



State of the School

School Year 2017-2018

May 21, 2018

Dear Members of the Learning Prep School Community,

As I write this State of the School report it is a beautiful spring day and the recent landscaping improvements have significantly improved the presentation of the buildings and grounds at LPS. We have received numerous compliments from members of our community on the enhanced plantings, gardens, and walkways that were completed during the April vacation. The message to those who are members of our community and to those families contemplating enrollment is that LPS is proud of its accomplishment and enthusiastically invested in its future.

This State of the School message will focus on the Educational Program, Personnel, Infrastructure, Institutional Advancement, Finance, Community Relations, Students, and 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 staff, a well-formulated curriculum, and an infrastructure to support teaching and learning is essential.

Every six years, we have a responsibility as an approved Chapter 766 Private Special Education Day School in Massachusetts, to develop and submit for approval to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), a Program Review and a Reconstruction Plan. Our Program Review, in essence a self-study, was developed and submitted to DESE early in the fall of 2017. It was approved by DESE and a hardcopy of this Program Review is available for inspection here in the Administration suite at LPS. Subsequent to receiving that approval, we began to develop the Reconstruction Plan for LPS. This plan, once approved by DESE, will guide our work for the next six years. This is an expansive and detailed plan that addresses program, personnel, infrastructure, finance, and attendant components of an educational institution. As such, the drafting of the plan involved countless hours of engagement and interaction with DESE and LPS leadership. Subsequent to Board approval, the plan was recently submitted to DESE. The plan has an educational and a financial component. Once DESE approves the educational plan, the financial plan will be submitted to the office of Operational Services Division (OSD) for review and approval. The preliminary feedback on our Reconstruction Plan has been constructive and positive and we expect to receive final approval by July, 2018. Once that approval is granted, we will proceed with the implementation of our Reconstruction Plan.

Throughout the 2017-2018 school year our focus has been on the institutionalizing of best practice in every facet of our work at LPS. The mission and educational program of highly effective and highly efficient schools reflect and are congruent with the policies, protocols, and practices that define and

codify the essence of the school. Schools that fail to accomplish this are at the mercy of being driven by the “cult of personality”, that is, by the staff present at any point in time. The problem with this approach is obvious, when that staff moves on, the program is at risk.

Current and Ongoing Focus Points and Initiatives

Educational Program

As articulated in the school’s Mission Statement, Learning Prep School 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 the academic program, the skills for life program, and positive social pragmatic work. As such, the students expand and enhance their understanding of core content knowledge, as well as the acquisition and refinement of skills required to navigate the challenges and avail themselves of the opportunities they will likely experience in life.

We have developed a comprehensive Curriculum/Instruction/Assessment/Data Analysis protocol designed to ensure the ongoing development, review, and assessment of all content areas. This is a focused, collaborative effort of teachers and administrators engaged in the design and development of a written document that clearly and succinctly describes the core content, essential skills, and assessments for each grade level course. The result is a well-articulated scope and sequence for all subject areas, grades 3-12. This is a four-year review and renewable four-year cycle and it will begin with English/Language Arts and Math for school year 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.

We are the recipient of a \$100,000 grant to renovate our greenhouse facility and to rejuvenate our horticulture program. The renovation and the program will be operational for the 2018-19 school year. This program provides students with an understanding of horticulture, of the protocols attendant to managing a business, community involvement, and the farm-to-table initiative.

We are also focused on Student Citizenship as the underlying principle of helping our students to understand why societies and institutions develop laws, rules, and regulations to govern our behavior. At the heart of all successful schools is a healthy, vibrant culture that is based upon the core beliefs of the institution. These core principles are embedded in a code of conduct that define and advance the core beliefs of the school. At LPS these five core principles are respect, responsibility, honesty, caring, and compassion. These values are integrated throughout the educational program of the school. The goal of the program is to promote an understanding, appreciation, and modeling of what it means to be a good person and to contribute to the common good.

Other focus points include the refinement of the Transition Program including the preparation for post-secondary education placement and career placement; the work study/skills-for-life program; and exploration with several other 766 schools on the viability of providing opportunities for interschool engagement in athletics and activities.

