

## Site Visit Report Leman Academy Charter School

The Site Visit to the Leman Academy of Excellence took place Wednesday, October 12. Principal Jason Edwards was the contact person throughout the visit, and arranged a comprehensive visit with students, office staff, teachers and leadership.

As has been noted in each report, the heart of any's school's educational program, culture and philosophy are the school's mission and vision statements. Leman Academy's mission is as follows:

*Leman Academy of Excellence's mission is to offer a rigorous, Classical Education based on the traditions of Western culture, where all disciplines are interrelated, allowing scholar the ability to think independent and critically. We purpose to partner with supportive parents, pursue excellence, provide a safe and challenging environment, and to instill morals and values in order to produce tomorrow's leaders today.*

It is not an overstatement to say that the mission of Leman Academy of Excellence permeates every corner of the building, whether classroom, hallway, lunchroom, or recess area.

The mission of the school, and critical virtues and values are seen not merely in published form, but also observed in student interactions in and out of the classroom in teacher interactions with students, and between students and administration. Principal Edwards, teachers and staff refer to the students at Leman as scholars. It is not a cliché or artificial gesture; students are considered and are treated as scholars, and the students accept the moniker.

Leman Academy holds strong to their core values:

- ∞ Academic Excellence
  - A rigorous, classical approach to education.
- ∞ Partnership with Families
  - Parents have the ultimate responsibility for the education of their children. Learning takes place in both the school and the home
- ∞ Children and Learning
  - The child's mind is not a blank slate or a bucket to be filled; facts are not presented without their informing ideas, allowing scholars to think in an independent and critical fashion

Similarly, Leman stresses critical Character Attributes:

- ∞ **Caring**
  - Empathy
  - Compassion
  - Forgiveness
- ∞ **Citizenship**
  - Accepting responsibility
  - Staying informed
  - Caring (and active) participation in school and community
- ∞ **Perseverance**
  - Setting and achieving personal goals
  - Learning from failure
  - Following through
  - Commitment
  - Positive attitude
- ∞ **Respect**
  - Recognizing other's feelings, opinions, or possessions
  - Accept differences
  - Respect for authority, for others, for self and for country
- ∞ **Responsibility**
  - Taking control of your actions and obligations
  - Taking ownership of fault
  - Reliability, dependability, commitment
  - Self-discipline
  - Think before acting, considering consequences
- ∞ **Trustworthiness**
  - Reliable
  - Following through
  - Possessing the courage to do the right thing

## **Classroom Observations: Instruction**

Along with Mr. Edwards, I made several observations in a variety of classrooms, where there was ample, repeated evidence that students were highly engaged, and were eager to make substantive, material observations and contributions to the instruction. Teachers were observed pacing lessons to meet students diverse learning speeds and styles.

Looking within classrooms, it was clear there were sufficient materials to supplement learning, and principal Edwards spoke about how the school uses data to inform instruction.

What was evident, however, were classrooms of scholars, to use the Leman vernacular, who demonstrated a variety of abilities, and despite that, the classes were all well run, the students were engaged, and learning was evident.

<b>Engaging Students in Learning</b>	<b>3/3</b>
<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>3/3</b>
<b>Academic Intervention and Acceleration</b>	<b>3/3</b>
<b>English Language Acquisition (did not observe/not applicable)</b>	<b>3/3</b>
<b>Special Education Instruction</b>	<b>3/3</b>

**Summative Evaluation:** **Exemplary**

### **Classroom Observations: School Culture**

During the site visit, the school culture was evident, whether during transition time, lunch time, recess or in the classroom. The culture of interaction between students and between students and teachers, as well as students and staff, that personified genuine warmth and caring toward individuals, as well as mutual respect. The character attributes of caring, citizenship, perseverance, respect, responsibility and trustworthiness were clear and numerous. It became clear that this quite simply is how school is done at Leman.

The pride scholars took in their work, being eager to share and eager to assist one another was also evident. They strive not just for teacher recognition, but to understand. This was evident in questions students would ask of teacher and of each other, and also evident in the questions students had for me in a focus group Q/A I had with a small group. During the length of the visit, I did not observe any inappropriate behavior in or out of the classroom. In fact, quite the opposite: I often heard students complimenting each other without prompting.

Similarly, students were observed assisting each other, whether in an art class or in an ability grouped reading class. I did not observe any student-on-student monitoring of behavior because there was never an instance where it was required.

In a subsequent visit designed to observed special education at the school I interviewed staff and made classroom observations. Leman Academy offers services to students with mild/moderate needs and has a staff of 4 academic/learning specialists, 2 part time speech/language pathologists, 1 part time occupational therapist, 1 school psychologist, 2 school psychologist interns and 1.5 instructional assistants dedicated to exceptional student services. Classrooms are both stand alone and integrated with respect to special education services, depending on the needs of the students. Leman serves 10% ESS, which is higher than many charter schools in Colorado. The school offer a wide range of accommodations, designed to meet the needs of students. Evidence of the success of the ESS program is that at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade 23% of writing scores of ESS students exceeded the district average. The school uses MTSS and RTI, and teams regularly assess how the interventions and support services are working. This data collection is central to the special education programming at the school and clearly informs the effectiveness of academic interventional and programming.

Professional Developments is offered to all staff on making accommodations for ESS students, both those with 504 plans and those with Individual Education Plans. The trainings focus on how to track accommodations. Case managers similarly receive regular professional development.

