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Loudoun County School Board, Loudoun Education Alliance of Families (LEAF) Committee Meeting, Monday, September 18, 2023

Date Monday, September 18, 2023
Place Loudoun County Public Schools / School Board meeting (see BoardDocs / LCPS-TV)
Length 1h 22m (video)

- Official meeting video (Vimeo / LCPS-TV): <https://player.vimeo.com/video/865730453?rel=0>
- BoardDocs (School Board): <https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/loudoun/Board.nsf/Public>

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Speech-to-text: whisper.cpp, model large-v3-turbo. Produced 2026-10-21. Each paragraph starts with its time [HH:MM:SS] in the meeting video.

[00:06:19] Good evening, everyone. Welcome, LEAF members. We have a full agenda tonight. So if you will find your seats by your district clusters, be sure to fill out the attendance form on the computer at your table. I'm going to call to order the meeting. Welcome, LEAF members, to the September 18th meeting of the Loudoun Education Alliance of Families. The meeting will come to order.

[00:06:40] As we begin our agenda this evening seats are by planning district clusters. Please be sure to sign in. We are continuing to implement our new attendance process and appreciate your support. There are two options a computer at the end of each table for you to use or a QR code or URL to access with your phone. As a reminder staff and the officers do not share a list of contact information so please feel free to share your contact information with those in your district as needed.

[00:07:09] Anyone attending who is not a school board approved member or alternate should sit in the public viewing area. LEAF meetings are open to the public. Loudoun County residents are welcome to attend the meeting but must refrain from interrupting the meeting's agenda.

[00:07:29] Per the LEAF charter bylaws, public comments should address an agenda item. Members of the public who wish to address items on the agenda may do so at this time. tonight's agenda includes a

visit from dr spence discussion on leaf member communication practices and agenda priorities do we have any public comments tonight so the public comment period is designed to support strong community engagement and informs a strong school system by gaining

[00:08:05] input from the public for those who wish to comment there is a time allotted to two minutes we'll move on to the next action item the meeting minutes for the august 21st 2023 meeting are linked on the leaf website as well as a few copies at your table to provide another opportunity for review i will entertain a motion to accept the minutes from the august 21st 2023 meeting as submitted do we have a motion to accept the minutes motion accepting your name thank you is there a

[00:08:42] second named thank you Melanie all in favor say aye all those opposed with no changes requested the minutes stand approved as submitted the minutes are approved and we will move on to the information items next I would like to invite our school board representative for LEAF Erica Ogedegbe to say a few

[00:09:08] words yeah no we'll go and then and then I'll introduce dr. Spence when he comes here as as well so good evening and welcome you know we've got a lot of new faces I know last time for the board meeting there are I think 20 people who were approved through the consent agenda to join LEAF so welcome if this is a new

[00:09:47] participation for you thank you I guess I'm quiet is that better so two two things I wanted to highlight one of them was several several board members recently have expressed an interest in addressing use of cell phones in schools currently policy 8650 which is the student technology acceptable use policy addresses personal devices in section E and indicates that students can bring personal devices but they need teacher permission to use them during

[00:10:25] instructional time I think we all know that that is there's a varied experience related to how that is enforced so I think probably unanimously we're all interested in addressing this I know it's something that dr. Spence when he's here if there's some questions about that he can also address how staff is going to help kind of propel and get some information to help kick-start that conversation with community input that's something I've also heard from folks about now I feel like I'm really loud hopefully you don't think I'm shouting

[00:11:01] the other thing I wanted to mention is at the end of last year and I'm looking around but your tables have changed so I don't know where people are but I had had yes and we had some conversations at the end of the year about policy feedback and knowing what's coming and there was some information shared at the last school board meeting about some changes and you will be receiving this week a list of the policies that are scheduled for review this academic year

[00:11:36] note that this is might change because there could be things that come up that are brought forward through committee or there could be evolving things where there are new new policies that come up or people identify policies that we want to revisit off schedule but this list basically consists of everything that is due for the five-year review as well as policies that need to be revisited due to changes in Virginia code or federal law as well.

[00:12:08] So that will be shared with you in the next couple of days and then you can plan as an advisory board to think about how you want to, you know, prioritize which ones you might want to look at in

advance. As you know, it's hard to kind of anticipate exactly when these policies will be coming through committees.

[00:12:31] So they will come through each individual committee. Sometimes it's a pretty quick review and they'll go through one review and then they'll go out for comment. Sometimes there's a lot of back and forth even within the committee. So it is hard to gauge exactly when things would come for action to the full board.

[00:12:49] But the hope in sharing that full list is that it gives you a sense of what's coming up. So if there are particular policies that you're very interested in, you could start looking at those now and be ready if, you know, when those come up for public feedback.

[00:13:07] Those were the two main things I wanted to bring that I thought would be of interest. It's a little bit early to start talking about budget. I know somebody mentioned that offline, but the process for that will be we'll expect to have conversations around budget priorities probably starting in November, and then the superintendent's statement of needs is usually happening in January, and then there are a series of four or five if we need a fifth meeting with the board to work through what the priorities are and what that final budget would look like.

[00:13:46] And then that vote happens in February. So I will hand it back to somebody. I don't know who I'm handing it back to. And then when Dr. Spence is here, I'll be happy to invite him up and introduce him as well.

[00:14:06] Thank you, Erica. I am going to introduce Ginny Beers. She is our vice chair of membership. She's going to give us a membership update. And then she's going to take us through a short activity about communications. Thank you. Good evening, everybody.

