

# Shepherd Elementary LSAT meeting for Jan. 22, 2019

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## Participants

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- James Sarakatsannis, Chair
- Jade Brawley, Principal
- Kristin Baldwin (by phone)
- Robyn Brooks
- Theo Francis
- Sandra Hart
- Bonnie-Jean Harvey
- Crystal Moorefield (by phone)
- Gwendolyn Washington

Not present:

- John Clayborne
- Promithious Denmark

## Minutes

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Mr. Sarakatsannis called the meeting to order at 4:19 p.m. and suggested four agenda items, time permitting:

1. Budget roundtable discussion and PTA priorities
2. Any staffing updates beyond Principal Brawley's email earlier in the week
3. Report on Wilson feeder pattern working group from Ms. Washington
4. Future LSAT meeting dates and DCPS budget timeline

The agenda was approved by consensus.

### 1. Budget process and priorities

Mr. Sarakatsannis said he, Principal Brawley, Ms. Hart and Ms. Washington attended the budget roundtable on Jan. 8, including a discussion of the budget process.

Mr. Sarakatsannis said DCPS shares its "allocated budget" around the first week of February. This budget is largely formulaic, determined by the number and kind of students expected at the school. A subset of the budget is flexible and can be allocated by the principal. A monthlong process determines what changes to seek. Final budgets are set in late May.

Principal Brawley noted that any proposed changes submitted to DCPS must leave the school “budget neutral” — i.e., they can’t increase the overall size of the school budget. LSAT makes recommendations for changes, signed off on by the chairman. Throughout the budget process, Principal Brawley may petition DCPS to shift funds to different purposes. However, some funds can’t be moved; e.g., about \$7,100 was allocated this year for the library, and couldn’t be altered. Other funds can be reprogrammed, such as some (but not all) spending on electronic learning.

Mr. Sarakatsannis asked whether some funding can be shifted without petitioning DCPS for permission.

Principal Brawley said most non-personnel spending is flexible without petition; some personnel spending, particularly administrative, is similarly flexible.

Mr. Francis asked how much flexibility is available for existing staffing.

Principal Brawley said some positions cannot be changed, including for ELL instruction. DCPS determines how many ELL teachers the school receives. The budget cost for other staffing is based on an average salary of \$110,000, so schools aren’t penalized for having more experienced teachers. In the past, certain positions have had to be purchased from flexible funds, so the school hasn’t always had two instructional coaches, for example. Other hiring is mandatory, such as aides for the pre-K and kindergarten classrooms.

Mr. Sarakatsannis said the LSAT budget discussion will be fairly focused: What do we use flexible funding for, what should we petition for. This will occur within the first several weeks of February.

Mr. Sarakatsannis said areas the school should consider shoring up include (not in priority order):

- Additional resources for more coordination and coaching on social-emotional learning (SEL);
- Additional resources around the International Baccalaureate (IB) program and the coord and enhancing of IB;
- Taking some of the burden of teacher evaluation and coaching off Principal Brawley, by hiring an assistant principal;
- Purchasing more devices and other technology;
- Adding another custodian to the staff.

Mr. Sarakatsannis said flexibility in how the school handles positions for psychologist and counseling positions might allow it to free up a full-time position for an assistant principal. A full-time behavioral technician would cost the school about the same for budget purposes as its current half-time social-worker and half-time counselor; the change could both fulfill the school’s requirements on the behavioral front and make more SEL possible.

Principal Brawley said the school has a vacant half-time counselor position in its budget because the person holding that position resigned after the budget reprogramming period.

In addition, Principal Brawley said the school could meet its business-management and logistics needs by reallocating funds currently used for a half-time director of school strategy & logistics (DSL) to a full-time business manager, at about the same net cost. The school is required to have someone handling business manager functions, but this can be done with a DSL (as currently) or a business manager. DSLs can handle more responsibilities than business managers.

In response to a question from Ms. Baldwin, Principal Brawley said ELL staff is determined by a formula, currently 22 students or more per teacher. She emphasized that the school has no say in ELL staffing, and that Shepherd has moved from an itinerant ELL teacher on site 1–2 days a week to a full-time ELL teacher starting last year.

Mr. Francis asked about the cost of the flexible administrative and SEL positions.

Principal Brawley said a behavior tech costs between \$45,000 and \$50,000; and half-time counselor costs \$60,000; and a half-time DSL costs \$62,000. An assistant of school strategy & logistics (ASL) is least expensive, and a master of school strategy & logistics (MSL) falls in between.

Mr. Sarakatsannis said a full-time ASL is roughly the same cost as Shepherd's current half-time DSL.

Mr. Francis asked what the school loses by moving from a half-time DSL to a full-time ASL.

Principal Brawley said a DSL can handle facility management, such as ordering furniture, in addition to financial and budgetary matters. She noted that she would take over logistics responsibilities that an ASL isn't able to handle. The primary difference is cost.

