

EDUCATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
Thursday, November 18, 2021, 6:30 P.M.
CITY HALL, 8th Floor Conference Room
100 North Andrews Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301

Members	June 2021 – May 2022		
	Attendance	Present	Absent
Dr. Allen Zeman, Chair	P	4	0
Amy Ellowitz, Vice Chair	P	4	0
Heather Brinkworth	P	4	0
Ruchel Coetzee	P	1	3
Yolanda B. Francis	P	3	1
Leah Polhemus Hopkins	A	0	4
Tina Jaramillo	P	3	1
April Jeff	A	1	3
Colleen Lockwood	P	2	2
Tomislav Lukic	P	3	1
Lisa May	A	2	2
Vickie Melus	P	2	2
Christopher Relyea	P	4	0
Betty Shelley	P	2	2
Lillian Small	A	1	3
Rory Sponsler	P	3	1
Dr. Michele Verdi-Knapp	P	4	2
Moises Acosta	P	3	0
Denia Perloff	P	2	1
Suzanne Dean	P	2	0

Staff

Zoie Saunders, Chief Education Officer, City of Fort Lauderdale
 Crysta Parkinson, Prototype, Inc.

Guests

In Person

Sheila Shedd, Regional Partnership Development Leader, Bezos Academy
 Irene Eshak, Architect, Project Manager, and Construction Leader, Bezos Academy
 Marta Laos, Regional School Leader, Bezos Academy

Online

Liz Swanby, Senior Operations Leader, Bezos Academy
 Elias Gonzalez, Community Engagement, Bezos Academy
 Mark Strauss, Cadre Director
 Danielle Smith, Principal, Bennett Elementary

Deniece Williams

Michael Billins, Principal, Thurgood Marshall Elementary

Lane Polakoff, Curriculum Supervisor, Adjunct Professor at Broward College

Sarah Leonardi, Broward School Board

Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Dr. Allen Zeman, Board Chair.

Attendance and Roll Call, 21 appointed members; 10 needed for quorum

As of this date, November 18, 2021, fifteen (15) of the 21 members were present, which constituted a quorum.

Communication to the City Commission

The Education Advisory Board encourages the City Commission to express support to the School Board of Broward County to ensure the leases with Bezos Academy at the four identified schools are completed by January 31, 2022, to include North Fork Elementary School, Thurgood Marshall Elementary School, Bennett Elementary School, and Seagull Alternative High School.

Ask the School Board to prepare to expedite building permits and other infrastructure needs to support an opening by Fall 2022.

The Education Advisory Board acknowledges this is an expedited request and thanked the Commissioners for their commitment to meeting the needs for Early Childhood Education in Fort Lauderdale.

Motion made by Ms. Perloff, seconded by Mr. Relyea to approve the Communication to the Commission. **Motion** passed unanimously. (15-0)

Board Chair's Minute

Chair Dr. Zeman advised they are ramping up volunteer opportunities to do things that have significant meaning and impact on the Education Advisory Board's central mission, which is to improve educational achievement across the City. They continue to work on Strategic Initiatives, which are strategic for their City, but they are expanding beyond core issues. Today, they are going to discuss Bezos Academy as a program, but he would like everyone to think of this as an opportunity to fundamentally change the City's role in education on birth through age five. This Board is going to have a big impact because no other organization takes primary responsibility for children who are born here or move here at a young age. From all the education research, these five years are fundamental to education achievement. There is extra capacity in some schools and the literal program

offered by Bezos is a perfect fit for Fort Lauderdale. He mentioned the Gap Analysis for the City of Fort Lauderdale and noted that education achievement is an east west issue in Fort Lauderdale. There are dramatic opportunities for improvement in west Fort Lauderdale and part of that is Early Learning; it is about literacy, showing up Kindergarten ready to learn rather than showing up in Kindergarten and struggling to identify numbers and letters. This Strategic Initiative has an opportunity to expand in some significant ways, so the City can think differently about the 3,000 kids born here every year. There is going to be significant growth over the next five to ten years in students in Fort Lauderdale and he is happy there are Strategic Initiatives they know will make a difference for their education for a long time. He requested everyone think of this expansively as an opportunity to fundamentally change the City's relationship with people born or who move here every year. As a Board, think about opportunities that open beyond the Bezos Foundation program.

Self-introductions were made. Ms. Saunders advised that Dr. Lori Canning could not be here this evening.

