



LEARNING PREP SCHOOL

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State of the School School Year 2019-2020

June 20, 2020

Dear Members of the Learning Prep School Community,

Tuesday, June 16th marked the end of school year 2019-2020, a year that I imagine most of us will never forget. When we closed school in March for what we anticipated to be a week or two, it ended up being for the rest of the year. The challenges the extended closing presented for staff, students, and families were complex, and at times daunting. Our mantra at LPS over the past few years has been that “Challenges=Opportunities” and this proved to be the case as each week during mid-March to mid-June everyone realized that the demands of remote learning enabled us to refine or acquire skills that will well serve all of us moving forward. We are very grateful of the supreme effort that LPS families have made to support their sons and daughters, partnering with LPS staff to enrich teaching and learning.

Recently, we celebrated the accomplishments of the Class of 2020 with a virtual commencement ceremony that was a wonderful tribute to our twenty-two graduates and their families. Jen Thorell, our HS Principal and her staff dedicated their creative genius to develop a virtual ceremony that reflected the culture and the core principles of LPS. The music, the videos, the visits by LPS staff to each senior’s residence, the individual photo on campus in cap and gown with diploma of each senior with their family, as well as the many expressions of congratulations by their family and school staff, made this a memorable commencement for our departing seniors. We are hoping that we will be able to hold an actual graduation for the Class of 2020 at a date to be determined in the fall, if the State’s directives at that time on large assemblies, allows us to do so.

LPS, for the third consecutive year has earned recognition by the National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET), as a NASET School of Excellence, the highest honor bestowed on a private special education school from this organization. Further, LPS is now a member of the Association of Independent Schools of New England (AISNE) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). As a member of AISNE and NEASC we are privileged to have access to the many services and resources they provide to schools. We, of course, maintain or membership with MAAPS, the association of private special education schools (766 Schools), across the Commonwealth. Our governing body, the LPS Board of Trustees, adheres to the principles of good governance as developed by the National Association of Independent Schools. The school’s educational program, policies, and financial protocols and practices are aligned with both the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the OSD, the latter serves as the State’s financial oversight entity.

Current and Ongoing Focus Points and Initiatives

Educational Program

As articulated in the School’s Mission Statement, LPS provides students with a language-based instructional program in a safe, secure, and structured environment. This approach enables students to

develop competency in oral and written communication. Our program of teaching and learning integrates the essential skills and core content throughout our educational program. They include a focus on academics, social pragmatics, informed and responsible citizenship, skills for life, activities and athletics. Students acquire the knowledge and skills required to successfully navigate the challenges and avail themselves of the opportunities that they will likely experience in life.

Our Curriculum and Development Protocol designed and implemented in school year 2017-2018, serves as the foundation document for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and data analysis for all content areas. This protocol includes a four-year review and continuous four-cycle within which each content area is subject to a comprehensive review and editing process conducted by appropriate staff and administration. As of May 1, 2020, our English Language Arts (ELA) and Math departments completed two years of work reviewing and developing the core content and essential skills that are at the core of their respective instructional program. During school year 2020-2021 our History/Social Studies and Science Departments will be engaged in this process.

Given the intrusive impact on schools resulting from COVID-19, DESE suspended MCAS this spring. They will resume in the upcoming school year. We are confident that they will continue to increase their understanding of core content and development of essential skills once school reopens. We are offering a remote-learning based Summer Program for three weeks beginning July 6th and we encourage students and families to consider this opportunity to engage in teaching and learning.

