



*State of the School  
School Year 2018-2019*

*June 11, 2019*

*Dear Members of the Learning Prep School Community,*

*During the past few weeks we have been focused on celebrating the accomplishments of the Class of 2019. The festivities have included Senior Week, a time when the seniors are feted with a host of activities enabling them to be together enjoying fun events. Senior Parents' Night is a long-standing tradition where seniors and their parents gather and the seniors share letters of appreciation to their parents with classmates, staff and parents. The highlight, of course, is Commencement. This year it was held on Friday evening, May 31<sup>st</sup> and it was a joyous occasion for everyone. We are excited about the opportunities that await each of the graduates as they continue with their life's journey.*

*I am pleased to share with you that LPS has been selected as a 2019 Family Favorite in the Boston Parents Reader's Choice Awards, specifically one of the top five schools in Massachusetts in the Special Education category. LPS has received further recognition by the National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET) as a NASET School of Excellence, the highest honor a private special education school can achieve from this organization. This is the second consecutive year the school has been so recognized.*

*The State of the School message was initiated last year and the focus, then and now, is on the Educational Program, Personnel, Infrastructure, Institutional Advancement, Finance, Community Relations, Students, Governance, and Administration. Learning Prep School is committed to providing a highly effective, substantive educational experience for all students. With this commitment, a highly qualified and dedicated staff, a well-formulated curriculum, and an infrastructure to support teaching and learning are essential.*

*The Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) requires every approved Chapter 766 Private Special Education School in Massachusetts, every six years, to develop and submit a Reconstruction Plan. Once approved by DESE, this plan serves as the foundation document for the educational program of the school and attendant services moving forward. Aligned with the Reconstruction Plan is the school's Financial Plan which is submitted for review and approval to the Commonwealth's Office of Operational Services (OSD). Learning Prep School's Plans were approved in the fall of 2018 and now serve as our reference points for the next few years.*

*As stated in the 2017-2018 State of the School, the mission and educational program of highly effective and highly efficient schools are congruent with the policies, protocols, and practices that define and codify the essence of the school. This requires that the school institutionalize best practices, not leaving the institution at the mercy of interpretation by various individuals and constituencies. Not doing so leaves an institution at risk! This work has continued in earnest throughout 2018-2019 and will remain our focus over the course of 2019-2020.*

## **Current & Ongoing Focus Points and Initiatives**

### **Educational Program**

*As articulated in the School's Mission Statement, Learning Prep provides an individualized language-based learning program in a safe, secure, and structured environment. This approach enables students to develop competency in oral and written communication. These competencies are integrated throughout our educational program. They include a focus on academics, social pragmatics, citizenship, skills for life, activities and athletics. Students are able to expand and enhance their understanding of core content knowledge, as well as acquiring and refining the skills required to successfully navigate the challenges and avail themselves of the opportunities they will likely experience in life.*

*In 2017-2018 we developed a comprehensive Curriculum Review and Development Protocol that serves as the foundation document for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and data analysis for all content areas. This protocol includes a four-year review and renewable four-year cycle within which each content area and is subject to a comprehensive review and editing process conducted by appropriate staff and administration. During 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 our focus is on our English Language Arts (ELA) and Math programs. This work is intensive and extensive and is critically important to establishing an articulated and sequenced curriculum across the grade levels.*

*This year we added the Star 360 Assessment Test to our educational program, providing us with an external assessment of student progress to complement teacher assessments. The results of the test are analyzed and provide important information for instruction.*

*As always, as required by DESE, substantial time was provided for MCAS testing. This annual battery of tests identifies each student's progress and, ultimately, whether or not they achieve the level of achievement required to pass MCAS. This was the first time that we had students taking the computer based test and they adapted to the program very well.*

*Thanks to a generous grant, in August 2018 the greenhouse and the attendant horticulture program once again became a vibrant and constructive component of our educational program. This program not only provides our students with an opportunity to learn about horticulture, but also to understand and appreciate the many facets of running a business enterprise.*