[00:14:22] I took a look at the latest list that the board approved as of September 12th and cross-referenced it to all of our schools across the county and I wanted to share via elementary middle high and educational centers how we stand as of the 12th so these are they could be slightly different because they haven't anybody that have been nominated hasn't been voted in yet but please if your school is listed it means they do not have a delegate which doesn't make sense because you're here. So if you have a friend at a neighboring school, there we go. If you have a

[00:15:00] friend, if you have a friend or a neighbor or somebody that you know that could fill the vacancy seat, please email me at, we just got our new email, leafmembership at lcps.org. And then I will reach out and work with PTA, PTO, or principal at that school to get that person nominated.

[00:15:23] So for elementary, we have 22 vacancies. So 64% of our elementary schools are represented, so thank you. The ones that are vacant currently are Arcola, Banneker, Cardinal Ridge, Catoctin, Cedar Lane, Creighton Corner, Discovery, Dominion Trail, Frederick Douglas, Forest Grove, Guilford, Hillside, Hutchinson Farm, Lincoln, Lovettsville, Meadowland, Middleburg Community Charter School, Francis Hazel Reed, Rolling Ridge, Seldon's Landing, Elaine Thompson, and Waterford.

[00:15:55] So if you know, yes, ma'am. No, that's okay. No. You can only be primary for one, but you can be an alternate for another because you only receive one vote. So if you'd like to be an alternate for one of the schools, you can email me that as well because we definitely would like, we have even less alternates on this list.

[00:16:19] So that would be helpful if you can do that. So if you heard of any school that you're connected to in any other way, please, I'm And working with those people inside of those schools and talking with the principal.

[00:16:37] But you guys have the feet closer to the ground at those schools, so please help on that side. Middle school, we're at 71% occupied, so only five vacancies. Blue Ridge, Harmony, Mercer, Sterling, and Willard. I'm hearing a lot of Della South schools, ladies and gentlemen.

[00:16:56] High school, 47%, 10 vacant. Briarwoods, Broad Run, Dominion, Freedom, Thomas Jefferson, Loudoun Valley, Parkview, W.O. Roby, Tuscarora, and Woodgrove. And then our educational centers, Historic Douglas High School, North Star School.

[00:17:17] Again, if you hear of anybody at any of those schools, send them to me. Any questions on membership? The goal is to get at 100%. Let's do it. We got a year under our belts, and I know we can do this. I know we can do great things, but we need the voice of our families.

[00:17:33] So please, please help. Let me keep going on the other piece. Okay. So we're going to move forward with Vice Chair of Communications. Lydia couldn't be with us tonight. During a discussion, the topic of LEAF member communication practices was brought up specifically around what LEAF representatives do to communicate with the communities and vice versa.

[00:17:56] While there is a flow chart on page 53 to help jumpstart communication practices, And there are new books, if anybody did want a new book with the new quorum rule that we voted on last month, so please raise your hands.

[00:18:12] So again, page 53, we wanted to take about 10 minutes to have a discussion at your tables, being sure to allow time for all voices to be heard, veteran and new members to leave. What has worked for you? What barriers have you encountered?

[00:18:28] What questions do you have? What support would you like from the chairs and or staff? There's paper at the table. If you'd like to jot down anything your group shares, if somebody can be a designated leader and secretary for the table.

[00:18:45] At the end of the 10 minutes, we'll ask for a short summary of what your group thinks is important to lift for the group. Because at the time, we won't be able to hear everyone, but we will collect all the notes, and we'll compile them, and the chairs will take a look and see what we can bring forward via email or to our meeting next month.

[00:19:04] Any questions before we begin? So ultimately, what has been working and what flopped? To put it bluntly. Yes, ma'am. Page 53 should be practices for communication.

[00:19:25] Is that not correct? Possibly in the new book. It might not be. What page? 52. So should be communication information on how to communicate with your community. So it is 5.50.

[00:19:43] Let's take 10 minutes. Talk inside of your group. Have a secretary. Write everything down. And we'll come back together in 10 minutes and share.

[00:25:37] Hey, ladies and gentlemen, one, two more minutes.

[00:29:31] Wrap it up, please, and get one minute. Tick tock, tick tock. And then have a speaker for each of your groups with your top yes or your top no.

[00:29:54] Okay, everyone, if we can quiet down, please, and have a table to volunteer to go first.

[00:30:12] Dallas South, thank you for volunteering. All right, Dallas South, can you please move your mic? Use your mic and let us know what y'all talked about. What's your top yes or top no?

[00:30:27] Closer. Hello, I'm Leah Macchiarolo from the Della South District. Our conversation revolved around the usage of Facebook and Instagram linking the two to be more easy to get the information out. The other part of the conversation was that the no part would be that there is so much information and people are lazy and they don't want to go find it.

[00:30:56] So how do we best balance the two? To elaborate, we're creating a Facebook page, and we're inviting PTA presidents, who then can invite PTA members, who then can invite friends of neighbors, and it just spreads, because you can invite each other to Facebook pages, right?

[00:31:23] So that's how we're going to get more people onto our LEAF Facebook page. Also, possibly make it a button on the homepage of your website, if you can talk to your webmaster at school, so it's not buried. who's next thank you south dallas north where are you all right what you got hi i'm juelyn costgrove um first time uh we mostly just kind of talk to get the lay of the land um some of us are new to leaf and figuring well i guess most of you were new last year right so we're all

[00:32:02] relatively still new to this process um i don't know that we had any major takeaways other than trying to open up greater amounts of communication, creating a stand-alone email account that could be passed on to the next LEAF representative from your school to make that personalized so we also don't have that in our own personal email boxes and can kind of keep that clear, adding something to newsletters so that folks in the community know how to contact you and

[00:32:31] raise any issues. Thank you. Next group. Hi, Haley Singer, Eastern Loudoun. We talked about um, how helpful the meeting minutes were last year for us to present to the PTA. Um, we were hoping that perhaps we could get them translated at least into Spanish. So we were able to, um, get those meetings to a wider population of the students at our school and the families. So you're talking about more of the presentations or the minutes or both? Um, there was that little blurb about what

