



Lauren Knight, *Chair* (Board director)  
Dr. Shearon Roberts (Board director)  
Jethro Celestin (COO, LFNO of 10 years)  
Jolandra McNeil (Parent of 2 Lycée students)  
Jinger Whiddon (Parent of 2 Lycée students; Teacher since 2014)  
Keith Bartlett, *Emeritus* (*ex officio*)

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## MINUTES

**Meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee for Interim CEO of  
Lycée Français de la Nouvelle Orleans  
Monday, June 28, 2021 at 5:45 p.m.  
In-person meeting at LFNO Johnson Campus  
1800 Monroe Street New Orleans, LA 70118**

### **I. Open Meeting and Roll Call**

Ms. Knight called the meeting to order at approximately 5:45 p.m. In attendance were Dr. Shearon Roberts, Mr. Jethro Celestin, Ms. Jolandra McNeil, Ms. Jinger Whiddon and Mr. Keith Bartlett. Approximately 25 Community and LFNO affiliated members attended.

### **II. Leadership Transition Discussion**

Ms. Knight opened the meeting with a leadership transition discussion among the committee members.

Mr. Celestin noted that summer time is crucial for school business and a lot of major decisions have to be made during July for preparation for school reopening in August. He noted the major stages of the school's construction project, the need for someone to be there to look at the day to day requisitions. Each morning over 20 meetings could be scheduled and paperwork needs to be processed. Those two major aspects of school business require continuity. He stated it was important that in the transition the responsibilities do not suffer. Mr. Celestin said he hopes to assist during the CEO transition in ensuring the Priestly project is finished and the post-COVID operations are addressed smoothly. He noted that currently for the school both the CEO and COO gaps in personnel places daily business at a stand still.

Mr. Bartlett stated that holding off for a CEO or an Interim would not work for Lycée. He stated that the building principals would still require an interim CEO to keep the overall business of the school going.

Ms. Knight stated that the current situation was not sustainable. There were term sheets and contractual decisions that require a central authority figure to execute the business side of the school.

Mr. Bartlett shared that in past onboarding of CEOs it can take all summer into a school year for a new leader to become familiar with outstanding and daily school business and it would be beneficial to look at the existing staff to serve in an interim capacity.

Ms. Knight stated that this was the purpose of an interim CEO. That this would give the school the breathing room to find the right expertise for leadership while ensuring the school does not skip a beat. This committee can also informally recommend to the board that they hire a national search firm. She encouraged that teachers and parent lean-in to identify areas of leadership that were strong and need to be built upon as well as areas were lacking so the search committee can choose a CEO that won't repeat past missteps.

Ms. Whiddon said she is looking for a team of rivals. She stated that continuity is important and that she is looking for someone who can listen to different opinions, and did not need someone to agree with them all the time, to stand up and take people's criticism and differing opinions and make decisions.

Ms. McNeil shared that she believed it was important to have someone to handle the school's business as well as someone who listens to stakeholders. She stated that she still wanted to make sure that we are doing what needs to be done to find someone for the position permanently who was best for New Orleans.

Dr. Roberts stated that an interim CEO is best practice. She said that it would allow the school the bandwidth to have a robust, independent search nationally, regionally or locally for a new CEO. This would give all Lycée stakeholders the ability to participate fully in the process to find the right leader. She shared that the board is currently functioning as a default/quasi administrator signing contracts and handling school business which is not an appropriate or sustainable practice. She noted that parents have been communicating with the board because they are no longer receiving school communication in the absence of a CEO. She stated that new parents to the school are also not receiving information, as well as teachers and school leaders. She said that bringing in an external interim CEO would place a burden on school heads to onboard that CEO uncompensated while adding to their load. She said that the board will have to ensure that the interim leadership has as many resources and tools needed to ensure they can address many of the schools ongoing challenges while operating in an interim capacity.

Mr. Bartlett stated that there are current school principals we can look at who can fulfill the role of an interim CEO that have transferrable skills.

Mr. Celestin shared his experiences working with Principal Danielle Dufauchard. He shared how Ms. Dufauchard goes above and beyond. He said he would like to put his support behind her.

*Mr. Celestin makes a motion to recommend an interim CEO. Dr. Roberts seconds.*

**III. Motion to recommend interim CEO for appointment by LFNO Board of**

### **Directors**

Ms. Knight explained the procedures for the motion and reiterated committee rules for public comment on the motion.

