
Lift for Life Academy

2020-21 Annual Review

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Annual Review Process

SEMO fulfills its oversight responsibilities by conducting an ongoing standards-based annual review process in a variety of ways throughout the school year. It begins with an examination of a host of information about the school, some of it provided by the school to our liaison; including sponsor-required documents, assessment data, and financial audits that provide evidence of academic and organizational health. The Charter School Liaison carefully reviews this information along with DESE generated reports including annual MSIP-5 data and the Annual Performance Review (APR). While such documentation provides important information on how a school is performing, the SEMO Charter Liaison understands “seeing is believing” and has incorporated informal monthly site visits into its charter school annual review process along with in-depth full day site visits held in the spring. The SEMO Charter Liaison reviews all board meeting agendas, minutes and document packets and attends all board and committee meetings. SEMO also stays in close communication with various offices within DESE to monitor school compliance with state and federal guidelines and works with schools to address any issues that may arise. Upon release of MSIP-5 and APR data, SEMO finalizes the school’s Annual Review Report that identifies areas of strength and growth. The school’s board of directors is required to review this report.

Virtual Interviews, Document Reviews and Site Visits

The site visit, interviews and document reviews, provides a mechanism for SEMO to verify and corroborate information collected throughout the year by gauging the culture and climate of a school and gathering additional evidence on school performance from a range of perspectives. This year interviews and classroom observations were conducted virtually as well as in person. The SEMO Charter Liaison’s onsite and virtual visits include:

School Leader Interviews

Teacher Interviews

Staff Interviews

Parent Interviews

Student Interviews

Board Member Interviews

Support Staff Interviews

Classroom Observations

Document Submissions

School Day Observations

Financial Review

Review of Student Support Systems

Review of LEA Operations and HR

Findings from the virtual and on site visits are incorporated into the Annual Review Report.

Required Document Submission

To better assure that schools meet and maintain all of their State/Federal/Local compliance and reporting responsibilities, the SEMO Charter Liaison has developed a Required Document Submission Checklist located in the Charter Handbook. While many documents require an annual submission, some are quarterly (enrollment numbers) and monthly (financial reports, board meeting minutes, agendas and board packets).

Evaluation Standards Elements of School Evaluation:

- I. Transformative and Innovative Vision
- II. Responsible Board Governance
- III. Strong School Leaders
- IV. Transformational Curriculum
- V. Empowering Culture of Achievement
- VI. Transformational Teachers
- VII. Engaged Parents and Community
- VIII. Comprehensive Student Support System
- IX. Substantive Student Academic Achievement
- X. Sound Financial Operations

Summary

Please note that the comments in this report reflect the analysis as of March 2021.

Areas of Strength

Here are the top strengths that you can leverage to continuously improve and move towards your vision.

Vision

Stakeholders maintain a strong commitment to the school's mission.

Governance

The board fulfills its governance responsibilities and monitors academic and financial performance.

The board is a working board, lending expertise in finance, operations and academics.

Leadership

The Executive and Deputy Director and Principals provide strong leadership that generates genuine progress in student achievement and teacher instructional skills.

Curriculum and Instruction

Each year, LFL makes progress on a path towards a rigorous, engaging academic program that is more student centered.

Culture of Achievement

This is one of the great strengths of the school. The environment is one within which children are nurtured in both socio-emotional and academic areas.

Teachers

Hard working teachers embrace continuous improvement and invest in students in socio-emotional and academic growth.

Parents

In general, parents are active partners in school life.

Student Support Systems

Overall, the Student Support System is a significant strength of the school.

Areas for Growth

Here are the key areas for growth that could move LFL towards your vision.

Vision

Clarify and communicate the school's new focus on inquiry. "Blend inquiry/project based learning in a family based environment where LFL helps your child identify their passion and turn this into their profession."

Board Governance

Prioritize continuous board development and onboarding of new board members. Implement recommendations based on the boards self evaluation including expanding board diversity.

Curriculum and Instruction

Continue to focus on ways to increase opportunities for students to engage in real life learning and problem solving.

