APPROVED

Lawrence Family Development Charter School

Minutes

LFDCS Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Wednesday October 8, 2025 at 5:30 PM

Location
Zoom

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

Trustees Absent
L. Perez, R. Almanzar

Guests Present
A. Croes (remote), C. Parcell (remote), D. Thakkar (remote), H. Castleman (remote), L. Lawler (remote), M. Ventre (remote), N. Arpin (remote), Nicole Dean-Ward (remote), P. Macario (remote), Parent: Jeovanny Rodriguez (remote), Rachel Sanchez (remote), S. Reardon (remote), S. Stukuls (remote), Y. Rodriguez (remote)

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 Oct 8, 2025 at 5:37 PM.

C.

Pledge of Allegiance

D. Approve minutes from the September 10, 2025 BOT Meeting

D. DeFillippo made a motion to approve the minutes from LFDCS Board of Trustees Meeting on 09-10-25.
J. Henriquez seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

II. Public Participation

A. Parent Participation

Parent Jeovanny Rodriguez, father of three LFDCS students, attended the meeting to express concerns about the emergency dismissal on September 30, 2025. He questioned why students remained in school until noon if the situation was considered an emergency and asked whether the dismissal time was chosen to ensure the day counted toward the 180 required school days. He also raised concern about the follow-up call, stating students picked up before noon would be marked absent, which he felt created inconvenience for parents.

Mr. Rodriguez asked whether the day would need to be made up, whether the policy had been changed after the event, and whether there is a separate policy for emergency dismissals versus early dismissals.

Darshan T. explained that the early dismissal resulted from an unexpected power outage, which qualified as an emergency disruption to normal operations. He clarified that if student or staff safety had been at immediate risk, students would have been released immediately. Because the school is required to provide meals before any early dismissal and must manage dismissal safely to avoid chaos, students were dismissed at noon. Dr. Thakkar stated that the school followed the established policy adopted last year and shared in the Parent/Student Handbook, therefore, the day counts and will not need to be made up. He also confirmed that the policy had not changed.

Due to the five-minute public comment limit, Mr. Rodriguez was invited to schedule a meeting with Darshan T. to continue the discussion.

III. Board Member Terms and Offices

A. Re-elect Rita Almanzar to a second term.

Rita A. was not present; therefore, this agenda item will be moved to the next meeting.

B. Committee Assignments-Finance Committee

Lynette M. expressed her interest in continuing to serve on the Finance Committee. She recently started a new job and is still adjusting to her schedule, noting that Wednesdays are particularly busy. She acknowledged that if her inconsistent attendance were a concern, she would be willing to step down, but emphasized that this is her final year on the board and she would like to remain involved.

Chris N. noted that the Finance Committee may have a particularly busy year ahead due to the potential purchase of the buildings and suggested, with Lynette's approval, that another trustee could take her place if interested. Since no other trustee expressed interest, Lynette M. confirmed her desire to continue serving and proposed moving meetings to Tuesdays to accommodate her schedule. The committee agreed, and meetings will be held on Tuesdays starting in November.

IV. Superintendent's Report

A. Audit Updates

Darshan T. reported that there has been significant progress on both the lease and the audit. The audit is moving forward according to the established timeline for document collection and analysis, and Mark V. holds check-in meetings with the auditors every Friday morning.

B. Lease Agreement

Darshan T. reported that significant progress has been made on the lease and that discussions on the terms are now complete. Mark V. shared that, after lengthy negotiations, the school and LFD have reached an agreement on the lease terms, and a final version was distributed to the board earlier that day. The Fund's board has also approved this final version. The only remaining item is the attachment of the legal description of the properties, which depends on the survey. Fieldwork for the survey was completed yesterday, and a full report is expected during the week of October 20. Mark V. noted that the board can vote to approve the lease with the understanding that the legal description may be updated once the survey report is finalized.

