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New LRSD board members bring fresh, positive energy to first board meeting

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These are exciting days in the Little Rock School District. We already had a superintendent dedicated to ensuring that every child receives the education our community has long promised. On Thursday, we learned that the new seven-member board is also committed, focused, and determined to collaborate effectively to work for our students and our community.

This new board enters during a period of real change in the district, where there is now a sustained focus on the students who have too often been left behind in the allocation of money, resources, and attention. With all seven members stepping in together, there is a rare opportunity to build something collaboratively from the ground up, creating and shaping a culture rooted in trust, clarity, and common purpose.

Meet the new board

Each of the new board members brings something important, new and fresh to the board.

Greg Adams brings a sense of calm and deliberation. He has a way of drawing on the past while thinking about the present and future, helping the board avoid reactive decisions. His focus is on building real consensus among board members in their decisionmaking.

Osyrus Bolly brings a commitment to participatory democracy. He sees students and teachers as voices at the table when those decisions are made and as stakeholders who can help shape a board that values input, transparency, and shared ownership, especially in decisions that directly affect classrooms.

Selandria Jackson brings years of experience working with young people in the city. Her background in sports gives her insight into athletics and student engagement, an area that often plays a significant role in community connection. Beyond that, her work securing grants for city parks should translate into tangible gains for district programs.

Norma Johnson is focused on student improvement, particularly for students with special needs. She brings a deep concern for equity and ensuring that every child's needs are met.

Eugene Krupitsky brings experience in finance and as a lawyer. He will be able to help

navigate legal questions before the board and explain them in a way that ensures all members are working from the same foundation, while his financial background positions him to engage deeply with budgets, revenue streams, and allocation of resources.

Anthony Nichols also brings a financial background along with a real desire to be helpful. He has shown a passion for our community and a willingness to approach decisions carefully. His deliberative and thoughtful posture suggests someone who will carefully weigh options, listen and contribute.

Anna Strong has a background in lobbying and policy work and has taken on the task of working with committees to rewrite and strengthen policy manuals, which are often the backbone of how a district functions day to day. She has shown herself to be a strong leader who asks hard questions, slowing the board down when necessary, so that decisions are not made hastily.

Working alongside Superintendent Jermall Wright and his staff, the new board looks poised to focus on students, on the well-being of the city and on the long-term health of the district, rather than being pulled into unnecessary conflict or personal ambition.

The first act of the new board on Thursday night was to organize itself for the work ahead. Members moved to elect officers, with Johnson elected board president, Adams chosen as vice president, Strong elected secretary and Nichols tapped to serve as board bursar. Krupitsky was selected to be the board's legislative liaison.

The board the drew lots to establish the length of their respective terms, a process required to determine which members will serve two-year terms and which will serve four-year terms so that future elections are staggered. Johnson, Bolly and Jackson drew two-year terms, while Krupitsky, Strong, Nichols and Adams will serve four-year terms.

The district's finances look good

They also heard the monthly report on district finances. Revenue is up, and the district is working hard to decrease expenditures. The report showed that revenues are largely meeting expectations, with most property tax categories performing close to projections. The primary property tax account has reached 98% of its target, only about $2.3 million short, while delinquent taxes and excess commissions are also near expected levels. Some smaller categories, such as land redemptions and revenue in lieu of taxes, are slightly under target. Interest on investments stands out as significantly exceeding expectations, however, helping offset minor shortfalls elsewhere.

On the expenditure side, salaries and benefits are projected to come in $3.5 million under budget. Several areas may require future budget adjustments, including one-time security

costs, special education-related professional services, transportation, supplies and fuel expenses.

Regarding fund balances, the district remains in a stable position overall. The operating fund holds nearly $38 million, and the capital improvements fund has more than $42 million. The child nutrition fund is also positive, while the federal fund balance is slightly negative, indicating a need for monitoring. Overall, the financial position appears stable, with strong reserves and manageable budget pressures.

