

Yesterday, just before a scheduled labor-management meeting with representatives of our certified union, I received a letter of concern from LEA signed by 22 current certified staff members. The concerns dealt primarily with our strategic planning initiatives and the timeline and process for implementation of these initiatives. Unfortunately, the letter also included attacks on my leadership with comments such as:

1. "LEA members feel as though they are on a ship with no captain."
2. "This leadership style has led to extreme anxiety among teaching staff, to the point of losing faith in school leadership."
3. "As evidenced by your lack of community outreach, some feel you don't care about this little community."
4. "If teachers are baffled and feel a sense of impending danger about your strategic plans, how do you expect teachers to buy-in and promote changes."
5. "We don't want our students to be an experiment or a PhD Thesis."

A list of thirteen demands followed these and other comments. I have shared this letter with board members, so you have the full picture of what was said in the letter. While I understand the source and reason for staff concerns, I have worked diligently to identify key strategic initiatives from a strategic plan that was only approved in November 2022. You have seen tonight the key initiatives that we hope to focus on in the near term. I recognize that we face many challenges in the weeks and months ahead. We must explore school calendar options, consider staff restructuring in concert with budget development, engage in collective bargaining with our unions, and pursue favorable legislative outcomes to support our continued operation. All this and more while we continue to support the growth and achievement of our students to the best of our ability.

I admit to feeling isolated as I have confronted these issues and considered this message to you. We have a vision for LISD that can only

come to pass with your understanding, support, and commitment to change. It is a vision driven by both the best interests of current and future students and the financial constraints that project significant budget deficits in the years ahead. I firmly believe that business as usual is unacceptable, and we must come together as a team to blaze new trails for students and staff in the coming years.

While recognizing concerns about stakeholder levels of participation in the process, we have a board-approved strategic plan that must guide our future progress. We have to take to heart the premise that it is necessary to “plan for change, not perfection.” I previously shared several strategic initiatives that stand out as immediate concerns.

The identified strategic initiatives constitute the district office’s primary focus over the next few months. Other areas of the strategic plan will also be under review and consideration, such as facility needs that were once again accentuated by our loss of access to a classroom coming back from winter break.

Ultimately, this board must decide if I have the capacity to continue leading this district, even if my leadership and communication style are different from what the staff and community are accustomed to from past experiences. Past experiences have put us in a hole academically and financially, while substantive change is our path to a brighter future. I have confidence in my ability to navigate these seas of change, but I recognize that I must have a competent and committed crew to help us reach a safe harbor in the future.

Thank you for listening, and I look forward to continuing to serve the students, staff, and community of Lopez Island.