[00:33:09] we talked about in it for that. And so, um, if we could get that translated so we could communicate to those families that are bilingual. Okay. Thank you. Good idea. Um, so what we talked about is the importance to us in knowing the topics in advanced so that we can get those topics out to families in order to get the feedback to provide for you guys so that we can have, you know, a

[00:33:49] discussion prior to certain things being decided and another thing that we also talked about is maybe having some dedicated time where us LEAF representatives do or are allowed to bring up the concerns that are brought to us by the community if it is not something that's maybe directly on the agenda so some outside topics that are being brought up to us so if maybe there's a time during meetings that is designated for us to be able to discuss those topics or at least put them on the

[00:34:22] agenda for the next meeting. And the last thing we also discussed is if there is a possibility for maybe a communications team or somebody who does have all this information to be able to provide us with notes to bring back to our community to make sure that we are not misconstruing anything or that we are not, you know, changing any of the verbiage or any of the words so that our community does have the most up-to-date and the most accurate information.

[00:34:54] Thank you. Any feedback from staff on those ideas? We can work with Lydia, the vice chair for communications on that, and work with the team.

[00:35:12] So, yes, don't know what that will look like, but I think we can do that. Hi. I basically took up all the time. I'm sorry to my team. but um i talked about um as the vice chair for communications last year for leaf what um our district had done was we had done a couple of things one somebody already mentioned which was to have a not your own email address so like hhs.leafrep at gmail.com um that way there all of

[00:35:51] the historical data about leaf is there when you pass it along to the next person the others that we created a group chat so that we knew when who would be at the meeting like if somebody wasn't going to be able to make the meeting we knew in advance and we made sure that they got all the information if they had any questions or something that they wanted to bring up we knew in advance um and the fact that the summary that the communications office provides um to the LEAF representatives after each meeting is invaluable as someone whose school has the LEAF

[00:36:28] rep as part of the PTSO board I use that as my readout at the PTSO meeting each month if your school doesn't have the PTSO or the LEAF representative as as a board member you can simply send that readout to your PTSO or and it's usually if your school has a PTA you can and that read out to the pta president um and then the the other is um using the like the principal's newsletters so like if the principal sends out a weekly s'more or some other type of newsletter

[00:37:05] on a regular basis keeping them up to date with things like for example we let um we were in the principal's update last week to let them know that we would have like a question and answer session with um dr spence because our community listening session with dr spence isn't until may and so it allows them to know that hey if you are interested and you have any questions or anything like that you can do it now versus having to wait until may for that you know community listening thank you

[00:37:41] one more group i believe um so we talked about we share with the principals monthly newsletters or weekly newsletters we share with PTO and PTA group pages either on Facebook or their newsletters but we do we did discuss several concerns that we have one thing I did just think of is have we seen an uptick in parent feedback with the policy reviews since we've started because if we're not seeing that it's not what we're doing is not working so it's just a data point to keep in mind

[00:38:20] um you know we're not getting feedback from parents could be for a multitude of reasons but something i've heard multiple times is i don't even know what leaf does we have so many other options to provide feedback or get up or i can just call you know so and so and get the answer directly from them what is the point so that's some of the feedback we've gotten um the value in what we're sharing with families some parents have said they're like that's great or i'm not clicking on any extra links in the monthly newsletter or you know so it's just been kind

[00:38:57] of negative what people are saying to us i mean the pto president asked me at the end of last summer like what so what do you guys actually do besides policy feedback i am not sure yet um and then also for the people actually participating in this group is there an online option that we could still participate if we can't be in person, is that even possible? Because sometimes we can't make it or would rather not bring our kids with us if we're stuck. To speak to the attendance

[00:39:36] piece, that's why we all need an alternate. So you have a vote and then you can go back to the website and look at the minutes and look at the presentations. I think the data point, did we get an uptick,

would be great to know if that could be shared with all of us. We have some very good points. I think we all have to remember that we need to meet with our principal right after this meeting, like within five business days, if that's allowed, even if it's on a phone call while they're driving home, to give them an update of what you just experienced for an hour and a half, what

[00:40:10] policies are coming forward, and know the audience of your community. Your principal should know how that community responds, because mine may respond via Facebook better than a newsletter, or vice versa no one comes to our pta meetings so that's not a spot that i'm going to spend time but i know we have a group a facebook group for every single class of the six classes and they're active so know your audience know your communities work with your principal and we're just keep trucking along we're brand new it's going to get out there msac and siac have a reputation now good bad and

[00:40:50] different, they do. LEAF will as well. And if we keep pushing forward to say we are your voice and if you don't take advantage of that, I can't help you. We're not going to please everybody. But the people that want to be heard are going to support us. Maybe they'll be an alternate, maybe they'll be a representative, but hopefully they'll get on the web page and click on those policy links and have their voice be heard. Thank you everybody. I hope we took all those notes down and we can get some feedback for next month thank you for taking the time to participate in that activity

[00:41:29] and just so you know in the back of your relief handbook are flyers that you can use to put up around your school so like this one has a place for who your relief representative is so you know make sure that you take take these and utilize them because they're additional resources all right I'm going to bring Erica back up here to introduce Dr. Spence for us thank you so much

[00:42:04] So I would like to introduce Loudoun County Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Aaron Spence. As you may know, he joins Loudoun from Virginia Beach City Public Schools, where he served for nine years as their superintendent. During that time in 2018, Dr. Spence was honored to be named Virginia Superintendent of the Year.

[00:42:25] And before coming to Virginia Beach, he served as superintendent of Moore County Public Schools in North Carolina. We are thrilled that Dr. Spence has chosen Loudon and look forward to working with him and his leadership. Just for context, in terms of I'll steal your thunder and say why you're late, he was in the joint committee meeting with the Board of Supervisors at the county building on the dais, having a conversation, couldn't exactly get up to come to the meeting.

