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CLV Strong Start Academy Elementary Schools, Inc. Board Meeting – February 9, 2023

Lorna: Hey, good evening everybody. This is the board meeting for Strong Start Academy Elementary Schools. It is called back to order as there's time we were having some technical difficulties with the recording, so I'll go ahead and reread the roll call. Present are Lorna James-Cervantes, Jaime Gonzalez, Heather Nay, Alain Bengochea, Dachresha Harris, Alee Moore, Nicole Thompson, Heather Nay, and Melida Pulido. So, all board members are present at this meeting at this time. I will just remind everyone in compliance with Open Meeting Law that we are recording the meeting, and at this time we were on agenda item number three, public comment. We do not see anybody in the room wishing to make a public comment. Was there any emailed or called in?

Amanda: No.

Lorna: Okay. So, Amanda has informed us that there were no email or call-in public comments so that will end the public comment period. And we will move on to item number four for possible action to approve the final minutes referenced for the January 12th, 2023 board meeting. Did anybody have any corrections to those minutes? I did note a couple. This is Lorna Cervantes again for the record.

On page two in the last paragraph, it should have read, "We will have a reelection in March," speaking about the treasurer's position and the other officer's position. And then next to the last sentence on that page, it should say, "Would anyone like to put their name in," instead of, "Anybody would like to put their name in." I'll give these corrections to Amanda on my written copy so that they can be updated. On page three in the next to last paragraph, the recording recorded in the conversation about, and so I'd like to open the floor to

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Miriam at this time, and then it says, "If dot, dot, dot and that should have been of it, period."

And on page six in the last paragraph where it's talking about Miriam bringing back a report to us on the open enrollment period, they should have said, "But I think that it's on Miriam at that point," instead of "the point" in that sentence. And lastly, on page 10, in the second paragraph, it says, "And I think that Alee is," instead of reporting to, it should be "referring to" in that sentence. But those were just a couple of things that I caught if you guys are okay with making those corrections in the minutes. Were there any other concerns or corrections with the minutes from our last meeting? I don't see anybody looking like they had any, and if not, then we could have a motion at this time to accept the minutes as corrected.

Jaime: Jaime Gonzales, for the record, I move that we accept the approved final minutes of the last meeting, the January 12th meeting as amended.

Lorna: Okay. Is there a second to that motion?

Alain: I'd like [inaudible 00:03:37] chair second.

Lorna: Okay. Thank you. All those in favor?

Jaime: Aye.

Amanda: Aye.

Alain: Aye.

Lorna: Any opposed? Okay, thank you. So that motion passes and I will make sure that Amanda gets the written copy of those to make sure that we get them corrected properly before they are posted. All right. So now at this time we will move to item number five. This is an introduction of our new board member, Melida Pulido for ward three, who has recently been appointed by the Las

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Vegas City Council to a two-year term ending in December 21st, 2024. So, Melida, we'd like to just give you a couple of minutes to tell us a little bit about yourself and to welcome you to the board.

Melida: Thank you. It's my honor to be able to be here and serve a community that I grew in. And I was nine years old when I came into the United States, and I didn't speak English, so bilingual education and education period is very meaningful to me. I did retire from the city of Las Vegas after 25 years of service with the city of Las Vegas. And if you're trying to do the math, I was 12 years old when I started. I did do 25 years with the city, predominantly human resources, I left to the fire department for three years, and I got recruited back to HR. The last 10 years was mainly doing projects and programming for mayor, city council, and city manager.

After that I kind of tried to retire and it didn't work out very well. So since I've always done nonprofit work, and served on boards, and worked with the community, I took on a project with Project 150. That was an idea that two gentlemen in the community had, but they were stuck at a napkin idea. And so in 2013, I became their executive director, and we left there in 2019. What started as a napkin idea when I left, we were doing several million dollars worth of services to all high schools in southern and northern Nevada. So that project continues and I continue to support it.

And now I'm a realtor, because I can't sit still and I can't retire, and I feel that that's another way that I can educate my community and help them evolve to their dreams and their goals. So a little bit about me, and I hope I can make an impact and, you know, learn from everyone here.

Lorna: This is Lorna. Thank you so much Melida for that introduction of yourself, and we're very happy to have you as a member of the board. Do any other board members have any questions or any comments for Melida?