Develop a fully aligned curriculum to help students achieve.

Strengthen literacy with a focus on academic vocabulary and culturally relevant teaching and learning.

Teachers

Continue to develop instructional skills around literacy, inquiry, project based learning, and readers writers workshop.

I. Transformative and Innovative Vision

Areas of Strength

- A. The vast majority of teachers, staff and administration clearly share the same mission and vision for the school.
- B. The vast majority of stakeholder interviews indicated the existence of a strong sense of community and collaboration.
- C. Stakeholders were involved in decision making regarding COVID based learning adjustments.

Areas for Growth

- A. A vast majority of stakeholders state the schools mission is to provide a supportive, family oriented environment. Focus on developing a clear message as a school of inquiry.

II. Responsible Governance

Areas of Strength

- A. The Board is a working board that operates in the best interests of students. Board meetings and individual member interviews strongly indicate that the board understands and believes in the school's mission.
- B. The Boards Committee structure allows for deeper knowledge of the Academy's operations, finance and education.
- C. The Board has implemented an annual self assessment process.
- D. The Board has all proper insurance policies in place.
- E. Members bring diverse areas of expertise to the board: finance, law, education, business, and healthcare.
- F. An onboarding policy has been adopted by the Board.
- G. About half the board has participated in available trainings in the past year through the Missouri Charter Association and Tueth - Keeney.
- H. LFLA board is compliant with state and federal statutes and regulations.
- I. All board members have cleared Criminal Background checks and FCSR registration.

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- J. The board is compliant with Missouri's Sunshine Law.
 - K. The governing board has a plan in place and school leaders review progress on goals and action steps during board meetings.
 - L. Board – school leader relations are very strong.
 - M. The board monitors ED performance, student achievement and financials. ED evaluation is based on measurable goals and completed each year.
 - N. Board interviews indicate that the board is aware of the key challenges and issues school leadership faces and provides appropriate support.
 - O. LFLA board fulfills its responsibilities to SEMO, as defined in the contract between the two institutions.
 - P. The Board has conducted virtual board and committee meetings throughout the pandemic and has reviewed instructional plans and outcomes.
 - Q. Board policies are up to date. The board has a process for policy review and update.
 - R. Board members have developed good connections to the LFL community.

Areas for Growth

- A. This years board evaluation is thorough and can lead to increased member knowledge and skills in board governance and diversify the board.
- B. Policies are updated but reliant on the Budget Director for maintenance. The process of policy updating could be assigned to an administrative assistant.
- C. An onboarding process for new board members has been adopted. The process needs to be assigned to a committee and implemented. No formal training on school governance is currently in place for new board members.

III. Strong Leadership and Operations

Areas of Strength

- A. Leadership refers to the strategic plan as one of their guideposts.
- B. The vast majority of staff interviews indicate they value LFLA's ability to implement changes and improvements immediately.

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- C. LFLA's response to closure due to the coronavirus indicates that leadership has structures in place to address unanticipated challenges. These plans build in flexibility that enables quick adjustments when initial ideas meet hard reality.
 - D. Interviewees expressed the belief that Leadership fully embodies the vision of LFLA.
 - E. Staff, parent and student interviews strongly indicate that Leadership is available and prepared to hear concerns or suggestions.
 - F. The ED and Budget Director continue to manage LFLA's finances with the long term future of the LEA in mind.
 - G. Student enrollment is strong with waiting lists for most grade levels.
 - H. Leadership plays an important role in shaping LFLA's culture of family, support and social and emotional growth.
 - I. Staff and school leaders indicate a strong desire to increase staff diversity.
 - J. The school is compliant with state and federal statutes.
 - K. All LFL staff have cleared Criminal Background checks and FCSR registration.
 - L. LFLA limits access to MOSIS and Core Data to appropriate staff as needed by their roles.
 - M. LFL publishes its Annual Performance Report on its website.
 - N. Teacher interviews indicate that school leadership strongly supports their work.
 - O. Teachers have a voice in most decisions that impact their work.
 - P. Staff interviews strongly indicate that principals support the development of teachers towards improving academic outcomes.
 - Q. Teacher interviews indicate that the leadership team and instructional coaches focus strongly on improving teaching and learning and helping them design classroom lessons that are effective and efficient.
 - R. Teacher interviews indicate that they appreciate the level of collaboration and support among themselves and between leadership and staff; specifically noting that leadership takes a collaborative approach to problem-solving.
 - S. Student interviews indicate that discipline is handled fairly and consistently.
 - T. Before school closure suspensions were on a declining track.
 - U. Staff, teacher and parent interviews indicate that communication is one of LFL's significant strengths.