[00:42:54] So nothing like being double booked, but welcome Dr. Spence to the Loudon Education Alliance for Families meeting. Yes, thanks. Good evening. So nice to be here with you, and I apologize for being late, and thank you for letting them know why.

[00:43:17] It was not just that it would have been a little awkward and the optics wouldn't have been great to stand up and leave the dais, but they have a badge access, and mine wouldn't work, so I wouldn't have been able to get off the dais if I wanted to, so I was kind of hostage. But I am glad that I was able to get back in time to be with you all, and I'm actually really glad i was able to get back in time to hear some of that conversation because some of you said you know we're new at this and i'm new at this with you all and um and so some of you sort of brand new first time here and then just generally it's a new organization and i really appreciated

[00:43:53] that response like it's a new organization it's going to take a little bit of time to figure out both for ourselves uh kind of internally working together like what is this what is the value of this let's make sure we're not wasting anybody's time yours or ours right like and also more importantly to build that reputation of hey this is really like this is an opportunity to really be engaged with each other on these critically important issues that surround our schools and so I'm excited to be a part of that with you I am excited to be here in Loudoun County I've been asked the question quite a bit why did you come to Loudoun County what were

[00:44:30] you thinking has come across several people's and I and I give the same answer every time and it's like are you kidding me why wouldn't you come to Loudoun County what an incredible school division what amazing schools we have committed caring deeply caring families kids who just I have been in over a dozen schools already in the two weeks that I've been here and I am just blown away by the kids that I'm meeting and having the chance to sit down on the rug with and talk to and I was in a middle school class today talking to some kids about their hopes and dreams.

[00:45:06] And just so exciting, so much energy here in Loudoun County. And I know we've got challenges. I don't know how many of you have had kids in other school systems, but there's challenges in all school systems. That's sort of the nature of the beast. We're a big organization.

[00:45:21] But we can't get better at solving those challenges unless we have opportunities like this to keep our voice open. and to be listening to and talking with one another about what we want and what our hopes and our aspirations and our dreams are for our children and then how we can work together to make those things happen.

[00:45:39] And I think it's also really important. I love the structure of this because it's an opportunity to hear from a very diverse group of schools and communities. So one of the things that's also really unique that I love about Loudoun and one of the things that attracted me to Loudoun is that it's so different depending on where you are right so I don't know I'm out in Hamilton anybody out in Hamilton with me from Hamilton people I know and and I love it and it's just beautiful out there so I so as mentioned I came from Virginia Beach I grew up in Virginia Beach I spent not much of my career there

[00:46:17] but the last nine years of my career in Virginia Beach as the superintendent and Virginia Beach is very housing dense so it's a lot like kind of Ashburn in many ways unless you're kind of south of the green line and then there's like no houses and so we lived in a kind of dense place and one of the things I had to promise my wife was a little bit more space if we moved and so that's why we're out in Hamilton we have a little bit more space which was nice but that doesn't mean that I don't love like Ashburn and Sterling and some of the more housing dense places it's just that's what I promised my wife but what I have figured out very quickly is the schools in Hamilton super different than the schools in some of the other places and the schools in Sterling are

[00:46:56] super different than the schools right down the street and and so that we know that right and it's so important that you're representing the voice of parents in your communities so that as we're tackling these challenges a couple of things can happen one we can realize what those differences are and then try to find ways to meet the needs of all of our different communities which can be very challenging again in large and complex organizations but it is not impossible as long as we're keeping the channels of communication open.

[00:47:27] And it is an opportunity, and I appreciate somebody who was reporting, and I didn't see who, but I know it was over here, saying, you know, hey, we want to make sure there's time for us to kind of put things on the agenda. And it is important that we continue to find ways to do that, right? Because we don't ever want to, like, be a, I got this really pressing concern, and I think we need to talk about it.

[00:47:46] And I think it's also good to know that in those moments, let's make sure that we're doing that in ways where we're identifying kind of the large rocks that we've got to push around together you know and and if you've got this individual you know school issues you know we're going to work with our principals but if these are big voice issues this is this is the right place for it and we're going to solve these problems we're going to have these conversations we're going to be honest with each other um I was in a in a meeting with SEAC so anybody else on SEAC in here and we've got folks who serve on multiple committees thank you for that by the way being on multiple committees um don't you have other things no I'm just kidding I'm joking

[00:48:23] totally kidding um you know I said in there so you remember me saying they're like we're not going to be perfect okay so anybody who's expecting their school division to be perfect it's just not it's just not realistic right we're going to be really really great and we are really really great and we can be better but we're not going to be perfect but what we are going to do is commit to continue working together to get better tomorrow than we are today and we're always going to be looking to do that and we can't do it without you we just can't do it without our parents. And I'm saying that as a superintendent. I'm saying that as a career educator. I'm saying

[00:49:00] that as somebody who started in the classroom and had to have daily conversations, in some cases, with my parents to make sure that we were on the same page about what their child needed and what I needed from their child. And then I'm saying that as somebody who was a school administrator for a decade. I was a high school principal. And, you know, we couldn't have done what we did at the high school where I served without our parents. Like, we just couldn't have been the school we were without a committed group of people who wanted their children to have the best possible experience and then that collaborative relationship that we had. And I say that as the superintendent going into my 13th year of the superintendency, I know we can't thrive as a great school division

[00:49:40] unless our parents are part of the collaborative process of problem solving and goal setting and aspiration defining. And to me, that's kind of the last thing I want to say is that I hope in here we dream big for our kids right because I'm also saying this as a parent I'm also telling you that this matters to me as a parent so I mentioned I'm out in Hamilton but also that means my kids are in Hamilton schools right so well they're in they're in that weird attendance zone out there where they go to Blue Ridge and they go to Loudoun Valley but they're in those schools and so I have aspirations for my own children you know and I see things I feel so bad for the principals in those buildings

