

The Oliver Partnership Proposal

A Labor-Management-Community-School “Connecting Oliver Students to Lawrence’s Past, Present, and Future”

Mission Statement

To serve the Oliver School community with effective and innovative educational and school governance practices rooted in research and evidence. These best practices will improve student learning and provide the richest educational opportunities available, including extended learning time and academic enrichment activities, for every student. There will be an infusion of the city of Lawrence’s rich history into the curriculum, connecting lessons learned from the past to the present day and a path forward for today’s students. The Oliver Labor-Management-Community Partnership School will provide students and families wraparound services and supports in a holistic approach to reach student learning goals.

AFT best practices include:

- Neighborhood public schools that embrace the opportunity to educate all students.
- Labor-management collaboration to improve school culture and enhance student success.
- The commitment of teachers, staff, and administrators to a shared decision making process.
- Minimizing student mobility and its detrimental effects by working in tandem with the district on critical matters such as curriculum, instruction, and adequate resources.
- Parent and community engagement with wrap-around services.
- Features of community schools including coordinating partnerships to support academic enrichment and health, mental health, and social services for students and families.

The AFT with the AFT MA and LTU commit to:

Provide extensive resources and expertise relating to:

- School improvement
- Labor-management collaboration
- Best research-based educational practices
- Professional development
- Best community partnerships for wrap around services
- The recruitment of a university/college educational partner
- Assisting Oliver staff in understanding institutional change
- On-the-ground support for the school effectiveness and governance processes

Overview of School Structure, Governance, and Management Philosophy

We are proposing that the union and district, with significant community involvement, enter into a partnership to run the grade 1-8 Oliver School. For the purposes of educational stability, instructional continuity, and family cohesion, we are recommending that the school remain one school versus being divided into a separate elementary and middle school. The school would be overseen by a Partnership Council consisting of union, district, school, parent, and community representatives.

The Oliver Partnership School will use a collaborative governance model in which teacher leadership is a recognized element, as well as administration working with the teachers and staff in shared decision making. Administrators will be selected, in part, based on their commitment to this shared decision-making model. Furthermore, the AFT will facilitate extensive professional development to staff on the principles and practices of effective shared decision making and teacher leadership.

As outlined below, we are honoring the spirit of the stakeholder group's recommendations by proposing that the Oliver School have two distinct grade spans—grades 1-5 and grades 6-8—for the purposes of day-to-day school administration and educational decision-making. This division allows smaller learning communities that correspond to the Common Core grade groupings (grades 1-2 and 3-5 in one grade-span and 6-8 in the other). The 1-8 structure at Lawrence has been attractive to families who want older children to accompany younger siblings to and from school. Each grade span would have two co-leaders (one focused on operations and the other on instruction), and its own Partnership Team (with majority teacher representation) that would be responsible for key educational decisions.

Partnership Council

The Partnership Council would essentially function as the school's Board of Directors. All policy and personnel decisions would be vetted through the Council, with the understanding that the Superintendent would have ultimate decision-making authority.

The Partnership Council would consist of representatives from the following stakeholders: union, district, school administrators, school staff, parents, and community.

Starting as soon as possible, a Transitional Partnership Council would be created to set in motion the opening of the redesigned school in 2013-14. The Transitional Partnership Council would consist of union, district, and teacher representatives. (The teacher representatives will be teachers who have been vetted as certain to remain at the Oliver Partnership School). The Transitional Partnership Council would be responsible for hiring each grade span's co-leaders, subject to the Superintendent's approval, and for overseeing the staff re-commitment and assignment process.

Once the redesigned school is up and running, the Transitional Partnership Council would be replaced by the permanent Partnership Council.

School Leadership and Partnership Teams

Administrators

There will be two administrators for the grade 1-5 span and two administrators for the grade 6-8 span. One of the two administrators, or co-leaders, will focus primarily on administrative/operational matters and the other administrator's primary focus will be on instructional matters. Administrators will be chosen, in part, based on their commitment to the philosophy of shared decision-making and teacher leadership.

Partnership Team

There will be a Partnership Team for Grades 1-5 and Grades 6-8 respectively. Each Partnership Team will represent a cross section of staff and administrators and will be heavily weighted with teachers who are elected by faculty. The two co-leaders for each grade span will serve on their respective Partnership Team.