Strategic Initiative Updates

- **Early Learning**
 - **The Bezos Academy**, Presentation by Sheila Shedd, Regional Partnership Development Leader at the Bezos Academy

Ms. Saunders reported that the Bezos Academy identified the State of Florida as one of the areas they wanted to expand and first contacted Vice Mayor Moraitis. From there, they had initial conversation and were immediately impressed and excited about the opportunity to expand Early Learning opportunities in the City of Fort Lauderdale. This fits a need they have had for many years and this Education Advisory Board has been very instrumental in leading the effort of expanding Early Learning opportunities. They know there are under-enrolled elementary schools that could benefit from this high-quality type of programming. There have been several meetings, touring four different schools, and as an update to the Education Advisory Board, the School Board of Broward County approved the first partnership agreement, which was allowing them to share floor plans for the four school locations they are working with. The Bezos Academy is interested in opening at all four locations assuming they can continue with the timeline to open in the Fall 2022, which is a key thing to discuss.

Ms. Shedd provided a brief video presentation. Bezos Academy is a non-profit, tuition free, Montessori inspired preschool network. They believe every child deserves the advantages that an excellent preschool provides. Early Childhood Education helps children thrive and their potential is dramatically impacted by what happens from birth to about five or six years old, that is why it is important to invest in preschool education. Not only do they build a love of learning, but they also set the children up for success in the future. Their first school was a single classroom with a maximum of 20 students.

Ms. Shedd discussed the history of why Bezos Academy came into existence. Their mission is to partner with others who are focused on quality Early Education, bringing quality to the table and not sparing any resource, making sure the children are given a chance to be prepared for Kindergarten. When they come into a community the partnerships look different, they are not always going to be School Districts. They partner with all types; with senior citizens and retirement homes, which was their first school. Since then, they have expanded the partnership to work with private landowners, those who have excess space to host a Bezos Academy within their property. One of the key things they want to discuss is thinking outside the box. They know the Board represents all kinds of organizations, whether they are private, public, non-profit, or faith based. They are looking for more mission alignment. If the Board is as committed to education as they are, they want to talk. They appreciate the support in getting those first four schools across the line. One key thing is getting the lease agreement signed. The goal is to have everything signed by January 31, 2021, so the focus could be on the school launch in the Fall 2022. When they are looking at opening these schools they are not looking to come in as Bezos Academy, they cannot do it alone.

Mr. Gonzalez commented if anyone has connections throughout the State of Florida in communities in need with a desire to have this, let them know, they are always looking for partners. They like to go into a community and not displace already established operators, they like to work and be a part of the community. They are happy with their partnership with the Senior Center, the seniors love the children, and they activate activities where the children can participate. They like to identify community leaders early and work with them on how they can turn their locations into a useful community venue. He could not say what it would look like in Fort Lauderdale, but they like to bring people that are of the community to the table, so they can tell them in what ways they can synergize.

Ms. Laos mentioned education philosophy and the Montessori program. Their program is based on the principles designed, which is play of work, prepare the environment, and how they intentionally prepare the environment with Montessori materials, which are not seen in a traditional childhood program. There is freedom within limits; they have choices, hands-on learning, and independence. Teachers are there to support the children. They are planning to hire teachers from within the community and they will be trained and certified.

Ms. Swanby mentioned growth strategy and stated her focus is on logistics. The reason there is an urgency is because they try to align with local school districts in terms of timing, launching in the Fall and teachers starting at a certain time. In terms of the growth strategy, they identified the need in Florida. The population is growing and there is a large population of people who get excluded from things like Early Childhood Education, which should be a basic right, not necessarily a privilege. Their hope is that they have hundreds of schools across Florida, and these four locations are the first of many more to come. It is imperative they do things with the community, not to a community, so they look for recommendations from everyone. The best recommendations they get come from people

deeply committed and rooted into the communities they are looking to expand into.

Ms. Saunders asked Ms. Shedd to share about the model and how they operate year around and full days.

Ms. Shedd explained they are a full-time Early Education provider, working Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 or 6:00 p.m., and they are also year around, so parents know their children will be in a quality education environment and they can commit themselves to full-time work. The key thing they want to emphasize is if a parent wants to get into the classroom, they will train and help them on a succession plan, so they could start as an Assistant Teacher and put them on a path to become a head of school. That is where they are trying to change the dynamics of the industry for it to become a career, not just a job. It is believed this will be a ripple effect, not only with the children, but the families themselves, and the community.

Ms. Swanby thought it was important for children show up and not worry about their basic needs other than learning ABC's or Montessori work; they try to remove all barriers including from the family. Many parents do not have the ability to pick up their children at 2:00 p.m., so it is critical they have an extended day. Often, children have food insecurity, so it is critical they are fed three meals a day and if needed, weekend meal packs are provided as well. It is important children show up to their organization with basic clothing for inclement weather, so they are not worried about staying warm. Their model is encompassing of that and where there are areas they cannot directly fill, they try to rely on the School District to provide resources, so these children can get wrap-around services. They try to look at the child, not just necessarily if they can do basic arithmetic and reading.