*As a result of anonymous gifts, we are developing a new Health & Wellness Center at LPS. Located in Room 151 of the High School/Administration Building, the Center will be operational with the opening of school in August. It will provide opportunities for students and staff to engage in healthy physical activities designed to encourage and advance a healthy lifestyle.*

*Our focus on character, ethics, integrity and the common good has continued this year under the aegis of our Code of Conduct. The LPS Code of Conduct embraces the five core principles of Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, Courage, and Compassion. Our focus for this school year has been on the principle of Respect and Responsibility. Through common readings, films, and other mediums, students and staff together have reviewed and discussed the critical importance of being respectful and responsible and how that applies to our community each day.*

*The Transition Program, including career education, work study, life skills, functional academics, and post-secondary placement continues to be expanded and refined as a critical component of the LPS educational program.*

*With the establishment at the beginning of 2018-2019 school year of the position of Director of Athletics & Activities, we are working with several other 766 schools to develop opportunities for students to engage in athletic competitions. This year has included several field days with other schools and next year we anticipate opportunities to engage with other schools in soccer, basketball, and ultimate Frisbee. This remains a work in progress and more information will become available in the coming months. We had another year of robust Blue/Green Spirit Day competitions and these will conclude with a Field Day on June 17<sup>th</sup>. Both students and staff have embraced this program.*

### **Personnel**

*We welcomed new staff at the opening of school in August 2018 and we are very pleased with the significant contributions they are making to the school. During the course of a year it is expected that there will be some turnover of staff due to the relocation of a spouse or significant other, a medical/maternity leave, enrollment in a graduate program, or accepting another professional appointment.*

*We are completing our annual evaluation of all staff and developing short and longer term goals with everyone. Our protocol for these assessments is comprehensive and provides our staff with an opportunity for professional growth.*

*Last year we developed opportunities for our senior administrators to focus on the skills, knowledge, and disposition that define exemplary leadership. Through shared readings and case studies on leadership, we engage in discussions designed to refine and enhance our performance as senior administrators. This year we have introduced sessions on leadership for our mid-level leaders. The intent is to expand their knowledge of what constitutes effective leadership and how they can then apply this new learning in their role as a Director or Supervisor.*

*The staff, faculty, and administrators at LPS are dedicated and competent professionals whose collective expertise and experience continues to provide a vibrant and substantive educational program designed to meet the needs of our students.*

### **Infrastructure**

*During the past two years we have focused on improving our facilities to better support teaching and learning. This work has included lowering ceilings to improve acoustics, new lighting systems throughout the school, new flooring, direct access to classrooms where that had not existed, stripping and refinishing all doors and woodwork, renovation of the greenhouse, new exterior signage, new tables and chairs for the cafeteria, painting some classrooms and other spaces, updating the HVAC system in the administrative offices, and further landscaping improvements, among other initiatives.*

*A student lounge for seniors, aptly named the Panther's Den after our LPS mascot, was established on the third floor of the high school. This idea was originated by a few students in 2017-18 and with the*

*generous support of a few donors, the lounge was formally opened at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year.*

### ***Institutional Advancement (IAT): Development & Alumni Relations***

*Last year we established the Office of Institutional Advancement, an initiative that has responsibilities for Development, Alumni Affairs, Marketing, and Admission. In July 2018, we welcomed Alex Magay as our new Director of Alumni and Development. Alex has provided energy and creativity to the development of a healthy and vibrant Alumni Association. Establishing an Alumni Executive Committee and establishing several alumni events during the course of the year have provided alums with a variety of opportunities to reconnect with one and another and with LPS. Beginning with the graduation ceremony of the Class of 2018, we now have one of our Alumni Executive Committee members present a certificate of membership to the alumni association to each of the graduates.*

*The Family and Friends Fund (LPS Annual Fund) is the major fundraising effort for LPS and the funds raised are used exclusively to supplement revenue raised through tuition. We are most appreciative of those individuals and organizations that contribute to our annual fund. As this report is being written, we are at 93% of our goal for this year, with the hope we can reach 100% by June 30, 2019. Private schools, colleges, and universities depend on their fundraising as a source of revenue.*