Each Partnership Team will be responsible for key educational decisions, such as those relating to hiring of new staff, curriculum, assessments, professional development, school schedule, use of extended learning time, and discipline/school climate. Each Partnership Team may convene additional teams focused on particular areas—e.g., data analysis, grade-level curriculum planning, or supports for English language learners. Any additional teams that are formed at the school or grade level, or by content/department/specialty area, will be expected to submit regular updates, including any recommendations, to the Partnership Team.

The two Partnership teams will work in close coordination with each other, thus ensuring alignment in curriculum, professional development, teacher evaluation, scheduling, discipline, and other matters across the full span of grades (1-8).

Staffing

We anticipate that the vast majority of existing Oliver faculty and staff will be part of the turnaround process. As stated above, the two co-leaders at each grade span will be selected by the Transitional Partnership Council and confirmed by the Superintendent. The Transitional Partnership Council will also oversee the faculty/staff re-commitment process and provide existing faculty and staff with a written overview of the redesigned school's mission statement, terms and conditions of employment, and new expectations for teachers and staff.

All staff subject to the new performance evaluation system who are appropriately certified and receive a final overall rating of Needs Improvement or higher in the 2012-13 school year will be invited back to the Oliver. Such teachers will be asked to reaffirm in writing their commitment to the mission of the school and the new terms and conditions of employment.

A three-year commitment will be requested of all staff due to the school's extensive professional development investment, and to help ensure school stability and realize the Oliver Partnership School vision. This pledge to the school community, although aspirational in nature and not legally binding, would be an ethical bond to the mission of the new Oliver Partnership School.

All teachers who meet the criteria and who reaffirm their commitment under the new guidelines will be guaranteed a job at the Oliver that matches their certification; however, they may not be given the exact same job they had in 2012-13. For example, a 4th grade teacher with an elementary certification may be assigned to 3rd grade instead.

In regard to staff rated Unsatisfactory, it is our expectation that these educators will have the right to request an outside evaluator to validate the rating, if they have not already been assigned an outside evaluator. If the rating of Unsatisfactory is confirmed, it is our expectation that such educators will be placed on Improvement Plans and will receive the intensive support and assistance they need to improve their practice to the level of proficiency. Furthermore, it is our expectation that the district will make every effort to transfer such educators in accordance with state law and the LTU contract to other LPS schools, where they will have the opportunity to continue to receive the help they need to reach proficiency.

Once the redesigned school is up and running, ongoing teacher vacancies will be filled as follows: Each grade span will have a hiring committee comprised of the two co-leaders and teachers elected by the faculty. This hiring committee may be the Partnership Team, a subset thereof, or a separate entity created by the Partnership Team. During the application and interview process, the hiring committee will use a rubric outlining the standards of performance that job candidates will be expected to demonstrate. The hiring committee's recommendations will be subject to the approval of the Partnership Council and Superintendent.

Throughout the stakeholder and subsequent planning process, Oliver teachers consistently articulated that they want coaches who will model lesson planning and instruction *with their students*. The duties of coaches will be well-defined to exclude administrative duties. Individuals in this role may be half-time teachers and half-time coaches to ensure that they are grounded as teachers first, coaches second, and to ensure that teachers have coaches in their subject area. The terms of coaches in the Oliver school may be limited in order to rotate coaching positions. Coaches will play a critical role in Common Core implementation and in the Common Core aligned teacher evaluation system.

As a general principle, teachers will not have lunch duty, playground duty or bus duty, thereby allowing them to devote maximum time to instruction or instruction-related duties. Aides or other appropriate positions may be added to cover non-instructional duties.

The new Oliver Partnership School will hire a social worker and/or behavioral specialist dedicated to discipline and student behavior. These specialists would work closely with parents to keep students in school rather than removing students from the learning environment.

Class sizes will be decided by the Partnership Teams and will depend on budget and other personnel options. Currently, the Oliver does not have enough paraprofessionals assisting regular classroom teachers with struggling students or ELLs and special education students in inclusion classrooms. The teaching staff is exploring the possibility of additional instructional paraprofessionals. The AFT has professional development programs designed with and for paraprofessionals that improve their skills in the classroom, including supporting the Common Core transition, and that strengthen the working relationship between teachers and instructional paraprofessionals.