Personnel

LPS is dedicated to the proposition that professional development is essential to highly effective instruction and to the content and the utility of the educational program of the school. We have developed a belief statement and protocol to guide all professional development at LPS. We believe it must be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than focusing exclusively on individual teachers. It must engage teachers in discrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection that illuminate the process of teaching and learning. It must be grounded in inquiry, reflection, and experimentation. It must be connected to and received from teachers' work with their students.

The membership of the senior leadership team has been transformed with new appointments for the positions of Executive Director, Chief Operations Officer, and High School Principal. The latter two positions have been filled internally, ensuring continuity of leadership and knowledge of LPS. We are currently engaged in a search for the next Director of Development and we have appointed an Interim Director of Admissions for the period September-December, 2018 to cover a maternity leave. The new Supervisor of Transition Services was also hired this year with the intent to refine and expand opportunities for our students as they prepare for post-secondary placements. During the course of this year we have had the normal turnover of staff, each one due to the relocation of a spouse/significant other or a medical/maternity leave.

We have refined our comprehensive annual evaluation system for all LPS staff. This includes establishing annual goals, workplace observations, and periodic conferences with supervisors. We have completed a review and attendant modification of the search and hiring protocol that governs all faculty and staff hires.

Infrastructure

We have developed a three-year maintenance and capital plan for the school that will be instructive in the development of the annual operating budget. We are continuing to replace carpeting throughout the buildings, lower the ceilings to improve acoustics, and refinish all of the wood doors. During April vacation new lighting was installed throughout the facilities. As stated earlier in this report, we have improved the grounds by creating new gardens, planting new shrubs and flowers, mulching all gardens, and installed an irrigation system for the front of the school facing Washington Street. The final phase of this facelift will be the installation of a new fence (white) around the playground area which will be done in a few weeks. Not only does this landscape initiative provide improved curb and aesthetic appeal, it also serves as a marketing statement and demonstrates school pride. Plans for the renovation of the greenhouse are advancing with the opening of this renewed facility schedule to coincide with the opening of school year 2018-2019.

Development, Marketing, & Alumni Relations

The Office of Institutional Advancement includes Development and Alumni Relations

The Office of Development and the Office of Admissions collaborate with respect to the marketing of the school. The Office of Development assumes a pivotal role and responsibility in securing funds to support the operational budget and program enhancement, not feasible through tuition revenue alone, by cultivating mutually beneficial relationships with the school's stakeholders and philanthropic entities. We continue to create various platforms designed to advance awareness and appreciation of the school. Private schools and universities depend on a robust annual fund to complement tuition revenues and LPS is no different in its need to secure that support. It is in that context that we continue to focus on increasing the number of donors to our Family and Friends Fund, as well as increasing the amount of those contributions, each year. We are rejuvenating our Alumni Association and will begin the practice during Commencement of presenting a certificate of membership to the LPS Alumni Association and establishing opportunities for the alumni to connect with the school.

The Office of Institutional Advancement also includes Admissions and Marketing.

LPS established an Office of Admissions and the position of Director of Admissions in 2016. This was the first time that resources were allocated solely for that purpose. This initiative was long overdue and critical to the school's long term viability, as it would be for any private educational institution. Our focus is to attract and enroll mission appropriate students, students whose needs and interests we know we can serve well. We are continuing accurately and assertively to market the school through a myriad of social media tools, attendance at select venues to expand awareness of LPS and to attract interest among potential applicants. Attendance at our Open Houses over the course of this school year has been strong and we are looking forward to welcoming a number of new students for the 2018-2019 school year. We are very appreciative of the support that we have received from some dedicated parents who continue to be wonderful ambassadors for LPS.

Finance

Ensuring financial stability and accountability is the highest priority for the school. The Board, the Executive Director, the Chief Financial Officer, and the Chief Operating Officer have the primary responsibility for this work. We have established protocols and policies to secure and sustain financial stability through the efficient and effective stewardship of funding resources that support the mission, the educational program, and the operation of the school. Given the decline in enrollment over the past few years, due in large part to the decision of the public schools to educate children with mild to moderate learning disabilities in the district, tuition driven revenue has declined, as well. The enrollment several years ago was 280 students compared with 200 students currently enrolled. If one does the math, loss of 80 students X \$42,000 tuition, it is easy to comprehend the financial impact of that decision on LPS.

