APPROVED

Lawrence Family Development Charter School

Minutes

April 09, 2025 LFDCS Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Wednesday April 9, 2025 at 5:30 PM

Location
Zoom
OW Conference Room
355 Haverhill Street
Lawrence, MA 01840

Trustees Present
D. DeFillippo (remote), E. Nolberto (remote), G. Lopez, J. Cedeno (remote), J. Henriquez (remote), L. McRae (remote)

Trustees Absent
C. Needham, J. Tejada, L. Perez, R. Almanzar

Guests Present
D. Thakkar, L. Lawler, N. Arpin, Nicole Dean-Ward (remote), P. Macario (remote), S. Perry, 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 Apr 9, 2025 at 5:43 PM.

C. Pledge of Allegiance

D. Approve Minutes

D. DeFillippo made a motion to approve the minutes from LFDCS Board of Trustees Meeting on 03-12-25.
J. Henriquez seconded the motion.
Dave suggested some edits to the March 12, 2025, meeting minutes.

Superintendent Search Numeral 6: Dave would like to add on the end of the sentence, *the search committee held in-person interviews with 4 candidates....*

The correction of the candidate's name to Laurie.

Insert: The board voted to approve the motion to appoint Dr. Darshan Thakkar as Superintendent.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

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

II. Superintendent's Report

A. Ms. Castleman's Baby

Dr. Darshan wanted to report that the principal, Ms. Hali Castleman gave birth to a baby boy and both are doing well.

B. Management Services Agreement

1. Term of Agreement (Section 1.3)
Dr. Thakkar emphasized that the MSA is intended as a one-year contract ending on June 30, 2026. He recommended removing any language implying renewal or extension, including:

> "…or unless extended in accordance with the terms and conditions of this Section…"

> “This Agreement may be approved and renewed… for additional renewal terms…”
> “If either party intends not to renew…”

Dr. Thakkar advised that any decision to renew should be revisited next year, not predetermined in this agreement.

2. Intent to Contract IT Services for One Year
Although there had been prior discussions about bringing IT services in-house, Dr. Thakkar explained that continuing the contract for one more year is a **good-faith gesture** to support LFD during its current financial challenges, given the long-standing relationship between both parties.

3. Scope of Services (Section 2.1)
Dr. Thakkar recommended removing the following language:

> “Other services required… must be agreed upon and will be the financial responsibility of LFDCS.”

He argued that the $514,000 contract amount is more than sufficient to cover all necessary services.

4. Annual Rate Increases (Section 2.4)
Dr. Thakkar recommended deleting the clause:

> “The Management Organization reserves the right to increase this amount at a rate of 5% each year...”

Since this is a one-year agreement, the clause is not applicable.

5. Insurance (Article 4, Section 4.1)
Dr. Thakkar sought clarification on the two-year commercial liability insurance requirement.
Susan P. explained that the clause exists to cover the runoff period for processing any pending claims after contract termination.

In response to a question from Dave D. regarding the one-year term, Dr. Thakkar explained that among the 69 charter schools in Massachusetts, only 7 to 9 contract out management services. The majority have internalized departments like HR, Finance, Payroll, and IT as their enrollment and staffing have grown.

Dr. Thakkar added that:

- Financially, it is more cost-effective to bring these services in-house.
- It has already been discussed to internalize HR and payroll; the IT contract is being extended for one year to prevent a sudden financial burden on LFD and allow time to recover from losses.
- The school intends to transition IT in-house in the future. As such, it is important that the MSA clearly reflects this one-year commitment with no assumptions of renewal.

Dr. Thakkar acknowledged that while some of his suggestions were incorporated, several were either omitted or replaced with language he had not proposed. He provided the following feedback:

Exhibit 2 – Technology Basic Services
Infrastructure
Original proposal: Reference to “necessary services”
Current language: “DESE-specified system requirements”
Dr. Thakkar noted that DESE only provides guidance for MCAS systems. The school’s technology needs extend beyond this, and language should not restrict services to DESE specifications.
Help Desk – Orientation & Training
Current language: “Orientation and training for users of existing technology”
Dr. Thakkar raised concerns about the phrase “existing technology,” which could exclude future platforms.
Suggested revision:

> “Provide directions and training for teachers and staff on smartboards, online learning platforms, and virtual classrooms. Assist the Digital Instructor with implementation of technology as needed.”

Help Desk – Support Access
Current language: Email, phone, and other electronic devices
Dr. Thakkar noted that the original proposed language included a dedicated support team, which was removed. He emphasized the importance of ensuring support is not limited to email or phone channels.
Deliverables – Billing
Current clause allows for billing of $200/hour for services not listed, and biannual billing for after-hours board meeting support.
Dr. Thakkar objected to additional billing, citing the high base contract fee.
He stated that:
The contractor should absorb any routine operational costs, including necessary staffing.
He is willing to accept the $200/hour rate specifically for after-hours board meetings, as they fall outside the standard scope of daily support.
Deliverables – Staffing

The draft states: “A minimum of two individuals are trained in each of the processing steps.”
Dr. Thakkar accepted this, but added that if more personnel are required, LFD will assume financial responsibility as the contractor.

