

LAS VIRGENES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
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**LAS VIRGENES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
CURRICULUM COUNCIL MEETING**

December 7, 2021

**Present:** Emily Austin, Su Baird, Bella Bernt, Melissa Brennan, Kirby Brock, Marnie Davis, Karrie DeMarco, Marlene Didierjean, Dr. Clara Finneran, Willow Gavin, Sheri Given, Dr. Ryan Gleason, Jessica Guenther, Nicole Goldstein, Robin Hassen, Lisa Hatfield, Jeannie Hoffman, Tina Johnson, Paula Johnson, Laura Kintz, Doug Kohno, Leslie Martinez, Pam McDonnell, Darci Miller, Hannah Mogul, Michael Robkin, Allison Stein, Lesli Stein, Amy Strachman, Courtney Peoples, Lila Rahimi, Sandra Ritvo, David Rivas, Pamela Rudy, Monette Thomas, Carrie Trupp, Dr. Kate Vadehra, Heather Wassenberg, Adam Weinstein

The meeting was called to order at 3:06 p.m. by Dr. Finneran, who welcomed the Committee and introduced Dr. Gleason to review the Service Learning Data and Feedback agenda item.

*Service Learning Data and Feedback*

Dr. Gleason reminded the Committee that students are experiencing challenges meeting their service learning graduation requirement due to the pandemic. Given this and reflecting on the current 60-hour service learning graduation requirement, a desire surfaced to take a deeper dive to pull and review data which could inform a recommendation to potentially shift LVUSD's current board policy. This process will be overseen by three committees to support the board's consideration and decision. If Dr. Finneran, Ms. Kintz, and Board representatives are in agreement, and an update is to be considered, Dr. Gleason will bring this back to the Council for a more formal recommendation later this spring.

Dr. Gleason shared that service is and will remain an important part of LVUSD's curriculum and vision. It's important not only in high school, but equally valued in elementary and middle schools, as well as within the clubs and organizations whose activities students participate in to support and serve our communities. What is specifically being reconsidered is whether service learning should consist of a 60-hour graduation requirement, as our current board policy requires? The graduation requirement was implemented with great vision and good faith that service can support student learning. However, multiple years into a requirement, it's important to review policies to see how and whom they may be impacting. This data is reflected in the following:



- Looking at the 11th grade class from 2018-2019 (just prior to the pandemic), 50% of LVUSD students were deficient in service hours.
- 33% of students were already behind in their senior year and one of every three high school students were deficient by more than a year's worth of hours (15).

Dr. Gleason wondered if subgroups of students were more impacted by this deficiency in requirements than others and found this to be the case. They determined whereas 50% of the student population overall was on track at the end of 11th grade year, only 27% of students who come from impoverished families, and 32% of our students who have disabilities or who come from families in which college education is less than a college degree, are accessing or on track for their service learning. There is a disproportionate impact of this graduation requirement on the subgroups of students who have higher DNF rates and need more academic intervention supports and this suggests there's a strong body of data to look at revisiting the current graduation requirement with the following questions in mind:

1. How might the District meaningfully implement service through TK-12?
2. What could be put in place of a graduation requirement that honors the core value of service students provide to the community, in ways which support their thinking, provide opportunity for reflection, and will be recognized by our community as an important value? In other words, how might LVUSD acknowledge service to students in high school outside of a graduation requirement.

**Question:** Do students get a list of potential service areas? And what would count as a service requirement or do they get to pick and then somebody reviews it and approves it or not?

**Answer:** Both are true. There is a list of approved organizations. And that list continues to be updated by our administration. And students can also select their own path and then reflect on that experience and submit it to the administrative designee.

Dr. Gleason shared that he did not have definitive data as to why this disproportionality exists. It could be that students from lower income backgrounds, (with only 27% who are on track) are working part time jobs after school. As it currently stands, service has to be unpaid volunteer work. Our families who identify as low income have doubled over the last five years, which is an important metric to keep in mind.

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**Question:** I'm just wondering if there are other districts that have already changed this or not? Is there anyone that we can look at as an example of changing or dropping this requirement?