Tuition receipts for private schools leave little room for discretionary spending. Eighty-five percent of operating costs are typically used for salary, taxes, and fringe 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 percent of operating expenses for discretionary spending including program resources, professional development, and contingencies that may arise over the year.

Unlike most private schools, Chapter 766 schools do not have the option to establish tuition annually, except for the state adjusted Cost of Living Allowance. Furthermore, 766 schools are not allowed to significantly modify how they spend their funding. Tuition, staffing levels by position, average salaries, and operating expenses are established and monitored by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Operational Services Division (OSD). Tuition and spending levels are reset every six years as a result of a process with DESE and OSD called Program Reconstruction. Learning Prep School has applied for Program Reconstruction effective with the 2018-2019 school year.

Private schools, Chapter 766 schools, colleges, and universities engage in fundraising to secure the funds required to complement tuition-driven revenues. This enables these institutions to provide a high quality educational program. In recent years, Educational Foundations have been established in towns across the Commonwealth to raise funds for public schools to complement tax-driven revenue.

Moving forward we expect to stabilize enrollment in the range of 190-210 students and we are aligning our program and resources with those numbers. We are very comfortable that with DESE approval of our Reconstruction Plan the viability of the school is on a firm foundation.

Community Relations

Among our initiatives this year is the establishment of the Partners In Education (PIE). The intent of PIE is to cultivate and nurture a strong sense of community, to advance good will, to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas between the school and parents, and to promote and enhance the character, culture, and values of the educational program. An Executive Committee of five parents and five school administrators serves in a leadership capacity for PIE. The initial meeting of the PIE Executive Committee was held on May 10th and we are enthusiastic about the capacity and the dedication of this partnership to advance the interests of LPS and, in doing so enrich the teaching and learning experience at the school. The PIE Executive Committee also has responsibility for the Parent Advisory Group meetings, two of which are required each year by DESE. We have expanded that from 2 to 4 meetings each school year, one each quarter, beginning with school year 2018-2019. DESE states that the PAG shall engage the school on education, health, and the safety of students. These meetings focus on the accomplishments, the challenges, and the opportunities attendant to the educational program at LPS and provide a forum for the exchange of ideas.

We have been very engaged in the cultivating and sustaining an active presence in the Massachusetts Association of Approved Private Schools (maaps), including my recent presentation to the Maaps Board on the mission and program of LPS. Representatives of LPS are active participants in conferences and

events focused on the interests of 766 schools, and cultivating and sustaining relationships with other educational institutions, NGOs, corporate entities, small businesses, DESE, the Massachusetts legislature, and philanthropic foundations and individuals. Recently, we hosted a delegation of key legislators here at LPS to update them on school programs and other salient and timely topics. I have also met with the leadership of the Massachusetts Superintendents Association and sent letters to each Massachusetts Superintendent and Special Education Director informing them of our intent to be a steadfast partner in meeting the needs of children with language-based learning disabilities. Each of these initiatives is designed to advance the mission, the program, and the reputation of LPS. This outreach and participatory initiatives have been very positively received.

Governance and Administration

The Board of Directors and the school have established a sound working relationship based on mutual respect and trust. The protocols that serve as the guide for the Board and the Head of School are aligned with the Principles of Good Practice of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). The Board is a self-perpetuating governing body. One of the Board committees, the Committee on Trustees, is charged with the responsibility to identify people who can bring “Time, Talent, & Treasure” to service on the Board. The Board also has a Finance Committee and a Committee on Institutional Advancement. The latter committee has responsibility to work closely with the LPS Office of Institutional Advancement (Development & Admissions) to advance the interests of the school through the cultivation of a healthy annual (Family & Friends) fund and by achieving a robust student enrollment each year.

The Board, the Head of School and the senior administrators work collaboratively to ensure financial stability for the school. They also establish the policies that govern the school’s operations and program. Unlike public school boards, as the Board of a private school, it is not involved in the daily operations of the school, the educational program, or the hiring of personnel, other than hiring the Head of School. That said, it is responsibility of the Head of School and the senior leadership to keep the Board informed of the salient and timely issues, challenges, and opportunities that the school is addressing.

Students

The Class of 2018 is focused on Commencement, Friday, June 1, 2018. This class has made numerous substantive contributions to the school and the members are now poised to take the next step in life’s journey. We shall miss them and we look forward to their return visits as alumni to LPS.

