



Lippman Day School Jewish Community Focus Group Summary Report October 6, 2009

Background: A focus group with Jewish parents was held on Thursday, October 1, 2009 at the Jewish Community Center. Parents were randomly selected and invited to attend from a database supplied by the JCC of all JCC members who have children that are Pre-Kindergarten age through 7th grade. This list encompassed families that are registered for Kidspace, as well as those who are not. This group of families included members who attend: Lippman Day School, Akron Public Schools, Revere Public Schools, Copley – Fairlawn Public Schools and private schools. A total of 144 parents were randomly invited to attend and they were offered their choice of a Borders Books or Lowe's gift card as an incentive for participation. It should be noted that a previous attempt in June to attract parents from a mailing of 144 did not yield enough responses to warrant a focus group. A total of 7 parents attended the October 6 focus group. This group was primarily comprised of parents who previously had their children attend Lippman Day School. One parent has a child in the JCC pre-school but is uncommitted regarding her choice of a future elementary school for her child. Co-facilitators were Katie Wells Goodwin and Barb Greene.

Questions Addressed by Participants:

1. What qualities do you think define a successful elementary or middle school?
2. What skills will our students of today need to be successful in their futures (in their roles in higher education student, citizen, employee, family member)
3. What is the number one thing you look for when selecting a school for your child? What are other considerations?
4. When you think of schools that you have a favorable perception of in the Greater Akron area, which ones come to mind? Are there any outside of Akron that come to mind?
5. What makes these schools stand out (image, curriculum, physical facilities, parent involvement, enrichment activities, sports and recreation, tuition cost, teachers?)
6. Do you think it's important for students to be taught universal values to guide their behavior and thinking?
7. Based on the description of the school LDS hopes to be in the near future, how would you go about marketing this school to parents in the region?
8. Are there any other schools in the area that you believe fit this description and if so, what are they?
9. Why did you choose to have your child (children) attend Lippman Day School?
10. Lippman Day School officials are redesigning the school to prepare students to successfully
11. There are a lot of schools in Summit County. How can Lippman Day School distinguish itself from all of the others?

Key Themes or Salient Messages voiced during the forum:

Qualities of a successful elementary/middle school:

- high academic achievement that exceeds that of public schools
- strong performing arts program
- opportunities for children's diverse interests and their own learning paths to be explored
- children's learning potential is fulfilled
- teachers that are nurturing and knowledgeable—they build the self-esteem of children
- there is structure, rules, discipline and accountability for one's actions
- students learn to be drivers of their own learning destiny
- the school offers a safe, bully-free environment

- values and morals are discussed and acted upon

Perceived gaps in the LDS learning experience (offered by one or more parents who had sent their children to LDS):

- students sometimes struggle going from LDS where learning is cooperative to other schools where learning is more self-driven.
- The needs of special needs children may distract from the culture of the school – more time spent managing these children at the expense of other students.
- The academic level of LDS is no better than area public schools—math and science were cited to be weak academic areas. Kids aren't challenged at LDS.
- Really small classes
- Compensation and professional development of staff

Perceived strengths of LDS:

- Environment is gentler, kinder and with stronger values than found at other schools.
- Jewish education
- Performing arts program
- Cultivation of Jewish identity
- Individualized attention—children's self-confidence is nurtured; e.g. buddy system

Essential skills for 21st century:

- High emotional intelligence + high academic knowledge
- Know how to be a successful learner for life; "engineers of their own learning"
- Moral, responsible citizens
- IT skills
- Well rounded—happy successful people

If LDS were not available, other possible school choices:

- Copley Public Schools
- Revere Public Schools
- Lawrence School – special needs students
- Elms (per parent – this was not a good experience—very structured and students are tracked)

Competitors of LDS: no one felt there was a strong competitor of LDS because of its foundation rooted in Judaic traditions and values. Those mentioned were not strongly endorsed as competitors: Old Trail School (more homogenous, wealthy and no special needs, quite elite), St. Hilary's (big classes), Spring Garden (small nurturing model; but very distinctive Waldorf principles). The most frequently mentioned alternatives to LDS were public schools.

Key distinctions of LDS that should be marketed:

- Middle School – it's exactly the environment that parents want for this age group of students and it has a strong success record for students that transition into high school.
- Facilities – recreation and health and fitness component
- Arts
- Preschool and K-8 connection
- Challenging learning environment
- Safe, secure, nurturing environment
- Holistic development of children
- Success stories of graduates