

Reflections on LPAS Community Reaction to Principal Selection Process

Ben Wilson

(Read to LPAS SBDM Council Meeting, 12/15/2020)

My name is Ben Wilson. As one of your two LPAS SBDM parent representatives, and as someone who wishes to help move us forward, together, I'd like to offer a few observations and recommendations as a parent representative.

I believe these perspectives I offer will represent accurately, and with appropriate focus, the distilled thoughts and feelings from the families that I have heard from regarding this process for LPAS.

It is clear from your feedback this principal selection process has affected us all, in many different ways. Regarding the process itself, I don't believe I can add anything further to what has already been stated.

Rather, what I offer comes from two perspectives that you have told us LPAS holds in high regard: Community & Culture and Communication. I believe that focusing on these two aspects will help us learn and move us forward.

In my day job, my work centers around listening - both in public and in private - to understand the needs and desires of communities, and then to ensure that they feel seen and heard. Here, it is my responsibility to do the same for the parents of LPAS.

We have a strong, invested, engaged and supportive community. It is a large part of what makes us special, and to have it frustrated in any way is tough to hear. Yet, I am glad you have made yourselves heard. It is important.

Here is what I have learned from listening:

Community & Culture

LPAS feels like and is often referred to as a family. Drawn to the performing arts, recommendations from friends, or myriad other reasons - we choose to join and are welcomed into this family. So when there is a change - especially of the leadership of the school - it is bound to be felt, and widely so.

That a change was coming, we all understood. But a surprising change was not adequately anticipated or planned for. So then, the decision was a shock to most families who contacted me publicly, privately or through the Council. The intensity of this shock ranged widely, and was felt in many different ways by different families. For a few, it was deeply concerning. For others, it mattered little. But for most, it was a surprise. **This, I feel, is important to recognize to move forward.**

For a school like LPAS that benefits so much from it's community - any such confusion or discord - should be acknowledged quickly. Or better, anticipated. **I have come to realize that work needs to be done to recognize, acknowledge and plan for change to ensure that communities like ours are brought forward, together. In stating this and sharing it, I hope to achieve that.**

Communication + Consistency

The shock of the decision aside, all that I have heard from recognized the impact it would have on both them as parents, and most importantly on their students. For students, an important person in their lives would be leaving. "Who would replace them?" For parents, the question at its core was the same - but broader in scope - "What does this mean for the LPAS I have come to rely upon?" **These questions are real, and here at the**

end of 2020, some families feel these impacts very deeply. Many of these families rely deeply on LPAS, and rightfully, they felt they needed answers.

In the end, I saw that the community needed to be guided through this transition. Because of your feedback, our administrators are working to answer these questions and give space to your voices, including tonight.

In addition to that, though more broadly felt, was a frustration that the process was hard to follow along with, understand or give input on. I believe this is why some felt the process was “rushed” and then further led to wonder if the process was unfair. I believe that it was neither rushed nor unfair. **But, I also believe that there is work to be done to better involve and communicate with communities like ours in this critical process. We can do this, too.**

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Most importantly, these are areas where we can make efforts to improve while retaining the sanctity of the processes with which we are all involved.

To end, I would like to make some recommendations for this School and this District, based on our shared experience here. My hope is that we can learn from the insights we’ve gained.

- 1) Communities like LPAS are, in my estimation, the gold standard for community-involved schools, and provide incredible support. Do better to recognize these communities and their level of investment, especially in times of great change. From that adjust the tried and true processes. Ensure ample opportunity for community awareness and involvement, ahead of time. Have a post-decision communication plan in place.
- 2) Do better to communicate the principal selection process (or any other processes that will be felt so directly) beforehand. It is not impossible to find or understand SBDM or JCPS policies or communications, but it certainly is not easy. I think this contributed to some of the frustration we saw. Stand over the shoulder of a JCPS parent and ask them to find information on their principal selection process, how or where to send feedback, or when the next SBDM meeting is - all in the time between dinner and bedtime - while on a phone. It will be enlightening for sure, but it is also reality.
- 3) JCPS and LPAS both have set new standards for excellence in communication. Continue doing this great work, and use this experience to drive us forward.

To the Families, I know that change, at this moment, is hard. But never forget that we, together, have built what LPAS is today - a unique, innovative school with a community repeatedly recognized for its involvement.

You have a voice and you have used it. Continue to be involved. Remember that the magic of LPAS lies within the community we have built, together.

Finally, I want to bid farewell to Mrs. French-Epps. I would not be here today, engaged as I am without her. While I sent my kids to LPAS to be educated and inspired by the performing arts, I never anticipated learning

so much from the school she has led these last 10 years. We'll all miss you, but know you will leave behind a lasting legacy in the hearts of so many families.

To our new principal, I welcome you and our community welcomes you. Together, we are LPAS.