

LINCOLN EXTENDED-DAY ACTIVITIES PROGRAM (LEAP)

Application to License Hartwell C Pod
Submitted to Lincoln School Committee March 7, 2024



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Introduction:

On behalf of the Lincoln Extended-day Activities Program (LEAP) Board of Directors, staff, and families, we are pleased to submit the following application for the licensing of Hartwell Pod C. As we enter our 43rd year on the campus of the Lincoln Public Schools, we are energized by the addition of new families, activities, and resources to our program, and our partnership with the Lincoln Public Schools and the town of Lincoln.

The following information outlines the LEAP program's proposed use of Pod C. We believe LEAP possesses the attributes that the Lincoln Public Schools are looking for in an after-school care program and welcome further dialogue with the Lincoln School Committee to discuss our qualifications for continued use of the facility.

Numerous positive developments have taken place throughout the past couple of years. Here is a snapshot that speaks to our focus on program quality, safety, and affordability:

- A secured licensing with the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care in December 2022, with a scheduled review/Licensing for November 2024.
- A safety plan and staff safety training conducted in accordance with the Town of Lincoln Police Department
- A balanced yearly LEAP program budget
- A higher staff-to-child ratio than the Commonwealth requires to provide greater attentiveness to safety, allow staff to escort students to non-LEAP activities throughout the Lincoln School campus, and support the interests and activities of individual children.
- A balanced approach to education and recreation with the goal of supporting the academic as well as social and emotional development of children
- An active board that invests in long-term strategic planning for LEAP
- A stable environment with core staff members present five days a week
- A comprehensive staff training relevant to the education of children and new programs
- A discounted fee structure for all Lincoln Public School employees
- Financial aid to families as needed
- A continued evaluation of fee structure to ensure best value to all LEAP families.
- A strong relationship with Parks and Rec, Magic Garden, Lincoln Public School, METCO, and Lincoln Administration.

Overall, we believe these, and many other substantial enhancements, continue to make LEAP a safe, dependable, and affordable choice for Lincoln families who desire after-school care for their children.

We look forward to receiving any questions or comments you may have about our application. We thank you and the Lincoln School Committee for the time and consideration you have given the ongoing evaluation of our after-school program.

Licenses and Certifications:

Every other year LEAP takes part in a comprehensive audit required for certification by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care. LEAP most recently renewed its two-year license in December 2022. LEAP is scheduled to undergo this process again in November of this year.

Per Commonwealth requirements, in addition to an application form and fee, LEAP completes and submits documents and accounts of policies and procedures to support the licensing process. The full list description and details associated with this list are available here:

<http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/eec/2014/20140122-required-docs-provisional-licensure.pdf>

- Request and policies for background record checks to determine compliance with EEC requirements
- Tax certification statement form to verify that all applicable taxes have or will be paid
- Evidence of completion of staff orientation
- Forms maintained in children's records
- Parent information (Parent handbook)
- Enrollment procedures and non-discrimination statement
- Plan for referral services
- Plan to avoid suspension and termination
- Evacuation/emergency contingency plan
- Ownership papers (names and addresses of all owners, officers, and directors)
- Personnel policies (if applicable)
- Plan for staff supervision
- Plan for staff meetings
- Staff records
- Integrated pest management plan
- Required inspections including building inspection certificate indicating approval for the number and ages of children in care.; documentation of fire inspection; detailed lead paint inspection report and compliance letter. Health inspection, well water or public water supply test results.
- Financial documentation, including a projected budget for one year and evidence of three months of operating cash on hand
- Health care policy
- Health Care consultant agreement form

Evidence of Insurability:

LEAP is insured through our agent USI Insurance Services (phone: 855-874-0123, address: 75 John Roberts Road, Building C, South Portland, ME 04106). LEAP carries three separate insurance policies, which are as follows:

1) Our insurance policy for public liability for bodily injury and property damage is comprehensive, and covers \$1,000,000 per occurrence and up to \$2,000,000 as an aggregate sum. Our liability insurance is provided by Philadelphia Insurance Companies (phone: 610-617-7900, address: One Bala Plaza, Suite 100, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004). This policy was renewed on November 11, 2023, and expires on November 11, 2024. The policy number is PHPK2606393.

2) LEAP's worker's compensation policy is provided by The Hanover Insurance Group (phone: 508-853-7200; address: 440 Lincoln Street, Worcester, MA 01653). LEAP has used this plan since March 2009 without a claim made. The plan was recently renewed on November 1, 2023, and will continue until November 1, 2024. It covers bodily injury by accident (per accident) and bodily injury by disease (per employee) of \$100,000. LEAP also has a policy limit of \$500,000 for bodily injury by disease. The policy number is WSB-A722139-08.

3) LEAP retains a not-for-profit organization Directors and Officers liability insurance policy with Philadelphia Insurance Companies as our provider. (The telephone number and mailing address for Philadelphia are the same as those provided in item number one above.) This policy includes coverage of up to \$1,000,000 for LEAP's Directors, officers, and employment practices. LEAP renewed this policy on June 30, 2023; the policy will continue until June 30, 2024. The policy number is PHSD1495140. This is a "Flex Plus Five" policy.