Annual Amendments & Fee Increases

Dr. Thakkar recommended removing the following paragraph, as it is not applicable to a one-year agreement:

> “The Services may be amended annually… The Management Organization reserves the right to increase this amount at a rate of 5% each year…”

While the MSA was intended as a voting item, the board did not receive the revised draft in time for full review. Dr. Thakkar instead requested preliminary feedback from board members.

Dave D. expressed support for a one-year agreement with no additional billing. Elizabeth N. also supported the one-year term under the proposed conditions.

Next Steps

Dr. Thakkar confirmed that he will present a final draft of the MSA at the next board meeting for a vote. He reiterated that the school is ready to sign the one-year agreement if the recommended changes are incorporated. If a counterproposal includes added billing or limits on services, the school will strongly consider bringing IT services in-house, which could result in 20–30% cost savings in preparation for potential federal funding cuts.
Dr. Thakkar shared a snapshot of the Administrative Expenses section from the FY26 budget, specifically lines 45–53.
He inquired about the fees listed under payroll services and human resources, asking for clarification on their purpose. In response, Susan P. explained that the fees cover the costs associated with using BambooHR for human resources management and Harpers for payroll processing.

C. Transitioning Employees

Dr. Thakkar reported on faculty transitions from LFD to LFDCS. The following positions will be transitioning:

- Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, Yulissa Rodriguez, effective March 31, 2025

- HR and Payroll Services: Caroline Estabrook and Cristina Ramirez, effective April 28, 2025

Dr. Thakkar noted that interviews are ongoing for the Assistant Superintendent and Finance Director positions. They have received eight applications for the Assistant Superintendent role and nine for the Finance Director role. He will provide an update once more information becomes available.
Dave D. inquired about the Assistant Superintendent search. Darshan T. responded that an update can be provided by the search committee lead, Andreina Croes.
Dr. Thakkar also presented an Assurance and Indemnification Agreement as part of the transition process to ensure a clean handover. The purpose is to confirm that no outstanding financial or employment-related obligations remain with LFD and to protect LFDCS from being identified in the event of any employee complaints.
Susan P. reported that one pending item remains — a travel reimbursement.

D. Plan for lease negotiations

The next major item, assuming the MSA is finalized, is the lease agreement.

Dr. Thakkar stated that LFD will be proposing a new lease amount based on an appraisal currently being conducted. He expressed hope that the proposed amount will be fair and reasonable.

Dr. Thakkar asked Susan P. if there is a timeline from the real estate professional. Susan P. responded that an update should be available by the finance meeting in May.

E. Federal Funding for ESSA and IDEA programs

Dr. Thakkar provided an update on the status of federal funding for the ESSA and IDEA programs in light of potential nationwide funding cuts. For LFDCS, approximately $2.5 million in federal funding could be impacted.

He delivered a brief presentation to address concerns surrounding this issue. Dr. Thakkar clarified that federal education funding cannot be eliminated through an executive order alone—it requires legislative action by Congress.

He also noted that on March 11, the Massachusetts Attorney General, in coordination with 22 other state attorneys general, filed a lawsuit against the federal government. This coalition argues that efforts to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education would deprive students with special needs of essential resources and support, and create widespread disruption for educators and school communities.

The lawsuit contends that such actions by the Executive Branch are both unlawful and unconstitutional, as they violate the principle of separation of powers by attempting to

dissolve a federal department without Congressional approval. Dr. Thakkar expressed confidence in the strength of the case and the likelihood of a favorable outcome for the coalition.

F. Draft of Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

Jose H. provided an overview of the FY26 Budget Draft. He stated that the Finance Committee reviewed the draft during its most recent meeting. One of the items discussed was the $2.5 million in federal funding the school currently receives. After the meeting, some committee members met with Dr. Thakkar to explore alternatives in the event that the school were to lose this funding. Dr. Thakkar assured the members that there are ways to mitigate the impact of such a loss within the budget if necessary.

Dr. Thakkar reiterated that while there is a cushion in the budget, there are also unused grants with a shelf life that could serve as alternative sources of funding.
Regarding revenue, the committee discussed tuition projections based on full enrollment of 920 students. However, they acknowledged that this figure could be adjusted to account for the possibility of not reaching full enrollment.

