



May 17, 2024

Minutes of the Lawrence Alliance for Education Board – LAE

A meeting of the Lawrence Alliance for Education Board meeting was held at the South Lawrence East Educational Complex, Auditorium with the following members present: Patricia Mariano, Chair; Dr. Dolores Calaf, Early Childhood and K-12 Education, Consultant with Community Collaborative; Juana Matias, Regional Administrator for the New England Regional Office, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); Edgar De Leon, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director at Noble and Greenough School; Maria Moeller, CEO/The Community Group; Arlene Garcia, Parent Liaison, Lawrence Family Development Charter School, and Mayor Brian De Peña

Also present, Maria L. Campusano, Recording Secretary for this meeting.

Chair Mariano, called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. The Chair called the audience to recite the pledge of allegiance.

Public Participation

Chair Patricia Mariano explained the norms of public participation, she then called the following:

- **Mr. Homayoun Maali**, 53 Chester Street, Lawrence, MA. The members of the Lawrence Public School community are voting for a new superintendent, emphasizing the importance of listening to teachers and their union. He urged against political influence and ensuring the best qualifications for the new superintendent, as it is crucial for the future of the school and the city; he then thanked the teachers and their union for their participation in the process.
- **Kimberly Barry**, president of the Lawrence Teachers Union. Urged the board to choose the most qualified candidate for the superintendent position. She believed that the decision should be based on qualifications and fit, stating that the education of students is crucial and that transparency should be upheld. Barry urged the community to listen and support the chosen candidate.
- **Jennifer Cahill**, Lawrence Teachers Union. Teaching at John Green School for 28 years, expressed that she has had numerous opportunities to celebrate learning with students and families. I have hugged parents, shared their child's writing efforts, and celebrated various events. The school is dynamic, educated, and part of the community, despite not everyone having Lawrence's address. She requested the superintendent to guide and bring the community together.
- **Tracy Clark**, Teacher As a 29-year teacher in Lawrence, expressed having had both positive and negative experiences with the school department. Despite some criticism, I continued to return due to the love and relationships she has formed with families. Parents trusted her with their children's education, and she treated them like her own. She is invested in the community and hoped the board would have watched all the interviews and chose the right candidate.
- **Patricia Flyn**, 106 Woodland St, Lawrence, MA. A resident and grandparent from Lawrence, a graduate of Lawrence High School and a teacher at Head Start, she aimed to see democracy and everyone's voices heard in the process. Despite their lack of public speaking skills, she hoped everyone listened and considered all perspectives.
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Laura Santana, 75 Pearl St, Lawrence, MA. A graduate of Lawrence Public Schools expressed that the community had spoken loudly and clearly in support of the candidate, who they believed can bring positive change and innovation to the school community. She urged people to listen to the voices of the community, to recognize the deep depth of investment in the future of the schools and the students.

- **Mindy Richardson**, 27-year veteran of the teaching profession and a member of the 1400-member Lawrence Teachers Union, requested the selection of the next superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools based on the competencies and performance requirements established during an extensive search by the Alma Group. Richardson expressed her expectations that public servants should respect and vote with the will of the LPS community, as data matters and teachers are evaluated by data.
- **David Lemay**, 69 Beacon St. Lawrence, MA. As a lifelong resident of Lawrence, have been teaching for 16 years and he is appalled by the current situation. He believed the best candidate should be voted in, indicating that students and families are the future of the city depends on their dedication.
- **Luis Robles**, 183 Abbott St, Lawrence, MA. Spoked as a parent who participated in the parent panel. He expressed that the LAE board's lack of transparency has led to confusion, controversy, and conspiracy theories. The board should apologize to the teachers union for disrespecting their First Amendment rights and Ralph Carrero for the lack of transparency, which caused his name to be disparaged. The LAE board should apologize to the community for the lack of transparency. The board's leadership has received an F grade, and the drama should be left out. The focus should be on understanding the candidate's policies and common sense, rather than their background. Students should vote for candidates based on merit, not location, as none of these factors matter. The miscommunication and lack of transparency have caused these issues to occur, and everyone has good intentions.
- **Lori Morris**, a native of Lawrence, has been teaching at Frost School for 26 years and believed the schools were going in the right direction. He expressed sadness over recent negative comments and called for a superintendent who can bring the community together and prevent tearing the trust apart. He believed everyone has good intentions, but miscommunication and lack of transparency have caused issues.
- **Santina Turowski**, teacher. Encouraged the community to make the best possible choice when considering a superintendent who serves the community with respect, transparency, and belief, but she was nervous about the process.
- **Juana Espinosa**, Parent, 47 Adams St. Lawrence, MA. Spoke as a former LPS graduate; requested the city to prioritize the best interests of their children's education. She believed that their children will contribute to the community and move back to Lawrence for their future. She urged the best interest of the community and for the city to make the right choice for their students.
- **Quin Gonell**, 27 Cross St. Lawrence, MA. Manager of Restorative Justice at the HS, and education researcher, a book author. Mr. Gonell expressed that he had been working at Lawrence High School for nearly 10 years. During his doctoral studies, he visited Finland, known for its high test scores and happy students. The author believed that the success of schools is largely due to the respect teachers receive. However, he was concerned about staff retention in Lawrence Public Schools. The current superintendent, Juan Rodriguez, was teaching geometry, and the lack of



