

January 12, 2022

Minutes of the Lawrence Alliance for Education Board – LAE

The Lawrence Alliance for Education Board meeting was held in person at the South Lawrence East Educational Complex Auditorium with the following members remote present: Jessica Andors , Executive Director for the Lawrence Community Works, remotely present Patricia Mariano, Lawrence School Committee member, remotely present Daniel Rivera, CEO/President MA Development, remotely present Dr. Noemi Custodia-Lora, Vice President of Northern Essex Community College Lawrence Campus, in person, Julia Silverio, Silverio Insurance, in person, Maria Moeller, CEO/The Community Group, Lawrence, in person, Dr. Ventura Rodriguez, Chair, remotely present.

Also in person, was Superintendent Cynthia Paris and Maria L. Campusano, Recording Secretary for this meeting.

Chair, Dr. Ventura Rodriguez, called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. The Chair held the Pledge of Allegiance; also recognized that in accordance with Chapter 20 of the Act of 2021 extending certain measures that were adopted during the COVID-19 state of emergency to have some board members who were participating remotely as such and he noticed that he will conduct the roll call. Chair added that the meeting was in person for people to participate and observe as well as having the meeting live streamed. The Chair also recognized Mr. Dan Rivera, who has served on the LAE Board since its inception four years ago, announced that this was Rivera's last meeting with the LAE Board. The Chair appreciated Dan for his partnership which also helped him on becoming a better leader and for his collaboration through partnership, and for everything he had done for the City of Lawrence and for the LAE Board.

Dan Rivera shared his experiences while he worked for the LPS students, reminiscent of him being one of the kids who also attended LPS, his role serving the LAE Board, and working with his colleagues before and under receivership to support the LPS in unprecedented times, to also working in capital improvement projects etc.

Chair thanked Mr. Rivera for being part of the LAE Board, pointing out that when it is safe to gather together, there will be a more appropriate way to acknowledge and celebrate.

Public comment: Dr. Ventura Rodriguez called the following:

1. **Santina M. Turowski (Sunny Ski)**, Teacher. Said that she was going to read a list of issues from educators and parents in the community:
 - There seems to be no surge plan as evidenced by the huge amount of staff absences in the coverage issues that accompany how is in school learning
 - How is in school learning actually happening effectively if on average it seems 13% of teachers have contracted COVID and they are contractually and legally obligated to stay home in self isolate
 - How is in school learning happening when we have to combine so students have a teacher but it acts more as a babysitter also how is this not a cross contamination issue in a logistical nightmare for the nurses who do the contact tracing
 - Were nurses compensated for coming in on that Sunday one January 2nd and Monday to distribute the COVID test

- Were teachers compensated for coming in on their off contract time or is it just an exploitation of their kind hearted nature
 - I believe on Monday the 10th in my building, there were 17 teachers out because of COVID issues and other family related obligations so we're just kind of wondering how that's working because it doesn't seem to be fair to anyone.
 - I heard that the library at the spark , there's still a leak and mold
 - I guess there was 50% off our staff here at spark
 - it was negative degrees out on Tuesday, our students are not the wealthiest and don't all have access to appropriate winter gear and speaking of that doing some guerrilla math as I like to call it there were 80 out of 433 students present parents, they were asking how this affect their attendance, they know it's an excused absence
2. **Colby Sawyer**, Teacher. Talked about how his educational peers are making fun of him for working in Lawrence; and the comments they made about what they heard of the working conditions, treatment by administration, racial injustice, and other things that make his peers in disbelief; adding that the curriculum lacks support. Also invited the board to go into the classrooms and see what the students are learning before implementing a new curriculum
 3. **Homayoun Maali**, Parent and Lawrence resident. Demanded to have contract negotiations for teachers and paraprofessionals to be equitable. Mr. Maalai added that 80 to 3000 citizens are behind demanding a fair and excellent compensation to prevent a citywide strike. Also cited the great leader Nelson Mandela when said "education is indeed the most powerful weapon to change the world, only possible if we support our teachers and their great Lawrence teachers union.
 4. **Kimberly Barry**, Teacher and Union President. Spoke in front of the board representing 1300 members composed of teachers, nurses, counselors, long term substitutes, and building based educators. Barry indicated that they were not supporting the approval of the turnaround plan; while also added a number issues such as no being in agreement with MCAS measurements of the students, the lack of resources, that they have lost their collective bargaining rights under receivership, that they have officially sent a demand to bargaining contract to the district. concluding that they are looking to have a dialogue on retraining and attracting career educators by offering higher wages, better benefits, shorter days, and more consistency and commitment.
 - a. Dr. Ventura wanted to reiterate that they had received through the superintendent, a letter from the LTU asking for a collective bargaining; he thought this was a great opportunity to come to the table and work on a new contract that recognizes and tries to compensate the teachers.
 - b. Superintendent is pleased to work collectively to address these important issues
 - c. Dr. Ventura, Announced that he met with Jonathan Guzman, City School Committee member and Glenn Koocher, Executive Director of Massachusetts School Committee Association, on concrete topics for training. He asked the board to volunteer on helping coordinate and liaise with the school committee.
 - d. Dr. Ventura, announced that he understood by Commissioner Riley that Mayor Depeña will be appointed to serve on the LAE board. Also thought of the great opportunity of the Mayor serving as a Chair of the city elected school committee members while also serving at the LAE board, it was a positive step in that direction