During the past three years we have been cultivating relationships with several other 766 schools to develop opportunities for our students and theirs to engage in coed athletic competition. This year we provided an opportunity for our athletes to participate against other schools in soccer (fall) and basketball (winter). Ultimate Frisbee was to be the spring sport but due to COVID-19 that season was aborted. Further, the menu of afterschool activities and sports has continued to offer students interesting choices for their engagement and enjoyment. The new Health and Wellness Center has provided a wonderful venue for our students to attend to their personal health and well-being. We are most appreciative of the leadership and dedication that our Director of Activities & Athletics, Alyson Humphreys has brought to these programs and initiatives. These programs, the Blue/Green Spirit Program, now in its third year, as well as other initiatives fostered by individuals and organizations, are providing meaningful and important opportunities that contribute significantly to the school's vibrant and respectful culture and to the physical and social emotional well-being of our students.

Personnel

As previously stated herein, the staff of LPS responded to the demands and complexities attendant to remote learning with the same dedication, creativity, talent, and skill sets that define their professional competencies and personal values and integrity. Our meetings with senior and middle level leaders continued with a focus on the essence of highly competent and highly confident leadership. Wednesday staff meetings and several professional days focused on the continuing professional growth and development of both the school and the staff.

Infrastructure

Efforts have continued to improve our facilities to better support our instruction and to improve the aesthetics of the teaching and learning environment. These improvements are also designed to enhance our marketing initiatives and outreach to potential students and families. This year, with the financial support of the Board of Trustees and senior leadership, we established (furnished) a nicely appointed reception area in the high school for visitors, as well as one for visitors to the Middle School. Work is now being finalized on the lowering of ceilings and adding new lighting which has significantly improved the

acoustics, lighting, and aesthetics in the classrooms, offices, and other areas of the school. We are already designing adjustments in our buildings two facilitate State directives with respect to COVID-19. This portends to be a significant cost for the school, but one that must be done to insure the health and well-being of students, staff, and visitors. Details on these plans and adjustments will be forthcoming over the summer as we secure more details from the State informing all schools what must be done to be in compliance.

Institutional Advancement (IAT): Development & Alumni Relations

Under the tutelage of Alex Magay, Director of Development and Alumni Relations, the LPS Family & Friends Fund is closing in on another successful year, approaching the target of \$250,000. As you know, these funds are contributed annually by the generosity of members of the extended LPS community, including Trustees, staff, alumni, both former and present parents, grandparents, friends of the school, and philanthropic foundations and corporations. These funds are critical to the school in meeting its financial obligations and to providing a comprehensive educational program for all students. Our fiscal year ends on June 30, 2020 and we would respectfully request that if you have not as yet given this year, please consider doing so in these next few days. We are most appreciative of those of you who include LPS in your annual giving to institutions and organizations that you believe are making important and significant contributions to the greater good. Thank you!

A few years ago we made it a priority to revitalize a near dormant alumni association. We established an Alumni Executive Council and working with this group of dedicated alums, the association has grown exponentially over the past two years. Each year we hold several events for alumni, some on campus and others at interesting venues including restaurants. During the past three months we have held three Zoom events with each of them having in excess of thirty-five alumni participants, plus some LPS staff. Alex and the Alumni Council plan and execute these events and the response has been most positive.

Working with IAT colleague, Korina Martin, Director of Admissions and Marketing, Alex has dramatically expanded our social media presence, as well as developed several informative videos that provide important insights and information from students, staff, parents, alumni, Trustees, and friends of the school. We encourage you to access the LPS website and click on these videos to learn more about this wonderful school.

Institutional Advancement (IAT): Admissions and Marketing

As stated above, Korina Martin is the Director of this office of our IAT department. Korina is about to complete her fourth year at LPS and has transformed our admissions and marketing program. Working with her colleagues on the Admissions Committee, she has established a thorough and objective set of protocols that guide our work as we engage in the review and discussion of each applicant, making sure the student is a good match for both the child and LPS. The last three months have presented a few challenges to the normal protocols of the admission/enrollment process. Korina and colleagues have proved adept through the use of Zoom, the website, and other creative initiatives to advance this important work.