In classroom observations, I observed a mathematics class for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students where three students were working directly with the teacher and three others were working independently. Students were highly engaged in their work and were able to work at a pace commensurate with their abilities.

I observed speech classes with 2 and three students per teacher, where specific interventions and strategies could be used to meet the specific needs of each student. The instruction, without questions, explicitly addressed academic language, vocabulary, phonemic awareness and the process for creating the appropriate sound for an appropriate letter or word.

The school has a robust special education program, working to meet the needs of all students who have learning needs. The goal is to ensure that all students, by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, are prepared for high school academics in all subjects.

**Classroom Observations**  
**School Culture**

**Creating an Environment of Respect** 3/3

**Establishing a Culture for Learning** 3/3

**Managing Behavior** 3/3

**Summary Evaluation** Exemplary

### **Board Legal Obligations**

I was able to have an extended conversation with Board President Director, Victoria Hostin. In that conversation, and through conversation with administrative leadership, I was able to confirm that the Board of Directors meets each of the following standards:

**Bylaws in place that outline board role and legal obligation**

**Articles of incorporation in place that indicate current nonprofit status**

**Board handbook in place that outlines board member expectations**

**Financial transparency compliance**

**Financial reporting compliance**

**Board complies with open meetings requirements**

**Board holds meetings (at least quarterly)—Leman Board meets monthly**

**Regular revision and approval of key policies (employment, enrollment, etc.)**

**Approval of annual audit**

## **Approval of annual budget**

### **Board meets authorizer deadlines and requirements**

**The charter school has adopted and implemented conflict of interest policies that prevent real or apparent conflicts of interest.**

**The charter school administration provides monthly financial reports to its governing board for review and approval.**

In these conversations, I was also able to confirm that the Lemman Academy has members who have expertise in K-8 education, that board members are familiar with and thoroughly understand student achievement data, and that the board, through the administrative leadership, regularly reviews academic performance.

Similarly, board members have experience with finance, and are very involved in budget and in the annual audit process. The board monitors all financial data that impact both short-term and long-term financial health.

Board members are also well versed in and have experience in operational data and uses that to create, revise as needed and revisit the strategic plan of the school.

President Hostin further shared that one of the great strengths about the Parker school is the institutional knowledge that is in place. She was a founder of the school and has vast experience writing charter school applications. She also mentioned the positive leadership influence, the culture of clear expectations, and the ongoing professional development for teachers.

The discipline, is relational, supporting the core values and character attributes. Ownership for errors is critical, but failure is not fatal; rather, failure and missteps are educational and personal growth opportunities. The emphasis on virtues and values is a pillar of the school—perhaps dual pillars, that support the success of the scholars and assists faculty in doing their work to the best of their abilities.

The Board is comprised of 2 members voted in by community and 3 who are appointed, all of whom are on staggered terms to ensure continuity.

### **Board Governance and Legal Obligations**

**Legal Obligations 14/14**

**Board Governance 15/15**

## Summary Evaluation

Exemplary

In conversations with a student focus group, the students demonstrated the extent to which they have bought into the culture of the school. When asked what 2-3 things they would never want to see changed at the school, they responded with:

1. Uniforms
2. Math
3. Free dress day and Fun Day
4. The virtue of loyalty
5. Specials
6. Golden Rule Reading
7. Recitations (one of which the group performed for me before they left)
8. Senators (elected students who represent their class)

When asked what 2-3 things they would like to see changed (not eliminated, just changed), they offered:

1. More dances
2. Recitations privately rather than publicly (student choice)
3. Donations for hot lunches for students who do not have the means
4. Transportation
5. Add a high school

The students all said they felt physically safe, but the transition has been difficult on some students, according to the students' observations shared with me. When asked how the transition to full-time, in-person learning is going on a scale of 1 (poorly) to 10 (very well), the response was revelatory:

1      1 student

2	0 students
3	0 students
4	0 students
5	4 students
6	1 student
7	1 student
8	0 students
9	1 student (actually 9.5)
10	1 student

When asked what makes the school “work,” the responses were:

1. Tried and true methods and tried and true educational model
2. Mission-driven school
3. Parent partnership and support
4. Teaching of virtues and values
5. Teaching of perseverance
6. Family feel
7. Great follow-through
8. Leadership cultivates the culture
9. Administration has been in the classroom and is easy to talk to

With respect to “blind spots” (my term in the conversation), staff mentioned that since Leman is Arizona-based, everything must first go through Arizona review, which can hold things up logistically. Colorado autonomy was suggested as one fix for this issue. The staff also mentioned a greater support for young children, recognizing their needs and having that reflected in services would be helpful. The staff noted that mental health issues have been identified in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade in particular given the dates of the pandemic. This year represents their first year doing traditional school, and it has been a challenging transition.

## Summary

Leman Academy for Excellence has, in a short period of time, established a successful school that is supported by students, staff, faculty and the greater community. It truly has a family feel. It is a school where it seems clear from all observations that everyone has bought into the virtues and values, the character of culture and the high academic expectations that are grounded in a supportive, can-do atmosphere.



The faculty and staff and leadership believe in the future of their scholars and believe that each can realize whatever dream each may have. The partnership with parents is evident, and the enrollment, and the waitlist, suggest that the upcoming replication will be received as enthusiastically as the original site has been embraced.