School Resource Coordinator, PTO, and After Care Director

**Partners:**
1 – School Resource Coordinator
2 & 4 – Rec Center Employees
3 – PTO Representatives
5 – After Care Director

**Timeline:**
End of this year and summer for programming and plans in the summer and for 2014 - 2015

**CLC/RC:**
- To contact and coordinate joint events/activities
- Communication

**Other Info:**
Name of: Lead Agency, Resource Coordinator, Recreation Center Coordinator, After Care Coordinator
**PRIORITY: KENNEDY HEIGHTS ART CENTER**

**Goal:**
Expand/broaden students awareness of the arts to increase their appreciation of various forms of arts.

**Action Steps:**
Continue/expand number camps/programs:
- Create more options, ex oil painting, sculpting, etc.
- Exposure to various forms of art to develop appreciation

Building relationships:
- Expose parents/students to Kennedy Heights Art Center (KHAC) and its services to increase mutual benefits for both parties
- Create an action plan that would benefit both parties

**Owner:**
Camps and programs: Resource Coordinator
Building relationships: academic Sub-Committee
Volunteer: Niehsa Wiley

**Partners:**
- People in the community
- KHAC contact (to boost their publicity and marketing)
- Partner w/ communication team
- Artist in residence program would be a good person to have involved

**Timeline:**
Summer: fact finding/research/resources/relationship building/develop a plan for the year
School year: implement plans throughout the school possibly per quarter

**CLC/RC:**
Relationship build, plan, manage/direction, implementation

**Other Info:**
Further exploring who the owner would be.
PRIORITY: COMMUNICATION

**Goal:**
- Create and implement clear procedures
- Increase reception
- A newsletter
- Protocols?
- (Approval stamp, envelopes)

**Action Steps:**
- Design draft system, put out for input from parent/teacher/staff groups
- Research envelopes (Tyvek)
- Explore scanning technology
- Research baseline communication data

**Owner:**
Principal Jenny Mauch and Jodi Osborn

**Partners:**
Main Office – CLC, PTO, LSDMC, Foundation, ICT

**Timeline:**
Budget for Tyvek folders by Tuesday, April 15

**CLC/RC:**
Communicate the protocol
CLC/PTO/School

**Other Info:**
Cost of folders/how to scan/research other schools