**Answer:** I'm not aware of other districts who actually have this as a formal graduation requirement. LVUSD was very progressive in calling out service as an important value. And the intent is to maintain this value. One recommendation is a new diploma seal, The State Seal of Civic Engagement. This could allow the district to recognize students who meet the requirements of the Seal, including engaging in civic activity. The Seal acknowledges and recognizes those students who have gotten to that threshold, while not requiring every student to do so.

**Question:** We talk about the district valuing service learning, but I'm curious as to where this shows up other than requiring kids to do it? How do we support or help our students do this in a variety of ways? I've never talked about it in my class. Where do we demonstrate this value and how do we help kids do it? If we're taking away this requirement, would a new situation or a new recognition and praise come to the kids who have the privilege to be able to do this? They likely don't have to work, or they might have a car and can get themselves to service opportunities? They don't have to watch younger kids. Aren't we just privileging privileged kids again? How will we identify groups that are able to do this? What are we looking at that's going to help them do this? If we value this?

**Answer:** I will speak to some of these questions, but I don't want to infer that there's not deeper exploration needed. These are important guiding questions. When looking in terms of where service already exists, I would say well, you actually know a lot of places. Your social justice leadership class, as an example, will have a civic component to it. You are an ASB advisor. So I'd have to ask you, as the expert of how many clubs already at Agoura, as an example, are service oriented. I think that there is an area of civic education in the social studies framework that is not necessarily explicit and called out yet. And although the graduation requirement has been a big focus of the policy, when we think of service learning from a board policy perspective, I think there is a need for a TK-12 dialogue around these important questions. The questions of privilege and access that Ms. Brennan posed are really vital, because the system currently, one could argue right now from the data, gives those with privilege an advantage to accessing completion. At the same time, part of the privilege seems to be baked into the current system –

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meaning the service is something that is outside of the schools themselves, as opposed to supporting the internal school and the internal community. So access is a really important part of any designation you have. So could we eliminate systemic barriers entirely through a change? No, but I do think we need and can address some of it.

**Question:** I dug through the old minutes from when the service learning graduation requirement was approved by the board. They referenced another organization and in their references for best practices for service learning, they describe this as civic engagement. But with that definition, just an idea, there's no reason not to include going to work, right? Because that is how you engage with society and become a production person. So one option we can consider is to include eight hours or something like that, if that would help level the playing field. And the other point that they talked about was mentoring. So at some point, could you talk about, how much engagement there is from teachers with the kids, and how much feedback they get, selecting their project or actually learning from it? Or is it just, sign off on your 15 hours, write a report, and you're done.

**Answer:** I was not here but as I understand it, the intent of the initial policy was that it's not only for students to participate in service, they also need to reflect on service. Staff, with the very best of intentions, have tried to create thoughtful reflection. There are 2000 students at each high school, and a lot of priorities which is important to keep in mind. We can't just talk about service learning in a bubble. We have to talk about the other things kids need right now in terms of mental health, and in terms of the college-going pressures, especially in a test-blind SAT, ACT climate. The question of what we do is one, and the questions Ms. Brennan posed are vital to reflect upon. The questions right now before us are should this be a graduation requirement? How might we still honor the commitment and value to service and also make it TK-12 and transparent to the community as an important value.

Student Board representative Ms. Bella Bernt added that there are clubs at the high schools that offer service learning hours. She shared that she thought if we were to remove this as a graduation requirement, there would definitely be a decrease in the amount of clubs because the reason the majority of students form clubs, and the reason that they get student members, is because students think, "I need to get my service learning requirement hours filled." So if there's a way to advertise it as more as doing good for our community, or again, looking at a different way of promoting service learning hours, that would be great, but removing the requirement

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would definitely create a decrease in club participation.

Dr. Gleason shared that the reason that Curriculum Council is involved in this is because the initial policy and recommendation came through this Committee, however the next time he joins the Council, this work will have gone through two additional committees. He encouraged everyone to reach out if they have thoughts, feelings or questions they would like to share and reiterated that it's a complex issue. He expressed that what he did not want anyone to hear is that we do not value service. It's how it manifests as a graduation requirement and who it impacts, that we are revisiting, so we can support the holistic priorities of our kids, especially post COVID.

