

October 21, 2020

Minutes of the Lawrence Alliance for Education Board

A virtual meeting of the Lawrence Alliance for Education Board was held at 6:00 P.M. with the following members present: Honorable Dan Rivera, Mayor of Lawrence, Julia Silverio, Lawrence City Councilor and local business owner, Jessica Andors, Executive Director for Lawrence Community Works, Patricia Mariano, Lawrence School Committee Member, Dr. Noemi Custodia-Lora, VP of NECC Lawrence Campus and Acting Chairman Dr. Ventura Rodriguez, Associate Commission for statewide support DESE.

Also present was Superintendent Cynthia Paris, and Joan Milone, Recording Secretary for this meeting.

The Acting Chair, Dr. Ventura Rodriguez, called the meeting to order at 6:08 P.M, and held the Pledge of Allegiance and noted the meeting was virtual due to the school district is remote due to the City's rise in the Covid rates.

The Chair noted that he had received several completed Superintendent evaluations from the LAE members; he will compile the information and provide them the summary to review prior to the next meeting for vote as well as an Executive Session to discuss the Superintendent's compensation.

Public Participation

No participants.

Superintendent's Report

Financial Update – Masiel Jordan, CFO, provided a FY21 Final Quarter Financial report update showed 22.5% of the budget as spent and encumbered. The staffs' yearly salaries will be encumbered in November once the hiring process is complete and the new grants for the year are in place. The encumbering process has begun for the transportation contracts for the regular education and special education riders. To date, there have been no payments processed for regular education transportation expenses due to the Covid remote learning. The Special Ed department is encumbering the out of district tuition contracts. There are no known deficits at this time.

In response to concern of funds not spent, Mayor Rivera noted that there is two years to utilize Chapter 70 funds and unencumbered City funds transfer to the General fund prior to the school year's end to appropriate to a specific fund to support next year's budget.

Ms. Jordan also reviewed the Remote Learning Essentials, the Covid Virus Relief and the Cares Act grant funds.

The Superintendent confirmed for the members that all students have received devices, that additional BCBA's and BBE's have been hired to assist with the social/emotional and high needs' students and one family technician liaison has been hired per school to trouble shoot any technology issues for families.

Dr. Rodriguez added that the Budget Subcommittee will work along with Masiel Jordan on the upcoming budget process.

Jessica Andors requested that the leadership request feedback from the families with special needs students to understand what they could use for additional support. Superintendent Paris will provide this information at the next meeting.

Facilities Update – Michael Teller, architect for CDI – He presented that the Phase I of the process is complete, which was to review/evaluate the larger schools' buildings ventilation systems. The seven schools evaluated were: Parthum, Arlington, LHS, Wetherbee, Guilmette, South Lawrence East and Frost and all did meet the “codes”. Additional recommendations to assist in exceeding these codes requirements are: 1) running ventilation constantly, 2) replace filters with MERV13, 3) run bathroom exhausts, 4) adjust units for highest outdoor air ventilation, 5) open common space doors, 6) reduce in school traffic 7) use operable windows when weather permits. CDI provided the evaluation reports to the cost estimator.

Phase II will commence the week of October 26 to evaluate the remaining 14 schools, which do not have any ventilation systems. Chris Merlino will assist in prioritizing which schools to evaluate first based on their student body size.

Acting Chair Rodriguez requested the timeline for the mitigation of the 14 additional schools; CDI would provide this information within 3 weeks from when the engineers begin their work. Dr. Rodriguez requested that CDI keep the District informed as CDI receives the information on each school.

Reopening Plan Update - Superintendent Paris provided an update for attendance, remote requests, enrollment and remote learning. As of October 19, the district returned to remote learning in light of the City's increased rates. She noted that to date 23 staff and 39 students have tested positive and provided the district's protocols to assess the situations. She continued in noting that the districts is maintaining its attendance rate, which shows 0-5% change since the last report. Assistant Superintendent Denise Snyder provided an enrollment update noting that enrollment is down by 547 students. The largest decline is in PreK and Kindergarten with 8th grade as next largest decrease (typical based on high school enrollments elsewhere).

Jessica Andors requested a report reflecting weekly average of absences to note the trend. Superintendent explained additional absences could reflect students who have transitioned to other living situations based on family needs. Ms. Snyder noted that PreK/K enrollment changes possibly reflect on families' needs for necessary full-day childcare. Noemi Custodia Lora suggested comparing the current year's enrollment decreases with SY2018 and 2019 for trends.

Julia Silverio inquired on the process of hiring high school students to assist younger students with their remote learning. Superintendent Paris stated the Mayor and the LHS team are in the planning process for a proposal. Mayor Rivera provided an update on the process/proposal.

Dr. Rodriguez noted and questioned reason for the decrease in the 11th grade enrollment, which is not typical. Ms. Snyder agreed it is a concern and will review to assess for information. He asked for weekly and monthly information. He also requested for future meetings, to receive information on how the daily remote model works with examples from an elementary, middle and high school class so the Board can understand the experience of the students, staff and families. Patricia Mariano requested information on the students' assessment results with comparisons.

Maricel Goris continued the presentation with updated information for the employee waiver requests to work remotely. Julia Silverio requested a breakdown of what positions will be effected with the waivers. The Superintendent clarified that remote work will continue until the situation is reevaluated on November 4, 2020 with the priority to allow the high needs students to return.

Report of the Chair

Superintendent Summative Report – The report will be sent to members and at the next meeting the Board will review, discuss and approve.

Dr. Rodriguez appointed Mayor Rivera, Jessica Andors and Noemi Custodia Lora to select a Student Representative for this year. The schools will provide a list of nominations for the subcommittee to consider.

Other

Upon the recommendation of the Chair, motion was made by Patricia Mariano, seconded by Noemi Custodia Lora, it was

VOTED: To approve the October 7, 2020 minutes as submitted.

The Vote: Yes – Jessica Andors
Yes – Noemi Custodia Lora
Yes – Patricia Mariano
Abstain– Mayor Dan Rivera
Abstain – Julia Silverio
Yes – Ventura Rodriguez

Mayor Rivera presented a Covid update for the City of Lawrence.

Upon the recommendation of the Chair, motion was made by Mayor Dan Rivera, seconded by Patricia Mariano, it was

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 8:10 P.M.

The Vote: Yes – Jessica Andors
Yes – Noemi Custodia Lora
Yes – Patricia Mariano
Yes – Mayor Dan Rivera
Yes – Julia Silverio
Yes – Ventura Rodriguez

Dr. Ventura Rodriguez, Acting Chair