Mr. Francis said it appeared difficult to switch to an ASL from a DSL without also hiring an assistant principal. Principal Brawley agreed.

Principal Brawley said adding a custodian would help the school with the additional traffic caused by a growing student body, especially in light of complaints during the year about cleanliness. She said the school currently has two custodians at RW5 level, who are able to open the building; as well as one at RW3, the least-expensive level; and one foreman, who can also open the building. Schools must have a foreman. RW3 custodians are budgeted at \$43,000, while RW5 custodians are budgeted at \$53,000.

In response to a question from Ms. Baldwin, Principal Brawley explained that the school has flexibility over the number of RW3 and RW5 staff. However, realistically, Shepherd needs at least three people who can open and close the school, to accommodate periods when one may be unavailable.

Mr. Francis said the PTA's priorities, as discussed by the executive committee and at the most recent membership meeting, are similar to those outlined by Mr. Sarakatsannis:

1. An assistant principal, preferably with a math coaching background.
2. Coordination for the planned Department of Parks and Recreation's community center on Shepherd grounds, including security concerns.
3. Social-emotional learning resources.

Principal Brawley noted that DPR issues fall into school logistics responsibilities. She said security doesn't fall under the school budget; although the LSAT and school administration can advocate for additional funding, the budget and process are separate.

Principal Brawley said DCPS has funded a program called Second Step for this year for both first-grade classes and two of the school's three second-grade classes, beginning in February. This program is being used across DC schools and includes mindfulness training. The cost for adding classes is \$500 per class, and the school needs 14 total to cover all kindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms, including the four already funded (i.e., needs 10 more).

Ms. Washington asked if the PTA might be able to help fund the additional modules. Mr. Francis said he would raise the question with the PTA.

Principal Brawley said the school would need to allocate \$7,000 for the other classes next year if they can't be purchased this year.

Mr. Sarakatsannis said the school received approximately \$80,000 in nonpersonnel funding last year, some of which (such as library funding mentioned previously) isn't reallocable. That sum includes funds used to purchase toilet tissue, cleaning supplies and programming, such as about \$3,000 a year for ST Math.

Principal Brawley said the school's DSL or ASL position would greatly help coordination with DPR over the community-center project. She noted that the school's modernization project took up considerable time while it was ongoing. She also said she would reach out to DCPS's liaison with the Department of General Services, which selects the architect, to get an update.

Mr. Francis asked if the LSAT needed to formalize or vote on any of its discussions. Mr. Sarakatsannis and Principal Brawley indicated no. Mr. Sarakatsannis said the LSAT could more formally structure its priorities and recommendations once DCPS issues its initial budget for the school, around Feb. 11.

Mr. Francis summarized that the switch to a full-time ASL from a half-time DSL would essentially be a financial wash; moving to a full-time behavior tech from a half-time counselor would also be a financial wash; but that both would be dependent on also hiring an assistant principal, to absorb some of the administrative load that would otherwise shift to Principal Brawley.

Principal Brawley said the school is projected to have 382 students next year, close to capacity and about current enrollment. She said last year's allocation was based on enrollment of 367, which would have provided 90% of a full-time assistant principal. In theory, the school could be eligible for more with a higher enrollment. However, during her time at Shepherd, the school has always only been eligible for 90%, meaning the threshold has risen along with Shepherd's student enrollment. She noted that her instructional superintendent is also advocating for an assistant principal for Shepherd. The instructional superintendent also must sign off on an budget petitions for the school.

Ms. Washington noted that, once allocations are made, the key actions are petitioning for budget changes by Principal Brawley, and mobilization of parents for DCPS budget hearings.

Mr. Sarakatsannis said that the LSAT's duties through February will entail reviewing the initial budget provided by DCPS, helping Principal Brawley determine what changes to petition for, and helping to mobilize parents and community members for specific requests at budget hearings.

## 2. Principal updates

Principal Brawley said she had no specific update regarding filling the Spanish and music vacancies, beyond what had been sent to parents earlier in the week. Her goal is to hire high-quality teachers rather than simply filling the position.

Principal Brawley said that, given the difficulty of recruiting a qualified Spanish teacher this school year, Shepherd could consider offering only French as a world language and hiring a dedicated science teacher instead of a Spanish teacher.

Principal Brawley said the change would give students more hands-on access to experiments. This was suggested last year, but the school had two robust foreign-language teachers. She said two world languages adds to the IB experience, but that a science teacher would also add value in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

In response to a question from Mr. Francis, Principal Brawley said it would mean fewer total days of language for all students. However, all students would then French from Mme. Gadie at least once a week, and would also take science at least once a week.

Ms. Baldwin said she supported the idea, which fits with preferences expressed by parents of early-childhood students. She asked if science teachers require special certification, the way language teachers do.

Principal Brawley said an elementary science teacher would only need certification in elementary education, but she would try to find one with a science background or experience. She noted that all teaching positions are budgeted at the same cost, so the change wouldn't have a budget impact.