Superintendent Updates:

- Superintendent provided a timeline of events from December 29 - January 3rd. This outline detailed information on rapid test kits, KN95 masks, availability, delays, and distribution updates.
- Melissa Spash provided a presentation outlining student attendance from January 3rd through Jan 11, 2022 which described content regarding the percentage of students absent, number of students absent and additional context.
- Maricel Goris, provided a presentation outlining district vacancies as of January 2022. It described the percentage staffed and current vacancies for teachers, paraprofessionals, and nurses. In addition, she presented an outline of resignations trends from 2019-2021, retirements, and terminations followed by the LPS staff attendance rate as of January 2022 which included non-COVID related absences. Adding a description of the staff absences during the week of January 3rd.
 - Jessica Andors asked, what are the non-covid related absences
 - These are medical, maternity leaves, bereavement, family medical leaves and other illnesses not related to covid.
 - what is the normal range of absenteeism: average is 3 to 4 % but, in this school year is 4-8%
 - Noemi C. Do we know why people are resigning:
 - resignation for people is around 3% feedback analysis is under review.
 - What is the plan to fill out these vacancies?
 - Always hiring
 - Patricia Mariano, How are we covering the classroom and ensuring that students are not missing quality instruction.
 - It has been a challenge for staff members to cover the classroom and they are doing remarkable work. i.e. there was a combination of two classrooms and the total number of students were seven.
 - Vacancies at the LHS, how are you managing the vacancies with the subject, also concerned with people monitoring the classrooms. Does the LHS have any particular plan to make sure students are not missing their academics. The LHS is impacted, but they use additional staff including paraprofessionals; it is not ideal.
 - Maria Moeller, is the total number of vacancies inclusive - in the attendance rate for January, the last road is 79% of the absences were teachers? correct
 - Dan Rivera, how is the district absences for students compared to other districts
 - been in close communication with the merrimack valley superintendents, we are the largest, there's no comparison, however, they are also experiencing significant absences in both staffing and students.
 - Do you have the sense that before the pandemic we were already walking on thin ice when it came to retaining teachers before COVID. In general educators and most especially of color are more difficult to find.
 - Julia S. Is there a way we can compare the teacher retention rate prior to having the turnaround plan vs. not having the turnaround plan.
 - What are the plans on attracting new candidates for teaching positions?

- Is this going to distract us from hiring high quality teachers? If we compare the plan with other districts that may not have the turnaround plan. (Look at what other districts in general are doing, but we can look at what others under receivership are doing)
- Maricel Goris, compared retention and salary rate, to understand where we seat in comparison with other neighborhoods districts as of June 2020.
- Ventura Rodriguez, interested to dig into the resignation data, look at what people are saying to create an action plan.
- Ventura Rodriguez, the budget process, we may have some staffing savings. Given that a lot of the budget is fiscal, how are we keeping them. If we have some savings, how are we utilizing it? I Want to understand what these figures look like at the next meeting.
- Jessica A., asked if the fight and staff situation at LHS has improved? Significantly. What is affecting that; high need students expressing a need for support which this year has been twice the amount. Students were referred to the right programs, and supports. We also presented a series of activities, safety task force, building on activities that engage students to one another, the code of conduct. Hired a manager for the center of restorative justice specialists to support students who are having conflicts with one another.
- Dan Rivera, there has to be a centralized way if a kid is absent, that a package is available for the kid to make sure every student has it.
- Noemi C. what efforts had been made to reach out to teachers of specific tasks; give us an idea as to how many teachers were involved and the school