To train, or not to train

The board then spent a significant portion of the meeting grappling with familiar but unresolved questions: how to improve student outcomes, and whether investing in long-term governance training is the right path forward.

At the center of that discussion was a proposal to enter into a governance partnership aimed at improving student outcomes by changing how the board itself operates. The model, developed by the Council of the Great City Schools, says student performance improves only when adult behavior at the leadership level changes, particularly the relationship between the board and the superintendent.

The proposal presented to the board outlined a structured, long-term process that begins with an evaluation of the board's current performance, designed to identify both strengths and areas for growth. From that assessment, board members and consultants would work together to develop a multi-year improvement plan, combining training, coaching, and ongoing development.

The work would unfold over roughly 24 months in three phases. The first phase focuses on orientation and assessment. This stage is designed to establish a baseline understanding of both strengths and gaps.

The second phase shifts toward goal-setting and structural change. The board would work to establish clear student outcome goals along with "guardrails" to guide district priorities. These would be informed by data, superintendent analysis, and community input.

In the final phase, the focus moves to implementation and sustained monitoring. The board would track progress toward its goals, review interim benchmarks, and report regularly to the public. A key component of the model is a scoring system that allows the board to measure how effectively it is focusing on student outcomes.

There is no cost for the initial evaluation and report. However, if the board chooses to move forward with the full model, the total cost could reach up to $40,000 over two years. District leaders emphasize that this is not intended as a quick fix, but as a sustained effort

requiring discipline, consistency, and a willingness to change long-standing patterns of governance.

Ray Hart, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, emphasized that his organization does not profit from the work and that he is willing to fundraise to offset some of the cost. He also noted that the model does not require board members to travel, as coaches would come to Little Rock or meet virtually throughout the process.

Even so, some members expressed hesitation about committing to a major initiative without first establishing stronger internal alignment.

Krupitsky suggested that, before engaging in a consultant-led process, the board should take time to meet informally, perhaps in a local retreat setting, to discuss shared priorities, values, and goals. The idea was framed as a way to build cohesion among a group that includes multiple new members.

Others supported that approach but cautioned against relying solely on self-directed conversation. Strong argued that skilled facilitation can make the difference between productive collaboration and unstructured disagreement, especially in a group with diverse perspectives.

The conversation also revealed differing views on the financial commitment of this proposal. Adams noted that the board already budgets roughly $5,000 per person annually for travel and training. Redirecting those funds toward a unified governance effort, he suggested, could actually save money while producing more meaningful results.

Hart attempted to address these concerns by offering flexibility. In addition to the full coaching model, he pointed to a smaller workshop option and reiterated that there is no deadline for the board to decide. He also confirmed that a previous governance evaluation conducted with an earlier board would likely need to be redone, given the number of new members.

Still, not everyone was ready to move forward immediately. “I’m not ready to make that decision tonight,” Bolly said, pointing to both the cost and the logistical challenges of committing to a multi-year effort.

No vote was taken at the end of this discussion. Rather, there appeared to be a consensus for taking an intermediate step or asking the board president and the superintendent to explore various options for facilitation and alignment, possibly beginning with a local retreat or structured conversation.

Wrapping up

Following a discussion on parliamentary procedure and Robert's Rules of Order, the meeting came to an end. Ultimately, what stood out for me on Thursday was the tone. There was a calmness to the proceedings and a steadiness in how members spoke, listened, and responded to one another. It was thoughtful, courteous, and notably collaborative in a way that has too often been absent.

For those of us who have watched this board over many years, the difference was clear. The familiar patterns of tension, interruption and adversarial exchange simply were not there. Disagreement, where it appeared, did not turn into conflict. Instead, it was handled with patience and a willingness to understand rather than to win.

That shift in culture, if it holds, may prove more important than any single policy decision. A board that is able to work in a calm and deliberate way, grounded in mutual respect, is far better positioned to focus on what matters most: the students, the educators and the long-term health of the district.