

**LNS Board Meeting Minutes**  
**September 20, 2022 (First Meeting of the 2022-23 Board)**  
**In Person**

**Attendees:**

- **Present:** Emily Lines, Raleigh Werner, Kate Brooks, Anique Lebel, Vickie Slingerland, Mitch Brooks, Nancy Fincke, Laura Mellen, Andrew West, Emily Beekman, Annie Magee, David Henry
- **Absent:** Bryan Wynn, Bridget Healy, Aidan Flanagan, Abigail Flanagan, Mara Rus, Lauren O'Neil, Colleen Bixby, Caroline Nordstrom
- **Also present:** Patrick Allen, Kelly Melcher

**President: Emily Lines**

*Welcome and Thank You*

(see full notes below)

- Chance for us to step forward from challenges of last couple years and really focus on kids/programming
- Big thanks to Nancy, steering committee, Sisy, members of board, and to all faculty

**Secretary: Raleigh Werner**

- Approved June 7th, 2022 board meeting minutes. Kate Brooks motions and Vickie Slingerland (and others) seconds.

**President: Emily Lines**

*Board Goals Discussion*

(see attached PDF of slides)

- Emily Lines (Goal #1): strategic planning
  - Examples of big considerations:
    - Attracting people from other surrounding areas
    - Permanent home at deCordova
    - Longer hours to align better with family schedules
    - Commitment to DEI and social justice
- Anique Lebel (Goal #2): creating more opportunities to connect
  - Especially in-person, in light of past two years of social distancing
  - Room Parents can be a way to help make connections
- Laura Mellen (Goal #3): increase accessibility to a wider demographic
  - Currently 12 towns represented at LNS; hoping to branch out further
- Andrew West (Goal #4): implement strategies to meet DEI goals
  - Come up with indicators of progress

- Nancy Fincke (Goal #5): plan for reinvigorating Professional Development offerings
  - Regain momentum lost during pandemic
  - Belmont Nursery School visiting next week
  - How can we keep opportunities like this coming without excess overhead?
  
- Emily Lines (Goal #6): budget goals
  - Year of strategic investment
  - Progress toward breakeven in 2023-24 year
  
- Kate Brooks (Goal #7): development goals
  - expand our audience of potential donors
  - increase the number of targeted donation requests
  - Coming up with other creative approaches
    - David Henry: shared experiences with grandparents' days in the past
    - Andrew West: Storypark gets grandparents really excited
  
- Mitch Brooks (Goal #8): clear, concise statement of LNS's educational philosophy and mission
  - Good to have more than an implicit understanding around LNS's mission; make it clear & shared
  - Important to focus on this now
    - Recent staff departures; more will happen in future
    - We're reaching new geographies and families

See attached PDF for board goals slides.

Discussion regarding board goals:

- Anique Lebel: definitely reach out with ideas regarding any of these goals; it's a year to reimagine

**Vice President of Development: Kate Brooks, Director: Nancy Fincke**

*Presentation and Conversation: The Challenging Economics of Early Childhood Education*

- Why is early childhood education so expensive?
  - Labor costs – can't outsource teachers!
  - Regulation – teacher-to-child ratios (3:1 in MA)
  - Real estate – often expensive, b/c in high-visibility areas
    - For context, 14% of LNS budget goes to rent
  - Greatest determinant of program quality is teacher quality
    - 81% of LNS expenses go to salaries & benefits
  
- Median preschool teacher pay = ~\$36K

- Most are earning below “living wage” in Middlesex County – either need to commute long-distance or have partner with income
- Public school teachers earning ~\$100K in LNS region; much more attractive for educators
  
- LNS has unusually low turnover:
  - Above market pay
  - Professional development
  - Culture of learning/respect
  
- Big question: how do we address issues in the broader childcare field? If only to ensure LNS continues attracting high quality teachers.

See attached PDF for presentation slides.

Discussion regarding presentation:

- Wide-ranging conversation around status of state/federal funding, how to align civic values to prioritize early childhood education, advocacy as key to build awareness, questions around how to set tuition levels

**\*\*\*\* FULL NOTES PROVIDED BY PRESENTERS**

### **Welcome & Thank You from Emily Lines**

#### Welcome

Welcome everyone to our second Board meeting of the 2022-23 year! It was so nice to see so many of you at LNS over the past couple of weeks as we re-opened our gates once again. The mood at the school feels much happier and lighter this year, and seeing families connecting at drop off and pick up feels like the convivial atmosphere we all love at LNS.

I want to thank all of you for coming this evening.

#### Thank you

I would also like to thank a few others before we get started:

- Nancy: We are so lucky to have you as our school leader. You’re like the keel of our ship, always keeping us connected to why we’re here and who matters most. I am really looking
  
- Steering: Anique, Kate and Laura - your dedication to LNS cannot be thanked enough. You stayed plugged in this summer despite your best efforts to get away and shut down for a while! Thank you all, I am so excited to work with this superstar team this year.

- Sisy, our assistant director, and parent of children formerly at LNS, We'd never be able to list all of the background work Sisy does to keep the school running so smoothly, but we all benefit every day from her efforts.

- Raleigh: Thank you for jumping right in with both feet to the Secretary role. You bring such a positive, can-do attitude with you, and I'm really happy to have you on our team right from the start.

- Board: Thank you for giving so generously your time, expertise, and energy to LNS. I am very excited for the year ahead, and much of that excitement comes from knowing we have such an incredible team in action this year. We are ready to focus our attention on things other than covid, and I know we will have a very productive year.