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- V. New teacher summer orientation and staff summer institutes are thorough and well designed.
 - W. Teachers cite LFLA PD program as a key factor in strengthening academic rigor.
 - X. Teachers note and appreciate that they have a voice in determining their personal areas for improvement (i.e. Passion Project).
 - Y. LFLA added a full time Director of Athletics. This position has served to increase the focus on athletics, involve more students and raise pride in the school.
 - Z. The LFLA team created and implemented a dyslexia screening process that meets DESE requirements and effectively uses screening data to provide useful information to teachers and parents.
 - AA.All instructional staff were trained on the dyslexia screening process and the characteristics and fundamental principles of dyslexia intervention.
 - BB.Screening data were used to create individualized intervention plans for those students most at risk.
 - CC.Classroom teachers target specific areas for intensified small groups during reading block.
 - DD.Progress monitoring is on-going using a variety of assessments including NWEA, Fontas & Pinnell, running records and winter/spring screening.
 - EE.LFLA has a full time literacy specialist at the elementary who works with the most challenged readers and trains/coaches classroom teachers and instructional assistants.
 - FF.The Director of Special Education has been in this role for 1 year. The program is growing under her leadership. She is knowledgeable about special education compliance requirements and routinely monitors compliance documentation and timelines with her team.
 - GG.Teachers are responsible for developing and monitoring IEPs for students assigned to their caseloads. IEP goals are based on MO Learning Standards and Grade-level expectations.
 - HH.Teachers collect classroom work and data on IEP goals to monitor student progress.
 - II. A special education management tool (SpedTrack), is used to document and monitor evaluations and IEPs. The team reports this is working effectively.
 - JJ. Evaluation, occupational therapy and speech-language therapy are provided by contract with a private agency. The LFLA special education team is satisfied with the services provided by the contracted agency.

KK.LFL Elementary has implemented several literacy programs including RISE and Leveled Literacy Intervention System (LLI—Fontas & Pinnell) for small group literacy intervention.

LL.The teachers report that students are making strong progress as a result of more focused and systematic instructional programming.

MM.Special and general education teacher collaboration is expected.

NN.Middle school special education services are primarily provided through a push in model. General education teams reported this service delivery model to be effective in supporting students with IEPs as well as other non-IEP students with similar support needs.

OO.A collaborative culture exists within the middle school teacher teams. The special education teacher is considered an essential part of the middle school instructional teams.

PP.Transition planning is a newer area of support for older students and the Director of Special Education is researching appropriate transition goals and activities to initiate 4-year transition planning.

QQ.The LFLA Student Parent Handbook contains required parental notifications and relevant board policies. The handbook is posted on the LFLA website and is available to parents and others in the LFLA community.

RR.LFLA enrollment form includes prompts for parent identification of special needs, Home Language, Migrant Identification, Homelessness, 504 and other medical or health concerns.

SS.Affinia Health is available to LFLA students and partners with the school to provide health education, immunizations, and physicals, among other services.

Operations/HR/Facilities

A. LFL students participate in fire, earthquake, tornado and active shooter/intruder response drills.

B. Transportation and food service have gone above and beyond to help students and families during these challenging times.

C. Custodial staff have met the challenge of implementing Covid mitigation strategies.

D. HR has been a strong leader in addressing and implementing all necessary pandemic measures.

E. Students interviews indicate they enjoy the food that is served.

F. The classrooms are clean and well kept and meet mitigation standards.

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- G. The physical space has expanded significantly in the last few years with the addition of the gym, high school wing, and elementary.
 - H. HR is implementing software to increase efficiency and effectiveness.
 - I. A Director of Operations has been hired and will begin July 1.
 - J. LFLA's teacher evaluation system embodies a continuous growth approach and includes feedback from non-managerial stakeholders.