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Melida: I do like to go by Meli.

Lorna: Meli? Okay.

Melida: Yeah, if that's okay Melida is that my mother was the only one that ever said it that way, and she didn't say it in a nice tone, whenever it was used in the full name.

Lorna: Thank you, Meli, for making sure. And so we are glad to have you and we will definitely put you to work.

Melida: Thank you.

Lorna: All right, so moving on from our introduction, we are ready for item number six, and this is a report by Kristin Dietz from Ed Tech on the budget and finance report, including CSP Grant, and possible action to approve the December forecast as the amended budget. Remember, it's important that we have the opportunity to approve an amended budget because that really affects our audit and how we're doing compared to our budget and our actuals at the end of the financial year. So I will let Kristin take over the floor from here.

Kristin: Hey, thank you. Good afternoon, board. This is Kristin Dietz for the record. I have for you the financial presentation with the updated annual forecast as well as actuals through December. So we're about halfway through the year at this point. And our current forecast is this middle column, which is showing total revenue of \$3,011,954 and total expenses of \$3,109,881 for a total net deficit of \$97,927. I just wanna point out though it is negative because we are utilizing carryover from year zero, from our pre-launch year.

So the most important number to be looking at is the ending fund balance, and we are reflecting an ending fund balance of just under \$695,000, which is about a 22% reserve. So very strong. It looks really good. And as mentioned, this current forecast, we are recommending that the board approve as an amended

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budget. You can see the left-hand column is our original budget, which was from almost a year ago. This budget was based on very different enrollment numbers and a lot of unknowns and assumptions. So, now that we have landed at an average daily enrollment, and we now have all of our expenses pretty well known, those are all factored into the forecast. So that's why we really wanna have this forecast approved as an amended budget so that we can then use that as our benchmark. And as was mentioned, this becomes the budget that is compared to actuals in the audit report. So it'll just look a lot more consistent with what we expect and what we know.

In terms of what has changed from last month to this month, the main changes were around compensation and payroll. We had some movement, a couple of staff left, and they were some of the higher-paid teaching staff, and they are not being replaced. But we also have two additional positions that are needed. One is a long-term sub and the other is a special ed aid. So those have been included here as additional costs, but they're being offset by the savings of the two staff that are leaving or that have left. And then we also had a little bit of an uptick in our health insurance costs. We increased the forecast by about \$5,000 based on what's actually being charged in the total cost that we're expecting for the year. So those were the biggest changes.

Overall, we saw a decrease in expense and compensation of about \$49,000. We did have a couple of areas that are going up in expense, and we are adjusting the forecast based on the actual experience that we're seeing in our nursing costs, our contracted nursing costs, as well as some custodial supplies, expenses, and the food management fees. So those were the adjustments, but overall, this month we saw an improvement in our forecasted bottom line of about \$20,000 from what we had last month.

In terms of our year-to-date actuals, we have received approximately 53% of our revenues. You can see here on the graph, the local and the state revenues are coming in as expected. The area where we're seeing a gap is in the federal Transcription by www.speechpad.com

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revenues, and that's really our grants. And I have a separate slide on that, so I'll go into that in just a moment. And then in terms of expenses, we have incurred 41% of our expenses to date. Some of the areas where it's a little bit slower are our CSP-funded expenses that we had budgeted for this year. That may actually push into next year depending on timing. But overall, our regular operating expenses and our salaries and everything are happening on track with timing that we had expected.

In terms of our balance sheet, we ended December with a cash balance of \$1,107,000. So really strong cash. And we had a little bit of receivables related to the CSP grant, and just a little bit of accounts payable, and overall, we had a net income of \$307,000 year-to-date. Our cash flow remains very strong. We anticipate ending the year with approximately 53 days cash-on-hand. You can see we're expecting to see a dip in cash balances, mostly because of the delay in the grant funding on the federal grants. We just don't know the timing, so we're kind of conservatively anticipating that that's gonna take a long time to get. And so we will be utilizing our cash reserves in the last few months of the year, but we still expect to end with well over 30 days cash-on-hand, which is the metric that the authorizer likes to see.