teachers and administrators have led to campus violence. He believed that it is crucial to hear teachers' opinions on staff retention to ensure the school's seriousness about children's wellness and academic success. He believed that ignoring the input of teachers and district employees is not enough to ensure the school's success.

Online Public Participation:

- **Jonathan Guzman, Vice Chair of the Lawrence School Committee - District F. sent via online; a request for public comment** dated May 15th a letter to the LAE board members and the Commissioner Dr. Russell D. Johnston.

The letter expresses support for Dr. Alma Gonzalez de Castillo, who is applying for the position of Superintendent of Lawrence Public Schools. The letter highlights her dedication, leadership, and commitment to education, which has led to significant improvements in the quality of education. Dr. Gonzalez de Castillo's tenure at Pflugerville Independent School District has been marked by innovative strategies and student-centered approaches, which have improved academic outcomes and student engagement. She is also praised for her compassionate leadership, willingness to listen, and commitment to fostering an inclusive learning environment. The letter concludes that Dr. Gonzalez de Castillo would be an invaluable asset to the Lawrence Public Schools community, demonstrating her dedication to education and leadership skills.

Jonathan Guzman. On May 16th Mr. Guzman sent a press release regarding concerns raised in Lawrence Public Schools Superintendent Search Process. Community members in Lawrence Public Schools are questioning the superintendent search process due to alleged political strategy and deviations from community recommendations, urging Acting Commissioner Russell Johnston to intervene and protect families and students.

- **Wendy Raquelina Luzon, City Council.** Requested the superintendent search results from the second interview. Provided at convenience. Asking if there are any necessary procedures or forms required to access the information to please let her know.
- **Kayla Willimas, staff.** After receiving the e-mail communication that was shared on Monday, May 20th from the Lawrence Alliance for Education on a communication to all LPS staff regarding the vote that took place on May 17th. Ms. Williams replied: "How convenient"

Chair Patricia Mariano informed the audience that Dr. Timothy Sippel had withdrawn his application for the superintendent position.

Chair Mariano also informed the process of the voting selection of a superintendent which must be approved by a 2 / 3 majority of the LAE board members present and the voting and the selection must be ratified by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The names of the three finalists are: Ralph Carrero, Dr. Alma Gonzalez de Costello and Lydia Noriega Murphy.

Member Maria Moeller, expressed that they also felt significant pressure to vote against certain candidates. She clarified that they wanted to have a fair process from the first round up and if she could go back she would do things differently. For example, she wished she could have the opportunity to evaluate the entire slate of candidates that applied for the position. Then the communication with Alma



as to how many to bring forward to the second round had impacted the trust level of the community and at their level as well; they tried to correct that by asking for raw data that was analyzed for them in which there was no consensus in terms of what candidate was the best. Ms. Moeller expressed that one thing everyone had in common was that she didn't think anybody was perfectly happy with how the process went; but moving forward with the best intentions in mind and appreciated the comments emphasizing that the board wanted this to work and get out of receivership. concluding that no superintendent

Edgar de Leon, commented on understanding the scope of the search process when there are still many questions to be asked and that this was his first time commenting on it. He concluded stating that they should have started earlier and had more transparency throughout the process, and another option was that this does not have to be the end.

