APPROVED

Lawrence Family Development Charter School

Minutes

LFDCS Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Wednesday March 12, 2025 at 5:30 PM

Location
OW Conference Room
355 Haverhill Street
Lawrence, MA 01840

Zoom:
Meeting ID: 203 254 9498
Passcode: yJ32tX

Trustees Present
C. Needham (remote), D. DeFillippo, E. Nolberto, G. Lopez, J. Henriquez (remote), J. Tejada (remote), L. McRae (remote), L. Perez (remote)

Trustees Absent
J. Cedeno, R. Almanzar

Guests Present
A. Croes, Allison Blount, C. Parcell, D. Thakkar, Elaine Fuller, H. Castleman, L. Lawler, N. Arpin, Nicole Dean-Ward, P. Macario, Rachel Sanchez, S. Perry, Sarah Hecht, Sean Reardon, Y. Rodriguez

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B.

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 Mar 12, 2025 at 5:41 PM.

C. Approve Minutes

E. Nolberto made a motion to approve the minutes from LFDCS Board of Trustees Meeting on 02-12-25.
J. Henriquez seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

II. Public Participation

A. Report from the Heads of School

Nicole A. presented a letter on behalf of all the Heads of School, expressing their full support for the appointment of Dr. Darshan Thakkar as the permanent Superintendent of Lawrence Family Development Charter School.

Chloe P. submitted a letter of recommendation to the Board from the Lower School teachers, affirming their endorsement of Dr. Thakkar’s appointment as Superintendent.

Hali C. extended her gratitude to the search committee for their diligent efforts and conveyed her strong support and recommendation for Dr. Thakkar’s appointment.

Sarah H., Paraprofessional Coach and a new faculty member this year, shared her experience working with Dr. Thakkar. She highlighted his positive impact on the school's paraprofessionals through his leadership and support.

III. Superintendent's Report

A. Management Services Agreement

Dr. Darshan Thakkar reviewed the Master Services Agreement (MSA) and informed the Board that a vote on the agreement will take place at the next Board of Trustees meeting in April. He noted that most of the proposed changes are outlined in Exhibit 2 of the agreement. The revised agreement primarily focuses on the IT department, which is the only service the school will be contracting.

Dr. Thakkar requested that the Board take time to review the provided documents in preparation for the upcoming vote. He also presented key revisions based on his review of the MSA.
One significant change is the agreement's duration, which has been adjusted from a five-year term to a one-year term. Additionally, Dr. Thakkar clarified that the only service being provided under the new agreement is IT support, at a proposed cost of $514,400. This is a reduction from the original draft, which proposed a cost of $1,445,250—equivalent to 6.7% of tuition. It is important to note that the proposed cost included other services such as HR and Finance which will be transferred to the school. He explained that the stated amount is a lump sum fee, which is standard for contracted services.

Dr. Thakkar requested that Susan P. provide further details on how the proposed cost was determined. If the Board is in agreement, they will proceed with a vote for approval in April. He also emphasized the need for greater clarity in the description of services, including a detailed breakdown of the basic IT services covered under the agreement and how additional projects beyond these services would be billed.

Susan P. provided background on the MSA, which has been in place for more than 30 years, and noted that fees have historically ranged between 14-18% of tuition. She explained that, with the assistance of Chris N. and an external consultant, they arrived at a reasonable cost proposal. Additionally, legal counsel advised that reimbursements are not structured on a dollar-for-dollar basis.

Susan P. confirmed that the agreement's term will be adjusted accordingly. She also mentioned that Tony S. would be able to provide further details regarding the specific services included. Furthermore, she noted that larger IT projects are typically scheduled during the summer months.
There were no questions from the Board, and the discussion will continue at the next meeting.

IV. Principal's Report

A. Nutrition and Wellness Report

Rachel Sanchez provided an update on the Nutrition and Wellness program, highlighting recent initiatives and discussions. The third Wellness Committee meeting of the year was recently held, aligning with March as National Nutrition Month. To promote awareness, she shared nutritional fact information at tonight's dinner.

During the meeting, the committee discussed the social-emotional climate and presented the results of a student survey focused on healthy online behaviors among middle school students. The survey received responses from 150 students and covered topics such as:

- Time spent online
- Types of digital platforms used
- Parental restrictions on internet use
- Awareness of online dangers

The results showed that, on average, students in grades 5-8 spend more than four hours online outside of school, primarily for entertainment and communication. Regarding parental restrictions, 75% of students reported having either strict or lenient limitations, while 25% indicated they had no restrictions at all.

Most students demonstrated an awareness of online risks and ways to protect themselves. Additionally, many expressed interest in learning more about avoiding scammers and hackers, as well as strategies to prevent online bullying. The survey also included open-ended questions, which provided valuable insights into students' personal experiences and challenges in the digital space. The goal of this initiative is to better understand students' online behaviors and provide them with the necessary support and education to navigate digital spaces safely.

In terms of nutrition initiatives, Rachel shared updates on recent student taste tests. A breakfast bake trial was conducted but was not well received, whereas a waffle taste test in February was met with positive feedback. As a result, waffles were officially introduced to the menu this past Tuesday. The team will continue making menu adjustments based on student preferences.
Additional wellness activities included a bingo event for the lower school and upcoming collaborations with first and second-grade students on healthy choices, climate education, and activities related to recycling and composting. Rachel is also assisting the health teacher in developing nutrition-related curriculum content.

Plans for Field Day have been discussed, and efforts to promote composting and recycling remain steady at a 93% divergent from the landfill. The committee will continue working to enhance these sustainability efforts.

