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## Red Cedar Survey Suggests Most Families Would Stick with Their Neighborhood Schools <sup>[1]</sup>

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**By:**

Karessa Wheeler



*Photo by Raymond Holt*

More than 700 responses came in to the Red Cedar Elementary Programming Survey, sent out by the East Lansing Public Schools earlier this year. What have ELPS district leaders learned from an initial review of the data?

?With all the different options we put out there,? Schools Superintendent Dori Leyko told the Board of Trustees Monday night, ?one of the big takeaways was that most respondents indicate that they plan to stay at their neighborhood no matter what you put over there? at Red Cedar School.

She explained her interpretation: "They are happy to be able to walk to their school, they are happy with their schools. And that you can put unique programming over there, but most respondents indicated that they would prefer to stay in their neighborhood schools."

According to the \$94 million bond language [2] passed in spring 2017, the District is committed to reopening Red Cedar Elementary School with early childhood programming and up to seven classrooms of elementary education.

The survey was designed to ferret out what it is parents in the District want done after the school is finished being a "swing school" during reconstruction of other buildings.

"Compared to the other options, more respondents would consider unique programming over the other options," wrote Leyko in an email to ELi this week.

Indeed, the survey results show that the most popular option "one that 20.6 percent of respondents would "strongly consider" involves a unique instructional model such as Montessori or Reggio. Another 29.9 percent of the participants said they would "likely consider" enrolling their children in Red Cedar School under such a scenario, bringing the positive response for that option to just over 50 percent.

Leyko told the Board this week, "Some of the big "aha" takeaways from the survey were that high level of support for early childhood programming [including] both what we have currently and also expanding that potentially to tuition-based preschool, interest in Head Start to rent some of our space, and blended classrooms at Red Cedar."

She later explained, "My comments at the meeting about the support for early childhood programming (pre-K programming) came from the comments that individuals provided." (Individual comments contributed via the survey have not yet been released.)

The survey showed that respondents strongly rejected the option of housing preschool through grade 8 at Red Cedar in multi-aged classrooms, with 43 percent indicating they "would not consider [this option] at all."

Also unpopular was an option to combine Red Cedar and Glencairn school populations, with Red Cedar housing preschool through grade 1 and Glencairn housing grades 2-5. Forty percent of respondents said they would not want to consider that option at all.

Survey results showed that the support for other options was consistently around 16 percent "likely to consider" and 5-12 percent "would strongly consider." (See the released results here [3].)

### **The survey is a sampling that is not necessarily reflective of district-wide parental perspectives**

As to the demographics of those answering the survey, 70 percent of respondents said they have elementary-aged children attending East Lansing public schools. Around 26 percent said they had no elementary-aged children. The remaining respondents include people who have elementary school-aged children who attend private school, a public school in another district, or

are homeschooled.

More than 31 percent of respondents indicated that they live within the Glencairn school boundaries, meaning that the responses are not representative of the District as a whole. (Glencairn is the closest school geographically to Red Cedar.)

Among the other respondents, about 19 percent indicated Marble is their "home" school, 14 percent Whitehills, 13 percent Pinecrest, and 8 percent Donley. About 5 percent of respondents employ the Schools of Choice option, and another 2 percent were school district employees with children in ELPS.

In a communication to ELi, Leyko noted that, "while only one response could be submitted per device, families [or individuals] with multiple devices could potentially submit multiple responses to the survey."

Leyko plans to formally present the survey at a later meeting.

"I haven't yet presented the data and outcomes at a Board meeting," she explained by email, "as I felt it important for the Red Cedar Programming Committee to read and draw conclusions from it first, and I just wrapped up meeting with a few members of the committee today who were unable to attend last week's meeting."



*School Board Trustees Chris Martin and Kath Edsall at the October 14 meeting.*

School Board trustee Kath Edsall has reviewed the data but preferred not to comment about the responses.

"I am certain the [Red Cedar] programming committee has utilized the data in addition to months of conversation as well as other information to make a thoughtful recommendation to the Superintendent," Edsall wrote in an email to ELi. "What I am excited to see is twofold:

elementary programming will return to Red Cedar and our preschool programming will be merged and potentially expanded to provide more preschool opportunities for our underserved populations as well as allowing integration of our special education preschool students with their typically developing peers. ?

### **What's next?**

Leyko expects a decision about the plans for Red Cedar for 2020-21 to come before the Board of Education in November. That decision will also come with a recommendation on where to house the Marble Elementary School population next year during the reconstruction of their new school.

Administrators have not yet decided whether they will move the school population of Marble to Red Cedar or the old Donley School. This year, Red Cedar is housing the Pinecrest Elementary population and old Donley is housing Whitehills Elementary's.

Some Donley parents are hoping that the Board will send Marble's population to Red Cedar next year in order to avoid another year of sharing [4] the Donley campus with another school's population.

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[3] [https://eastlansinginfo.org/sites/default/files/red\\_cedar\\_school\\_survey\\_summary\\_data.pdf](https://eastlansinginfo.org/sites/default/files/red_cedar_school_survey_summary_data.pdf)

- [4] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/parents-plea-school-board-please-spare-donley-third-year-swing-school>
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