

Indianapolis Needs Renaissance Kids

By Shawnta S. Barnes – August 17, 2017



Diamond Malone and Sylvia Denice

Diamond Malone and Sylvia Denice, fourth grade Crooked Creek Elementary School teachers in the MSD of Washington Township, believed children need more experiences than schools can provide. Instead of relaxing or traveling during spring break last school year, these ladies worked diligently to create Renaissance Kids, Inc. Recently, I had the opportunity to chat with these talented educators to learn more about their organization.

Shawnta Barnes – What drove you to create Renaissance Kids, Inc.? How did you get started?

Diamond Malone – During my first year of teaching, I believed I should have done more for my kids. I built strong relationships, but I wanted to do more to develop the whole child. I thought about what I could do to fill in those gaps,

but I knew I couldn't do it by myself. About a year later, I was working on my master's, and I had to complete a presentation for one of my classes. During my presentation, I shared my vision for programming I wanted to offer families. People in my class thought I had a good idea. It encouraged me, and I knew I had to make it a reality. Sylvia, a fellow 4th-grade teacher at my school, believed in my vision and believed it was possible. Last year, during our one-week spring break, Sylvia and I completed all the paperwork necessary to become a 501c3, and our organization went public on May 1st.

SB – What does Renaissance Kids offer families?

DM – When you hear the phrase renaissance man, you think of a well-rounded, skilled, and talented person. Our goal is to help each kid reach his or her own potential and become well-rounded emotionally, socially, and academically. We also plan to expose our Ren Kids to different cultures and have them participate in various experiences.

Our programming is broken into four categories: SMART Start, Mind & Body, Exposure, and Family Time. SMART is an acronym for Scholars Manifesting Academic Refinement, and Tenacity. Through SMART Start, we plan to help students become intrinsically motivated to improve academically and to develop grit to perseverance when academics becomes challenging. Our Mind & Body programming will address healthy eating, taking care of your body, and mental wellness. Exposure gets our Ren Kids out into the community to participate in activities such as: art, sports, cooking, theater, yoga in addition to having guest speakers and cultural experiences. Our last and critical component is Family Time. We are not only providing a service to our Ren Kids, but also to their families. Twice a month, we will have family activities such as game nights, movie nights, family dinners, and family counseling to share what their children have learned and to empower and equip parents with the tools to support their children.

SB – How can families get involved?

Sylvia Denice – We are beginning this fall at our school Crooked Creek. We are connected to our families here, we have the interest, and know our families will

be supportive as we begin this work. We plan to start with our kindergartners. We want to work with families as their children progress through school. If those kindergartners have siblings in our building, they will also be included. We believe our programming will work best when parents and all of their children are involved. This year, we are working with students from our school with the hopes of expanding to children in the greater Indianapolis area.

SB – Are you faced with any obstacles?

SD – We would like to have a van to be able to transport our Ren Kids to our various activities. We are also looking for board members, in particular, a person who can advise on finances.

SB – Where can families sign-up?

SD – They can sign-up on our website <https://www.renkidsindy.org/>.

DM – Although we are not enrolling students from outside of Crooked Creek for our initial group of Ren Kids, we are accepting applications from families outside of our school. This will help us know how many families are interested as we expand our program. Parents are interviewed as part of our enrollment process. Interviews will begin this September, and our first group will begin meeting in October.

SB – Is there anything else you would like to share?

SD – We know parents want the best for their children. Sometimes they don't have the time or know-how to support their children. We hope Ren Kids fills that need and makes it feasible. We hope to encourage parents and facilitate family activities that help parents support their children.

DM – We are looking for volunteers to assist us. If you are interested, you can find our contact information on our website.

Crooked Creek's principal Keana Parquet shared:

As Diamond and Sylvia's principal, I am extremely proud of them for seeing the needs of the students they have worked with and creating a program that will provide the necessary services for these students. They are both loving and caring teachers who work so hard to meet the needs of every student whether they are easy or challenging. I wish them the best of luck in this venture and am so excited to see it flourish. I am glad to do whatever I can to support them and make their dreams a reality. I can't wait to see what these two will do for students around the Indianapolis area.

The teaching profession requires hard work and dedication and for these two educators to step out and create and operate an organization while teaching is admirable especially since their mission is not only to provide more services for the families they already serve but to expand to the entire Indianapolis community.