Ms. Dufauchard stated that not only is she a school head but a parent as well. She reflected on when the school was experiencing similar transitions that the school community was extremely sad and worried. She spoke to the outstanding interim needs of the schools: not all staff and teachers have received term sheets, local staff needed to be hired, there were Louisiana Department of Education requirements coming in daily, there are facilities and operations requests on hold, the building principals are currently filling gaps that a CEO would handle. She stated that regardless of the board's decision she is committed to working to move the entire school forward during this time.

Ms. Whiddon asked what would be the plan for Patton campus leadership if Ms. Dufauchard were to step into the interim CEO role.

Ms. Knight said that there is an Assistant Principal coming on board at Patton but that the issue would need to be addressed once the Interim CEO position was decided.

Mr. Alex Jarrell of the New Schools for New Orleans nonprofit described the competitive fellowship program for school leaders that Ms. Dufauchard was chosen for, called the E-3 fellowship. Ms. Dufauchard was accepted as part of a cohort of 9 school leaders in-training to serve as effective CEOs. He said the team were "blown away" by Ms. Dufauchard. The fellowship offers support in four areas: direction setting, strategic management, engaging stakeholders and managing talent. Fellows also shadow other CEOs and have an executive coach assigned. Mr. Jarrell states that New School for New Orleans is prepared to ensure that Ms. Dufauchard is matched with an executive coach and is supported with all the resources at their disposal.

Ms. Knight stated that not always are school heads who are strong in academic development able to manage the business side of running the school. Ms. Dufauchard has an MBA in Finance and a background in corporate and non-profit work. Ms. Knight said that in her 10 years of experience working in New Orleans charters schools in various capacities, she has seen leaders succeed and fail. Just because someone may be an academic rock star may not mean they can handle the day to day of the job of running a school at the top.

Mr. Celestin stated that working with Ms. Dufauchard, who has an engineering background, she has a firm understanding of any kind of numbers, data and the finances and how to read them both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Ms. Knight opened up for public comment.

### **IV. Public Comment**

*Summary of public comments (total of 10 public comments presented to the committee):*

a. Comments in support of the Motion: A consultant supporting Lycée with the Priestly project stated that the business of moving the construction of the Priestly campus along remained in jeopardy without a functioning CEO. Parents spoke of Ms. Dufauchard's empathy, leadership of the Patton campus, and care and concern for students and parents. Parents also spoke about their desire to not see school business go unattended during the transition. Teachers and staff spoke of Ms. Dufauchard's ability to work together with others, figure things out, and support teachers and staff with resources and other needs.

b. Comments not in support of the Motion. Parents wanted the board not to rush to pick interim CEO because many changes seemed rushed in the past. Parents wanted more information on how this would affect leadership at the Patton campus. Parents wanted to learn more about support and mentorship for Ms. Dufauchard. Teachers wanted to ensure that their voices would be heard during this turning point for Lycée.

#### **V. Committee Recommendation**

Ms. Knight called for a committee vote for the Motion on the table to recommend Ms. Dufauchard for board appointment as interim CEO.

*Mr. Celestin, Ms. McNeil and Dr. Roberts voted yay, Ms. Whiddon voted nay.*

#### **VI. Remarks from the Committee**

Ms. Whiddon wished to state that her vote was not in opposition to the choice of Danielle for interim CEO. Plans should be in place regarding other areas of the school before this shift in leadership happens.

#### **VII. General Public Comment**

During general public comment, community members reiterated the need for parents and stakeholders to be heard. They requested more regular communication from the board on the CEO process going forward. They called for support for the interim CEO through professional mentorship and resources. They asked for information on how the Patton campus will receive support while Ms. Dufauchard served in an interim CEO role. They called for more board transparency and clarification of the selection of the ad hoc committee.

Dr. Roberts responded that the ad hoc committee was formed by the board chair's appointment of Ms. Knight as chair of the ad hoc committee with a mandate to include stakeholders from different groups. Ms. Knight noted she made over 30 calls within a few days to take a temperature and suggestions among stakeholder groups and to identify representatives of different stakeholder groups who have longstanding histories with the school and bring diverse perspectives to the ad hoc committee.

After final committee comment, Ms. Knight called for the meeting to be adjourned.

*Mr. Celestin made the motion to adjourn the meeting, and Dr. Roberts seconded.* All committee members and the public agreed to adjourn without comment. The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.