

## STATEMENT OF THE EAST LAWRENCE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION REGARDING SCHOOLS

January 23, 2022

For more information contact: Barry Shalinsky, president

[ELNAPrez@yahoo.com](mailto:ELNAPrez@yahoo.com) ; 785-330-5067 (mobile and text)

Public schools are the beating heart of neighborhoods. They bring us together, cultivate our future and capture our past. They provide an anchor for families, a gathering place for celebrations and a core sense of identity for who we are. And most importantly, our neighborhood schools are where new generations of young people discover each other and the world.

We know this intimately in East Lawrence. We just held our annual MLK celebration dinner at New York School on Tuesday, are looking forward to the Yart Sale this spring, and anticipate walking our young ones to kindergarten in the fall on the same brick sidewalks that Langston Hughes walked on. We cheer on the Liberty Memorial Central students from our front porches during their annual Fun Run, and celebrate their many achievements in arts, athletics and academics. Like many neighborhoods, our schools and the energy they activate are the biggest reason why many of us live here, and why many others would like to. Without them, a fundamental current of community is lost and with it, the aspirations and dreams of the neighborhood.

In East Lawrence, we also have a long memory. We remember past attempts to close schools, and how all too often we were told that it was “inevitable” when it was not. Just ten years ago this happened. East Lawrence fought alongside others to counter the district’s attempt to close both Cordley and New York schools. With passion and purpose, parents, teachers and students crafted a proposal that clearly showed a path forward without those closures, and we were successful.

Today, some district administrators are once again pushing a deeply traumatic overhaul of our community’s school system, while not engaging with parents, students and teachers. It is a terrible mistake. These plans would decimate the social fabric of the targeted neighborhoods and have cascading negative impacts on our whole community. We can find a better way if we are given the time we need to collaborate.

We support all of those who are working diligently on solutions. To help them in their efforts, we believe that the district should work with a new school solutions working group led by parents and teachers, as they did in 2011-12. We also encourage the district to make space for the voices and concerns of those who will be most impacted by these potential scenarios – our students. Honor their experience and first-hand knowledge of our schools by giving them a platform for sharing their experience, questions, and advice.

How we go about engaging with this issue will be a reflection of our community values, what we believe to be important. Closing off dialogue, running down the clock and refusing to collaborate implies a lack of concern and confidence in our young people, parents and teachers. Opening up avenues for creative solutions centered on the expressed needs and experience of students and families, speaks to a belief in community and a way forward that upholds values of equity, care and compassion. It is the right thing to do.