Areas for Growth

- A. Increase teacher understanding of where their students are and how to analyze data and target support.
- B. Continue to explore and implement recruitment strategies that increase the number of diverse applicants.
- C. Enhance LFL's website to increase access and usability for parents, teachers and visitors.
- D. A recent Federal food procurement audit resulted in improvements in written procurement and purchasing process. The processes should be monitored and implemented.
- E. 7 teachers have expired certificates. Certificates should be up to date.
- F. HR and Finance need to be fully staffed to address the impact of Covid on their workload.
- G. Expand data-driven work to include assessment of social emotional development, inquiry learning and post secondary placement.
- H. M.S remains as a targeted school due to math and reading scores for students with IEP's. Continue to target this with a renewed sense of urgency.
- I. Current Special education caseloads are small. Elementary is in need of consistent high quality services. Monitor staffing and caseloads to determine if this is sufficient to provide appropriate services across all grade levels.
- J. Instructional minutes and group sizes should be regularly monitored to ensure that services can be scheduled and provided to meet the student's need.
- K. Planning for post-secondary transition as early as grade 8 should be implemented.
- L. DESE sponsors a Transition Institute each summer for secondary special educators. Consideration should be given to sending the middle school special education teacher and the special education director to this professional development institute.
- M. Clarity on how to provide special education evaluation and IEP services in a virtual setting has not been forthcoming at a national, state, or local level. Should additional school

closures be needed in the upcoming school year, these challenges will continue for all schools. The special education team should review IEP progress data immediately in the fall to determine the impact of virtual teaching on student progress.

IV. Transformational Curriculum

- A. LFL continues to make significant progress developing its documented curriculum.
- B. The student assessment plan incorporates a wide range of instruments (Fountas and Pinnell, NWEA, teacher made/compiled and MAP).
- C. The curriculum provides teachers with ample opportunity to leverage their own knowledge and skills to make it their own. Student interviews indicate that they appreciate the opportunity to learn different things in different ways.
- D. Student interviews indicate what makes LFLA better than other schools is a sense of family and a challenge to be your best. “Teachers here challenge us to advance your thinking and problem solve. And if you don’t understand, they stop and help.”
- E. Staff, parent and student interviews indicate that overall the curriculum is rigorous and students are challenged.
- F. Teachers meet in PLCs where they look at outcomes and posttests to monitor student growth.
- G. Curriculum management software is being implemented beginning with the elementary grades.
- H. The Academy has addressed the technology needs of learners and teachers. Teachers indicate they have appreciated the PD and support and will continue to implement many digital tools.
- I. Classroom observations revealed inquiry based lessons, readers workshop and project-based learning.
- J. Interviews indicate that LFLA “has made growth in raising teacher expectations for students, but we’re still not there yet.”
- K. Teacher interviews indicate that some teachers would like to implement a writing curriculum.
- L. Middle school student interviewees indicate they’d like more variety and choice in electives and after school activities.
- M. Student, teacher and school leader Interviews indicate a strong focus on academic achievement in tandem with meeting social-emotional needs of all children.

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- N. The school operates as a caring community where everyone supports one another. Many teachers know students by name schoolwide.
 - O. Classroom observations and student interviews reveal joy in the learning and teaching that happens at LFLA.
 - P. Teacher and student interviews strongly indicate that they are happy to teach and learn at LFLA.
 - Q. Teachers are embracing PLC work to strengthen LFLA's curriculum.
 - R. Reading instruction centers on Readers Workshop at the elementary and middle.
 - S. Parent and student interviews strongly indicate that staff effectively help students having difficulties in school.
 - T. Teacher, staff and parent interviews strongly indicate the children feel safe at the school and neighborhood.
 - U. Student interviews indicate that they appreciate their teachers because they build strong relationships and provide help when needed.
 - V. Students note that there is not much bullying at the school and most of the kids are really kind to each other.
 - W. Staff, parent and student interviews strongly indicate that expectations for behavior are clear and that teachers expect great work and behavior from all students.
 - X. The addition of a gym greatly expands the opportunities for large group gatherings and sports/indoor games. Ongoing facilities expansion will continue to enhance educational opportunities.