In response to Chair Dr. Zeman, Ms. Shedd clarified this is a ten-year lease for free; they cover overhead, but the rent is free.

Chair Dr. Zeman stated in their case there are four under-enrolled schools that have some capacity left over and they may be the first places where they get started. They understand the urgency and are surprised they can go from January 31, 2022, to the start of the school year next August and have it done in time; it is a huge amount of work to do it right. One area the Board would like to learn more about is the goal and the capacity of Bezos Academy. They need to understand more about what Bezos Academy is trying to achieve, Early Childhood education or Enhanced Literacy. He questioned the limit as to how much they would do in Fort Lauderdale.

Ms. Shedd advised one of the key things is to eliminate wait lists, especially where there are smaller daycare centers; they want to tackle quality as far as possible because unfortunately, there are some daycare centers that do not have the high quality. Basically, students are allowed to come, but they are not being enriched, and they want to provide the enrichment.

Chair Dr. Zeman asked about limits because there are questions from community members who would like to know the limit of the generosity of the Bezos Foundation in Fort Lauderdale. Four schools give a certain number of students in a traditional Early Learning Center, ages 3 and 4, free education and wrap-around services, and if mental healthcare is needed there are services that exist. He thought the City of Fort Lauderdale would be interested in providing support to help identify those kinds of resources. He questioned the limit of kids this Early Childhood Education would be provided to.

Mr. Gonzalez indicated it is not about the limit, it is about fulfilling the identified need. If there is a need in Fort Lauderdale beyond four schools and there are available sites, they will go in if it makes sense. He mentioned they also like to provide value three-prong, the children, community, and teachers. They are proud of trying to retain teachers from the community and training them. As far as the question about limit, it is more about demand and how they can complement what already exists without displacement.

Chair Dr. Zeman stated there are 3,000 kids born per year in Fort Lauderdale, so there will be a significant growth in student population over the next five to ten years based on known construction permits that have been provided. There are some zip codes in two-thirds of the geographic portion of Fort Lauderdale of extreme poverty where the gap between Early Learning, whether it is thought of as quantity or quality, is pronounced. They do not have great estimates of the need, but it is on the scale of 800 to 1,000 kids easily. If the answer is that they would meet the need, they would find in Fort Lauderdale that there are significant unmet needs of kids who do not get Early Education. Not pushing out providers is a good idea but pushing out providers who are not providing high quality Early Education is going to happen. There will be people who have a choice to go to the free Bezos Academy or to a low-cost one that does not deliver the same academic content. If Bezos is a choice, people will leave other institutions to go there. The reason the limit issue is so important is because the City of Fort Lauderdale would like to have a solution for Early Learning and Bezos' contribution could be significant, not in terms of the number, but in the quality of education. It is likely to attract others to live in Fort Lauderdale because there is such a wonderful opportunity to attend these schools. If the philosophy is that you will meet the need, they will do some work to find out what the need is; it will exceed the capacity of the four schools by a significant number and they have to think what could be done now versus what they plan in the future. Fort Lauderdale is an interesting combination of extreme wealth and high quality 100% affordable daycare families, and the opposite case where there are low-income and some significant poverty and other challenges that exist in pockets of Fort Lauderdale. The reality is that Bezos Academy and Fort Lauderdale are a wonderful fit, but he hopes the idea they work on is strategically in how it becomes a piece of an over-arching system because Bezos' vision is the same as Fort Lauderdale; no child should not have an opportunity to have Early Learning high quality with certified teachers, so when they show up at a formal school, they have all the advantages kids gain from such an experience.

Mr. Gonzalez indicated he was in the Army and one thing they talked about all the time was crawl, walk, run. There are four schools coming up and there is infrastructure

associated with that. Remember, they do not pay rent and they require space. With that in mind, they are here to fulfill the need and not to displace, but he would say that is a long-term plan, which requires many partners. They are more than happy to do so, but he sees that more in the long-term. Currently, the focus is to get the four schools up and running and then there can be discussion about long-term plans. There is infrastructure as well, it is not just them, it is location and partnerships, which is the aspect they do not control.

Chair Dr. Zeman advised the Board will continue to think strategically about this and plan for the next steps while executing near term steps. Crawl, walk, run is fine; they have a deep passion for helping the citizens of Fort Lauderdale and the need is a big part of their motivation. They have been planning for improvements, writing grants, and working with a variety of partners to make improvements over time, and there is a nice opportunity with Bezos coming to reengage people they have asked to participate and to ask those who are participating to do more. The City of Fort Lauderdale will lead that effort, coordinate the partners, and make sure they have an eye on what is best for the City. The need is profound and if they follow the need they will probably run, run, run instead of crawl, walk, run.