Chris N. asked whether the school secured everything it sought in the lease. Mark V. confirmed that the main issues, right of first refusal and the timeline to complete the purchase, were successfully resolved. The school had requested 365 days to close on the properties, which was granted.

Darshan T. and Mark V. assured the board that both parties can sign the lease now and amend it later to reflect the updated legal description from the survey.
D. DeFillippo made a motion to approve the final version of the lease with the agreement that the survey will be amended once completed.
J. Henriquez seconded the motion.
Dave D. asked for clarification about the reference to 240 days in the lease and what it pertains to. Mark V. explained that it relates to the financing commitment: the school must secure financing within 240 days and complete the purchase within 365 days.

Elizabeth N. wanted to acknowledge everyone who has worked to get to this point in the lease negotiations.

Darshan T. also wanted to acknowledge the Board members who volunteer their time to work on this.

Dave D. shared the same sentiment.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

V. Assistant Superintendent's Report

A. Updates from the Assistant Superintendent

Sally-Ann Stukuls, Assistant Superintendent, reported that the district recently applied for two federal grants. One grant would support training four bilingual staff members as certified educational interpreters beginning this winter. The district also submitted its annual IDEA grant application to continue funding special education services and programs in compliance with state and federal requirements.

She also shared updates from the Digital Learning and Extended Day departments. The Digital Learning team supported the launch of instructional technology for the new school year, including staff support with Schoology and classroom technology. The Innovative Learning Team reconvened after four years to lead the integration of ActivPanel displays, and the department welcomed a new part-time Digital Learning Specialist, Kara Malo, who will assist staff with technology integration and professional development. In Extended Day and clubs, 332 students are now enrolled across 11 programs, including Math Olympiad, Debate Club, robotics, and choir. Due to growth in after-school programming, the district hired a new Extended Day Site Director, Lenny Paulino, who also serves as a paraprofessional and has been part of the program for three years.

VI. Principal's Report

A. Wellness Committee Update

Rachel Sanchez, School Dietitian, provided the Board with an update on the Wellness Committee and the Nutrition Department.
Over the past year, the committee focused on three main areas.

- In Social Emotional Climate, a survey at the Upper School revealed high student screen time, access to questionable content, limited safety awareness, and inconsistent oversight.
- In Nutrition Environment & Services, the department produced a “Cafeteria Confessions” podcast, conducted taste tests for breakfast items, implemented menu changes, and provided nutrition education across both Lower and Upper Schools.
- In Environmental Action, the school maintained a strong focus on sustainability, including classroom composting and keeping the cafeteria composting rate at 93%.

Looking ahead, the committee plans to work in five areas this year.

- In Social Emotional Climate, they aim to establish a social institute to empower students, staff, and families, and develop programs for Bullying Awareness Month.
- In Health and PE, they will integrate wellness and the arts to meet cross-curricular goals, supported by a grant.
- In the Nutritional Environment, a new food vendor has been well received by students, and National School Lunch Week will feature related activities.
- In Environmental Action, the school will continue to expand composting efforts and provide more education, including classroom-level initiatives.
- In Educator Well-being, the committee will assess staff needs via an upcoming survey and provide ongoing support and resources through newsletters.

The Wellness Committee, composed of 16 members including the Dietitian, nurse, PE and Health staff, SEL, SPED, teachers, parents, and the Assistant Superintendent, held its first meeting last week and will meet three more times this school year.

Dave D. commended Rachel for her work and asked about recycling oversight. Rachel explained that cafeteria staff monitor students and guide them to use the correct receptacles, which are clearly labeled. Darshan T. added that child-friendly signage further supports proper disposal and Rachel S. provides information to students and families during Right from the Start, which is offered to K1.

B. Panorama Results

Nicole DW. provided the Board with an update on the Fall 2025 Panorama results. Panorama is a tool that allows teachers to access student data, including grades, attendance, test scores, and social-emotional learning (SEL) surveys. Students in grades 3–8 complete SEL surveys focused on supportive relationships, social awareness, challenging feelings, and emotion regulation, with grades 7–8 also completing a self-efficacy component. Teachers of students in K–2 complete a perception survey assessing emotion regulation, social awareness, classroom effort, grit, and self-management.

