

Memorandum

To: Littleton Public Schools and the LPS School Board

From: The Executive Board and Officers of the Littleton Education Association

Topic: The obligations of LPS to its students, their parents/guardians, and school-based educators

Date: February 25, 2021

Since COVID-19 began spreading widely, much has been stated regarding the obligations of schools to a society that is grappling with a global pandemic. As everyone acknowledges, educators have gone above and beyond to rise to the occasion.

Yet, too often, these educational experts have not been asked to provide input before important decisions have been made. Following those decisions, some educators have stayed quiet, perhaps because they have agreed with the decisions, and/or perhaps because they have not disagreed enough to speak out. Others have spoken out, either because they have disagreed with the decisions, and/or because they think that educators who work with students each day should provide input when important decisions are made affecting students, the students' parents/guardians, and educators themselves.

As an organization, an association such as LEA has an obligation to solicit, understand, and amplify the opinions of its members. Like the leaders of any representative body, LEA's elected leaders must consider the wide range of member opinions. Over the past two weeks, since the return to full in-person learning for secondary students was announced, LEA members have been encouraged to share their questions and thoughts with LEA leaders. After sorting through hundreds of written submissions and phone calls, LEA's Executive Board members and officers have crafted statements representing what they have heard. We know that some members have chosen not to say anything, and some members have chosen to say many things.

What follows is a summary of the belief statements and connected expectations that LEA leaders have heard from LEA members. We do not assert that every LEA member agrees with every statement and expectation, but we do assert that collectively, LEA members have expressed a series of ethical commitments that they wish to see from Littleton Public Schools and the LPS School Board. Thus:

Whereas school-based educators think that in-person learning is more effective than either remote or hybrid learning, and

Whereas the world is about to enter the second year of a global pandemic, and

Whereas everyone knows that the hybrid was put into place, despite its many flaws, at the secondary level due to specific public health agency recommendations regarding the physical distancing of students in grades 6 and up during a global pandemic, and

Whereas many students continue to struggle with ongoing and increasing mental health issues, and

Whereas many secondary students are expressing significant anxiety regarding a return to full in-person learning, especially related to the extraordinary diminishing of physical distancing in our secondary schools, then:

If CDC guidelines regarding secondary students (6 feet of distance) are not going to be followed after March 15, then secondary students, their parents/guardians, and school-based educators must be actively informed in writing by LPS regarding which public health organization's guidelines (3 feet of distance) are going to be followed after March 15, and

LPS must actively inform students and their parents/guardians in writing regarding increased available mental health supports, both before and after the transition to full in-person learning for secondary students.

Whereas parents/legal guardians have no way to assess classrooms or lunchrooms for themselves due to strict (and proper) school "no visitors" policies, then:

In cases where three feet of distance between students is not going to be possible, no matter the efforts that are undertaken before March 15 by school-based educators and transportation service employees, LPS must actively notify affected students and their parents/guardians in writing, and also must provide specific written instructions regarding how to receive effective/well-fitting district-provided PPE by March 15, and

School-based LPS educators must also be actively provided with specific written instructions regarding how to receive effective/well-fitting district-provided PPE by March 15, and

Teachers of music and physical education must receive specific written instructions from LPS by March 8 regarding enhanced safety measures that they can use in their learning spaces with students who are likely to expel more air from their lungs in music and PE classes than they will in other classroom settings, and

LPS must actively inform parents/guardians in writing if their children will be in any full in-person classes, such as PE classes, with no masks required after March 15.

Whereas many school-based staff are frustrated and in disbelief that they were not consulted about a March 15 switch from hybrid to full in-person learning at the secondary level, especially when the decision-makers have not worked in schools this year and will not be working in schools after March 15, and

Whereas parents at various secondary schools have demanded live-streaming of classes during quarantine situations, and

Whereas those demands have been met at some schools, and have been refused at other schools, then:

When schools are fully in person, school-based educators must devote their time and attention to socially integrating the two heretofore split alphabetic groups, as well as finishing the academic year strong, and

Live-streaming and video creation for absent students (even those in quarantine) must cease to be an administrative expectation of any LPS school-based educators.

