



## **LR School Board addresses systemic problems and how to fix them during January meeting**

by [Dr. James Ross](#) January 31, 2025 1:57 pm

**The Little Rock School Board's** meeting Thursday night focused on the body's commitment to following ethical codes as well partaking in a multi-year training program to fix systemic issues that have continued to plague the board. During Thursday's meeting, the LRSB also received a comprehensive review of the LRSD's governance practices, with several key issues emerging regarding the district's strategic direction, leadership dynamics and efforts to improve student outcomes.

The review, which involved examining the district's strategic plan, recent media coverage, board member interviews and public meeting materials, revealed both areas of consensus and significant concerns that require attention.

Read the *Arkansas Times* coverage of some of the ongoing issues with the board [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Through interviews with board members, several recurring themes emerged regarding the district's priorities.

The first and most prominent area of agreement was the importance of improving student knowledge and skills. Board members universally agreed that student achievement should be the district's top priority. Metrics like state summative assessments and graduation rates are seen as critical measures of success. There is a shared commitment among all board members who were interviewed to adopt evidence-based teaching strategies that enhance academic rigor and ensure students are well-prepared for their futures.

Equally important is the drive to address the achievement gaps that persist within the district. Many participants pointed out that marginalized communities, in particular, often lack the same access to educational resources and opportunities as their more advantaged peers. Board members stressed the need to provide these students with the tools and support necessary to succeed academically.

Some members noted a troubling pattern: poor performance in early-grade assessments often correlates with disparities in access to advanced coursework later in a student's academic journey. This highlights the need for targeted interventions aimed at closing these gaps from the outset.

Another area of consensus was the need for improved communication, transparency, and partnerships. Board members expressed a desire for better communication with the district's parents, staff, and the wider community.

Many agreed that enhancing transparency in decision-making processes would help foster a stronger sense of trust and collaboration. Strengthening partnerships with local community organizations and businesses was also seen as crucial to expanding opportunities for students beyond the classroom.

Despite these shared priorities, several concerns emerged during the interviews with board members. One of the most significant issues identified was the lack of clarity in the district's strategic direction. While all members expressed a desire to improve student achievement, few were able to articulate specific, measurable goals or define the exact achievements they were working towards. This lack of specificity in the district's strategic plan raises questions about whether the board is effectively prioritizing the most pressing needs of the district.

Attendance and discipline were frequently mentioned as important metrics for evaluating the district's performance. However, these measures were seen as insufficient in capturing the true quality of education students are receiving. Several board members noted that while attendance and discipline are important factors, they do not directly reflect student knowledge or academic skills.

Without clearer metrics tied directly to student achievement, it remains unclear how effectively the district is addressing its core mission of improving educational outcomes.

Another area of concern was the perceived disconnect between the board's intentions and its actual impact. While board members expressed a strong commitment to improving the district, several acknowledged the difficulty of translating their intentions into tangible changes. The most pressing issue, according to multiple participants, is a lack of trust within the Board. Many members called for greater attention to interpersonal relationships and leadership development to address this issue.

Despite this desire for more effective governance, several board members noted that the current state of governance is not without its challenges. Trust among board members has been described as a major barrier, with many members recognizing that the board's dysfunction has led to a public perception of instability. Several suggested that the board needs to focus less on repairing relationships and more on addressing the root causes of its inefficiencies.

At the same time, some board members raised concerns about the board's current structure, noting that not all members participated in the interview process. This, according to some participants, reflects a broader issue of disengagement that could undermine the board's ability to enact meaningful change.

As the Little Rock School District moves forward with board training, the findings from these interviews will provide a roadmap for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Kelsey Bailey, the district's chief financial officer, delivered his monthly report. Tax revenues are up but the LRSD's fund balance continues to not match where it has been historically for this time of the year, an indication of too many expenditures.

Bailey also said that the Trump administration's freezing of federal funds may potentially affect some district programs that are paid for by federal grants. The way federal grants work is the district has to pay for the work upfront and then the federal government reimburses the district. The LRSD has almost \$50 million in federal grants.

The Little Rock School District is a member of the **Council of the Great City Schools**, a coalition of the nation's largest urban public school systems in the United States. The CGCS aims to ensure that all students in urban districts receive a high-quality education.

The Little Rock School Board will be working with the group to make sure it's a student-centered district and that the board understands and excels at its work.