Results showed that students in grades 7–8 scored high in supportive relationships, with emotional regulation identified as an area of focus. Overall, students scored on or above the national average in most areas. Open-ended responses highlighted that students feel supported when teachers recognize the demands they face with homework and activities, and challenges included homework and preparing for high school.

Sixth graders scored high in supportive relationships but lower in social awareness and emotion regulation compared to national norms. Their feedback indicated difficulty managing grades and a need for breaks or teacher support.

Students in grades 3–5 also scored high in supportive relationships, with emotion regulation as the focus, while social awareness and emotion regulation were areas for growth. Open responses emphasized challenges at home and the need for help with problem-solving and academics. K–2 students, according to teacher surveys, scored high in emotion regulation and social awareness, with self-management identified as the next focus area.

Nicole DW. reported that 27% of students fall into Tier 3, indicating higher SEL needs, particularly in emotional regulation, social awareness, self-efficacy (grades 7–8), and self-management (grades K–2). Beginning in October, the school will implement an SEL RTI program, collaborating with teachers to design targeted interventions for the 237 Tier 3 students and others needing additional support in these areas.

Jennifer C. asked why students in grades 5–8 do not have free time, such as recess. Nicole DW. explained that these grades follow more of a middle school model. While

teachers are making efforts to provide breaks throughout the day, some students would still benefit from additional opportunities for walks or time for themselves.

C. MCAS Results

Principal Hali Castleman reviewed the MCAS results from Spring 2025, which were made public a week ago. MCAS is administered annually in the spring, with students in grades 3–8 tested in ELA and Math. Grades 5 and 8 also take a Science, Technology, and Engineering (STE) assessment, and this year, Grade 8 students completed the Civics exam for the first time.

The MCAS assesses student and school performance relative to state standards. Scores range from 440–560 and fall into four achievement categories: Does Not Meet Expectations, Partially Meets Expectations, Meets Expectations, and Exceeds Expectations. In the first year of the Civics exam, 97% of Grade 8 students passed. In Math, the percentage of 5th-grade students not meeting expectations decreased from 10% last year to 5% this year. In ELA, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations increased from 13% to 30% in Grade 4, from 16% to 27% in Grade 6, and from 46% to 62% in Grade 8, demonstrating significant growth since COVID. Math scores also improved, with Grade 4 increasing from 11% to 25% and Grade 8 from 25% to 39%.

The state uses accountability measures to evaluate schools, including MCAS achievement, student growth, English proficiency, and chronic absenteeism. Each indicator has a weighted score, with achievement carrying the highest weight (60%). Schools are categorized based on points earned, ranging from Recognition Schools for high achievement to schools requiring assistance or intervention. LFDCS was categorized as “Substantial Progress Toward the Target,” indicating no state assistance or intervention is required.

The state also tracks the progress of the lowest-performing 25% of students. LFDCS earned 2 points for overall achievement and 6 points for the lowest-performing students. In growth, the school scored 5 points for both overall and lowest-performing students. In progress toward EL proficiency, LFDCS scored 0 points, and in chronic absenteeism, 4 points. For high-needs students, the school scored 4/12 in achievement, 5/8 in growth, and 4/4 in chronic absenteeism. For ELL/FEL students, scores were 4/12 in achievement, 5/8 in growth, 0/4 in EL proficiency, and 4/4 in chronic absenteeism. Special education students scored 0 in achievement, 4/8 in growth, and 4/4 in chronic absenteeism.

Using these results, Hali C. identified areas for targeted support. For ELA, the school hired an additional Title I Reading Teacher, implemented a new ELA curriculum, provided staff professional development through the Dyslexia Institute, and will focus on reading in the Extended Day Academic Academy (K–8). For STE, a curriculum specialist was hired. For special populations, additional ESL teachers and special education staff have been added to support student growth and address gaps.