Ms. Jaramillo mentioned complementing and not displacing and stated that one of her concerns is the impact this will have on State and Local programs that have been serving communities for a long time. She questioned how they plan to navigate that to be sure they are complementing and not displacing programs already there. She also asked if their team has researched what the community members of Fort Lauderdale want and need, and if they have spoken directly to stakeholders.

Chair Dr. Zeman questioned which programs Ms. Jaramillo was talking about.

Ms. Jaramillo clarified she was talking about Early Head Start and the Early Learning Coalition of Broward.

Ms. Shedd advised they have started working with stakeholders across South Florida including the Children's Trust and the Early Learning Coalition. They have met with the Head Start leadership and have been having dialogue and understanding the dynamics of how they can complement each other. When looking at not displacing, they want to recognize there are stellar programs that are working, and they want to celebrate those. They are discussing things that make them successful. They are constantly speaking with the community and not just to those looking for space for them.

Ms. Saunders commented that Broward County Public Schools and Head Start have been involved in all these conversations with the Early Learning Coalition.

Mr. Polakoff stated they have been involved and from a School District point of view, they have the demographics to know there are enough children. There is a lack of space in Broward County, not just in the schools. Building capacity is not standing alone in

buildings, they are coming into four schools, and he mentioned the impact in the community besides those four schools. Currently, there is a lack of training availability for teachers to improve their methodologies in the school. The Early Learning Coalition does not have the capacity and the State not only has the capacity, but as they roll things out there are hiccups along the way that prevent them from getting the training they need. As training is offered to the schools and other schools, including private schools that do not have the capacity to give the teachers training is how they are going to make an impact in Fort Lauderdale and in other communities. If you want standalone three and four-year-old classrooms, you are not going to make as big an impact as quickly, but if you bring in other schools and train teachers there will be a bigger impact.

Chair Dr. Zeman questioned if they have capacity to train teachers who want to learn some of the same things new Assistant Teachers are learning to become certified Montessori teachers.

Ms. Shedd replied yes, part of the plan is to have an academy within the academy.

Ms. Laos stated they are currently working on developing a system for professional development and it is just in the beginning stages. There is a plan to expand that department within the Bezos Academy, so it will be a matter of having conversations with stakeholders in the area to see how they can collaborate and work together.

Chair Dr. Zeman indicated there is going to be a tremendous need. Part of the non-displacement is to train them.

Vice Chair Ellowitz questioned the application process.

Ms. Laos mentioned credentials for teachers. They must meet Florida State credentials, 45 hours, CDA, a Bachelor's Degree for the Lead Teacher, not for the Assistant, and they will be hiring teachers who do not have a Montessori certificate, but that will be part of the professional development and training.

Vice Chair Ellowitz questioned if there is ever an issue where teachers with the proper requirements cannot be found.

Ms. Laos stated they have not started hiring teachers in Florida, but there is a shortage of teachers in the State, and they understand it will be a challenge.

Ms. Swanby advised their preference is to hire locally, it is important they see value in the teachers and Administrators, but there is a teacher shortage, so there are situations where they hire outside. Partnerships are important because they go into the community and help find people to fill the schools. She was part of the initial team that evaluated the schools, which they narrowed down to five. They look at how many children there are and compare that number to how many available seats there are, quality or not quality. The chances of launching thousands of these programs and closing the gap entirely is not

reality, but she feels confident because there is such a great delta that they do not want to close existing programs.

Chair Dr. Zeman asked people on the call who are in the business of hiring teachers and assistants. If this group needs to hire 10 to 20 teachers and assistants to staff the level of Early Learning in the four schools, how much of a challenge it would be to find qualified people to apply for those jobs.

Principal Smith indicated she is currently in the process of trying to hire two Teacher Assistants since August; she needed four and has two on board. It is a difficult process and they do reach out to the community. She sees this as a great opportunity; there is a spark and interest in Early Childhood. She is concerned she might lose some of her teachers for this program because it is exciting. With her personal background and knowledge of Montessori, she knows it truly works and is ecstatic it is going to be at her school.

Principal Billins advised he has four vacancies for paraprofessionals, and it is centered around salary. Like Principal Smith, he is wary about losing teachers who will go to a different side of the campus.

Mr. Acosta questioned how locations are being selected, if it is takeovers of lower performing schools, and if they are looking at regions. He mentioned the application process and noted that schools are dealing with staffing issues world-wide. He asked how they are going to recruit and post the positions earlier. If applications were started earlier, they could get ahead.

