

DRAFT



Lawrence Family Development Charter School

Minutes

November 13, 2024 LFDCS Board Meeting

Date and Time

Wednesday November 13, 2024 at 5:30 PM

Location

Zoom

Orange Wheeler Conference Room, 355 Haverhill Street Lawrence, MA 01840

Zoom Meeting

[https://zoom.us/j/2032549498?](https://zoom.us/j/2032549498?pwd=Uhun3PubLdHgaVldOnoNCRG0J1F4h7.1&omn=93596128182)

[pwd=Uhun3PubLdHgaVldOnoNCRG0J1F4h7.1&omn=93596128182](https://zoom.us/j/2032549498?pwd=Uhun3PubLdHgaVldOnoNCRG0J1F4h7.1&omn=93596128182)

Meeting ID: 203 254 9498

Passcode: yJ32tX

Trustees Present

C. Needham (remote), E. Nolberto, G. Lopez, J. Cedeno (remote), J. Henriquez (remote), J. Tejada (remote), R. Almanzar (remote)

Trustees Absent

D. DeFillippo, L. McRae, L. Perez

Guests Present

A. Croes, C. Parcell, D. Thakkar, Dan Halloran, H. Castleman, L. Lawler, N. Arpin, Nicole Dean Ward (remote), P. Macario, S. Perry, Y. Rodriguez

I. Opening Items

A. Pledge of Allegiance

B. Record Attendance

C. Call the Meeting to Order

G. Lopez called a meeting of the board of trustees of Lawrence Family Development Charter School to order on Wednesday Nov 13, 2024 at 5:34 PM.

D. Approve Minutes

E. Nolberto made a motion to approve the minutes from LFDCS Board Meeting-October 9, 2024 on 10-09-24.

J. Henriquez seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

- J. Cedeno Aye
- D. DeFillippo Absent
- J. Henriquez Aye
- L. McRae Absent
- E. Nolberto Aye
- G. Lopez Aye
- C. Needham Aye
- J. Tejada Aye
- R. Almanzar Aye
- L. Perez Absent

II. Superintendent's Report

A. Financial Trends - Lawrence Prospera

Darshan T. reported that Lawrence Prospera (LP) announced a \$900K budget deficit last week. As LFDCS is a guarantor on loans with LP, Darshan invited LP's Executive Director, Dan Halloran, to address any concerns the School Board may have.

Dan Halloran explained that the deficit was unexpected. However, they have already engaged with auditors and implemented a financial recovery plan. He noted that, compared to this time last year when the organization's spending was \$500K, LP has significantly reduced expenses, with current spending totaling only \$250K. Additionally, the Board has tasked him with raising \$250K outside of grant funding, and he has already raised \$50K toward that goal. The Board's level of involvement has increased this year, with five returning members and five new members, and the potential for one more.

Dan also highlighted that the City of Lawrence had pledged a \$500K grant, which has not yet been received, though they remain optimistic. In addition, LP is set to receive a \$702K grant for the SSYI program. He also noted the organization has been down five staff members at SISU and is exploring opportunities to support CASA Dominicana, which runs an adult learning program currently experiencing a waitlist of about 250 individuals for its ELL class. Last Friday, LP invited local city legislators to discuss potential grants

for CASA Dominicana and SISU, hoping that both state representatives and senators will honor their commitments.

Dan reassured the School Board that LP is managing the situation and that bringing Mark Andrews on board temporarily has been instrumental, given his extensive experience with state budgets and his ability to facilitate new partnerships. LP is actively seeking other agencies to partner with in order to strengthen areas of growth.

Regarding enrollment, Dan mentioned that they had posted basketball programs just hours earlier, with over 300 children already enrolled. While last year's peak enrollment was 600 students, this is seen as a positive early sign of recovery.

The Board had no questions for Dan. He offered to email the financial recovery plan to any Board members who would like to review it.

Chris N. asked Susan P. to clarify the loan that was taken out several years ago involving both organizations. He emphasized that each organization needs to maintain strong financial standing. Although Lawrence Prospera is currently facing a deficit, the bank remains satisfied with the school's earnings-to-debt-service ratio, which is currently 7:1. Chris requested that the ratio be monitored over the next month to ensure continued financial health.

Susan P. explained that the school's income model is relatively straightforward, as it relies on tuition payments from the state based on student enrollment. She also outlined the business model of Lawrence Prospera, noting that its revenue streams are more varied and its expenses can fluctuate, particularly as a landlord and nonprofit. The school benefits from the Student Opportunity Act, which guarantees \$20,000 per pupil, whereas LFD does not have the same revenue consistency. Susan expressed hope for continued growth for both organizations.