D. School Site Council Minutes

Principal Hali Castleman provided an update on the School Site Council (SSC). The SSC meets four times per year and serves as a committee of school staff and parents who collaborate to support school improvement efforts.

During the most recent meeting, elections were held for parent representatives. Four parents returned to the council, and two new parents were elected. Parent members serve two-year terms.

Principal Castleman also introduced the Social Institute program, which focuses on supporting students' social-emotional development, particularly related to digital use and social media.

E. Parent Coffee/The Social Institute

The Social Institute is a program designed to support staff, families, and students in developing awareness and responsible use of social media.

The program provides a wide range of resources in both English and Spanish, including playbooks and newsletters that explain popular online applications and how they are used. Families can research specific apps to better understand their purpose and features.

During the recent Parent Coffee, Principal Castleman reviewed several commonly used apps with families to gauge familiarity and discuss how students are using them, including platforms such as FaceTime.

F. High School Fair

Principal Hali Castleman provided an update on the High School Fair held the previous evening. The event was very well attended, with 28 high schools from across the Northeast participating.

Board member Jose Tejada commented that the event was successful. He noted that his children were able to speak with representatives from their preferred schools and were even able to refine their list of school choices based on those conversations.

Board member Lynette M. expressed concern that some families, including her own, were told they did not need to attend the fair due to their children's academic performance. She shared that this messaging was discouraging and believes all families should feel welcome to participate regardless of grades.

VII. Other Business

A. Emergency Dismissal on 09/30/25

Darshan T. noted that this item was added to the agenda to confirm that the emergency communications policy adopted by the Board last year was implemented during the incident on September 30, 2025. This was the first time the policy was put into practice, and it proved to be effective. The process went smoothly, demonstrating that the school is prepared to respond appropriately during emergencies.

Elizabeth N. shared that her husband appreciated that the initial message did not explicitly reference an emergency, which helped prevent confusion or panic among parents, given the current climate around school safety. She noted, however, that the second message felt more urgent. Lynette M. and Germinudy L. agreed and expressed similar concerns regarding the tone of the second communication sent to families.

B. Agenda Setting Authority

Darshan T. explained that this topic was raised last week regarding the process for setting board agendas. To ensure compliance with Open Meeting Law, the school conducted a thorough review. Neither the school bylaws nor the Open Meeting Law specify who has authority over agenda setting.

Darshan asked the Board whether they would like to establish a formal agenda-setting process, including who may submit items, deadlines, and submission procedures.
Board members Germinudy L. and Chris N. expressed support for continuing with the current approach. Chris N. noted that, for finance committee meetings, he collaborates with the Superintendent and Finance Director to determine topics, and suggested board members may follow a similar process by submitting agenda items to Yulissa Rodriguez for Board meetings.

Dave D. also indicated he is comfortable with the current process and sees no need for changes as long as there has been no misuse.
Darshan clarified that agenda items must be finalized before they are posted 48 hours prior to the scheduled meeting, and board members may provide suggested items up until that publication deadline.

VIII. Executive Session

A. Enter executive session

C. Needham made a motion to enter executive session.
E. Nolberto seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

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

C. Needham made a motion to to exit executive session and enter open meeting to adjourn.

D. DeFillippo seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

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

IX. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

C. Needham 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
R. Almanzar	Absent
G. Lopez	Aye
J. Tejada	Aye
J. Cedeno	Aye
D. DeFillippo	Aye
C. Needham	Aye
J. Henriquez	Absent

Roll Call

L. McRae Aye

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Y. Rodriguez

Documents used during the meeting

- Report for BOT_ Wednesday, October 8, 2025.pdf
- Fall 2025 Wellness Highlights.pptx
- SEL Survey Results Fall 2025.pptx
- MCAS Accountability Results 2025.pptx
- SSC Minutes 092425.pdf
- The Social Institute.pptx
- Agenda Setting Authority.pdf