Vision for Teaching and Learning: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessments, and Professional Development

Major decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, assessments, and PD will be made by the Partnership Teams.

While more planning time with Oliver faculty is needed to develop specifics, the following principles and priorities will guide the development of a rigorous teaching and learning system at the Oliver:

- Student needs—informed by ongoing assessments that are judged as useful and reliable *by teachers*—will drive curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development decisions.
- Comprehensive planning in curriculum, instruction, assessments, and PD will begin with a needs assessment that incorporates a thorough analysis of student data. The needs assessment will be centered on two basic questions: 1) What kind of instruction and supports do students need to achieve at high levels? 2) What additional tools, supports, and voice do teachers need to make this vision a reality? (Particular attention will be paid to the learning needs of SPED and ELL students).
- The teaching and learning system put in place by Oliver faculty and staff will be continuously analyzed and assessed in regard to its impact on student learning. Changes will be made as needed. The goal will be continuous improvement, culminating in academic proficiency or better, for all students and subgroups.

Curriculum and Instruction

- Curriculum will be aligned to the Common Core and Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and will be based on the scope and sequence guides currently used by LPS. The goal will be to enhance these guides for the benefit of the Oliver and the district as a whole.
- Across the content areas, the curriculum will emphasize the rich history of the city of Lawrence and will connect students to the city's past, present, and future.
- Inclusion of special education students and English language learners in regular education classrooms will be the goal wherever possible. Sufficient staff and supports, including the use of instructional paraprofessionals, will be provided to make inclusion classrooms successful.
- The Oliver will look to incorporate a tiered instructional model that uses Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions (e.g., push-in supports from specialists and paraprofessionals at Tier 2, intensive one-on-one tutoring at Tier 3).

- The school will investigate an array of research-based literacy programs for possible use at the elementary level, as well as the possible adoption of a literacy program at the middle school level focused on non-readers who have had little formal schooling.
- There will be more time and focus devoted to mathematics instruction.

Assessments

- The school will conduct an exhaustive inventory of existing assessments, with the goal of distinguishing between what is useful to students and teachers and what is a distraction from productive teaching and learning.
- The school will work with the district assessment office to build a useful and reliable assessment system from the bottom up with one main criterion—the assessment information must be considered useful *by teachers* for improving instruction and student learning.
- The resulting assessment system will be designed to provide ongoing and timely student data that teachers can use to plan and modify instruction—individually and in teams, in all grades and content areas.

Professional Development

- Professional development will have three major dimensions: 1) traditional courses and workshops to build educators' knowledge and skills; 2) instructional coaching/feedback; and 3) common planning time.
- There will be a menu of courses and workshops, some elective and some mandatory for all staff. Identified areas of need at the Oliver include: team building and collaboration; the instructional shifts in the Common Core; support for ELL students; support for SPED students; using data to inform instruction; differentiating instruction; teaching mathematics and literacy across the curriculum; and parent/family engagement.
- Instructional coaching will be a major component of the Oliver's vision for job-embedded professional development. Coaches will have detailed job descriptions centered on observing classrooms, providing feedback, and modeling effective instruction for teachers.
- Time will be built into the schedule every week for common planning, within and across grades and content areas. Common planning time will be sacred and a critical part of the teacher leadership model.

- Role of the AFT in PD: The national AFT offers a rich array of courses and workshops that can be made available to Oliver teachers immediately and on an ongoing basis. For example, the AFT’s “Educational Research and Dissemination” program (in-depth, graduate-level courses aligned with best practices and the Common Core) and the AFT’s “Strategies for Student Success” program (shorter modules designed to introduce teachers to key topics) will be part of the PD experience, either on site in Lawrence or at national training institutes (e.g., the AFT has a week-long Summer Institute in Maryland). There is also follow-up PD available through the United Federation of Teachers’ Teacher Center that can build off the recent team participation at the AFT Center for School Improvement Institute in New York City. In addition the AFT provides all educators with free.
- The AFT on-line website sharemylesson.com (Share My Lesson) is the nation's largest free collection of classroom resources created by teachers, for teachers, including a new section of materials for developing curricula based on the Common Core State Standards. We will promote the use of this tool as it allows educators to share tried-and-true ideas, lessons and teaching tools with their colleagues to improve the quality of teaching.
- In addition, the AFT will strive to recruit a higher education partner to enhance professional learning, extended learning time opportunities, curriculum development, and the use of assessments/data to improve instruction.
- Four one-half days of professional development are left in the school year, and we would like to collaborate with the district to focus these on professional development for the transition to next year.