Ms. Laos advised they have started the hiring process for the Heads of schools and those positions are posted on their website and on Indeed. The goal is to bring them in by January 31, 2022.

Ms. Saunders indicated when the Board learned about this opportunity the first thing they did was look at the data and Kindergarten Readiness at their schools as a key criterion they felt could be a large benefit to the community and a feeder into the elementary schools. They also looked at representation across the Cities, so the four schools being considered are in different locations across the City, where it is felt there is a need. Different layouts were looked at when touring the schools. She noted the under-enrolled schools were a big piece, they wanted to understand the capacity.

Dr. Strauss stated they took all those factors into account; it was not done lightly. Principals and District personnel were involved in the discussion along with City staff. Everyone was involved in making sure these were the right sites.

Ms. Saunders indicated they were in coordination with School Board members as well. She acknowledged Ruchel Coetzee and Heather Brinkworth on the Board as well as Vicki Melus and Yolanda Francis online. When talking with School Board members, Ms.

Leonardi and Dr. Osgood, they were excited about the opportunity and the sites were shared with them.

Chair Dr. Zeman questioned if there was an opportunity to offer a Bezos Academy at a Middle or High School.

Ms. Shedd replied yes, one of the schools they are looking at is an Alternative High School, Seagull. Their partnerships are not cookie cutter, they want to go where there is capacity, willingness, and admission alignment, whether it is a school, church, or shopping center that has available space, is close to public transportation, and has high need.

Chair Dr. Zeman commented that the Board does not dream small dreams and they will do the pace that is feasible. He noted the need is what will pace the speed, and the need is significant. The fact they are flexible about where the programs are is brilliant and well thought out.

Ms. Dean expressed concern about people who do not need assistance gravitating to the schools once they open, taking away space from families who need it more. She questioned if there were admissions criteria to filter that to make sure people who need it most are getting access or targeted marketing.

Ms. Shedd advised if a student is homeless or in foster care, they automatically get a seat. One of the key things they look at is poverty and income levels. They look at 200% of the poverty level up to 400%. There are criteria for parents to qualify to bring their students to Bezos Academy. Regarding income level, they do not want to only look at one tier of socio-economic status, they want to have a diversity and that is why they go up to 400%, because even though some parents are working, there may be opportunities for them to access quality education, but they cannot afford it. They do not qualify for government assistance at that point, so they are very mindful of that.

Mr. Lukic was happy to hear everything about addressing the social and emotional needs of students. Montessori was mentioned, but that is the pathway to learning. He questioned if there was going to be a benchmark set by the end goal.

Ms. Laos advised they use Early Learning scales to track transitioning into Kindergarten, so they are ready; this is also about implementing best practices in the classroom. There will be Student Support personnel to work with special needs children to make sure they receive services necessary for them to be ready. There will probably be something around Montessori Accreditation.

Mr. Relyea mentioned crawl, walk, run, and thought they have the capacity to do all three at the same time. The City has proven this through the hiring of Chief Education Officer, this proactive Board, a willing Commission, and a willing School Board. He believes the City has the capable personnel to execute that plan. He questioned the metric that

demonstrates need and if that metric is defined by Bezos or by the City. He mentioned the square-footage capacity and if there must be minimum/maximum. Some members have a lot of access to people around the community that might have the capacity, so they need to know what it is; otherwise, they do not know what they are asking for.

Ms. Shedd explained that research was done as far as demographics and economic studies, which helps define the first layer of research conducted in communities. They incorporate and approach community leaders to help dig deeper into the numbers and understand what is happening in certain neighborhoods. That is why they work closely with the City, County, and with non-profits who are also operating within the community to help them understand where there is the greatest need. Need is not defined by just one metric, but as a collective to see who can benefit from their resources.

Ms. Laos indicated that many partners are excited when they go in, but the space is not ready. They try to share the minimum square footage for two classrooms, which is 2,500 square feet, which includes two classrooms, each with 20 children, and supporting staff. Other requirements they are looking for is safe drop off and pick up, designated parking spaces, and an outdoor playground. All these criteria must be looked at inclusively and shared with partners and the community.

Mr. Polakoff commented that in a licensed school there must be minimum requirements for Broward County Childcare licensing. There needs to be a minimum requirement for outdoor space adjacent to the facility plus indoor space. Shopping centers may be great, but they must have an outdoor space for the playground because the school would be licensed through Childcare Licensing in Broward County.

Ms. Shedd commented that both share a space requirement document.

Ms. Coetzee mentioned there are many retired schoolteachers in South Florida who might have lost their accreditation. She questioned if it were possible to approach those people to see if they would be willing to come back into the field and get the short training.