Mr. Weinstein offered that at his previous site they had a service learning requirement as well as class level advisories, of which service was a major component. The advisory system for service learning worked well if we're considering keeping service learning as a graduation requirement.

Dr. Gleason elaborated for context that we're currently looking at our high school bell schedules, which had to shift to an 8:30am start time in accordance with the law, and how that's affected period links and overall schedules. A committee is reviewing this to make sure we continue to have the best schedule to support kids and one of those models has advisory time built into it, where this could happen. He stated he did not want to get ahead of this process but what he heard Mr. Weinstein saying is that real service learning comes through reflection, coaching, mentoring, and application, not just doing the work. Dr. Gleason stated this takes time, bandwidth, and energy. And a question to ask is, where do we not spend energy, so we can prioritize it to the right places? He asked that if anyone would be interested in processing this more, prior to when it could come back for a vote, to please reach out to him or Dr. Finneran.

Dr. Finneran thanked Dr. Gleason for the information and conversation. She reiterated that this process started months ago, in the middle of COVID, when with the support and direction of the board, we moved towards adjusting and reexamining these requirements.

*Social Emotional Learning*

Dr. Finneran shared that a federal advisory had recently been released by the Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy on children's mental health. The 53 page report essentially asked 11 sectors, education among them, to take a look at the state of mental health and to prioritize support of it. This has been a value at LVUSD for quite some time. And thanks in large part to the work of this group the District has made a lot of progress. For example, we have a counseling center that

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didn't exist just a few years ago and have expanded counseling in K-12. We also now have a full time counselor at each elementary school. So these are the ways we've been responding to what we've been seeing. Last summer, the District read *Permission to Feel*, authored by Mark Brackett from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. It was a great experience to read that book and we have been facilitating and implementing this framework at a number of our schools.

Dr. Finneran invited Ms. Kintz to share about the social emotional initiatives in more detail and what our students' experiences may be in relation to this. Ms. Kintz stated that the district has been focused on social emotional development for some time with Dr. Gleason introducing professional development (PD) using Yale University's RULER Framework last summer and Principal Jorns, Principal Logan, and Ms. Kintz continuing to offer PD to our teachers. Many are already implementing these lessons. Some of our counselors have worked to develop a scope and sequence of character development and lessons, and some of our schools are implementing second steps. The RULER framework serves as the next layer of social emotional learning which at its core is the development of emotional intelligence in oneself and others and how this impacts our daily life. RULER stands for recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing and regulating emotions. Ms. Kintz stressed the importance of exploring how we experience emotions, how they inform our behavior and how we adapt to them. RULER uses a tool called a Mood Meter to introduce vocabulary words for feelings and also identifies areas or quadrants of feelings, so that staff and students can better clarify how they may be feeling and learn strategies for supporting their emotions.

Ms. Kintz facilitated a visualization and the Committee shared emotions and feelings that arose.

In closing, Ms. Kintz explained that the District is currently offering 3 ½ days of RULER training with 2 options available, each day. Through the classes this summer and the current classes, many of our teachers are using RULER strategies and more are asking for training. As we are folding RULER into the other rest of the social emotional learning, it's possible that we could bring this program (or another) to the Curriculum Council for a more formal recommendation for district-wide adoption.

Dr. Finneran added that the district is also using a social emotional assessment tool called RALLY which was started last year, and is administered quarterly to 4th-12th grade students. It also pulls in RenStar academic data so we can pair social emotional and academic data side by side. We can determine our highest need students and assess how to provide support and formulate a comprehensive response to this group. The system is imperfect but Dr. Finneran

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expressed gratitude that LVUSD already has many of these important pieces in place.