Juana Matias, thanked everyone for making the effort to attend, adding that their feedback was taken seriously regardless of the results, that the commitment was to the students of Lawrence Public Schools. That she was there because of the education she received in public education and that it will take work together. She concluded by saying as a member of the LAE board she looks forward to continuing to work with the teachers and their union to ensure that the students of Lawrence receive the highest quality of education.

Edgard de Leon, expressed that when looking at data you always look for big patterns and averages, always consider your own bias before reviewing data to acknowledge your own personal beliefs, assumptions. Use the data to drive the dialogue.

VOTED: For Alma Gonzalez to be the next superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools
Upon the motion made by Edgard de Leon to name Alma Gonzalez to be the next superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools.

No one came forward to second the motion. As a result, the motion failed.

VOTED: To start the process over
Upon the motion made by Edgard de Leon to start the process again.

No one came forward to second the motion. As a result, the motion failed.



VOTED: For Ralph Carrero to be the next superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools

Vote: Upon the motion made by Maria Moeller to appoint Ralph Carrero to be the next superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools; Seconded by Juana Matias

Discussion:

Maria Moeller expressed that the data spoke in many options. Losing one of the candidates in the process and her own interpretation of the data.

Juana Matias spoke about the competencies that were previously set. One that was an effective communicator who had a track record of delivering results for students and the public school system. Someone with cultural competence and who can deliver an inclusive process. someone who has team and leadership and management experience and that she was confident in giving her vote to Ralph Carrero. She concluded saying that the data was skewed, explaining that the data of 368 of the respondents were teachers.

Dr. Dolores Calaf spoke about the stress she was under and asked for respect and her beliefs of the roles people were representing as parents, teachers, and community as an example of that they were giving to the children.

Chair Patricia Mariano spoke about how the LAE has been working collaboratively with the Alma Advisory Group to select a new superintendent since November. The process involved gathering input from stakeholders through surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, panel interviews, and videos. The data collected helped determine the competencies necessary for student success in the district. Chair Mariano added that Dr. Alma Gonzalez de Castillo was the clear choice for the next superintendent due to her background in social work and support for newcomers and immigrants adding that she has created a 5-year strategic plan, focusing on goals, accountability, and results. Dr. Gonzalez's entry plan is clear and demonstrates a clear understanding of what it takes to hit the ground running.

Chair Mariano indicated that the candidate must have a track record of success in school improvement and turnaround; how important it is to understand how to implement innovative and effective instructional practices and models for school turnaround and improvement providing an example with the Doalina Elementary School where the school received the National Blue Ribbon School after three years.

On the other hand, Chair Mariano shared that Mr. Carrero lacks experience in working with turnaround schools and would not be able to successfully transition the district back to local control. The Chair concluded by expressing that the data supports the need for a superintendent with experience in turnaround work and the ability to successfully transition the district back to local control.



The Vote

Yes - Dr. Dolores Calaf

No - Edgar de Leon

Yes - Arlene Garcia

Yes - Juana Matias

Yes - Maria Moeller

Yes- Mayor Brian de Peña

No - Chair Patricia Mariano

Motion Passes

Chair Patricia Mariano informed that the board has voted consistent with the bylaws. The decision will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education with the request that the Commissioner ratify the decision.

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 6:56 p.m.

Vote: Upon the recommendation of the Chair Patricia Mariano to adjourn the meeting at 6:56 p.m.; So Move by Juana Matias; Seconded by Arlene Garcia

The Vote

Yes - Dr. Dolores Calaf

Yes - Edgar de Leon

Yes - Arlene Garcia

Yes - Juana Matias

Yes - Maria Moeller

Yes- Mayor Brian de Peña

Yes - Chair Patricia Mariano

Motion Passes

Ms. Patricia Mariano, Chair
Date