The primary focus of the staff and the administration is to ensure that all students have access to an educational program and experience that enables them to acquire the competence and the confidence to achieve their aspirations and to have a meaningful and rewarding life. Our intent is to make sure that our programmatic resources and services are integrated, seamless, and individualized as this enables them to more successfully navigate the journey as they progress through the grades at LPS. We are in the midst of planning to further improve, expand, and refine our career services program. This includes providing transition opportunities, post-secondary placements, and career preparedness that are aligned with the ever-changing landscape for career opportunities in today’s world. We are also engaged in

plans to design a Senior Year II program that is distinctive from the Senior Year I program. More on this initiative will be forthcoming.

We have established the Blue/Green Spirit Program, designed to enhance a healthy school culture and school spirit by providing opportunities for all students (and staff) to engage in friendly competitions throughout the school year. Each student is either a member of the Blues or the Greens (school colors) and has a t-shirt with LPS: Proud of It! Part of It! The feedback from students and staff has been very positive. Students serve with staff on the Blue/Green Committee that has the responsibility for planning these events. Students also serve on the Wellness Committee and are also taking the lead in a recycling program initiative. We are actively encouraging student voice by providing them with opportunities to engage in activities, events, and service on committees. The recent participation of students who were engaged in peaceful and silent protest over the school shootings in our country was the result of student initiative and planning. Student Council and other clubs are providing opportunities for leadership, self-reliance, and collaboration with others.

Earlier this spring we invited several 766 schools to join us in exploring the idea of establishing an association of schools dedicated to promoting opportunities for our respective students (middle and high school) to engage in friendly athletic competitions and events. Our first event will be a soccer field day to be held on October 25th, followed by a basketball field day during the winter 2019 and a Frisbee field day in the spring 2019. Details on these events will be forthcoming. It is our intent to expand these opportunities in subsequent years.

We are also in the early stages of exploring the idea of implementing an expanded intramural program here at LPS that will provide opportunities for our students to engage in friendly athletic competitions and other activities. Our intent is to provide some of these activities beginning with the 2018-2019 school year.

It is important to note that LPS does not sanction or administer Special Olympics athletic teams and events, as that is the responsibility of SOMA (Special Olympics of Massachusetts). That said, we do wholeheartedly appreciate the dedication of parents and others who offer their services as coaches and supporters of the various SOMA programs and we encourage our students and families to participate in them.

The juniors and seniors participated in the annual financial literacy workshop with volunteers from Price Waterhouse (PWC). The workshop focuses on various areas of responsibility that we all assume in life including transportation, clothing, and housing, among many others. PWC staff, as well our transition staff work with our students and student feedback is always positive.

Finally, with the advent of the new school year we will fully integrate the new "Student Citizenship" initiative as the foundation for our student behavior program. School communities are a microcosm of the larger macro community, the society in which we all live. Humankind has long recognized that we must establish parameters of conduct that enable us to live together (rules, regulations, & laws). School communities must do the same. In a democratic society these parameters of accepted behavior define good citizenship. In essence, if you abide by and promote these expectations, these laws, you are

considered a person of integrity, a person likely to contribute to the common good. This approach emphasizes the importance of seizing student misbehavior as a teaching moment, as an opportunity to make a constructive contribution to the life of a child. This initiative is defined by a code of conduct for all members of the school community, a code that is embedded in all aspects of our educational program. The code at LPS includes the core values of respect, responsibility, honesty, caring, and compassion.

Summary Statement

Highly Effective, highly efficient schools are dedicated to the premise that they always need to be engaged in conversations designed to enrich and expand the educational program and all attendant components of the school. We are dedicated to this proposition at LPS. Schools need to be data driven, using analysis of data to make informed decisions about program, teaching and learning, human and financial resources, infrastructure, and operations. This is an approach we are using to advance the interests of LPS. The most important question we ask ourselves before making a final decision is critical. That question: Is the decision we are about to make in the best interest of our students? If not, we go back to work until we can respond to that question in the affirmative. Parents have entrusted their child to us and we take that responsibility most seriously. No educational institution is without its challenges, but please be advised that at LPS we view challenges as opportunities to become an even better school.

I look forward to our work together during the next two years!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ted Sharp". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the top that loops back down into the first letter of the first name.

*Ted Sharp
Interim Executive Director*