Educator Evaluation

The redesigned Oliver will have a robust teacher evaluation and development system that puts the emphasis on continuous improvement. The system will fully comply with the new state regulations for performance evaluation, with a heavy emphasis on classroom observers (formal evaluators, coaches, and peers) providing constructive feedback and support to teachers. We would also like to experiment with teachers observing and giving feedback to each other in a no-stakes setting.

Teachers rated proficient or higher will be given a high degree of latitude in shaping their own self-directed growth plans consistent with the new state regulations; teacher self-reflection and self-evaluation will be heavily stressed.

The Oliver Partnership School will likely transition to a Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program that assists new teachers and struggling veterans, and that helps determine their employment status. As teachers become more comfortable with the process of giving feedback to

each other, we hope to create the kind of “continuous improvement” culture that will enable a PAR program. The decision to adopt PAR—as well as details regarding the program’s structure and design—will be left to the Partnership Teams.

School Climate and Conditions

The Oliver Partnership School will pay close attention to the school environment and stakeholders’ perceptions of teaching and learning conditions. Research has shown that the quality of teaching conditions can encourage or constrain good teaching and have a powerful influence on student achievement.

In the spring of 2012, Oliver’s educators took part in the statewide TELL MASS survey initiative. The survey results strongly suggest that teaching and learning conditions are not optimal at the Oliver. For example, among respondents:

- Only 14.7 percent said teachers have sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials.
- Only 11.8 percent said the physical environment of classrooms in the school supports teaching and learning.
- Only 27.3 percent said teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making in the school.
- Only 30.3 percent said there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in the school.

It is difficult to see how student learning will significantly improve at the Oliver if teachers continue to report these kinds of barriers to learning. Therefore, the redesigned Oliver—by emphasizing teacher leadership and by being responsive to faculty/staff concerns—will make a concerted and conscious effort to improve the school climate, culture, and conditions, particularly those conditions that are closely linked to student learning.

The redesigned Oliver will monitor progress in this area through regular surveying of faculty and staff, using the TELL MASS survey or similar instrument. The school will also explore the possibility of surveying students and parents. In all cases, the survey results will be analyzed and used to inform school improvement planning, contributing to a culture of continuous reflection and improvement.

Policies

Safety and Discipline

The school will apply and enforce the district discipline policy and will enter into a compact with parents to create an understanding of the consequences of poor or intermittent attendance. The Oliver Partnership School will hire a social worker and/or behavioral specialist to utilize strategies that focus on a safe and nurturing environment with peer remediation and restorative justice as an alternative to out of school discipline.

Attendance

Although attendance in general has not been a major issue at the Oliver, some families leave the country for an extended time over holidays, creating learning loss for some children. The school-based Partnership Teams will work to educate families and develop programs to reduce chronic absenteeism and contain learning loss.

Grading Policy

Grading will ultimately be decided by the Partnership Teams but initially the Oliver Partnership School will continue to use PowerGrade.

Uniforms

The students of the Oliver Partnership School will wear uniforms similar to the current uniforms and the uniform policy will be more strictly enforced than is currently the case. If there is a minimal change in the uniform itself, the Oliver Partnership School will seek to provide subsidies to ensure that all students and their families can comply with the change.

School Calendar, Schedule and Extended Time

We are committed to providing at least 1330 instructional hours for students, as required under the turnaround plan. An Extended Time Committee has already been formed at the Oliver to explore the various options. If our proposal is accepted, we would like to immediately work with The Extended Time Committee to describe the basics of the Oliver redesign; to identify the time and professional development needs of a teacher leadership model, such as common planning time; and to share with the committee our vision for the Oliver as a community school with wraparound services and afternoon enrichment activities.

