

August 12, 2020

Minutes of the Lawrence Alliance for Education Board

A 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 6:09 P.M, and held the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Public Participation

The Chair noted that many people have submitted their Public Comments by email, which have been provided to the Board Members and will be part of the meetings' minutes.

Kim Barry, LTU President – Addressed the Board and presented the LTU's request for a full remote learning start with a gradual, phased in reopening based on the ongoing increased Covid cases in Lawrence.

Jackie Marmol, former PTO President – Requested the Boards' consideration for a full remote opening for school.

Mayor Dan Rivera provided a Covid update for the City of Lawrence. He anticipates that the rating for the City will be termed "red".

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Paris presented a report on a "Full Remote Plan" for the opening of schools by PowerPoint. It provided the results from the Listening Forums from the previous week. The feedback from the various stakeholders leaned towards remote learning. DESE recommends that high needs students attend in person even with a remote model. They consist of students with disabilities, English learners, students without access to internet and Pre-K – Kindergarten students, which are 20% of the LPS students. The district's high considerations with the remote model are: devices, attendance and grading. There will be expanded instructional resources for digital access for both hybrid and full remote learning models; professional learning development for teachers and workshops for families. She also provided a budget breakdown for hybrid vs. full remote models. There is a budget savings in remote learning with the possibility to reinvest the savings into resources for the plan.

The members provided their recommendation of choice for the schools' opening – remote learning; Patricia Mariano requested that the process would be teachers teaching remote from their classroom. They also discussed with the Superintendent their concerns with student participation and accountability on progress of learning, device availability, availability and convenience for meals, supporting one-on-one family engagement and workshops for their understanding of the process and adequate resources and support for teachers and the health and safety for everyone; whether the number of teaching staff will be available to teach the high need students in person and whether the number of LPS buildings with the appropriate safety measures can accommodate these students in a safe environment.

Dr. Rodriguez noted this has been one of his hardest decisions. The indicators point to remote learning even though it may not be the best interest for students' learning. As the plan evolves, the Board will need weekly data on the students' participation/engagement, health data and benchmarks; an in-person orientation with families/students and collaborate with other school districts for ideas. He recommended that the Board meet weekly to review the ongoing data in order to move to the next phase for the reopening plan.

The Superintendent noted that once the Board approves the plan, she, her staff with the LTU will start the work on surveying staff and families to begin the process in determining the numbers returning.

Dr. Rodriguez requested a response based on the health safeties for the classrooms such as ventilation in anticipation that students do attend school. He noted that based on the data provided the Board would still have the authority to change the plan for the schools' opening.

Upon the recommendation of the Chair and a motion made Mayor Dan Rivera, seconded by Julia Silverio, it was

VOTED: To approve a plan for remote learning for the district to include up to 20% high needs students as directed by DESE; a census of the students to determine if they have a device, Wi-Fi, access to food; and to create a review team (union member, facility staff, LPS administration member) to review classroom spaces for the 20% in-person students and possible teachers instructing from their classroom.

Julia Silverio suggested the last part of the motion be a separate motion. Mayor Rivera requested it stay as one motion.

Patricia Mariano suggested a friendly amendment that the Superintendent collaborate with the staff to discuss the possibility for the instruction to take place remotely from each teachers' classroom with all the necessary precautions.

Mayor Rivera motioned and Julia Silverio seconded the motion,

To accept this as a friendly amendment.

Jessica Andors suggested the amendment read as “preferred vs. mandatory”. Patricia Mariano added the instruction from the classroom would allow students to be more acclimated, and provide the teachers additional staff support. Noemi Custodia-Lora noted the concern in the funding to support the teachers in the classroom vs. remote based on the need for additional necessary resources. Mayor Rivera noted that the amendment did not mandate, it was to consider. Patricia Mariano noted that her intent is not to force teachers into the classroom, but in certain cases, it could make it easier. Dr. Rodriguez noted his understanding for the implementation for this vote is to ask the Superintendent and her staff to see if this may be feasible, but he does not want the Board to cross the line into the operations of the district. Julia Silverio suggested rephrasing the vote.

Mayor Rivera reiterated his motion.

VOTED: To approve a plan for remote learning for the district to include up to 20% high needs students as directed by DESE; a census of the students to determine if they have a device, Wi-Fi, access to food; and to create a review team (union member, facility staff, LPS administration member) to review classroom spaces for the 20% in-person students and for the possibility of teachers instructing from their classroom.

Julia Silverio suggested the last addition should be a separate motion. Mayor added his reasoning was to inform the teachers and students that there has been discussion and consideration for their health/safety.

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

Jessica Andors noted she would be requesting updated information for the redirected resources saved for increased engagement at the weekly meetings.

Julia Silverio reiterated that the Board reserves the right to make changes on the plan based on the process of the approved plan and its effect on students and staff.

- Donation of Paper

Upon the recommendation of the Chair and motion made by Mayor Dan Rivera, seconded by Jessica Andors, it was

VOTED: To accept the donation of paper.

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

Upon the recommendation of the Chair and motion made by Julia Silverio, seconded by Patricia Mariano, it was

VOTED: To enter Executive Session for contract negotiations at 8:00 P.M.

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

Upon the motion made by Patricia Mariano, seconded by Jessica Andors, it was

VOTED: To come out of Executive Session at 8:08 P.M.

Superintendent Paris expressed her appreciation for all the support and feedback received to draft the plan and now to implement the remote model with staff and partners. Dr. Rodriguez noted his appreciation for the hard, on-going work to implement and continue this plan.

Upon the motion made by Julia Silverio, seconded by Jessica Andors, 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 – Dr. Ventura Rodriguez

Dr. Ventura Rodriguez, Acting Chair