[00:50:18] some days, because I see things, and I'm like, oh, this could be better, you know, and that's okay. We have to have those conversations, and I will tell you what you'll hear me say a lot, and what our team has already heard me say a lot, and we're going to keep saying it, is that the bedrock of our work is relationships, and it's critically important to me that we build a strong relationship together. My entry plan's online. If you want to see it, it talks all about the need for relationships, the need for trust, and I promise you that's the work we're going to do, and this is a key part of that work, but also I want you to know what I want for my kids. So here's what I want for my kids

[00:50:54] every day they go to school, right? So I want them to feel cared for. So I want them to feel safe, right? Like emotionally safe, physically safe. I want them to know like when they're in school, they're going to be taken care of. And I don't, as a parent, want to have to worry about that.

[00:51:10] I want them to feel loved. I know that we don't talk enough about that, I think, in public education, but I want them to be surrounded by adults who are deeply invested in their success. who really, really want them there. They really want them in their classrooms and really care about them and about their success. And then I want them, third thing, I tell this all the time, like I want them to learn something really important, like every day. And I know everybody says, well, that should be the focus, like learning, right? But I'm here to tell you, how many of you are familiar with Maslow's hierarchy? You ever heard of Maslow's hierarchy?

[00:51:44] Okay. If you're familiar with it, it's kind of this theory and psychology of like what it takes to become a self-actualized human being. And it's kind of this pyramid of needs to become a self-actualized human being. If I'm getting wonky, I apologize, I'll shorten this. But the short version is this.

[00:51:59] It starts with like having your physical needs met, right? Like you can't, and we know this. How many of you know about like our Fueled, our backpack program? We send a thousand bags of food home every week. And what an incredible program through our Ed Foundation. But that's because we know, you know, kids can't learn if their physical needs aren't met, if they don't have safety, if they don't have shelter, if they don't have food, if they're hungry, you know, those kinds of things. And then the bit that people tend to overlook in Maslow's hierarchy is what comes next before self-actualization, and it is the sense of love and belonging as a human being,

[00:52:37] right? So Maslow says, you got to be physically safe, have those needs met, and then you have to feel a sense of love and belonging in your space, right? So you got to know people care about you, you have to have friendships, you have to know that you're supposed to be where you are and that people want you to be there. And so that's why I talk about the need for love in our schools and the need for relationships. Because if a kid doesn't feel that, they are going to tune out.

[00:52:59] There's an old saying in schools. I didn't know how much time I was supposed to have. There's an old saying in schools that kids don't care how much you know until they know how much you care, right? And that's the fundamental reality of our work. And so we have to work on that together. And we're going to build that. And so I want us to dream big in here. And I want to know how we can do that work together build a culture of excellence a culture of instructional fortitude and a culture of love in our buildings and and where we're not getting it right and where we are getting it right and celebrate the latter and work on the former but do it together and I

[00:53:36] promise you that's going to be the goal of my administration and and of our work together so I'm glad we have this organization not everybody does and I'm really hoping we can leverage it as a powerful voice for parents in our community so thanks for letting me come and visit with you tonight and i'm really looking forward to working with all of you so thanks like a true school board member she's asked if i would be willing to take a couple questions and of course of course i am

[00:54:07] yeah absolutely happy to but you know don't overwhelm me you know i mean so yes ma'am yeah so so far great um minus the water situation so i like i moved into a house and the well went dry in three days which was a little shocking you know so uh no that's fussy we're past all that

[00:54:46] it's been great uh i'm i'm really pleased to be here and like i said most of you know i've been to a lot of community meetings it's been very pleasant i have um i have been in a lot of schools and really enjoying that experience and so yeah it's been great i'm glad to be here i think for the most part it's been very welcoming i recognize uh as as in all places i've been in my career not everybody's going to love superintendents. I can live with that. I'll get you on my side if you

[00:55:15] don't love me. How's that? Yes, ma'am. We've received lots of information that absenteeism is a big deal for LCPS this year. And we know what we can do as parents and community members to make sure our kids show up. What is LCPS doing to make sure that those other kids that aren't our

[00:55:46] kids but that everyone is showing up and making showing up valuable not just to get kids in seats yeah so i i think um so i'm gonna i'm not gonna punt i'm gonna answer your question but i am going to tell you that you know part of what i've committed to is listening and learning versus kind of telling you what i think we're doing um because i've been on the job for two weeks it's hard for me to give you a really detailed response to what i what i know we're doing but i can tell you what I think we should be doing, right? And then I'll be assessing against like what I think we should

[00:56:25] be doing. So first of all, it's a great question. Yes, chronic absenteeism, what we're talking about now, because it's also a state indicator for accreditation, is a significant issue. It was becoming a significant issue pre-pandemic. It has skyrocketed since the pandemic in terms of coming to school. Now, part of me likes to think that's because people are a little more sensitive to sending their children to school with a fever, but I think there's other issues, right?

[00:56:53] So there's a great deal of issues around mental health. There's certainly some other things happening in our communities. We have a few responsibilities. First of all, one is to communicate clearly with our parents, right? So we need to be kind of nudging our families and reminding folks about the importance of attendance.

[00:57:12] And so you've seen some. You've said, you know, you've seen some information coming from us. We have, by state code, some kind of curmudgeon-y form letters that we have to send out that I don't think do the best job in terms of how we communicate about attendance. And so I'm having some conversation with our senior leadership about some research behind some other ways to communicate about attendance that can encourage families and kids to come to school by recognizing the value of being in school and kind of connecting that to what happens when you're not.