The Transitional Partnership Council will ultimately decide the calendar and schedule for 2013-14, subject to the Superintendent's approval. Once the redesigned Oliver School is up and running and the Permanent Partnership Council has been formed, any changes to the school calendar and schedule will be determined by the Partnership Teams at each grade span, subject to approval by the Partnership Council and ultimately the Superintendent.

For all students, there will be a strong emphasis on academic enrichment activities in areas such as the arts, music, theater, debate, science/technology, fitness and health, high school and college preparedness and Lawrence History. We will also explore the use of outside partners, such as the YMCA and YWCA, Lawrence Heritage State Park, the Lawrence History Center, and Citizens Schools, in the after school enrichment program.

Technical assistance from the National Center on Time and Learning will be utilized, especially with regard to effectively and efficiently helping students who are struggling academically. Finally, we will review and consider the promising practices already being used by other Level 4 and ELT schools in Lawrence (some of these school visits have already been scheduled) and across the Commonwealth.

Budget and District-Provided Services

The district will continue to be responsible for special education evaluation, rules and templates for IEP evaluation, and support services for physical therapy and speech pathology as well as for English learner evaluation, services and plans of support for individual students.

Budget is integrally related to the staffing vision for the school. The AFT and AFT MA and LTU are already scheduling meetings to study budget formulas and the range of possible funding so that realistic staffing options can be determined.

The superintendent has proposed committing resources to an approved Oliver Partnership School equivalent to those provided to EMO schools in Lawrence--including per pupil funding (local, state and federal), management fee, startup capital, SIG money, and assistance and support to raise additional monies. In addition, the AFT will make every attempt to secure additional funding through grants, other resources and in-kind donations to make the Oliver competitive and successful. The AFT and affiliates along with the Oliver Partnership Council will work with community partners to secure wraparound services for Oliver students and families.

The Oliver Partnership School as a Community School

The LTU, AFT MA, and AFT propose transforming the Oliver, where teachers and staff serve the neediest students, into a labor-management-community school that brings together under one roof the services and activities that our children and their families need.

The Oliver students come to school under circumstances that frequently impede their ability to thrive academically. To close the achievement gap, the new Oliver Partnership School will address issues that are beyond the control of educators yet have a direct impact on student outcomes. Healthcare, social services and parental involvement are too often divorced from school life, although they are critical to student success.

With the support of local agencies and community groups, the Oliver Partnership School would provide students with services beyond instruction to reach their full potential. A variety of federal, state and local funding streams could also be drawn upon for these services.

The Oliver Partnership School would have after school enrichment programs, tutoring, homework assistance and recreational activities. Medical, dental, counseling and child care services would be phased in to meet the community's needs.

The Oliver Partnership School would create an inviting environment for parents with customized supports such as English language instruction, employment counseling, citizenship programs and GED programs. Having programs tailored to the community's needs would create an environment more conducive to parental involvement and family stability

The Core Principles of Community Schools that will be embedded in the Oliver Partnership School include:

- The Oliver Partnership School will have a strong academic curriculum. The Partnership Teams, in close coordination with the central office, will work to ensure that students have a strong and rigorous curriculum that will further student success.
- The Oliver Partnership School will be fully integrated with the school district and the community to provide services for students, their families and the community with the common goal of ensuring student success and building strong communities.
- The Oliver Partnership School will have partners including a variety of providers and funders. Once established, the Oliver Partnership School will provide medical services such as primary, vision, dental and nutritional services; mental health services; and a variety of social services.
- The Oliver Partnership School will have a comprehensive strategic plan agreed to in writing between the partner organizations, including providers and funders.
- The Oliver Partnership School will be a model of collaboration and respect between all stakeholders.

Final Thoughts:

The Lawrence Teachers Union, AFT Massachusetts and the AFT would like the opportunity to collaborate with Lawrence Public Schools to make the vision articulated here a reality for the Oliver community. Together, we can make the Oliver Partnership School a model community school that embraces the City of Lawrence’s rich past and helps move students and their families toward a better future.