*Due to the generous support of several donors, a new Health and Wellness Center will be established on the first floor of the high school facility. It will provide an opportunity for both students and staff to engage in healthy physical activities.*

### ***Institutional Advancement (IAT): Admissions and Marketing***

*These programs comprise the other responsibilities of IAT. We were fortunate to receive the gift of in-kind expertise and experience to design a comprehensive marketing program. The dollar value alone of this gift would be substantial for any school. The document resulting from this work has become the blueprint for marketing LPS. The Director of Admissions and Marketing works in concert with the Director of Development and Alumni Relations, as well as with other senior administrators to advance this important work.*

*During the past few years the competition in the marketplace for students whose learning profile reflects our mission, has increased and intensified. Several 766 schools have modified their student profile to attract students that have traditionally enrolled at LPS. In addition, many public schools are making a concerted effort to retain students in the district who have been identified with mild to moderate language based learning disabilities. We have dedicated human and financial resources to this challenge and are confident of retaining our niche in the marketplace.*

### ***Finance***

*As stated in the 2017-2018 State of the School, ensuring financial stability and accountability for the school is the highest priority as this enables us to provide a comprehensive educational program for our students. The Board, the Executive Director, and the Chief Operating Officer have the primary responsibility in this regard. We have protocols and policies to secure and sustain financial stability*

*through the efficient and effective stewardship of the sources of revenue that support the mission, the educational program, and the operation of the school.*

*As a result of DESE's approval of our Reconstruction Plan, tuition for school year 2018-2019 was \$54,848. Tuition revenue leaves little room for discretionary spending. As a reminder, eighty-five percent of operating costs are typically used for salaries, taxes, and benefits; twelve percent of operating costs are used for contractual and facilities related expenses including audit fees, legal fees, rent, utilities, maintenance, and property and liability insurance. This leaves about three per cent of operating expenses for discretionary spending including program resources, professional development, and contingencies that may arise over the year.*

*Massachusetts Chapter 766 Schools (Special Education Schools) do not have the option to establish tuition annually, other than for the state adjusted COLA (Cost of Living Allowance). The exception is the approval of a school's Reconstruction Plan as noted above. Such plans are usually developed every six years. 766 schools are not permitted to significantly modify how they spend their funding. Tuition, staffing levels and assignments, average salaries, and operating expenses are monitored by DESE and OSD.*

*Through gifts to the LPS Family & Friends Fund and through grants from foundations, corporations, and philanthropic entities and individuals, the school supplements tuition driven revenue.*

*An ideal enrollment range for LPS is between 190-215 students. Presently, our enrollment is 194 students and given a large graduating Class of 2019, thirty-six seniors, we anticipate a decline in enrollment for school year 2019-20. As cited earlier in this document, we are in a very competitive marketplace and we are laser-focused on reaching our desired range of students over the next few years.*

### **Community Relations**

*The initial year of the Partners-In-Education (PIE) group has been successful. The PIE Executive Committee consists of five parents and five school administrators and meets regularly throughout the school year. Meetings and minutes are posted on the school website and the meetings are open to all parents. The focus of PIE is to advance the interests of students and staff by supporting activities that enrich the educational program and to encourage a sense of community through communication, activities, and events.*

*The Parent Advisory Group (PAG) met four times during the year. These meetings are open to all parents and are listed on the LPS website, together with the minutes of the meetings. The focus of PAG is the educational program and attendant services of LPS, focusing on the challenges and opportunities therein and providing a forum for the exchange of ideas. We are most grateful for the parents who generously volunteered their time and talent to support various school activities and events. The annual luncheon for LPS staff was held this spring and it was a special event enjoyed by all.*

*During the year we have expanded our outreach to advocates, school district liaisons, neuropsychologists, and law firms with a focus on special education. The intent of these meetings is to update the participants on educational programs at LPS and to engage in Q&A sessions designed to cultivate mutual understanding and relational trust among the parties. These meetings have been very*