Ms. Laos advised State teacher certification is not required to work with them. If the retirees do not have State certification that is not a problem.

Ms. Coetzee thought a lot of retirees may want to come back and she questioned if there is an incentive to the owner such as tax benefits, tax credits, etc.

Chair Dr. Zeman advised one thing thought about was all the development going in Downtown. Many people are expected to move there, and the benefit of the Bezos Academy would sell the units. He questioned how the Board should talk to people, as there are opportunities for a win-win. Several churches have under-utilized space that is only used for Sunday School. There is a lot of space here that is not used; commercial space is not being used because they have shifted dramatically about where people live. They need more residents, but not much office space is being used per person, so there

is a lot of that space. There are significant corporations who would like to improve their image and what better way than to offer daycare for employees in an Early Childhood Education model especially with the Montessori and Bezos labels behind it. He suspects there are many opportunities, but they need to get them close to where the needs live, not along A1A. The Education Advisory Board will have to think about being the ones talking to leaders and the community to find some win-wins to meet the need. The City will benefit tremendously from meeting the need.

Ms. Brinkworth mentioned four locations and questioned if they have looked at the status of the bond projects and how that might impact the ability of the Bezos Foundation and infrastructure.

Mr. Billins explained that Thurgood Elementary is having their roof done; the areas considered were the first floor and the modules. They are looking at the first year of a two-year project.

Ms. Brinkworth thought that was something to be cognizant of as they are looking to have infrastructure in place. She questioned the status of the School Board's willingness/ability to execute the lease in enough time so the Bezos Academy can get in.

Ms. Saunders stated at the last meeting the sense of urgency became clear and this must go before the School Board in December.

Mr. Polakoff advised it will go before the School Board in January. They are working on the contracts and moving through the necessary Committees.

Ms. Saunders reviewed her notes and the communication she had was by January 31, 2022. She wants the Board to understand that it is critical and important that they continue to focus and help moving this forward. In speaking with School Board members, they have expressed an interest in making sure they do not get in the way to make sure this gets done.

Ms. Laos stated that January 31, 2022, is the beginning and triggers everything else, keeping in mind the design, permitting, and construction phases. They already engaged their architect to help move this along and sketches will be available to review through the partnership team and as part of the agreement in the Lease Agreement.

Chair Dr. Zeman suggested the Board engage the Commission on this and ask them to share their thoughts with the School Board because the City wants the School Board to move this quickly. The City will be working hand in hand with Bezos to move through all phases of permitting. A City Forum can be done for the schematics, so there is another opportunity to get more people in the neediest sections to be aware of what is coming, so they can make informed choices about where they are going to place their child in Fall 2022.

Ms. Saunders thought it would be helpful to engage the Commission to show the level of interest and support on part of the City for this project. She knows the Vice Mayor and Mayor have met with the Bezos Academy team, so they are familiar with the project. Additional communication from the City could be helpful in creating the sense of urgency.

A brief discussion ensued regarding the Communication to the Commission as follows:

The Education Advisory Board encourages the City Commission to express support to the School Board of Broward County to ensure the leases with Bezos Academy at the four identified schools are completed by January 31, 2022, to include North Fork Elementary School, Thurgood Marshall Elementary School, Bennett Elementary School, and Seagull Alternative High School.

Ask the School Board to prepare to expedite building permits and other infrastructure needs to support an opening by Fall 2022.

The Education Advisory Board acknowledges this is an expedited request and thanked the Commissioners for their commitment to meeting the needs for Early Childhood Education in Fort Lauderdale.

Motion made by Ms. Perloff, seconded by Mr. Relyea to approve the Communication to the Commission. **Motion** passed unanimously. (15-0)

Ms. Brinkworth emphasized the building permits are through the School Board, not through the City.

Chair Dr. Zeman commented that the City Commission has been pro-education and they are remarkable in the increased political capital they have been willing to spend.

Mr. Gonzalez clarified that they do not engage in proactive communications until there is a signed lease. There is a lot of excitement, but they requested this not be Tweeted or put on Blast until there is a signed lease. This allows their partner to have control over messaging moving forward.

Ms. Saunders advised this Communication would go to the City Commission and she will let him know the date. That is the avenue in which this Board communicates their recommendations to the Commission and at that time there is conversation, then they can direct staff to help support the project to the School Board in an official capacity; sometimes they might submit a Letter of Support.

Chair Dr. Zeman asked Dr. Strauss to speak about his thoughts and questioned what kind of impact this could have and what system people can envision. He asked if this could be the beginning of a big transformation in the City of Fort Lauderdale over the next ten years.