B. SY’ 2025-2026 Calendar (FINAL)

E. Nolberto made a motion to approve the FY25-26 calendar.
D. DeFillippo seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call
D. DeFillippo Aye

Roll Call

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

C. School Site Council Minutes 1/29

Hali C. provided a report on the most recent School Site Council meeting, which took place on January 29th. The meeting featured a presentation on the benefits of bilingualism.

The final presentation of the year will focus on parent engagement and strategies for enhancing involvement.

To conclude the year, the council will host a potluck at the final meeting on March 26th, bringing families together to share and celebrate their favorite cuisines from the community.

D. SPED/EL PAC Meeting 2/26

Sean R. and Elaine F. provided an update on the most recent SEPAC/ELPAC meeting, which took place in February.

During the meeting, they conducted an online presentation on accommodations for MCAS, ACCESS, and WIDA assessments. The session was attended by eight families, representing approximately ten students enrolled in these programs.

The final meeting of the year is scheduled for May, during which elections will be held.

E. Lottery Update 3/5

Hali C. provided an update on the lottery which was held electronically for the first time. It was successful. They received 450 applicants and they have accepted 87 students into the K1 program.

V. Update from the Academic Advisory Committee

A. Update on the AAC.

Dave D. provided an update on the Advisory and Advocacy Committee (AAC), which consists of three trustees and four faculty members. The trustee representatives on the committee are Germinudy R., Elizabeth N., and Dave D.

He highlighted the committee's purpose, emphasizing its role in fostering open and honest discussions. While the committee is not a decision-making body, it serves as a platform for trustees to hear directly from teachers and staff on ways to enhance the school's success.
The committee recently concluded its third and final meeting of the year. Dave D. also acknowledged the faculty members serving on the committee: Meredith Denu, Heather Clark-Kusiv, Heather Finochiarro, and Mary O'Toole.

Reflecting on the committee's development, Dave D. noted that while its initial direction was unclear, it has since evolved into a valuable forum for collaboration. Faculty members have gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of what it takes to run a school. To further capture teacher input, the committee has distributed a survey, and he expressed his satisfaction with the positive and constructive outcomes so far.

Elizabeth N. shared that she is pleased with the level of respect and the passionate responses from participants. She values being part of the process of finding meaningful solutions.
Germinudy R. emphasized the importance of teachers and staff feel heard and included in discussions that impact the school.

Looking ahead, Dave D. is excited about the committee's potential for growth. He echoed Elizabeth N.'s sentiments, reminding committee members that while immediate results may not always be visible, their contributions are shaping meaningful change for the future.
This version maintains professionalism while improving clarity, structure, and flow. Let me know if you'd like any refinements!

VI. Superintendent Search

A. Report of the Superintendent Search Committee Process

Dave D. provided a brief overview of the search committee's work. The committee was appointed in October and consists of five trustees—Dave D., Elizabeth N., Jose Henriquez, Rita A., and Germinudy R.—as well as faculty members Laurie Lawler, Allison Blount, and Erika Witham.
He noted that the committee followed a structured process outlined by the Massachusetts Charter School Association to guide their search.

In early November, the committee drafted a job posting that included details on the school's charter, a job description, and the key competencies sought in a Superintendent. Applicants were required to submit their educational philosophy, curriculum experience,

current licensing information, and references. The job posting was distributed across seven professional job sites, resulting in 18 applications.

To ensure a fair and thorough evaluation, the committee developed a set of interview questions aligned with the most desirable competencies, as well as a scoring rubric to assess candidate responses.

On February 7, committee members reviewed all submitted applications and created a shortlist of the most qualified candidates based on experience, expertise, and years in education. The search committee held in-person interviews with 4 candidates. Using the scoring rubric and committee evaluations, they identified two finalists to recommend to the Board of Trustees. In compliance with open meeting laws the committee ensured the process remained transparent and aligned with best practices recommended by the Massachusetts Charter School Association, which also advised selecting two finalists. The final recommendations were shared with the Board members for review prior to today's meeting.
The two finalists for the Superintendent position are:

- **Laurie Butterfield** – Currently the Principal of South Lawrence East, she has dedicated her career to education in Lawrence, serving as a principal, teacher, and administrator.
- **Darshan Thakkar** – Currently serving as the Interim Superintendent of LFDCS.

Dave D. emphasized that the statements made in the opening session accurately reflected the committee's impressions of the interview process.

Elizabeth N. added that all interviews were conducted in executive session to protect the candidates' confidentiality and ensure a fair selection process.

This version maintains professionalism, improves readability, and ensures clarity while keeping all key details intact. Let me know if you'd like any adjustments!

B. Recommendation of Superintendent finalists to the Board of Trustees for vote to approve the permanent LFDCS Superintendent.

E. Nolberto made a motion to accept the two candidates presented for the Superintendent position and vote.
J. Tejada seconded the motion.
Individual votes from Board Members present:
Linette P. voted for Laurie B.
Chris N. voted for Darshan T.
Jose T. voted for Darshan T.
Elizabeth N. voted for Darshan T.
Dave D. voted for Darshan T.
Germinudy R. voted for Darshan T.

Linette McRae was not present during this voting.

The board voted to approve the motion to appoint Dr. Darshan Thakkar as Superintendent.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.
Darshan T. expressed his gratefulness for the support and how it is his distinct privilege to serve as Superintendent of LFDCS.

VII. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

E. Nolberto made a motion to adjourn.
D. DeFillippo seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 6:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Y. Rodriguez

Documents used during the meeting

- SCHOOL CALENDAR 25-26 FINAL.pdf
- School Site council minutes 012925 minutes.pdf