Chris N. stressed the importance of maintaining a healthy relationship with Lawrence Prospera, given the shared loans between the two entities. He also mentioned that the school has earmarked \$1.1 million in capital improvements, emphasizing the need to revisit the lease terms in light of these investments. Specifically, Chris suggested that the school may want to consider negotiating a longer-term lease to ensure a return on investment.

Susan P. noted that Pedro M. is overseeing the Capital Improvement projects and has been working diligently on various initiatives, including roof repairs and pavement upgrades. Chris N. underscored the urgency of scheduling a joint meeting with the School Board and Fund Board to discuss the lease terms, particularly as these projects are moving forward.

B. Management Services Agreement

Darshan T. explained that under the current management agreement, the school pays a fee for five services: Finance, IT, Maintenance, Human Resources (HR), and Nutrition. These services are carried out by approximately eight positions. Darshan emphasized the need to assess how these services could be delivered more efficiently. He noted that, in

the past, contracting these services made sense due to the school's limited budget. However, as the school has grown and its budget has expanded, the trend in education has shifted toward hiring internal staff for finance and HR functions. Today, only eight schools out of the original cohort of 15 continue to contract these services.

Darshan highlighted that the functions of finance and HR require more attention and a direct reporting line to the Superintendent. Currently, there are two executives—one for the school (Superintendent) and one for the nonprofit (Executive Director)—but the HR and Finance Directors do not report directly to the Superintendent, which creates a potential conflict of interest. Darshan stressed the importance of having proper checks and balances in place. For instance, the Finance Director is currently working with the Project Manager to assist in the Capital Improvement Plan, developing the budget and overseeing how funds are allocated. Darshan reiterated the need for a system to address any issues that may arise.

He pointed out that absorbing the HR and Finance departments would create new roles and responsibilities. Currently, the school pays 66% of the salaries for these positions through the contract, as opposed to covering 100% of the costs if the departments were absorbed into the school. Additionally, the school currently pays a management fee, which would decrease if these departments were brought in-house, though the salary costs would rise.

Darshan also suggested that another option could be for LFD to increase its personnel. He proposed that both boards and their respective finance committees meet to explore the various solutions and associated costs in response to the school's growth and evolving needs.

Regarding the Management Services Agreement (MSA), Darshan mentioned that they are still working on finalizing the document. He proposed a joint meeting of both boards and their finance committees to discuss the proposal further.

Dan H. suggested evaluating all five departments individually to explore the possibility of creating separate agreements for each service, rather than consolidating them under one flat fee. This approach would provide greater clarity to new board members regarding the structure and relationships between the entities. Darshan agreed with this proposal and committed to reviewing the services on an individual basis.

Chris N. shared that he had met with the Fund Board before Ralph Carrero's departure, where the management fee and lease arrangements were discussed. Chris characterized the meeting as tense, noting that while there had been planning on the nonprofit's side, the school was not fully aware of the separation of the two organizations. He emphasized the need for improved communication and transparency between both entities, inviting both the school and the nonprofit to ensure that planning is shared and understood by all parties involved.

Dan H. committed to prioritizing efforts to reset the relationship between the two organizations moving forward. In response, Chris N. inquired if there is a dedicated account to track funds allocated for capital improvements.

Darshan T. confirmed that capital improvement funding will be a standing agenda item at monthly finance committee meetings, where both the financial management and progress on capital projects will be regularly reviewed.

C. Composting

Darshan T. reported that the nonprofit provided a summary chart detailing the cost savings achieved through the school's composting efforts. The school is currently composting 94% of its food waste, resulting in a total savings of \$50K this school year compared to last year. Darshan noted that the school aims to enhance the composting experience by installing more visually appealing composting stations. Pedro M. is leading the initiative to transition from the old system to a more modern, aesthetically pleasing setup, which is expected to encourage greater student participation.

Elizabeth N. expressed her approval, highlighting the positive impact of the students' contributions to waste reduction. She emphasized that the habits students are developing at school could also be transferred to their homes, and Darshan agreed, expressing hope for continued growth in this area.

Darshan also mentioned that further details about the composting initiative will be made available on the school's website, with Rachel Sanchez working to ensure the information is disseminated effectively.

The next goal for Pedro M., Darshan stated, is for the school to receive recognition for its water filtration efforts. The school has recently installed additional filtration units across its buildings and aims to publicize this achievement as part of its commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility.

III. Principal's Report

A. Quarter 1 Awards Results

LL said they implemented a new curriculum. They are still adjusting the criterias. The teachers are focusing on measuring exposure to the curriculum. They have been working on effective morning meetings and attendance with families.