VOTED: To approve the Turnaround Plan

Vote: Upon the motion to approve the turnaround plan; So move by Dan Rivera and Seconded by Patricia Mariano

The Vote
 Yes - Jessica Andors
 Abstain - Julia Silverio
 Yes - Maria Moeller
 Yes - Dr. Ventura Rodriguez
 Yes - Patricia Mariano
 Yes - Dan Rivera
 Yes - Noemi Custodia-Lora

Motion Passes

Melissa Spash provided an outline on the ARC audit update on expanded membership, Nellie Mae foundation funding, equity audit, and the SY ARC professional development.

Melissa Spash provided an outline of the District-wide literacy plan which included an strategic literacy workforce composed of a convened district strategic literacy workforce team, represented by early childhood, elementary, middle, and high schools. A team of principals, coaches, teachers, central office staff and DESE.

Dan Rivera, leaves the room

Superintendent provided an overview regarding the LPS funding sources which included the foundation, title grant, ESSER I, ESSER II, and ESSER III. This was followed by historical data, stakeholders top 3 priorities, stakeholders response to survey, and allowable vs. not allowable expenditures.

Maria M. are we getting measurements details with what was accomplished with the ESSERs

Superintendent provided a drafted letter regarding the Leahy School Project - Support Letter to the City Council

VOTED: To approve the letter of support to the city council with the edits on board names.

Vote: Upon the motion made by Dr. Ventura to approve a letter of support to the City Council; So move by Jessica Andors; Seconded by Julia Silverio

The Vote
Yes - Jessica Andors
Yes - Noemi Custodia-Lora
Yes - Julia Silverio
Yes - Maria Moeller
Yes - Dr. Ventura Rodriguez
Yes - Patricia Mariano

Motion Passes

VOTED: To approve the minutes December 8, 2021

Vote: Upon the motion made by Dr. Ventura to approve the minutes of December 8, 2021 with So move by Jessica Andors; Seconded by Patricia Mariano

The Vote
Yes - Jessica Andors
Abstain- Julia Silverio
Yes - Maria Moeller
Yes- Noemi Custodia-Lora
Yes - Dr. Ventura Rodriguez
Yes - Patricia Mariano

Motion Passes

VOTED: To approve the minutes of the Executive Session of December 8, 2021

Vote: Upon the motion made by Dr. Ventura to approve the executive committee meeting minutes of December 8, 2021; So move by Patricia Mariano; Seconded by Maria Moeller

The Vote

Yes - Jessica Andors
Abstain - Julia Silverio
Yes - Maria Moeller
Yes- Noemi Custodia-Lora
Yes - Dr. Ventura Rodriguez
Yes - Patricia Mariano

Motion Passes

VOTED: To approve the minutes of Executive Session November 10, 2021

Vote: Upon the motion made by Dr. Ventura to approve the minutes of the executive session on November 10, 2021; So move by Julia Silverio; Seconded by Patricia Mariano

The Vote

Yes - Jessica Andors
Yes - Julia Silverio
Yes - Maria Moeller
Yes - Noemi Custodia-Lora
Yes - Dr. Ventura Rodriguez
Yes - Patricia Mariano

Motion Passes

Reminders:

Dr. Ventura Rodriguez reminded that he will be reaching out to the turnaround committee to provide the board on ongoing communication with Jonathan Guzman and MA Association of School Committees on incoming training

Congratulations to Kate Cook who is now appointed as the first assistant Attorney General. Kate will provide some recommendations to the board on getting a new attorney to support the work of the LAE.

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 8:17 p.m.

Vote: Upon the motion made by Dr. Ventura to adjourn the meeting at 8:17p.m, So move by Julia Silverio; Seconded by Maria Moeller

The Vote

Yes - Jessica Andors
Yes - Julia Silverio
Yes - Maria Moeller
Yes - Noemi Custodia- Lora
Yes - Dr. Ventura Rodriguez
Yes - Patricia Mariano

Motion Passes

Dr. Ventura Rodriguez, Chair

Date: