

Agenda

President: Emily Lines
Welcome and Thank You

Director: Nancy Fincke
Start of School Updates

2023-24 LNS Board of Directors
Board Goals Discussion

2023-2028 Strategic Plan Overview
Emily Lines

Presentation and Conversation: Rethinking Our Governance Structure
Emily Lines

Slide 2

Welcome and Thank You

Slide 4

Please make note of the upcoming meetings for the remainder of the year. Continuing in the spirit of last year, meeting in an accessible, neutral space, we will be rotating through the Studios this year.

I'd also like to reiterate what I said in an email recently to the Board members, which is that **Steering wants to be really open and available to you all**. If you're interested to come meet with Steering, I've sent some dates in the coming weeks that we're available. And if those don't work for you, or you're interested to meet once those dates have passed, please don't hesitate to reach out and we'll set up a time that works with your schedule.

Slide 5 - Nancy

Slide 6 - Board Goals

Every year, we invite members of the Board to envision a goal for their program for the year. I know all of you do this informally and with your committees, but this is a chance to more formally document what we're aiming to achieve in the year ahead. I'll kick us off with the first few goals, and then I'll turn it over to the chairs to each present their own goal.

Slide 7 - me

Slide 8 - me

Slide 9 - me

Slide 10 - Nancy

Slide 11 - Bryan Wynn

- We have signed a contract with Harmony Books, a local accounting outsourced provider (a women owned business in the local community and former LNS parent). The partnership will provide Sisy additional capacity and enhance our reporting capabilities which we look forward to sharing at the next Board meeting.
- We have successfully onboarded Kyle Durand as our new investment advisor, replacing Ben Webber. Kyle's first order of business is shifting our investible dollars from our checking accounting into low risk bonds (e.g., US Treasuries) doubling down on our previous "Treasury Ladder" strategy which has proved fruitful over the last year as interest rates have increased.

Slide 12 - Andrew West

Slide 13 - Kate Brooks

Slide 14 - Laura Mellen

Slide 15 - Jenny Rogers

Thank you all! Steering is here to support these goals, and all of the programs at LNS, so please don't hesitate to reach out any time.

Slide 16 - **Strategic Plan Overview**

I am excited to let you all know that we're finally in the 9th inning of creating the strategic plan! And I want to walk through the process we underwent, which will be a review for some of you and new for others. And then I'll give a quick synopsis of some of the key recommendations of the plan.

We started about a year and a half ago...we realized that there were some questions on the horizon around the direction of the school that would need answering. We wanted to be able to answer those questions in a way that was grounded, where programs are aligned and working together toward a shared vision for the school.

Slide 17 - Project Overview

1. **Setting the Strategic Planning Project scope:** The Strategic Planning Team engaged the support of Doug Wein (of Manifest Consulting) to provide direction for the Strategic Planning process. Over the course of several meetings in the Summer and Fall of 2022, the Strategic Planning team developed a list of "**Strategic Components**," or core programs and activities of LNS that constitute what we do, who we are and who we serve, and how we operate now and in the future.
2. **Gathering Stakeholder Input:** At the November 2022 Board of Directors meeting, attendees met in focus groups to discuss LNS's (1) core strengths, (2) areas for improvement potential, and (3) adaptations that may be needed in the future. The insights that were gathered informed the Strategic Planning work and connected it to the voice of the larger LNS community. Office hours were held in January and February of 2023 and all members of the community were invited to bring ideas, questions, or concerns to the Director and President.

3. **Articulating the Mission and Strategic Focus of LNS:** In the Winter of 2022-23, the LNS Mission Statement was rewritten to more succinctly reflect the character and operations of the school, and a Strategic Focus Statement was created to articulate the strategic objectives of LNS in the coming 5 years. (See Section 2, “Mission & Strategic Focus.”)

Slide 18 - Mission

Slide 19 - Strategic Focus Statement

4. **Researching and Developing Strategic Component Briefs:** In the Spring of 2023, each Strategic Component was assigned a *Steward*. The Steward was responsible for guiding a process to gather insights and clarify perspectives and plans around each Strategic Component, and then document the outcomes of that process in a *Strategic Component Brief*. The goal of the Strategic Component Briefs was to orient future leadership of the school to the topic, and give background, context, and recommendations for the future that would assist future leadership to successfully move the Strategic Component forward in the coming 5 years.
5. **Creating the LNS 2023-2028 Strategic Plan:** In the Summer of 2023, the Strategic Component Briefs were edited for clarity and consistency and collated into this Strategic Plan.

Slide 20 - Strategic Components

6. “**Strategic Components**,” or core programs and activities of LNS that constitute what we do, who we are and who we serve, and how we operate now and in the future.
7. For the purpose of this presentation, I’m going to give a top level overview of **five** of the Strategic Components. But all of them has their own section in the Strategic Plan with lots of info and details.

Slide 21 - Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Lincoln Nursery School has a history and a continued goal of hiring highly skilled, dedicated, and compassionate early childhood educators. We understand that teachers are paramount to our curriculum and community and we are dedicated to providing fair compensation, excellent benefits, and a creative, supportive work environment. Labor shortages – which are now being seen more widely in our communities – have been an evergreen challenge in early childhood education for years. As we look to the future we must ensure the hiring and retention of high-level early childhood teachers remains at the forefront of our goals as a school.

1. We’ve made great strides in teacher compensation over the last 4 or 5 years, and we want to Continue to prioritize teacher salary and benefits moving forward.
2. Continue to create a supportive work environment with teacher autonomy.
3. Build up external professional development programming and connections
4. Creative hiring

Slide 22 - Cooperative Model

1. **The Cooperative Model:** We recommend keeping our Cooperative Model intact in the years ahead. Flexibility around time commitment for Family Partnering and the variety of Parent Jobs

allows for families with varying availability to be involved. Requiring some level of involvement from every family fosters our close-knit community feeling.

2. **A Culture of Partnership and Respect:** The balanced division of responsibility and authority between LNS staff, teachers, and parents has nurtured our success. For many years, there has been a culture of mutual respect and appreciation among parents and staff which has fostered a joyful and peaceful partnership that we hope will continue for many years to come.

3. **Family Partnering** requirements have ebbed and flowed over the years. Before 2020, parents worked an average of 10-12 mornings per year in their child's studio. In 2022, we reduced the time commitment to be more accommodating of families' varying availability. Families are now asked to volunteer a minimum of **6 mornings per year**, and may offer additional mornings. In the inaugural year of this structure, enough families volunteered additional mornings that each studio's needs were adequately met.

4. **Parent Jobs** support those operations of the school not covered by the Director and Assistant Director. Each family volunteers either 1 or 2 parents to fill the **approximately 80 Parent Job roles** (including Board Members). This number of jobs has been consistent, and the types of jobs are adjusted each year per the needs of the school.

5. **Board of Directors:**
We recommend conducting an **assessment of the function and composition of the Board of Directors during the 2023-24 school year**, and considering shrinking the Board. Currently, the Steering Committee oversees nearly all operational responsibilities and makes all but a few decisions regarding the operations and future planning of the school. A committee should assess the operational functions of the Board and recommend a structure that best supports the needs of the school going forward.

Slide 23 - Enrollment

In enrollment at Lincoln Nursery School, we seek families who a) value our Reggio-inspired philosophy and b) will be positive members of our co-op community. Critical to the success of our school is a healthy pipeline of families who are a fit. A clear and effective enrollment strategy will ensure that we continue to attract and retain such families over time, despite a changing landscape.

Historically, LNS was a neighborhood school primarily serving Lincoln families, and marketing was largely word of mouth. In recent years, we expanded our marketing efforts and in turn, our demographic reach. While many of our families do still hail from Lincoln—and word of mouth remains a highly effective recruitment tool—we have an increased diversity of towns, socio-economic backgrounds, and racial/ethnic backgrounds represented at LNS today. We aim to continue this growth in the next five years. Our goal is to allow as many families who prioritize our mission, values, and philosophy to have access to LNS without geography, cost, or logistics (i.e. school hours, required time commitment) acting as barriers. This goal is in alignment with both the DEI and Tuition/Tuition Assistance Strategic Components.

1. **Studio Demographics**
2. **Enrollment process**
3. **Floating teacher**
4. **School schedule:**
 - a. Assess the launch of expanded hours in 2023-24.

Slide 24 - Tuition and Tuition Assistance

Tuition is the main source of revenue for LNS. Tuition funds rent, teacher salaries, materials, programming, and financial assistance. It is important that we examine our tuition in order to charge families appropriately for our programming and to compensate teachers but also not to become too expensive and, subsequently, turn families away.

The amount dedicated to FA and Teachers' Children Tuition Benefit in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 school years is triple as much as has been allocated in any year prior. Targeted and strategic fundraising support this increase.

Tuition (per hour) has increased 25% since 2018. This aligns with the CPI over the same timeframe.

Ensuring donations are supporting our overall operations is the best use of fundraising efforts. Creates something of a sliding scale tuition for all and supports a healthy balance sheet.

Slide 25 - Budgeting and Finance

The budget strategic component is critical since it either enables or limits all other strategic components and expresses a perspective on the pace of execution of our strategic roadmap, as well as how to balance opportunity and risk across both time and stakeholders. We've made recommendations around several areas of focus for our budget:

Investments: we have ample funds to invest behind core strategic initiatives. To that end, we should aggressively invest in these themes as required and not hold ourselves in all years to a completely balanced budget. In years where we are not disproportionately investing in those strategic initiatives, we should seek to at least have a balanced budget.

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Our key takeaways here are that there aren't major programmatic changes that we want to make around who we are and how we operate. We will need to continue to be nimble and adapt to the world around us, as we've always done, and it's important that we stay grounded in the character of LNS—community, partnership, respect, and joy.

I want to offer a heartfelt thanks to all who participate in this process. Our Strategic Component Stewards and the folk supporting them: Kate Brooks, Anique Lebel, Laura Mellen, Mitch Brooks, Ben Armstrong, Nancy Fincke, Sisy Thomas, Andrew West, Abby Adams, Lauren O'Neil, and

Bryan Wynn. Each of them spent at least 20 hours on this, and in the case of Steering and Strategic Planning....we all met several times over the course of last summer 2022, in nearly all of our Steering meetings last year we spent time working on this, and we had to do several additional meetings and a lot of time working outside of meetings on this. Overall, counting everyone's contribution, we spent many hundreds of hours on this project. The best we can do for the school is leave behind resources and tools to facilitate its success, and that's what we're hoping this will help do.

The Plan itself is in the final stages of editing, and as soon as it's buttoned up, we will share it broadly with the community.

Slide 27 **Rethinking our Governance Structure**

Our form and our function don't really align well.

Form:

We have our Board of Directors, and identify them as the governing body of LNS. Our By laws describe the board as such. And Steering is articulated in the bylaws as a subcommittee that *"expedites planning, serves as a clearing house for ideas and addresses proposals and problems between and in advance of full Board meetings."*

There are a few issues here, as we see it:

- (1) The Structure we have in place is hierarchical. It doesn't feel like it aligns with the spirit of our co-op this day in age. Our school's spirit would suggest a more horizontal, inclusive, accessible structure.
- (2) Board Meetings are too infrequent for Steering to wait to bring operational topics to the Board. Waiting to do so would be slow and inefficient. The two main votes the Board casts are on the Budget, which few board members are intimate with enough to really scrutinize it, and the next year's Board Slate (which is a vote cast by the community)
- (3) It seems that attending meetings, is, for many members of the Board, a bit of a hassle and perhaps not always a great use of time if Board meetings continue to have more presentation/update content
- (4) We hardly ever get more than one or two non board members at meetings. Perhaps this is a combination of
 - (a) People not wanting to add 6 nights out to their calendar
 - (b) Folks not feeling like their participation is needed if they're not "on the board".
 - (c) The hierarchical structure makes people not on the board feel like an outsider no matter how much we beg people to come.
- (5) The amount of work that goes into running the school, i.e. being on Steering, is much more than most parents can commit. Every year, we're having to ask folks to be on Steering—we hardly ever have people who are asking to be on it. We're lucky to have incredibly dedicated parents who are willing to step up, and we will continue to, but the

size of Steering as it is now probably comes close to exhausting the amount of people available for this level of time commitment.

- (6) The Board is too big a body of people for the more sensitive or tricky matters to be brought to. About $\frac{1}{3}$ of the community has a parent on the Board. And so the more sensitive determinations need to be kept to Steering.
- (7) Anytime there's something tricky or that affects the larger community, Steering always consults with the community at large. Either through conducting an ad hoc survey or through the annual survey, or conversations with the Board at board meetings...but ideally we'd like those conversations to not be limited to just the $\frac{1}{3}$ of folks who have time to make the commitment to the board.

From By laws: (This description of the Board is actually how Steering is functioning).

The Board is the executive governing body of LNS, responsible for establishing and overseeing implementation of its policies, supervising the Director in the management of its affairs and representing the parents generally, under the leadership of the President. The Board's responsibilities include employing the Director and the Staff, including the issuance of contracts, managing LNS' finances and establishing the budget, setting enrollment targets and establishing policy in all areas. Although the Board is responsible for employing the Director, it is important that the Board (often through its President and various committees) work closely and effectively as partners with the Director in running the school.

Slide 28 What do we suggest?

- We suggest reducing the Board to about 6 or 7 seats, which would effectively be Steering plus one or two additional roles: Budget/Finance would be a likely candidate for the additional Board position.
- We'd keep all of the parent jobs and committee chair jobs. As they already do, each committee chair would report to a member of Steering.
- We'd make Steering meetings more open. Inviting committee chairs, and really anyone in the community, to come to steering meetings if they have something they'd like to discuss...either related to their program or otherwise.
- Rather than "Board meetings" we'd have "Co-op Meetings" or "Community Meetings" where everyone is invited. We'd make them more participatory and social. This is where we'd flesh out any new ideas, take folks' temperature on important decisions that might be on the horizon, provide all-school updates, and come together as a community to support the operations of the school.
- We'd continue to present the budget and next year's board slate to the community and solicit votes for both of those.
- Still a lot more figuring out to do...we welcome all input!

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Thoughts? Recommendations? Questions?