AC reported that they as well adopted a new ELA curriculum. Teachers are using this year to look at what works and what changes will need to be made for next year. The results shown are not as high as they would normally be. They are working with the 3Rs. think Sheets to reflect their actions and touching more of the SEL piece of behavior and choices. She reported taht she has not needed to have truancy meetings this year. There has been great improvement in attendance since the implementation of truancy meetings and plans.

CP reported that in third grade and 4th grade had lower high honor roll. they are closing gaps and figuring out what is working or not working with the new curriculum. She said 3rd graders are adjusting to the expectations. In 4th grade the teachers are putting higher standards and are raising the bar that is why there are not as many model attendance. She reported she has had to hold 1 truancy meeting.

NA says she has 3 out of the 4 grade there 50% more on high honor. in 8th grade there are 80%. In 5th grade they have departmentalized. in 6and 7 grade there has been a dip due to having more than one teacher, the work has been increased. 8th grade came in very prepared this year. they have worked really well with organization and time management.

they have implemented an honor system " We are on a roll" where they earn tickets. students are catching on and it has been going well. Attendance has also been going well at the upper school.

B. Right From the Start

The *Right from the Start* program has been highly successful this year. Rachel S. (School Dietitian) and Laurie L. have collaborated closely with the families of K1 students, and with the support of Arlene Garcia (Student Services Coordinator), they have achieved 100% attendance for the first time.

C. Rechartering Recap 10/17

Every five years, the school undergoes a rechartering process, which is assessed in three key areas: adherence to the terms of its charter, the effectiveness of its academic program, and the sustainability of the organization. Each of these areas is evaluated based on four distinct criteria, with each rechartering visit focusing on one specific category within each criterion. This year, the evaluations focused on the following:

- **Criterion #1:** Mission and Key Design Elements
- **Criterion #2:** Instruction (Criterion 6.2)
- **Criterion #3:** Contractual Relationships (Criterion 8.3) and Governance (Criterion 9)

As part of the rechartering process, the school follows a structured renewal procedure. This includes submitting an application, followed by a review of the application over the summer, submission of supporting evidence, and finally, an on-site inspection/visit. The results of the rechartering visit, which took place on October 17, 2024, are expected to be released in January.

During the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) visit, they triangulate the documents submitted by the school with direct classroom observations and focus group interviews. DESE conducted visits to 20-25 classrooms to ensure that the information presented in the application aligned with their observations and the discussions held during focus groups.

Chris N. inquired about DESE's concerns regarding the composition of the board, specifically the requirement for a majority of parent members. Darshan T. explained that DESE raises this question every year, expressing concern that a parent-majority board could introduce bias or conflicts of interest. However, DESE has clarified that they do not dictate how the board should be composed. Darshan reassured the board that the school will continue to engage with DESE on this matter to maintain transparency and

accountability. He also noted that most other schools do not have a parent-majority board, but emphasized that the school's charter is grounded in this founding principle. Darshan T. concluded by underscoring the significant effort involved in the rechartering process, which included 20 classroom observations, five focus groups, and the submission of over 30 documents totaling more than 600 pages.

D. Parent Coffee 10/25-Change Makers

Hali C. provided an overview of the *Changemakers* group and its efforts to positively impact the school community and culture.

This year, students in grades 7 and 8 are actively participating in the group, along with a select number of 6th-grade representatives. The group aims to expand its reach in the future.

What sets the *Changemakers* apart is their commitment to not only discussing change but actively implementing it. Last year, they organized a food drive at the Upper School, collecting donations for a local food pantry. This year, they expanded their outreach to include all grade levels, conducting presentations to younger students to encourage broader participation.

In addition, the *Changemakers* hosted a Culture Night last school year to celebrate and showcase the diverse cultures within the school community. The event saw significant parent involvement and was well-received by attendees.

Several *Changemakers* members also had the opportunity to present at the most recent parent coffee, sharing insights into their work and the goals of the club.

To further engage the community, the *Changemakers* maintain an active social media presence where they post updates and promote their events.

E. SPED/ESL PAC Meeting and Elections 10/30

The Special Education Parent Council and the ELL Parent Council had their first meeting on 10/30. They have 4 committee members. In their first meeting, they discussed the Tiered Focus Monitoring. In the next meeting, they will be going over the IEPs and Parent rights.

IV. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

E. Nolberto made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

J. Henriquez seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

D. DeFillippo Absent

E. Nolberto Aye

J. Cedeno Aye

C. Needham Aye

L. Perez Absent

Roll Call

R. Almanzar Aye

J. Tejada Aye

J. Henriquez Aye

G. Lopez Aye

L. McRae Absent

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 6:43 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Y. Rodriguez