Areas for Growth

- A. Continue to focus on ways to increase opportunities for students to engage in “deeper learning” and problem solving.
- B. Specialists indicate that they must create their own curriculum, though they consider this as an opportunity. LFLA should ensure that their work is codified and incorporated into schoolwide scope and sequence documents to support newly hired specialists in the future.
- C. Consider focused PD time throughout the year for vertical and horizontal curricular work in all content areas.
- D. Teachers note that appropriate leveled texts and novels are lacking for m.s. and h.s. ela.

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- E. H.S students would like increased rigor in ELA.
 - F. Consider implementation of a writing curriculum.
 - G. Student interviews indicated a desire for additional electives including vocal music and a strong band program.
 - H. Consider clear and expanded career pathways for students.
 - I. Continue to review and expand Dual Credit offerings.
 - J. Within the written curriculum, focus on more thorough documentation of units and incorporate model unit assessments.

V. Empowering Culture of Achievement

Areas of Strength

- A. Student, staff and parent interviews indicate the school is a safe place to teach and learn.
- B. Teacher interviews indicate they enjoy working at LFLA; citing its strong sense of community as a major factor.
- C. Interviews and observations indicate that teachers excel at building teacher/student relationships.
- D. Student state they can get help from any teacher.
- E. Teachers indicate there is immediate response when they need classroom assistance.
- F. Each campus implements age appropriate Covid mitigation measures

Areas for Growth

- A. Continue to explore and address Covid mitigation measures and communicate these measures to all stakeholders including potential new students and families.
- B. Although LFL provides security at many events, student and parent interviews indicate a desire for increased safety at athletic events.

V. Transformational Teachers

Areas of Strength

- A. This years PD focused on teachers' personal passions has been impactful to teachers and student growth.
- B. Strong staff development has supported teachers during the quick transition to digital instruction.
- C. Teachers state that they believe all students can learn and provide assistance for those who struggle.
- D. Student interviews indicate that the vast majority of courses are rigorous and teachers hold them accountable.
- E. Parent and student interviews indicate teachers build strong relationships with students and families.
- F. Student and leadership interviews state that teachers provide help to students beyond the instructional day.
- G. Classroom observations demonstrate an inquiry based approach to learning.
- H. Teachers use a variety of instructional methods and assessments in their classrooms.
- I. LFL teachers have made a tremendous transition to digital learning and adjusted their teaching and student monitoring.
- J. Technology support through hardware, software, and professional development and coaching has had a significant positive impact on teacher transition.

Areas for Growth

- A. Review and assess digital learning strategies for continued or expanded use.
- B. Expand PBL opportunities to further engage students.
- C. Continue to connect students learning to real world issues.

VII. Parent and community engagement:

Areas of Strength

- A. Interviews across all stakeholders and LFLA's performance during the early stages of school closure due to the COVID-19 outbreak strongly indicate that parental support and engagement is a key strength.

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- B. Teacher and parent interviews strongly indicate that parents partner with LFLA to support their students' education.
 - C. Parent interviews indicates that in general, parents know how well students are doing in class. Teachers are responsive to parent inquiries

Areas for Growth

- A. Parent interviews indicated a desire to increase involvement, i.e., PTO.
- B. Consider parent membership on board committees when appropriate.