In terms of our grants, here's a summary. You'll notice that we had original award amounts and then we had amendments on federal titles one through four and IDEA. The original grants were based on anticipated enrollment numbers, and now that the actual counts for the fall are in, and we opened the year with less students than expected, these grant amounts were adjusted downward to reflect that. So we did see a decrease in revenue and we also adjusted corresponding expenses. We have submitted amendments on all of these grants, and we're waiting for the state to approve them. And until we get the approval, we cannot submit our reimbursement request for these funds, which is why we are seeing a delay in that federal revenue.

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You can see here in terms of spending, we're spending down. Titles two and three, we haven't started spending yet, but the others we have begun to, or we've fully spent down those grants. So as soon as they are approved, we will be submitting for reimbursement, but we just can't do that yet at this point. In terms of the CSP grant, we've spent about 35% of this grant. It is your largest grant at \$750,000, and we have one submission that is pending receipt. That was the one that was submitted on January 10th. We're about to submit another one in April. We'll be doing it quarterly from now on, so our next one will be in April. We also received the ARP ESSER grant, which is a federal one-time grant related to COVID, and it's specifically for addressing learning loss. So this grant, we finally did get approval and were able to submit our first reimbursement request in January, and we'll be submitting these monthly until the grant is exhausted.

This next slide is just a little bit more detail on the CSP grant. We do have until July of 2024 to spend on this grant. So you can see budget remaining, we have quite a bit left, but it's mostly, we have a big chunk in professional development, and this is probably going to span across into next year. And we have some other, like, tech-related purchases, which are making up the majority of the balance, and those are all going to serve students this year and as you grow into next year. And that is it for the presentation. There is some detail at the back if you have any questions. So I'd be happy to try to answer them.

Lorna: This is Lorna. Thank you for your presentation, Kristin. Are there questions by any board members at this time regarding the budget or the desire to have this become our revised amended budget for the year?

[00:15:31]

[silence]

[00:15:48]

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Okay, this is Lorna again. I will just remind everybody that when you look on the grants page, like with the title one, title three, title four grants, those four specific grants, we're going to want to make sure they're spent by the end of this year in full because any monies that you don't spend from those grants will go back to the state. So we wanna make sure that those are spent in full.

So I know Miriam is definitely waiting for the okay from the state to start spending on those grants and putting in for reimbursement on those because we'll want those spent down completely. Hearing no discussion or questions about the presentation, I would appreciate it if we could have a motion to approve the December forecast as the amended budget for this year.

Dachresha: Dachresha Harris for the record. I motion that we approve the amended budget for this year.

Lorna: Is there a second?

Jaime: Jaime Gonzales for the record. I second that.

Lorna: Okay. All those in favor?

Alain: Aye.

Alee: Aye.

Lorna: Aye.

Amanda: Aye.

Lorna: Any...

Nicole: Aye.

Lorna: Sorry, Nicole. Any opposed? Okay, that motion passes unanimously. So thank you very much, Kris, and we appreciate your help. And if you need any

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other information from us or any other help, please let us know in the future. So we'll move now to item number seven. This is a report by the executive director on the status of ongoing marketing efforts, open enrollment and recruitment.

Miriam: Miriam Benitez for the record. So as of today, we currently have 83 students enrolled and our marketing efforts have gone well. We have 42 applications submitted. Since our last board meeting, we've had seven dates of tabling events. We had two of those dates at the Walmart on Lake Mead, one at Mariana's, one at the School Choice Fair, one at the Martin Luther King Parade, another one at Broad Acres, and then our last one was on the same day multiple sites Smith's, Albertson's and Walmart within the 89101 and 89104 zip code because that day the intent was to focus on families that live within close proximity of the school. In speaking with Edgar and reviewing different data pieces, one of 'em being the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority site evaluation, it makes reference in there when they were talking to the parents how they heard about the school. And many of 'em had said Facebook, social media.

So in talking with Edgar about that and our next steps for our marketing campaign, he suggests that instead of doing radio ads, because that's so wide, to focus on social media, on our target zip codes, Facebook, Instagram, and I can't remember what the third, I think maybe the third one is YouTube and looking at that and focusing on that for the next month, and then see... We added a piece on our application asking families where they heard about. So we hope to get more information on that. We thought about that piece a little late. So the information from there. Also, the majority has been Facebook.

So our next steps is to focus our marketing on social media and then we'll see where we are next month. But overall, we've seen good growth. Open enrollment closes February 16th, but that only means that we don't go to lottery and obviously we have till we start school August 7th to increase our enrollment, which I think we are on a good path.