Dr. Strauss replied this would have an impact on education achievement. They know high

quality preschool education is a factor in student achievement and they also know a Montessori-based preschool program inspires children's independence and independent thinking and fosters a love of learning. Those factors play in student achievement as kids move through the educational process.

Chair Dr. Zeman mentioned the Strategic goal, which is 100% of kids in all of Fort Lauderdale and questioned what else they should be doing besides the Bezos Academies.

Dr. Strauss could not answer that question in a politically correct way. The reality is they do not have control over peoples' individual decisions; they can encourage and offer programs, but they cannot force people to take their child to a high-quality program.

Chair Dr. Zeman wants the Education Advisory Board to move to the next phase and Bezos Academy is going to have a big impact. This opens the door to other things related to Early Childhood education and it puts it front and center for everyone concerned about the City of Fort Lauderdale. He asked the Board what else they need to focus on going forward so this is the beginning of a better system as they work towards their 100% goal of all kids joining to learn to the extent that they can.

Vice Chair Ellowitz commented that she recently watched the "I Promise" movie about the school James Lebron opened in Akron. The Board has previously talked about community schools offering services enticing to the parents to get them more involved and more invested in bringing their children to a quality Early Childhood Education program. She questioned if the Bezos Academy offers anything like that or if they could bring those services in and infuse them into the programming.

Ms. Shedd stated in partnership with Broward College they learned about the Broward Up program, which they will be a part of; collaboration is key because many parents will be able to afford to go back into the workforce.

Mr. Acosta complimented the vision and agreed with getting parents involved.

Ms. Jaramillo questioned obligations to the students with disabilities and learning issues. She mentioned data and Kindergarten Readiness and questioned how that plays as far as equity in that space.

Ms. Laos stated Student Support staff will coordinate services with children with disabilities. There will be screening, and they will connect with resources.

Mr. Sponsler questioned how much this endeavor with four locations would cost Bezos Academy and how it would be sustainable for ten years. He also questioned if it was possible to see the research Bezos Academy has done to identify the need in Fort Lauderdale.

Mr. Gonzalez stated they have a person who does the research, and he would encourage a conversation with her and would be more than happy to liaison.

Chair Dr. Zeman requested Mr. Gonzalez send the information to Ms. Saunders so she could send it to all Board members.

Ms. Shedd mentioned as far as investment, outside of the rent they invest in all tenant improvements for all properties and maintain overhead throughout the ten years. Mr. Bezos has invested \$2 billion in their "Day One Fund" to support this effort.

Chair Dr. Zeman commented that the partnership is off to a great start; it is generous and much needed in the community. The Board will continue working with Bezos Academy and it was noted that four ribbon-cuttings would be exciting.

Ms. Shedd thanked the Board for their Letter of Support and for hosting them.

- **School Building Parity**

- **Stranahan High School:** Update on School Board Approved Cafeteria Replacement

Ms. Saunders mentioned a thorough discussion at the last meeting surrounding options for the cafeteria. They were in a good position and the School Board had unanimous support for a new construction replacement. Options on the table were whether they could use a prototype, which was an architectural design of a cafeteria at Palmetto Senior High or opt for a new design. After deliberation and thoughtful construction discussion, the Education Advisory Board submitted a Communication to the Commission urging them to express support for the prototype option, formerly called reuse, because of the fact it met school specifications and it was projected to deliver the cafeteria in a shorter timeframe, saving a years' worth of construction. A lot of the Board's focus was what the school wanted and that is where they aligned themselves as a City and the Commission supported that. It went before the School Board and they voted in favor of the prototype, so it is now a reality, Stranahan High School will be getting a new construction and they know what it is going to look like. The school has already seen it and have identified things they want to improve, which they are in the process of doing. She is staying involved so she understands the next steps, so this Board can be made aware because they want to stay focused on the project making sure they are able to move forward quickly.

Ms. Brinkworth thanked the Board for their advocacy. It was important to communicate the support from the Education Advisory Board and Commission.

Mr. Acosta thanked everyone for getting this accomplished. This is so impactful and motivational for the team.

Chair Dr. Zeman stated this is the reason people serve on Education Advisory Board and the School Board, so they can try to make good decisions. He loves the fact that Stranahan High School will have a state of the art, gorgeous cafeteria in the Fall 2023. This is fundamental to great education. He thanked Ms. Saunders for her attention and insight.

- **Bennett Elementary School:** What are next steps for EAB?

Principal Smith thanked everyone for their continued support. They are currently in the process of transitioning with their Project Manager and once they identify who the new Project Manager will be, she will have more details to share at the next meeting. The Board's support throughout this last year has helped get them get noticed along with other schools with similar situations.