The challenge for LPS, as it is for many small private schools and colleges, continues to be enrollment. Due to the efforts of many public school's intention to retain students in the district whose profile aligns with the mission of LPS and due to declining birth cohorts across the Commonwealth, the pool of students available to private schools is shrinking and the marketplace is increasingly competitive. The nature of our program and the size and configuration of our facilities is ideal to serve a student population maxing at 190-215 students. We are closing the present year with an enrollment of 164 students and given the many unknowns related to COVID-19, we do not have sufficient data to make a

reasoned projection for school year 2020-2021. It may well be in the neighborhood of 150-160 students, grades 5-12. This range will enable the school to continue to provide the high level programs and services expected of LPS. Unfortunately, the decline in enrollment and the concomitant loss of tuition revenue, has resulted in the need to reduce staff, where possible. While always a most painful undertaking, be assured that preserving the sanctity of the educational program is always at the fore, underlying these decisions.

After an exhaustive review of enrollment numbers in recent years for grades 3 & 4, upon the recommendation of the senior administration, the Board of Trustees voted to end the elementary grades and to establish a Middle School for grades 5-8. The application of resources to support a handful of third and fourth grade students was increasingly difficult and no longer financially feasible. The high school will continue to serve grades 9-12.

Finance

Ensuring the financial stability and program viability for the school is the highest priority of the Board of Trustees and senior leadership. Protocols and policies have been designed and implemented to secure and to sustain financial stability through the efficient and effective stewardship of the sources of revenue required to maintain the integrity of teaching and learning at LPS. OSD establishes the tuition rate for LPS and other 766 schools. The tuition rate for 2019-2020 has been \$55,726.46 and the rate for 2020-21 will be \$57,242.22.

The challenges and expenses attendant to COVID-19 continue to be costly, and, to a large extent at this date and time, opaque or unknown. We are, of course, laser-focused on learning everything we need to know so that we can make rational and informed financial decisions now, and moving forward. Fortunately, once we were aware of the passage of the CARES Act at the Federal level, we immediately applied for and received funds attendant to PPE demands imposed on schools. That said, we anticipate that the 2020-2021 school budget will need to be increased to address the mandates from the State as a result of COVID-19.

The Board and senior administration will not finalize the FY21 budget until we have further clarity from the State concerning the protocols for the reopening of school, directives that will determine whether schools open onsite, remotely, or a hybrid model of the two.

Community Relations

The Partners In Education (PIE) group had a successful year, albeit some plans for student activities and celebrating the LPS staff were not able to move forward due to the virus. The five parents whose two-year tenure on the Executive Committee were due to expire on June 30, 2020. It was decided to postpone the elections for new members to the fall when, hopefully, we will be on campus again. We are grateful to the five parents who agreed to continue to serve until such time that those elections are held. We had two meetings of the Parent Advisory Group (PAG) during the first semester and had scheduled two more meetings during the second half of the year. Those meetings were not held and it is our intention to schedule four meetings for school year 2020-2021, more than the two that are required by DESE. The Winter Fair was another great success due to the efforts of Debby Worcester and parent and staff volunteers. This event is one of the highpoints each year at LPS. Thanks to all that made this annual event such a success.

We continue to expand our outreach to advocates, consultants, school district liaisons, neuropsychologists, and law firms with a focus on special education. These meetings provide an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and advancing the mission of LPS. This year we introduced our

Guest Speaker series, an initiative that has been well received by parents, staff and other interested parties. We had to cancel the third Guest Speaker but we intend to offer three more sessions during school year 2020-2021.

As part of our Admissions program, Open Houses were held each month through March, followed by individual and group sessions offered through Zoom by Korina Martin, Director of Admissions and Marketing, periodically during March-June. The development of four videos previously referenced in this document, have enhanced opportunities for interested families to learn more about LPS. We encourage everyone to visit our website to view them.

Family nights dedicated to fun activities were held during the year, offered by various staff members. Among the events this year were bingo nights, special food preparation presentations, and game nights. We look forward to offering these events next year as they provide opportunities for the LPS community to come together.