Jose H. concluded by stating that the Finance Committee recommends the board vote in favor of the first draft of the FY26 budget, with the understanding that certain figures would be clarified in the second draft.
J. Henriquez made a motion to approve the first draft of the budget for FY2026.
D. DeFillippo seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

G. Selection of the Food Services Vendor

Certainly! Here's the revised version with "Darshan T." replaced by "Dr. Thakkar," along with some minor edits for clarity and consistency:
Dr. Thakkar walked the Board through the food service vendor selection process.
The evaluation began with the submission and approval of the Request for Proposal (RFP) by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) in early 2025.
An information session was held on March 10, attended by four potential vendors. During

the session, the district emphasized its commitment to providing nutritious and culturally relevant meals. Vendors were given the opportunity to submit follow-up questions. Most did—except for Stock Pot Malden and Lawrence Prospera, the latter of whom did not attend the session or submit any inquiries. Final proposals were received by the March 27 deadline from Stock Pot Malden, SKF Management, and Lawrence Prospera.
Proposals were evaluated using DESE's rubric, which covered ten criteria including experience, operations, menu appeal, and financial stability. Stock Pot Malden received the highest score with 35 points, followed closely by SKF Management with 34, while Lawrence Prospera received 23. Stock Pot Malden stood out for its strong references, operational capacity, and diverse menu offerings, supported by a partnership with local business El Pez Dorado. SKF also presented a solid proposal with strong marketing and student engagement strategies. Lawrence Prospera's proposal was less competitive, especially in the areas of food service leadership and financial reliability.
Rachel S. added that the committee conducted a detailed review of the menus submitted. Stock Pot Malden provided five diverse menus offering both hot and cold meals. SKF included menus featuring Spanish, Asian, and Brazilian cuisine. Lawrence Prospera submitted its current menu, which includes culturally diverse options only once per week. The committee emphasized the importance of variety and consistency in menu offerings and noted that Stock Pot Malden and SKF better aligned with those priorities.
After selecting a preferred vendor based on quality and fit, the committee opened the sealed bid amounts, in accordance with DESE regulations.

Bid Amounts:

Stock Pot Malden: $869,581
SKF Management: $901,267
Lawrence Prospera: $894,014

Bid Bonds:

Stock Pot Malden submitted treasurer's checks, and Lawrence Prospera submitted a copy of a check submitted when they responded to the first RFP in July 2024.
SKF Management submitted a bid bond letter with an underwriting disclaimer.

Client Experience:

Stock Pot Malden serves several schools and organizations, including KIPP, Match Charter Schools, Hill View Montessori, and the Cambridge Housing Authority.
SKF Management's clients include Boston Collegiate Charter School, Lowell Community Charter, and the City of Cambridge.
Lawrence Prospera primarily supports early learning centers and school programs in Lawrence.

Food Service Director (FSD) Experience:

Stock Pot Malden provided a team of four experienced food service directors, each with at least seven years of experience, and highlighted a partnership with local food entrepreneur Yaniry Espinal of El Pez Dorado.
SKF did not name a specific FSD but described the qualifications required for the position.

Lawrence Prospera named one candidate with no prior experience in school food service; the individual had self-educated on DESE requirements but lacked direct operational experience.
Dr. Thakkar concluded by recommending that the Board approve Stock Pot Malden as the food service vendor for LFDCS, based on the evaluation rubric, competitive pricing, and overall strength of their proposal. A vote would need to happen at this board meeting since a contract needs to be submitted by April 25.

D. DeFillippo made a motion to accept the recommendation of Stock Pot Malden as the Food services contract.
J. Henriquez seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

III. Principal's Report

A. School Site Council

Darshan T. presented on behalf of the Principal.

Ms. Castleman gave a presentation on Family Engagement at the School Site Council meeting held on March 26, highlighting its positive impact on student success. Rachel S. presented how food connects us. Learning about different cultures and family ties.

Ms. Rachel Sanchez reported strong parent participation in the meeting. Parents shared that they feel well-informed and connected to the school, noting that the addition of a virtual option for meetings has helped them feel more included.

Parents also suggested recording future meetings and making them available for families who want to stay engaged but cannot attend live. In response, Elizabeth N. also proposed providing written summaries of the meetings to further support accessibility and involvement.

IV. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

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

Roll Call

E. Nolberto	Aye
L. Perez	Absent
J. Henriquez	Aye
J. Cedeno	Aye
R. Almanzar	Absent
G. Lopez	Aye
C. Needham	Absent
L. McRae	Aye
J. Tejada	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 7:05 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Y. Rodriguez

Documents used during the meeting

- IT services contract w LFDCS w Markups.pdf
- Admin Exp. Categories.png
- Written Assurance and Indemnification.docx
- Shutting down the Dept. of Edu.pptx
- School Budget F26a.xlsx
- Food Services Selection.pdf
- School Site council minutes 032625 minutes.docx