Chair Dr. Zeman mentioned the question of how the Education Advisory Board prioritizes construction requirements in Fort Lauderdale and how they communicate those things. Now that they are finished with the Stranahan cafeteria, it is time to remind the School Board what opportunities are at Bennett Elementary School.

- **Joint Use Parks, Staff Update**
 - **Discussion:** Project goals and project scope review

Ms. Saunders reported they are at a point in the project where they are stepping back to re-evaluate the objectives and goals of the initiative. In December, she will be going before the Parks Advisory Board to do a little more background knowledge building around the project. About 18 months ago, a lot of time was spent defining objectives for the project and some key principles set the parameters for the project design, which are related to geographic equity, opening as many Joint Use Parks as viable in a way that was most expedient as possible. A proposal was put forward and some communities are asking for additional funds based on what was listed in the Parks Bond. The Board needs to think about how to best approach the project as they think about the needs and objectives of how they can achieve the most. They are working with limited funds and the intention is to be able to reallocate those funds based on the need. She thinks further conversations are necessary to make sure they are maximizing the benefit of dollars they have while meeting the needs of each unique community and there will be conversations around different trade-offs. Cost saving opportunities for certain projects allow them to spread the wealth in other areas of the community. As a working group with the City and School Board, they have been intentional about having a methodology to rate the need for the sites, working extensively with the Principals and School District staff to come up with this plan. They need to look at what they are trying to achieve when looking at each project to see where there are opportunities to make those trade-offs and those conversations need to continue.

Principal Smith was one of the representatives on the Working Group and Mike Billins

has been very involved with his school as well. Many people are invested, and everyone wants to do as much good as possible, and it comes down to certain challenges with the budget; they are trying to maximize the dollars as much as they can while meeting the needs of each community.

New Business: EAB Community network Mapping

Ms. Saunders indicated that anyone who wanted to be added to the network send their information to her.

Chair Dr. Zeman commented that just knowing the network each member of the Board has gives them a tremendous opportunity to call on them when needed. The more they know about networks, the more likely they are to call and engage members in a way that allows them to improve the quality of education provided.

Ms. Saunders encouraged the Board to think about Joint Use Park projects and go back to the proposal and note they are continuing to work with communities to refine that. They want to engage in a robust and focused conversation on the best use of the funds and a way to allocate the funds where they are needed most across the City.

Chair Dr. Zeman questioned what the chance is of a resolution in December.

Ms. Saunders on December 1, 2021, at the Parks Advisory Board meeting, there will be an overview she presented to the Education Advisory Board. She did not anticipate a vote from the Board, it is more of providing them with an overview. If there are certain considerations important to Education Advisory Board members, please share them with her so they can be part of the discussion. She will have conversations with the Parks Advisory Board and then the discussion can continue with the Board in December.

Chair Dr. Zeman thought there was a good chance that 50% of the December meeting will be discussion regarding Joint Use Parks. The discussion will be about how to make a recommendation to the Parks Advisory Board as far as what should be done with this Joint Use opportunity. He encouraged everyone to attend the December 16, 2021, meeting if possible; it will be an important meeting.

Ms. Saunders announced that as of December 1, 2021, all meetings will be in-person.

Chair Dr. Zeman asked if anyone knew ahead that they would not be able to attend would request to phone into the meeting.

Ms. Saunders advised there is a policy giving an opportunity to phone in and vote; she will send the policy to Board members.

Ms. Jaramillo questioned if Board members could Zoom in late, her son has a band concert at Sunrise Middle School.

Chair Dr. Zeman questioned if this month's attendance had to be approved for next month's meeting. He thought that was how it was done in the past.

Ms. Saunders thought it had to be approved on the date of the call.

Vice Chair Ellowitz stated she could not attend in person, but she could attend virtually. She questioned if anyone else had that issue.

Ms. Saunders indicated she would review the policy. To be on the safe side, if anyone is aware they are going to participate virtually, it is better to have it on the record and she will share the policy with everyone.

Chair Dr. Zeman questioned who else thought they might need to participate remotely on December 16, 2021.

Ms. Perloff and Ms. Coetzee hoped to participate remotely.

Motion by Mr. Lukic, seconded by Mr. Relyea, to approve online attendance for the December 16, 2021 meeting. **Motion** passed unanimously. (15-0)

Approval of Meeting Minutes: September 30, 2021 and October 27, 2021

Chair Dr. Zeman postponed approval of the September 30, 2021 and October 27, 2021 minutes to the December 16, 2021 meeting. He requested Board members read their part of the minutes.

Closing: - None.

Adjournment

Chair Dr. Zeman adjourned the meeting at 8:34 p.m.

[Minutes prepared by C. Guifarro, Prototype, Inc.]