Whereas some school-based educators will have received one COVID-19 vaccine shot by March 15, other school-based educators will have received two COVID-19 vaccine shots by March 15, and other school-based educators will be two weeks past their second COVID-19 vaccine shot by March 15, and

Whereas a higher percentage of school-based educators will be at least two weeks past their second COVID-19 vaccine shot by March 29, and

Whereas according to public health guidance in Colorado (but not in all U.S. states) school-based educators who are exposed to COVID-19 but are two weeks past their second COVID-19 vaccine shot will not need to be quarantined, and

Whereas none of the students in secondary schools will be vaccinated until after the 20/21 school year ends, and

Whereas vaccinations rates of students' family members for the duration of the 20/21 school year are completely unknown, and

Whereas emotionally dysregulated students struggle to remain masked, and

Whereas there is apparently not enough room at the LPS online TOPS school to accommodate a significant influx of students, then:

LPS school-based educators must not be expected nor required to personally express to anyone (including their evaluators, their students, or their students' parents/guardians) their advocacy for a March 15 return to full in-person learning for secondary students.

Whereas numerous secondary students live in households with elementary students, and

Whereas there have been more quarantines at secondary than at elementary since the end of winter break, despite the fact that elementary returned fully in person a number of weeks before secondary returned to the hybrid, and

Whereas there are consistently more active COVID-19 cases on an average day amongst secondary students than amongst elementary students, and

Whereas an action that causes more virus spread at secondary has the potential to also cause more virus spread at elementary, and

Whereas all students benefit from in-person learning, even more so for elementary students than for secondary students, and

Whereas all students also benefit greatly from predictability, and

Whereas increased virus spread/quarantines actually diminish predictability for students, and

Whereas LPS leaders often express the desire for transparency, then:

LPS must actively communicate to students, their parents/guardians, and all employees the specific current quarantine rules being used by district-level personnel, and

LPS must actively acknowledge in writing to students, their parents/guardians, and all employee groups the possibility that the decision to return secondary students to full in-person learning on March 15 runs the risk of causing unwanted shifts to remote learning for secondary and elementary students alike.

Whereas many school-based staff think that state standardized testing of grades 3 and up are a waste of valuable learning time during the remainder of this school year, and

Whereas educators use formative assessments with LPS students throughout each and every school year, then:

A public stand by the LPS School Board must be taken against state standardized testing this year, and

In the event that state standardized tests are not cancelled, then parents/guardians must receive specific written instructions from LPS regarding how to opt students out of state standardized tests, and

In the event that state standardized tests are not cancelled, then LPS must take a public stand against the use of spring 2021 state standardized tests in 2021/2022 school year educator evaluations.

Whereas LPS School Board meetings and workshops have been live-streamed since April 2020, and

Whereas the technological ability to have visitors participate in School Board meetings and workshops can be accomplished via phone calls, and

Whereas district-level and building-level administrators have repeatedly spoken on behalf of school-based teachers and SSPs since April 2020, and

Whereas school-based teachers and SSPs are perfectly capable of speaking on their own behalf at School Board meetings, then:

If School Board members wish to have LEA survey results interpreted, or wish to know more about the impact that district-level decisions are going to have upon school-based teachers and SSPs, then such inquiries must be directed to the LEA President or her relevant designee(s), as was the practice prior to the current global pandemic.

LEA Officers: Amanda Crosby (President), Tom Andrews (Vice President), Alberta Maybee (Secretary / Treasurer)

LEA Executive Board members: Corey Brueckner, Lisa Calkins, Jamie Carroll, Shante' Dallapiazza, Deb Lang, Jay Lukes, Gayla Ruckhaus, Katie TeKippe, Brian White