[00:57:40] And then your last kind of part of that question, which was an interesting way that you posed it, is how can we make it, like, valuable? And I would say that's where what I was talking about earlier comes in, you know, is kids need to want to come to school, right?

[00:57:58] Like, it shouldn't be a you're coming to school because it's compulsory. You should be coming to school because it's a joyful place to be, and you can't imagine, like, missing school. So I don't know. Like, how many of you have a job where, like, you just can't imagine not going to work? Like, because it's just the best experience you ever had, and every single day you get up and you think, there's no way I'm missing going to work, right?

[00:58:21] No, I didn't see a lot of hands come up. But if you've been fortunate enough to have had that experience in your life, right? Or just any other thing that you do where you have that experience, where you're like, I just can't, I would never want to miss that.

[00:58:37] So I, and I'll answer, I'll say this for teachers too, like I want our kids to feel that every day. Like they're so excited by what they're going to learn. They're so excited by the teachers who are going to be teaching it with them, and they're so excited about the environment and the activities and the ways that they're connected to their school that they don't want to miss.

[00:58:58] They don't want to miss those opportunities. And so I think that that's incumbent upon us as educators to create those kinds of environments for kids. You know, there's other things that we have to do that, you know, I can go down a long sort of rabbit hole with you about the need for really, really good social work, the need for really good, like, getting out into our communities instead of waiting for our communities to come into our schools but like getting out and being a part of the community so that our kids know us and we know them and we know when they're not here whose door we have to go knock on and who we need to talk to to make sure that we can get them and

[00:59:31] find them so it's a big lift and I do think I mean and I'm certainly I think part of that question is you know part of my strategy will be in here to flip that back to you all and say what are we missing what are we not doing that we can do to make sure that our kids that our kids are coming to school you want to call on people i don't want to get in trouble all right let's go there and then we'll go to those two and yes all right so i have a question that you don't have to fully

[01:00:06] answer but i just want to put this in your head somehow okay um on the same lines ish about getting kids in school and wanting to go and being excited to go there are a lot of teachers that don't care don't I mean I love that quote or saying that you just said there are teachers that don't really and there's teachers that don't connect with kids and there's teachers that are in the system that don't even have the qualifications in some cases I have an exact example but I'm not going to say

[01:00:45] that don't have the qualifications to teach but because they've been around so long they're still here so is there you know clean clean up shop kind of thing i know there's there's oh you teach for x number of years you it's harder to get rid of you kind of a thing but i don't know what that is yeah and here's what i'll i'll say about that so i mean yeah i'm confident as with any profession in any field there are some people in there who are doing it for a paycheck and not for the work right and um i mean obviously that's not a situation we want to find ourselves in

[01:01:23] Clearly it exists here and elsewhere. That said, here's a problem we're facing. I'm going to tell you the problem, and then I'm going to, you know, what does that mean? So the problem is, and it's a bit of an existential crisis, we are facing a national teacher shortage unlike anything you've ever seen.

[01:01:43] And when I say that, I don't mean just like, oh, it's hard for us to find people, you know, to interview. I'm telling you, 35% fewer applicants in teacher prep programs across the country right now. The demand for teachers is skyrocketing. And there are just no young people who want to go into the profession.

[01:02:01] And there are a lot of reasons for that. That's a whole separate conversation that we probably need to work on together to figure out, okay, how do we fix that problem? So I mention that just to say it would be, I mean, there was a time in education. So, you know, when I was a very young high school principal, if I had a job opening, I had 15 or 20 applicants for those.

[01:02:20] And right now, that's not the case for these openings. And so I would say my obligation is to work with that person that you may be talking about and work on that person that you're talking about and

try to bring them to a better place, helping our folks remember why they do what they do, building on a cultural conversation in our classrooms and in our schools about the importance of children and reminding them about the value of hope and their responsibility for instilling hope in our kids and the importance of relationships.

[01:02:51] I mean, that's not, like, by the way, this isn't like touchy-feely, froofy stuff. This is science-driven work that I'm talking about when I'm talking about the importance and the value of relationships and hope. And so working on and with our teachers to kind of remind them of the importance of that. And then certainly professional development, ongoing professional development to build up their technical skills in areas where, you know, we might see that they don't have them.

[01:03:15] All of those things are going to be critically important as we continue to move forward. And I will say one of the things that I'm proud of in the work that I've done in other places is I've been able to really work at, you know, kind of working from the leadership down, getting people to understand what a school and what a classroom needs to feel like and then not accepting otherwise.

[01:03:37] And I think that's work we're going to do here. It's not overnight work. Heart work is really long work. So, but I want to be here for as long as it takes to keep moving us in that direction so it doesn't feel like that for your kids. Yes, sir. Oh, I'm sorry.

[01:03:54] You know what? I did, I did say I was gonna go back here first, then we'll come back over here, so. - Yeah, not so much a question as just feedback on the absenteeism. I think it would be very prudent to just wait and watch what the numbers do.

[01:04:09] This year, our kids were isolated for years and they didn't have contact with others and everybody's immune systems were damaged. And I mean, I can speak firsthand and say my kids were way sicker in the time they came back than they've ever been. And I know it's the same for most of my friends have kids in their schools so I think you know as the immune system starts to catch up that'll probably trend differently and I would just before issuing policy I think the prudent thing to do would just be to kind of watch and wait. Yeah yeah yeah no thank you very much that's a great point and we definitely we're tracking it every day our attendance and I hope you're right I'm crossing my

[01:04:46] fingers because we're very concerned about it and I would say you know I don't know that we would change policy but you know I mentioned this kind of there's a research basis behind this thing called the nudge which is this sort of friendly reminder to families about the importance of being in school versus like your kid's absent and you're a bad parent you know like we don't do that like it's this other way of going about it and there's actually really sound research behind doing that and so it might be a combination of watching and you know making sure you know seeing if the numbers are trending in the positive direction and also just trying to see if we can't do things better even for even if the numbers are going down for those who are still missing school a lot of it is

[01:05:25] you know, family connected. I think, you know, the single most important influence on whether or not a kid goes to school is mom and dad, right? And, and, and who's in the home and who's making it important to be in school or who's not. And so that, that's what we have to work on. Yes.