Ms. Baldwin called replacing Spanish with Science a viable long-term solution to the Spanish vacancy, but said it should be pursued in parallel with finding a Spanish teacher.

Principal Brawley said she is aware of several other schools that lack elementary language teachers. She said she is not sure the degree to which DCPS is competitively recruiting or retaining language teachers.

Mr. Francis noted the concerns that have been raised at PTA meetings about long-term teacher absences, and the degree to which those classroom time-periods could be put to more productive education use. He suggested approaches for short-term and longer-term improvements:

1. Teachers could be asked to prepare, in advance, basic one- or two-day lesson or review plans for substitutes to use during planned or unplanned absences. These should be usable even by teachers without much experience in a particular field, and could focus on review of past subjects, even those that had been covered some time earlier.
2. A roster could also be maintained of parent volunteers with experience or an interest in specific subjects (including music, art, science, languages, etc.). For longer-term absences, Principal Brawley could contact these volunteers to assist a long-term substitute, especially where the sub doesn't have experience in those subject.s

Ms. Washington said during her time at West school, she headed a Spanish club that solicited parent volunteers, who were enlisted to help in such circumstances.

Principal Brawley noted that classroom volunteers must register with DCPS and pass a background check and drug test. Ms. Brooks noted that the requirements and application are on the DCPS website.

Ms. Baldwin said efforts to organize volunteers in kindergarten classes have met with mixed success, and noted that a lot depends on how receptive teachers are. She said teachers would need to be encouraged to participate.

Principal Brawley said such a volunteer program could be helpful, but parameters would need to be defined so everyone involved has similar expectations.

Mr. Francis said he would explore and try to organize a roster of volunteers, if possible working with others in the PTA.

## Wilson feeder pattern

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Ms. Washington provided a report on the efforts of the Ward 3 Wilson Feeder Education Network to consider changes to the Wilson High School feeder network. She noted the group has been working since May 2017, and has included among the options it could recommend removing Ward 4 (including Shepherd) from the network entirely. This would result in Shepherd students no longer having the right to go to Deal Middle School and Wilson High School.

Ms. Washington noted that this would essentially segregate northern DC schools, because most of the racial diversity in Deal and Wilson's student bodies comes from Ward 4. Parents in the group, which is not an official DCPS committee, have said they are unwilling to send their children to any DCPS schools other than Deal or Wilson. Although Ward 3 parents in

the organization express support for diversity, they are clearly more interested in reducing overcrowding without sending their own children to other schools.

Ms. Washington said a primary concern is that DCPS isn't putting sufficient resources into other schools, relative to Deal and Wilson. She said one element of an alternative would be to re-open the Old Hardy school, but DCPS officials haven't been receptive to this possibility, and haven't said why they are reluctant to consider it. They also have been unwilling to seriously consider expanding into space near Deal, such as when the nearby Sallie Mae building was available.

DCPS has generally blocked consideration of expanding in Ward 3, which is the only area in DC without charter schools. As a result, the DCPS schools in the ward don't have to compete for students and parent time and resources, while DCPS schools elsewhere in the District do. One confounding factor is that recent DCPS changes redefined the amount of space that was required per student, making Deal and Wilson appear more crowded even with similar student body sizes.

Principal Brawley noted that Shepherd's official student capacity is 400, but she believes that isn't realistic. Ms. Washington said her understanding is that 30 years ago, even without its current floorspace, was officially rated for 450 students, but subsequent changes added 2 square feet per child to space requirements, which makes crowding seem worse. She reiterated that the Ward 3 Wilson Education Feeder Network expresses interest in student-body diversity, but appears to see removing Ward 4 students from the schools as the best fix for crowding at Deal and Wilson.

Ms. Baldwin said Shepherd's out-of-boundary students make it easier to argue for removing Shepherd from the Deal and Wilson feeder patterns, since it means many Shepherd students going to Deal and Wilson aren't from Ward 4.

Ms. Washington noted that at a recent gathering, a DCPS official told Ward 3 attendees that, if they truly want diversity at the schools, they should tell their neighbors to stop calling DCPS to request Ward 4 to be removed from the feeder pattern, because Ward 4 supplies most of the schools' diversity.

Mr. Francis raised the potential for creating a new middle- and high-school that would serve both Ward 3 and Ward 4.

Ms. Washington said a parent at the recent meeting said white families would be unwilling to send their students outside Ward 3. She said no parents or DCPS officials at the gathering objected to the remark.

In response to a question from Mr. Francis, Principal Brawley said Ward 3 lacks charters because it is difficult to find suitable space in the ward, and parents are generally satisfied with their local schools, so don't seek out or try to establish charters.

## Future meeting dates

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Mr. Sarakatsannis noted that the next meeting was scheduled for Feb. 11.

The meeting was adjourned at about 5:40 p.m.