VIII. Comprehensive Student Support System

Areas of Strength

- A. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is identified as a priority in the LFLA culture. Students and classroom teachers described a culture in which students are taught to believe in themselves, to push through hard things and to handle conflicts appropriately even without an adult nearby.
- B. Teachers stated that commitment to the emotional wellness of children is a huge motivator and a reason they love teaching at LFLA. Multiple staff described LFLA's social-emotional-behavioral supports and services to be strong at the MS and HS and growing at the Elementary.
- C. Staff members are expected to form relationships and to know students as individuals.
- D. Social Workers provide behavioral support, counseling and referrals.
- E. LFLA has developed the systems and allocated resources that enable students to get the supports they need when they need them.
- F. Grade level and building level leadership teams are highly collaborative and support classroom teachers with a "whatever it takes" approach.
- G. The stability of leadership and clarity of vision has contributed greatly to the development of strong student support services.
- H. A number of staff members cited student support services as one of LFLAs greatest strengths.
- I. Support services are in place for virtually all aspects of student needs.
- J. Most elementary classes include in-class supports such as sensory tools, alternative seating, noise reducing headphones, Zones of Regulation, Sensory and Motor breaks.

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- K. Restorative practices are included throughout middle and high school settings.
 - L. Social workers and counselors function as a collaborative mental health triage team.
 - M. Staff report a strong response to behavioral concerns in the classroom.
 - N. Out of school suspension is rarely necessary. The consistency of leadership, messaging, modeling, and allocation of resources has made this possible. It is uncommon to see this level of commitment and development in a public school. LFLA leadership and staff are to be commended for maintaining this focus and for continuing to make this a priority for the school.

Areas for Growth

- A. Consider career and mental health curriculum and services as part of the curriculum.
- B. Several staff expressed the importance of engaging parents as partners in the social-emotional-behavioral development of students. Consideration could be given to live streaming/recording of parent workshops for those parents who are unable to participate in person at school—due to childcare or work schedules.
- C. Consider developing weekly Wellness lessons and other mental health resources which are openly available to anyone on the LFLA website.
- D. The LFLA website could be improved to provide increased engagement for parents and access to information.

IX. Substantive Student Academic Achievement

Areas of Strength

- A. Leadership has committed to a Performance Contract establishing growth targets for all learners.
- B. The contract includes multiple measures that provide both formative and summative data.
- C. The graduation rate at LFL has remained high — between 90 and 95%.
- D. The Academy has been accepted to the Missouri District Continuous Improvement program. DCI will provide a framework for continuous performance improvement Pr-K - 12.
- E. LFL has also received a Literacy Grant providing a focus on Middle School.

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- F. With the acquisition of Build Your Own Curriculum and the addition of a Director of Curriculum and Instruction, the Academy can now fully develop and align their curriculum in all content areas.
 - G. Due to Covid, this years attendance has been challenging to manage. Staff have committed significant time and energy to engage all learners, track students and provide support for those who have moved, disengaged, etc.

Areas for Growth

- A. Implementing clear career pathways may increase attendance and provide clearer direction for students.
- B. Review the accountability and assessment plan each year to determine fit for LFLA's current instructional model and delivery system.

X. Sound Financial Operations

Areas of Strength

- A. The Finance department is responsive to the needs of the Academy.
- B. A budgeting process has been developed and implemented. Buildings and departments can access and manage their own budgets.
- C. The Academy exceeds the minimum required fund balance.
- D. The Board Finance Committee meets regularly and reviews LEA finances.
- E. The school fulfills its fiduciary responsibilities
- F. Quarterly financial reports are posted on the LFL website.
- G. A financial audit is conducted annually.
- H. The Board has adopted a strong resolution on attendance reporting.
- I. Additional federal finances have supported areas impacted by Covid.
- J. Teacher salary schedules have been Board adopted.
- K. The LFL Foundation provides strong support for capital projects
- L. The Development and Academic staff are continually researching and apply for grants and other sources of funding.

Areas for Growth

- A. Implement attendance reporting review by the Finance Committee as per board resolution.
- B. With ESSER funds and other responsibilities, the finance office would benefit from full staffing.
- C. Increase staff responsibility in assigning, training and managing their budgets where appropriate.
- D. Financial policies and procedures have been clearly established. There is a need for adherence to these procedures including procurement practices.
- E. It is recommended that the audit be bid out every 3 years.
- F. Support staff salary schedules should be board adopted.