*well received and are an ongoing component of our marketing efforts. In addition, we continue to attend conferences to promote LPS.*

*As part of our Admissions protocol, Open Houses were held each month, hosting families who are interested in learning more about the school. Each Open House includes an overview of the school, a tour, and an opportunity for visitors to ask questions. We are fortunate to have parent volunteers who share their experience and that of their child at LPS.*

*Family Night and Curriculum Night for parents are held during the course of the year providing time to meet and confer with teachers and to learn more about the educational program. Evening programs designed to provide our families with opportunities to engage socially with one another were held on several occasions this year, including a bingo night and an evening focusing on the joys of cooking.*

### **Governance and Administration**

*The Board, the Head of School and senior administrators work collaboratively to ensure financial stability for the school and to advance the mission and educational program of LPS. The Board meets five times during the school year. The Board has established three committees, each charged with a distinct focus. These include the Finance Committee, the Institutional Advancement Committee, and the Committee on Trustees. The Board will establish Ad Hoc Committees when required, assigning them a very specific task to be achieved in a relatively short time period. 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.*

*During the past few months the Board has been engaged in the search for the next Executive Director of LPS. The Board appointed a Search Committee including several Board members, staff, and several parents to work with the firm hired to conduct the search. The new Executive Director will assume his/her responsibilities on July 1, 2020. As of June 30, 2020, I will conclude my nearly three year tenure as the Interim Executive Director. An announcement from the Board to the extended LPS community will be forthcoming once that appointment has been made.*

### **Students**

*It is a privilege to work with our students each day at LPS. They are engaged in their studies, participating in activities and events including Blue/Green Spirit Days, Field Days, the Afterschool Program, Student Government, Special Programs, the Performing Arts Program, the Student Citizenship Common Readings and Discussions, and other programs designed to enrich and expand their opportunities at LPS. As noted earlier in this document, we are developing a relationship with a cadre of other 766 schools to provide opportunities for high school students to engage in activities with their peers from those schools.*

*While not sanctioned by LPS, we remain most appreciative of those volunteers (parents and others) who, under the aegis of SOMA (Special Olympics of Massachusetts), offer our students opportunities to participate in various SOMA athletic programs.*

*We are proud of the accomplishments of the members of the Class of 2019. Among the post-secondary plans for this class, twenty graduates will be attending a four or two year college including Framingham State University, Cape Cod Community College, Full Sail University @ Curry College, Landmark College (2), Lesley University Threshold Program (2), Via University (Denmark), Salem State University, Beacon College (2), Fitchburg State University, Bridgewater State University, Mass Bay Transitional Scholars Program, Massasoit Transitional Scholars Program, Massasoit Community College, and Middlesex Community College.*

*Thirty of the Thirty-Six seniors passed MCAS and several others have submitted Portfolios to DESE for their review, and, hopefully, for approval.*

### **Summary Statement**

*Highly effective schools are always focused on how they can further refine and improve their educational program and the attendant delivery of services to their students and their families. Schools need to be always challenging convention, the way we do things. It is to that end that we are consistently engaged in substantive discussions about teaching and learning and how to further improve instruction, improve the educational program, and expand opportunities for students to explore the arts, athletics, and the world around them. Our mantra is to view challenges not as problems, rather, to view them as opportunities to be creative in advancing the mission and the well-being of Learning Prep School. This process is driven by three basic, yet critically important questions.*

- *Are we who we purport to be? (True to our mission)*
- *How do we know? (What are the indicators that we use?)*
- *How do we know, we know? (The validity of our research and the application of data analysis)*

*Socrates said, "The Unexamined life is not worth living." We consistently apply this maxim as we focus on providing our students with an educational program that is designed to position them well to navigate the challenges and to avail themselves of the opportunities that life may present.*

*I look forward to working together next year to support our students and to advance teaching and learning at LPS!*

*Respectfully,*

*Ted Sharp  
Interim Executive Director*