[01:05:42] And then, yeah, I, it's a, such a, a broad question. There's a lot that's going on in the human resources team. I mean, they're doing a really good job. We actually started the year in pretty good shape.

Not again, not perfect, but much better shape than a lot of our colleagues in the region so a lot of that's the support of our school board making sure that we're thinking about

[01:06:20] compensation and benefits packages in particular but also and I you know I've shared this with the teachers I've been talking to like our best recruiters are our teachers and so if our teachers are saying positive things about our buildings and where they work then we're I mean I was in a school the other day where he does have like 40 candidates for every opening because the culture in that building is so good that the teachers there never want to leave and they every time there's an opening they call everybody they know and they say you got to put your name in right I want that for every school in Loudoun County because every kid deserves that kind of environment

[01:06:53] and teachers who want to be there and I would say candor time people if you want people to want to come to Loudoun County we got to get a lot of positive messages out about Loudoun County right and I'm just being honest because if you if I'll come right back to you after I come over here but if you are a young teacher you're 21 years old 22 years old you're just coming out of your teacher prep program, you literally have your choice of jobs, right? For the most part, you have your choice of jobs, given what I said earlier about the teacher shortage. So you want to live in

[01:07:30] Northern Virginia, you have your choice of where you want to live in Northern Virginia. So what does it take for Loudoun to be the premier employer? You have to be competitive and you have to be a place where somebody wants to work. And so there's, I mean, there's just such a big conversation that we have to have too around that, right? So we're a bureaucratic institution and we do a lot of things because it's how we've always done them and that's just public education in general right and there are people who are kind of coming up generationally I don't want to like date myself but I'm a little distant from some of the generations that we're now hiring and they

[01:08:07] have different expectations for work and what that feels like and and and how they're treated and so they want really positive cultures that are about trust and inspiration not necessarily about like you know kind of hierarchical thinking and they want to feel like there's a cause worth fighting for in their work right like there's all this research about like where people are coming to things from right now and I think we have to adapt to a lot of that I think that's going to be the nature of the conversation we have to have with our school board over the next x number of years as we think about any adaptations that might be necessary to get people to come and teach here

[01:08:44] Because really, the truth of the matter is, I mean, I don't mean to like paint a grim picture, but we're probably five to 10, maybe probably less than 10 years away from like having 500 kids in a freshman English class in the auditorium because there aren't going to be teachers to teach them.

[01:09:04] Like, so you've talked about kind of curmudgeonly old teachers who don't care. Well, that's a lot of our teachers in terms of aging out. And if they start to age out and there's nobody behind them, we can only steal other people's teachers for so long before that's no longer a viable option, right?

[01:09:21] And so even if we're the best at compensation and the best at benefits, we're super competitive and they want to come here, it's only going to work for so long. And so we have to find ways to entice people into the profession and make it so good and so valuable and so worth their time that they can't see doing something else.

[01:09:40] Or at least it's competitive. I mean, I could talk a long time about this, but if you think about, like, I mean, just how many of you have college kids? Anybody? Okay, so I have, like, four. I have six children. I didn't mention that. I have six children.

[01:09:57] So I've been through it as a parent. And I have two who just graduated from college, and I have two in college. So I think about them, and I think about their decision-making. I am blessed. I have one who's decided to go into education, which is great. But if you take two 18-year-olds, and you think about kind of the decision-making process of 18-year-olds, if you have teenagers, the decision-making processes, and you say to them, so here's the deal.

[01:10:23] You're both going to go through college. You're going to go, I mean, we're talking about college. So you're going to go through college. You're going to go four years. You're both going to work about the same in terms of, like, the pressure on you during that time. And at the end of that, you're both going to get a bachelor's degree. Now, you are going to make 40% less than you, and you're going to go into a profession that doesn't seem to be highly respected at the moment, and a lot of people are talking poorly about you and about the places where you're going to work, and they're saying all kinds of nasty things.

[01:10:52] You're going to make 40% more, and really, nobody's going to say bad things about your job. Now, which one would you pick? And, you know, and then, oh, well, I'll take the really terrible one. That sounds great. You know, oh, good, you're going to be a teacher.

[01:11:09] You know, like, you know, so, you know, I'm kind of being glib, but the point is, it's an opportunity for us to kind of reimagine how we lift up the profession and how we kind of talk about how people ought to come into the profession. And if we don't take advantage of that together, I think we're in trouble.

[01:11:27] And I will say it is a community's voice that matters, right? Like, we have to really lift up our people, and we've got to tell them how much they matter. It's why I visit schools. I literally spend all of my time in schools walking around telling my teachers how much they matter and trying to help them see the impact that they're having, you know, because it is, I mean, people come into it because it's a calling, because they really care about your children, and they want to see them do well.

[01:11:52] And we have to keep reminding them of that. So, by the way, superintendents do not give short answers. Just want to point that out. So I probably got time for one more. We'll go right over here, and then I'll stop talking. First of all, I want to thank you for coming to Loudoun.