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Lorna: This is Lorna. Thank you for that report, Miriam. Are there any questions regarding the marketing that has taken place or where we are with our enrollment at this time?

Jaime: Jaime Gonzales for the record. Just out of curiosity, you mentioned we had 42 applications submitted, and 83 students. Of the 83, do we know how many we expect to carry over into the next year?

Miriam: We are currently collecting data, so we sent out our registration for next year. And, of course, parents aren't as quick to reapply because they know they have a spot. So we're moving forward, assuming they're all coming back, unless we hear different. We just had parent-teacher conferences our second one on Wednesday, and, you know, parents are thrilled, they're happy. As far as I know everyone's coming back, so we are expecting those 83 back.

Jaime: Thank you.

Lorna: This is Lorna. So are we having the parents who are currently enrolled fill out the registration packets for next year at this time?

Miriam: Yes. So, Miriam Benitez for the record. We have our Infinite Campus registration link available. So they're just having to go into Infinite Campus and update anything that has changed. So yeah, not having to fill out an interest form like the new folks are doing, just updating their registration for next year.

Lorna: Thank you. Any other questions or comments for Miriam at this time? This is Lorna. I just think it's going to be important that we keep this as a monthly agenda item so that we can really track our enrollment very closely and make sure that we're on track to hit the enrollment we're expecting for next year, so that then our revenues are what we expect them to be next year and we can hire and move forward with this staff that we are hoping to have in place for next year and our training, of course.

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All right. Any other questions or comments on item number seven before we move on? At this time, we'll move to item number eight then. This is a discussion regarding the results of the state evaluation report conducted by the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority. This report was passed out to you in email with all of the other background for the meeting. I hope that everybody had a chance to read through it. As you could see when you were reading through it, it gave us scores in each one of the various metrics that this State Charter Authority is holding us accountable for. And it also gave some recommendations in the back that the school should look on. So are there any specific questions any board members may have, especially with regard to the challenges or the recommendations that are pointed out in this report, or the strengths? There were a number of strengths also listed.

Alain: Alain Bengochea for the record. I have a question regarding what are the comments from the staff regarding that multiple programs are challenging to implement. So I wanna hear a little bit more about what you claim or...

Miriam: Well, as you know you should limit... Miriam Benitez for the record. You should limit the initiatives or the amount of things you take on in a year. But by the very nature of being a brand new school, you can't really limit that. Everything is new to all of us. And so I think some of the staff was feeling overwhelmed by that new reading program. And, of course, not only new but new to the majority of the teachers came from CCSD and CCSD implements balanced reading and we're doing science of reading. And so all of that has been very challenging, new math program, new intervention programs, the dual language model program. So it goes on and on and on. But that's why we started our PD early way back in June and then we had two weeks in June and had that break. And then we started two weeks before school started to give teachers that time as well. And then during the course of the year, it has been ongoing.

So it has been a lot. But I think I was very clear and teachers knew what they were signing up for. So we do have very high expectations and we are Transcription by www.speechpad.com

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unrelenting with that. So if it's not a good fit, then that's why some teachers may have chosen to leave. But our data looks good and we're staying on course. And so just trying to find ways at this point for the teachers that are with us, talking about how to retain those teachers, make sure they stay because they're strong, and they're doing a great job.

Lorna: This is Lorna. I also read that comment, Alain, and I thought about it, but then I thought, you know, it's true, any time you're starting something new it's always going to be hard. And we know that the second year of anything we do is always going to be easier than the first year. And now those teachers are going to be ready to kind of bring others along and really it's the difference between theory and practice. Things in theory always sound good, but when you put 'em into practice and you learn what it really means in practice, and I think that's part of what the teachers were talking about as they were talking about then having experienced that myself in the past, I know that that can be true, but I think Miriam is right on with saying we need to stay the course, continue to support and provide coaching and professional development ongoing for our teachers, and just making sure everyone knows what's going to happen moving forward. So, thank you and keep up that great work.

