

## **ROBBINSVILLE: RED enrollment nearly doubles**

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By Jennifer Bradley, Staff Writer

ROBBINSVILLE — The Robbinsville Extended Day Program had a very successful pilot year, the Board of Education learned July 30.

Pam Elmi, program director of RED, told the board that enrollment has jumped 227 percent in one year.

According to Ms. Elmi, RED had 241 members when the program was launched in September 2011. She said by the time the district finished out the year, RED had 408 members.

”I attribute the rise in enrollment to several things,” Ms. Elmi said. “The main thing is that this is a service that people really need. We have many working families in our area, and they think this is a good program.”

RED provides child care before and after school hours. It replaced Robbinsville’s past private after-school and summer program, School-Age Fun and Enrichment (SAFE), which was in place for more than a decade.

Ms. Elmi also said that while RED is a service many families need, it is also a service children may not need, but may want because of the enrichment it provides.

”We are attracting people who do not need our child-care services, but are looking for quality enrichment experiences for their children,” she said.

Ms. Elmi said some of the enrichment services RED provides include certain clubs such as basketball, chess and knitting along with homework tutoring services.

Ms. Elmi also mentioned a child who was a part of the RED knitting club is now running his own online business selling knitted scarves.

”The increased enrollment is an indicator of our success,” she said. “Children vote with their feet. If we are doing a good job, they will come.”

According to Ms. Elmi, parents provided very positive feedback via online surveys about RED. She said parents reported they felt their kids were safe at the program and felt prices were fair for the quality of the program.

Along with the online survey, Ms. Elmi said RED encourages continual parental involvement. She said she conducted two focus groups to obtain parental feedback and is always open to suggestions.

After Ms. Elmi’s presentation, board member Vincent Costanza said he had a 5-year-old daughter in RED, and she was very happy with her experiences with the program.

"This program represents the district in a very positive light," he said.

Mr. Costanza and Ms. Elmi said they thought much of the program's success was due to the phenomenal staff.

"If it weren't for our staff, I wouldn't be here telling you these wonderful stories," Ms. Elmi said. "We are like a family. They are very special and make the program what it is."

According to Ms. Elmi, in one year the program went from employing 12 instructors to 25.

She added that of the 25 instructors, eight are licensed teachers, four are college education majors and eight have more than 25 years of experience in childcare or education.

"I've overheard kids saying they don't want to come home yet, which to me is a very good indicator of our success," she said.

Robert De Vita, district business administrator, said the previous extended day program brought in about \$10,000 whereas RED has brought in more than \$100,000. He said all of the money eventually ends up back in the classroom.

"This program has far exceeded what we expected," said Carol Boyne, board vice president.

RED has two sites, one each at Sharon Elementary School and Pond Road Middle School. Staff members are at Sharon before school from 7 to 9 a.m. and after school from 3 to 6:30 p.m. At Pond, staff are available before school from 6:45 to 8:15 a.m. and after school from 2:30 to 6:30 p.m.

RED staff also are available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. most days schools are closed. The program offers a variety of different summer programs.

Tuition rates for the program vary based on the times of participation and the number of days per week. There is a registration fee of \$30, and it costs \$127 per month for attending five days a week before school from 7 a.m., \$214 per month for attending five days a week after school until 6 p.m. and \$245 per month to attend five days a week after school until 6:30 p.m.