*Academic Data Overview*

Coupled with social emotional work, Dr. Finneran explained that the District looks at other pieces of data to determine what types of programs to implement, determine next steps, how to prioritize these, and creates a Local Control Accountability Plan or a strategic plan. Some examples include data related to our English learners, RenStar (one of our quarterly assessments), and attendance which all help to inform our practice and decisions. More than 34,000 districts/schools use RenStar. The results are issued as a norm referenced score or a percentile rank. It ranks students in the same grade nationally. She shared some of the academic data, and explained that it was so much better than anticipated. National experts were worried about how students would emerge from the pandemic, especially academically. In a district that looks like LVUSD, it turns out that their social emotional needs are more significant than the academic needs evidenced by the following RenStar data. The average percentile ranked decline across all RenStar scores in grades 2-8, compared to pre-pandemic, ELA had a 4% rank decrease and math an 11% decrease. LVUSD scores when comparing Winter 2020 to Spring 2021, had an increase in ELA of 1% and a 6% decline in math. These were less severe than anticipated by educators and researchers. Differences were more pronounced in places that have higher rates of foster and homeless youth, and black and brown students, which is why Las Virgenes has not seen that same decline.

Specifically, when looking at ELA since 2017-2018, LVUSD is at 74% at or above proficient and we see a pattern. A dip, a flatline, and then, an increase at the end of the school year. At the end of last year, LVUSD was at 79%. In the spring of 2021, the math state number was 70%, the national number was 77%, and LVUSD was at about 82%. Which is where we remain. If these percentages continue to increase, we will be where we were, pre-pandemic.

Dr. Finneran also shared some highlights, thanks to the work of this group and several other committees who thoughtfully provided feedback about decisions that needed to be made and things that needed to put in place. Some of these are:

- Instructional rounds (non-evaluative classroom observations and conversations)
- Cognitive Coaching (how to coach one another) investments
- Adaptive Schools (how to work together) investments
- Online support programs such as Lexia Reading and Symphony Math
- Our intervention specialists are working closely with teachers to address individual



- student and small group needs
- Social emotional well-being and awareness

Board Member Stein expressed that this data was really good information to receive and very hopeful. She stated it validated what the Board knew, which is that our teachers and all of our employees worked very hard during the shut down. She thanked everyone. Dr. Vadehra said she hoped teachers and staff felt good about the data and proud of it. It reinforces the great job everyone has been doing. She also thanked them for their hard work.

Ms. Davis raised a concern about RenStar Assessments which is that sometimes when students take the assessment, the questions are the same. Teachers at AHS and high school students are noticing this and wondering if there is a way to administer different versions of the test? Additionally, there does not appear to be an easy way for students to see their tests scores. Teachers are wondering if it might be possible to pull the results into Aeries. At the high school math level, it also appears that RenStar is not providing the data for some of the tests. Dr. Finneran said that the District would look into these issues, because if true, it would reduce the validity of the results.

Ms. McDonnell added that this is true for students who score at higher levels so it is more of an issue for secondary students. At the high school level, the more likely it is that there will be repeat questions because once a student reaches a certain level, the test cannot differentiate any further.

Student Board representative Ms. Willow Gavin confirmed this and added that she was glad to hear committee members sharing this as a concern. As a student who has taken RenStar for four years, she and other students do recognize repeat questions because they've answered them before.

### Update Regarding Progress with Secondary ELA and Math Adoption Process/Professional Development

There are some curricular materials expiring this year in ELA and math. Dr. Finneran met with both department's chairs this past month and based on the feedback provided during these meetings, the District has made a decision to renew these programs for one year to provide time to evaluate what will be best to adopt, going forward. There is a new math framework due out in the spring, so this will also provide time to better understand the framework and evaluate the available materials based on this new

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information. This means the Council will not see a major adoption during the first part of this year. What they will see, however, are books that teachers and administrators would like to add to our core literature list and there may be some course changes for review. In addition, during the department chair meetings, there were conversations about professional development, so Dr. Finneran will likely be providing an update on this, during a future meeting.

Ms. Kintz offered her appreciation to all for attending and for their participation. Dr. Finneran thanked those who were able to join the Jennifer Silvers event and wished everyone well.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 pm.