The other thing that I noted on the recommendations page is that the SPCSA offers quite a few trainings and I know that several of our board members were able to take advantage of the community training yesterday and some of the other possible trainings that are available to us. So I would just encourage that we do continue to use those resources. I know Miriam has been reaching out quite often to the Charter Authority staff members for help in different areas as well. So I'd just say continue to do that. And the other that I noted was that idea of bolstering family engagement. And I think we should just note for the record that it really was an intentional decision this year to focus on instruction at this school, getting the instruction up and running, making sure that the children were receiving the best educational opportunity that they could, and then

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knowing that adding that parent engagement piece later in bolstering that is like a second-year to third-year goal that Miriam has set. So I just wanted to point that out for the record as well. Any other thoughts or questions that anybody may have had as they read through the report?

Amanda: I think Heather wants to say something.

Lorna: Heather?

Heather: Yes. Can you hear me?

Lorna: Yes.

Heather: Okay. So just in regards to the teachers and training and the situation where the teacher has left, we went through some training and they have it once a year and it's a trauma response training. And it helps with the teacher's understanding maybe where the trauma's coming from. And being that we are a lower income, not really having opportunities, I think that it would be a great training for some of the teachers at the charter school if we can look into it. I don't know if... They come once a year, so I don't know if it would be an option or it's something you guys would be interested in. But yeah.

Lorna: This is Lorna. Thank you for that recommendation. Heather, and I know that Miriam is shaking her head, yes, that she'd be happy to look into the trauma-informed instruction training moving forward and add that possibly to the professional development for teachers.

Miriam: So, Miriam Benitez for the record. We have had trauma-informed training, but I believe Heather's talking about the training they received as onboarding for the city of Las Vegas and it was very impactful and I heard about it from her as well as from Amanda. So we would be very interested in following up with that.

Heather: Okay.

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Lorna: Thank you. Heather did that...?

Heather: Thank you.

Lorna: You're welcome. Any other comments or questions from any board members? Jaime.

Jaime: Jaime Gonzales for the record. So I'm curious how often is this evaluation.

Miriam: That... Miriam Benitez for the record. As far as I understood, the Charter Authority came out once and then they were just back out last week assessing our programs like our title one funding, title two, title three, special ed. But this was specifically just looking at the school overall to see how it was performing, visiting classrooms to see if we were living up to basically everything we said we were gonna do in our application.

Jaime: So do we or don't we have an expectation? And this is specifically regarding the challenges and the recommendations that the SPCSA will be coming back or doing any sort of follow up to see progress made on any of these or current status on any of those. And the reason I ask, it's just as Lorna has suggested, with regards to a regular monthly check-in as far as enrollment, these are three recommendations [inaudible 00:31:53] the instructional model or the family engagement or the other resources that we're utilizing. Are those things that we need to have some report out on or comment on or metric on or update on just to show that we've addressed or we are addressing and that we're making progress on any of those in addition to the two challenges that we made for metric?

Miriam: So, Miriam Benitez, for the record, as I understood it in the debriefing part of this session, that we would only have to worry about if we had strong recommendations or deficiencies, which we have used.

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Lorna: This is Lorna. I don't think that precludes us though from making sure that we look back on these recommendations in the future to see how we've made progress toward them. Tammy?

Tammy: Yes. Tammy Malich, City of Las Vegas, for the record. I would offer a couple of things. One, the first two bulleted strengths listed, I think, are certainly not that they outweigh and ignore any recommendations, but I think that to me is the greatest strength. The fact that they observed and noted the SSA's bilingual education program as a strength, that they saw that students were actively engaged and participating. And then the second as far as the teachers and the fluidity of teachers moving from full group to small group to independent, I think those are very positive. I would also say that that is what I see when I'm at the school.

I think relative to the recommendation or the challenge where teachers expressed the sense of overwhelming, I think part of that could be that Miriam is in their rooms multiple times every day. That's not always realistic or practical in a regular elementary school setting from where these folks came. And so you can fly under the radar a little bit if you're having that Monday where you didn't really plan well and you're tired and whatever. They don't have that grace. Not that Miriam's not graceful, but they don't have [inaudible 00:34:26]. I mean, you know, and Amanda's there, and Angela's there, and I'm there and the mayor's there, you know, and we are bouncing in and out as well. So they're under the spotlight all the time.