- Faculty: our exceptional teachers! They as always put so much of themselves into LNS and their dedication to our children and the school always shows through. I know we all know this, but we are beyond lucky to have the faculty we do. They are truly the best in the biz

### **Presentation by Kate Brooks**

#### *The Challenging Economics of Early Childhood Education*

As board members, you will be involved in important conversations throughout the year and may be charged with making recommendations and decisions for LNS. We believe having knowledge about the current landscape and challenges of the field will help provide context for many of the conversations we have throughout the year.

In this presentation, I'm speaking as an early childhood professional and advocate, not as the VP of Development, although fundraising does play a big part in the economics of preschools.

This message may not be new to you, but it's important that we all keep talking and thinking about it.

### **The Importance of Early Childhood Education**

- 0-5 is a critical window for brain development
- High quality early childhood education has long term effects on learning, relationships, and future success
- The relationships and opportunities for learning in the first five years establish a foundation for all future learning and are integral to who we become.

Nancy will be discussing more at her presentation in October

## Why is Early Childhood Education so Expensive?

It's essential to children's learning and development, supportive for families, and foundational to the economy. Costs are rising faster than inflation. Why is this happening?

Three major expenses:

### 1. Labor

- Labor cannot be outsourced to low-wage markets
- Labor cannot be automated

### 2. Regulation

- Regulatory requirements to protect the most vulnerable members of society
- Staff to child ratios:

Massachusetts 1 teacher to every 3 infants

South Carolina 1:6

More teachers are needed in Massachusetts

### 3. Real Estate

- A major expense for schools, but also a draw
- LNS spends 14% of our budget on rent

## All Education is Expensive

Public School Cost per Student (2020)

- Lincoln \$26,000
- Concord \$24,000
- Wayland \$20,000
- Weston \$27,000
- Boston \$24,000

This cost is split among tax payers.

As Massachusetts has started to investigate early childhood education for all, several studies have been done to estimate the cost per student.

Massachusetts High-Quality Preschool Estimated Cost per Student

- \$30-37,000

### **The Value of Teachers**

- You can have the best materials, the most beautiful space, but if you don't have highly skilled teachers, none of that matters.
- Working with children isn't an innate skill. Teaching well takes time, education, learned skills, and intention.
- A well-trained and highly skilled teacher tailors their interactions to fit the needs of each child—asking open ended questions, using responsive language, scaffolding their learning, fostering independence, and creating a language-rich environment.
- At a school like LNS, our teachers are working to create a curriculum that is responsive to the children. They are researchers—keeping up on best practices, using precise language and questions, everything is incredibly well thought out, investigated and analyzed. This takes time and skill.
- The cost of labor is the biggest driver of the high price of early childhood education

**I know what you're thinking: wow, preschool teachers must be raking it in!**

**False.**

- Childcare workers are some of the lowest paid workers in the country. They make less than janitors and pest control workers. Northeastern dining hall employees just negotiated a new contract for \$30 an hour. The average childcare worker in MA makes \$14.98 and hour.
- The younger the child, the less you make.



- Average childcare worker in MA—\$14.98
- Last night I looked up some preschool teacher job postings in the area:
  - Little Sprouts in Concord is looking for a teacher for \$16-19 an hour
  - Concord Carousel for \$17-21 an hour
  - Magic Garden is looking for a teacher for \$19-21 an hour
  - All are below a livable wage for our area

Teachers either need to have a high-earning partner, family resources, or commute long distances from a lower cost of living area.

### **Comparing preschool teachers to public school teachers**

Average Preschool Teacher Salary in our area (2021)

- \$43,000 a year

Average Public School Teacher Salaries (2019)

- Lincoln, \$93,000
- Concord, \$108,000
- Sudbury, \$101,000
- Wayland, \$102,000
- Boston, \$105,000
  
- MA average for a kindergarten teacher: \$85,000 (higher in our area)
  
- If you want to work with young children, and you graduate with a degree, probably with student loans, and you could be making \$40,000 a year or \$90,000, which would you choose? Not to mention the benefits. Most preschools and childcare centers don't provide health insurance, retirement plans, or paid vacation. The public school offers all of this.
  
- We're already seeing this play out. While preschools have raised the level of education and credentials they want their teachers to have, elementary schools are lowering them because they're facing a staffing shortage. Many schools are waiving certification—allowing teachers to get it their first year teaching. Teachers that would have taught in preschools are moving to the public school system.

### **Workforce Crisis**

Because of this there is a huge workforce crisis in early childhood education.



- We're hearing about it now in K-12 but for early childhood, retaining educators has been an evergreen challenge because of the historically low pay.

### **High Rate of turnover**

- Prior to the pandemic 25% of teachers left the field each year in Massachusetts. In places like Louisiana it was at 50%.
- This is bad for children, bad for parents, and bad for preschools.
- Children benefit from a consistent caregiver. Turnover equals transitions and instability which can lead to stress and anxiety.
- Bad for preschools—schools are constantly hiring and re-training which takes time and cost money and those expenses are then passed on to families.

The **poverty rate** for early educators in Massachusetts is 15.3 percent, much higher than for Massachusetts workers in general (8.7 percent) and 6.6 times as high as for K-8 teachers (2.3 percent).

**Cost of childcare:** after teachers have a baby they have the tough choice of putting them into care that often costs more than they make. It's easier to stay home and drop out of the workforce.

**Closing of teacher training programs.** Many universities are closing their preschool education programs. The demand isn't there and they're sending graduates with debt out into a field with low pay.

### **Is LNS Facing the same challenges?**

- We've been "lucky". But, it's not all luck—we invest in and respect our teachers.
- We have highly skilled staff and a high retention rate
- Pay above "market rate". Median salary is \$48,000
- Provide robust professional development
- A culture of learning and respect
- Our reputation makes us a desirable place to work

**Major challenge:** At LNS, we strive to deliver an exceptional preschool experience without making that experience available only to the exceptionally wealthy. This is not easy to do!