[01:12:08] I was one of the virtual speakers at the last board meeting, and I so appreciate that you have two kids in the system. That really means a lot. That's, in my opinion, that's your number one qualification as a dad who sends his kids to Loudoun County Public School systems. You understand the issues, or you will understand the issues that come up in our wonderful county. The fact of the matter, though, I represent a district where, unfortunately, we had the assault, and I see kids in the room, I don't even want to say the words that happened in our high school at Broad

[01:12:43] Run. But things happened. Our district was hurt, and there was a gaping wound in our county. And you speak, and I love it, because you're a breath of fresh air, and we really appreciate you. You can't do this job by yourself, though. It all has to do with the people you put into the positions in your administration and it's really important to us to see that positive change and so and as you know you have people in your administration your senior leadership that are not our neighbors

[01:13:20] they live elsewhere in different counties in virginia they come here they come to this beautiful building and they make decisions that affect me and my kids and you and your kids so the question comes back to when will you make appropriate changes in your leadership staff and organizational structure because we'd love to see that sooner rather than later and i and i appreciate that and i appreciated your comments at the uh the board meeting so i i do listen to those comments and um i would say this i think it it would be foolish of me to come in in a few short weeks and say okay

[01:13:59] you gotta go you gotta go you gotta go right like i need to come in and assess i need to assess both people's talents and where they have challenges and then i need to my first instinct is always to coach right and so can i can i figure out a way to to make sure that i have the strongest possible team around me and then where and if i discern that that's not the case and that we're not helping ourselves and that we're not helping our children in land kind schools then those are where those decisions will get made but it's too early in my administration to tell you hey you know

[01:14:30] next week is when i'm going to start making those calls use and during instructional time so i wanted to just give you an opportunity to talk about preliminarily what your kind of thoughts are on that i had indicated that kind of there is broad interest across the board to start looking at this and that you had some ideas about starting

[01:15:05] to look at that yeah so just i'll repeat it so it was uh she's teeing back up the cell phone conversation and um kind of getting thoughts on where where we might be in a conversation about cell phones in our schools and in our classrooms and i'll just say um i have a very specific set of thoughts about cell phones but they're not i mean i'm not the only person in the room you know and i'm not the only person in the county and so we we do need to engage on this topic my plan is to engage on this topic um by talking with students staff and parents and i'd like to actually use

[01:15:42] this group as the focus group on that conversation to try to get your perspective. So there's some homework. Go start working on your perspective from your community about cell phones and instruction. And kind of my thought process that i'm thinking about is sort of the pros and cons of cell phone use. And there's a couple of categories, right? So if you think about safety, and then if you think about instruction, you know, i think you can sort of delineate pros and cons in those different areas. And then we need to see, like, where do the cons outweigh the pros or where do the pros outweigh the cons my sense quite frankly is that the cons far outweigh

[01:16:18] the pros when it comes to cell phone use in our classrooms but i don't want to be the only one saying that i'd like to see if other people agree with me we did go through a similar process in Virginia Beach and ended up eliminating their use in our classrooms and you know ultimately i frankly i think we need to get there i'm really deeply concerned about the research on the harm of of social media in particular but just kind of like constant screen access for our little people and i'm not pointing any fingers at anybody i've got that problem in my house too

[01:16:53] um and and but i'm concerned about it and i will tell you what did it for me in Virginia Beach i went into a auditorium full of student leaders so these are like the best of the but you know student leaders so like um and we were having this kind of leadership conversation and one of our facilitators just kind of asked the kids he said hey so imagine an auditorium 500 students how many of you were distracted by a cell phone in your class today 498 pans went up in a room of 500 kids and so that in and of itself kind of is not good what's what's happening now which is

[01:17:29] really interesting is that there is more and more research that's coming out that is proving the hunch which is saying like it's actually having a detrimental impact on student academic achievement on student mental health. You all saw the Surgeon General issued a warning about it.

[01:17:46] So I do think it's really important we have that conversation here in Nottingham County and we figure out, okay, how do we address? Because I know like I'll hear, we'll hear, and we should hear, and we should talk about, well, what do I do if there's an emergency?

[01:18:02] And that's why I want my kid to have a phone. And so how do we work through some of those things? And I think there's solutions. We just have to be thoughtful together on how we arrive at those solutions. So that's where I am on cell phone use.

[01:18:14] I mean, yeah, kids usually are pretty resilient to these kinds of decisions.

[01:18:45] I find it's often not the students who don't like them as much as, you know, other people. I won't say who. Not you all. So I think, like you say, you guys got other things on your agenda, and I appreciate it. I'm glad to be here, and I'm really sincerely looking forward to working with all of you.

[01:19:04] And thanks for your patience, your understanding, and, you know, give me some time. I promise we're going to get there together. So thanks. Thank you, Dr. Spence.

[01:19:21] We really appreciate you taking your time out of your busy schedule to come speak with us. Before we conclude this evening, there are some events coming up that we wanted to share that are perfect to communicate with your schools. So first, we have the Special Programs Fair, and it is happening on September the 28th at Heritage High School from 6 to 8 p.m.

[01:19:42] While the audience is mainly geared toward eighth grade and high school families, anyone is welcome. The fair is an opportunity to learn about the LCPS special programs and meet the coordinators of these programs like Junior ROTC, the Health and Medical Sciences Academy, Dual Language and Academies.

[01:20:04] There will also be information regarding the enrollment process. The special programs team asked to be part of the October LEAF meeting. If there's anything specific you would like to ask them, feel free to include it in the feedback for tonight's meeting or in the advanced feedback form that we will link in the recap email in addition on October 11th there will be a PTA fair here in the LCPS admin building from 6 to 8 p.m. the event will include resources and information sessions on key topics flyers have

[01:20:36] been provided for you about both and we will also link those in the recap email as well does anyone have any questions if not that's everything on our agenda for this evening okay great if you would like to complete the feedback form before you leave the URL and QR doc is on the handout your thoughts and feedback are really important to us we read those and take everything into consideration our next meeting is set for October 16th here in this room and we appreciate your participation this evening and have a safe trip home we are adjourned



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