Given the move to remote learning in mid-March and the myriad of changes that it required of all of us, we have sent numerous letters and other communication from the CEO, CFO, COO and the building Principals, updating and clarifying information attendant to this new mode of teaching and learning. We are deeply appreciative of your cooperation during this challenging time. The term "Partners In Education" was truly realized as school staff and parents joined together to meet the needs of our students.

Governance and Administration

The Board, the Head of School (CEO), and senior administrators work collaboratively to ensure the financial stability of the school and to advance the mission and the educational program of LPS. The Board meets five times during the school year. It also has three committees that meet periodically during the year including the Finance Committee, the Institutional Advancement Committee and the Committee on Trustees. The Board establishes Ad Hoc Committees as needed to address specific tasks that usually have a short timeline to report back to the Board on their work. Unlike publically elected School Committees, the Board of a private school is not involved in the administration of the school; rather it is focused on fiduciary responsibilities and policy.

As you know, the Board established a Search Committee in the spring of 2019, composed of members representing the Board, staff, and parents, charged with working with the search firm of Carney Sandoe to conduct a national search for the next long term Head of School. As announced last spring, the search was a success, ending with the appointment of Kurt Moellering, Principal of the Upper School at The Carroll School, to assume the Position of CEO effective July 1, 2020. We have had the privilege to include Kurt in a number of meetings during the past three months designed to acquaint him with LPS. We have thoroughly enjoyed these meetings and we are certain that he will be an outstanding leader for LPS, the school that we all love. As of June 30, 2020, I will conclude my three year tenure as Interim Head of School (CEO). I will continue to consult with Kurt during his initial year as Head of School. It has been a distinct privilege to serve LPS and to come to know so many wonderful people who are proud to be part of LPS. A letter from Karen Kames, Chair of the Board of Trustees, was sent to the LPS community on June 18, 2020, welcoming Kurt to the school.

Students

We are always reminded of the privilege that our families have granted to us as we work with your sons and daughters each and every day. We revel in their success in the classroom, in athletics and clubs, field

days, the Afterschool program, Blue/Green Spirit Days, Student Government, Student Citizenship Activities, and other programs designed to enrich and expand their school experience.

We regret the onsite socialization that is so important and much enjoyed by our students, an important element of their educational experience, has been absent during this three month period of remote learning. Our staff and parents have worked diligently to provide such opportunities through Zoom and social media and while it will never replace being together at LPS, it has provided some semblance of the community spirit that defines LPS.

Many of our twenty-two graduates will be pursuing post-secondary educational experiences beginning in the fall while others will be in transition programs or joining the workforce. We wish each one of them every success as they take the next step in their life's journey. They are all now members in good stead of our LPS Alumni Association and we look forward to seeing them as they participate in our alumni events and during visits to LPS.

Summary Statement

As I have noted in my two previous end-of-year State of the School documents, highly effective schools are always focused on how they can further refine and improve their educational program and the attendant delivery of instruction and services to their students and families. Schools must be organic institutions, challenging convention and the way they do things. It is to that end we at LPS are consistently engaged in reasoned and substantive discussions about how we can further enrich and enhance the educational experience for all students at LPS. As stated previously herein, our mantra is that with every challenge there is an opportunity to be creative and purposeful in advancing the educational program provided to our students, as well as advancing the mission and the well-being of LPS. It is always an exciting enterprise and our talented and dedicated staff and administration consistently rise to the occasion, providing their rich expertise and experience to this ongoing process, making LPS an even better place to teach and to learn. LPS is well poised for continued success over the coming years.

In closing I want to restate what I have said on numerous occasions. Serving as Interim Head of LPS has been a privilege and a joy, an affair of the mind and the heart. Thank you to my colleagues, students, parents, the Board, and friends of the school for your wise counsel and support and for your dedication to our students, who grace our halls and classrooms each day.

Warmest Regards,

*Ted Sharp
Interim Head of School (CEO)*