And Miriam has very high expectations and high standards. That was one of the reasons we were hoping this board would hire her because I had personal experience with Miriam in her leadership role in CCSD and saw that Miriam does not tolerate anything less than 100%. And staff knew that coming in. And so I feel like yay on these strengths and for teachers that this isn't a right fit or a good fit, as a principal, I used to tell my staff, "Here are the expectations if you come here. So if you come, come fully informed. Don't complain to me later Transcription by www.speechpad.com

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because I laid it all out. I didn't sugar-coat it for you." And I think that was done as well. So I think that's a huge benefit and plus and strength. And we, the city, we feel very fortunate to have Miriam and all of you leading this work.

The other thing they noted is this board in participation and commitment, that isn't always the case either. Some of these boards are perfunctory in nature, I know, but the statute says da, da, and people would never not fully obey the statutes, right? But this board is definitely actively engaged, not we show up, we check in, we sign the sheet, Miriam says everything's good, thumbs up, and we all nod and smile and go home. And so I think that's [crosstalk 00:36:12.260].

Jaime: But can we do that?

Tammy: No. You can't. So, I think that speaks to all of you and your level of commitment and Miriam and her leadership. So thank you to all of you.

Lorna: This is Lorna. And thank you for those comments, Tammy. And I completely agree with you. I can say that in very few elementary schools do most principals have the opportunity to be in classrooms on a daily basis, but those that are five star elementary schools are one of two. Either the kids are learning in spite of anything the teachers do because they come with so much home background and support, or they're at one of our more at-risk schools where the principal is constantly in the room holding teachers to high expectations. And when you hold those high expectations for your teachers, for your staff, for your students, and you model them yourself in your own actions, then we're going to see a five-star school by the time we start having star ratings at Strong Start. So even though we have some recommendations that we may wanna watch and revisit, I think we should focus definitely on those positives for this report. And also I think it's a yearly report.

Jaime: Thank you.

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Lorna: You're welcome. All right. If there is no other discussion or no other questions about item number eight at this time, then we could move to item number nine. And I'd like to table item number nine for our next meeting, unless there are any concerns with that. We need just a little bit more time to prepare this item before we are ready to present it at the full board if that's okay with everybody. All right. Well, with that in mind we will move to item number 10. And this is Citizen's Participation. Public comment during this part of the agenda must be limited to matters within the jurisdiction of the board. No subject matter may be acted upon by the board unless this subject is on the agenda and it's scheduled for action. So is there anybody wishing to be heard at this time in public comment?

Heather: Can I say something again?

Lorna: Yes, Heather, please.

Heather: Yes, Heather Nay for the record. In regards to the new teachers and the other teachers leaving I just want everyone to know that Julian personally is so much happier with his new teacher and the communication between parent and teacher is amazing now. Like, she's in contact with me, we've been sick, she's been sending Julian, like, emails and letters home, like, letting him know that he's missed. And this was something we didn't get from the old teachers. So if anyone's concerned about this, it was literally for the best.

Lorna: This is Lorna. Thank you for that comment, Heather. And I'll be honest with you, I agree with you based on the information I have with regard to the teachers who have left. And I think one of the lessons that we've also learned going forward is experience in years does not always equal dedication in the amount of work that people are willing to put forward. For our children and our children these are the best. So we are going to accept nothing but the best.

Heather: Definitely.

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Lorna: Okay. Seeing no other public comment request at this time, we'll move to item number 11 and that is adjournment of the meeting. I thank you everyone for their participation tonight and appreciate you coming and we will see you back here again soon.

Jaime: Thank you.

Heather: Bye, everybody.

Lorna: Bye-bye.

Tammy: Heather?

Heather: Yes.

Tammy: Before you hang up, but not necessarily needing to be on the record, I was at the school the other day and Julian came up to me and gave me a hug and said, "I know you, you're the mayor's friend." I was like, "Yes, I am, Julian."

Heather: It's the mayor's world. We just live in it.

Tammy: Yes.

Alee: This is Alee Moore. I had a quick question. Is there a status update on the construction and the cafeteria?

Tammy: Well, you know what we can do, we can agenda that at the next meeting by then, we'll probably have a little bit more information. We don't have actual finite details yet, but we're pretty close, so the city can weigh on that at the next meeting.

Lorna: Okay, Tammy.

Alee: Sounds good.

Lorna: Thank you for that recommendation. We'll add it to the next meeting.

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Alee: Thank you.

Lorna: Yep. Thank you.

Alee: Bye.