Continuity of Operations:

LEAP families and children benefit from strong stability among the program's staff. Additionally, we place a premium on assembling and maintaining a core group of staff members who work more than 20 hours a week. Their commitment to and investment in the program have been factors in its long-term success. Moreover, we find that when children are in the care of the same staff members every day, they feel more secure in their environment. This year, we are pleased to have fourteen staff members who spend at least 20 hours each week at LEAP.

The tenure of our staff is also notable. LEAP's Director has been a member of the LEAP staff for 20 years, and the Assistant Director has worked at LEAP for a total of 10 years. The 3rd and 4th-grade coordinator is in his seventh year. The kindergarten coordinator is in her third year at LEAP.

Time in Operation:

LEAP has been in operation since 1981. From its start until the mid-1990s, the program moved between the Smith and Brooks Schools, hoping for a more permanent location. In September 1995, LEAP began its occupancy of Pod C.

Over the last four decades, LEAP has worked to transform the facility into a comfortable, child-friendly space where students can play, complete class assignments, and have a "home away from home" on the school campus. This gives students and families a sense of security and the ease and ability to participate in on-campus after-school activities such as the Lincoln After School Music Program (LASMP), Recreation Department classes, step classes, sports, and theater.

For the past 12 years, LEAP's enrollment has been steadily increasing. LEAP enrolled 21 new kindergarteners in the program this school year, bringing our total enrollment to 140 students. We believe these numbers will continue to increase over the coming years. We also continue to see an increase in our enrollment for the middle school program, with 29 students enrolled this year compared to 18 for the 2022-2023 school year.

Staff Training and Experience:

Of the employees at LEAP, ten have earned bachelor's degrees, in addition to other coursework and continuing education classes.

- LEAP's Director earned her B.A. in education and an associate degree in art; she also has a certificate in outdoor leadership. She is Director 1 certified.
- LEAP's financial administrator has a B.A. in finance and accounting.
- LEAP's assistant director has a B.A. degree in sociology.
- LEAP's Kindergarten Coordinator has her B.A. in Environmental Science and is in the second semester of her Masters.

- LEAP's 3rd and 4th Grade Coordinator has his B.A. in psychology.
- Six of LEAP's teachers have their bachelor's Degrees, and two are working towards their master's Degrees.

The rest of the staff are at various stages in their education. Four of our group leaders are working towards bachelor's degrees, and three are considering majoring or adding a minor in education.

In Addition, we also employ five part-time high-school students, three of whom were enrolled at LEAP as younger children. Three of these students also work as camp counselors and have demonstrated an interest and talent for working with younger children.

Before being hired by LEAP, staff members are processed through the Criminal Offender (CORI) and Sexual Offender (SORI) registries. Employees may not work with children until the background checks are returned to LEAP and proven to be safe to work with children. Once hired as a LEAP staff member, employees are subjected to yearly CORI and SORI reports through the Department of Early Education and Care as well as the Lincoln Public Schools. All new employees are required to submit to fingerprinting (CHRI), which checks a staff member's background against a national database. All employees are required to be fingerprinted within their first six months of employment.

LEAP core staff members must have First Aid and CPR training and complete 20 hours of additional training each year. Employees are encouraged to enroll in sessions that are of personal interest to them and that they put to immediate use towards the enrichment of LEAP. A few examples of staff selections in recent years include the Northeast Leadership Conference, non-violent crisis intervention at the Crisis Prevention Institute, Social Media

Marketing for small businesses, a pastel painting workshop, and the Tri-District Forum on Anxiety and Mental Health, a Town of Lincoln-sponsored event.

LEAP staff members are also required by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care to take five online courses:

- “51A Mandated Reporter Training” on recognizing child abuse and neglect
- “An Introduction to Early Education and Care in Massachusetts”
- “Look Before You Lock,” regarding safe transportation of children
- “Medication Administration: The Five Rights”
- “USDA Nutrition”
- EEC Strong Start

We believe our program has demonstrated a strong focus on hiring experienced and motivated employees and continuing their training to create a strong and dynamic staff. LEAP focuses on retaining a core group of employees who work at least 20 hours a week at LEAP and hiring part-time workers who are dedicated to child education. Employees continue to meet Commonwealth training requirements as part of our annual licensing process and are encouraged to seek educational courses that they are passionate about and can share with our students.

Staff/Child Ratio:

Although the Commonwealth requires a ratio of at least one staff member for every 13 children, LEAP elects to maintain a ratio that we believe is more favorable to the children in our program—one staff member for every ten children.

While this slightly increases our costs, we believe this allows students to have more personalized and individualized assistance with homework and reading. This also allows us to explore interests and engage in projects requiring more supervision, such as baking, computer programming, and performing arts.

Our staffing ratio also permits employees to escort individual children to and from activities, such as Recreation Department programs, music lessons, scout meetings, athletic practices, and theater rehearsals. These activities are held on the school campus or sometimes as far away as Pierce Park. If we were staffed at the minimum level, employees would not be able to see to the safe and timely delivery of children to their various activities.

LEAP Program:

LEAP's mission is to provide K-8 students with an engaging after-school program that offers diverse opportunities for enrichment, exploration, and the development of social skills in a nurturing environment.

LEAP provides a variety of learning experiences to enhance each child's social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development. We believe that children learn best by doing. The program is designed to allow children to choose from activities including arts and crafts, nature, science, reading, games, baking, sports, and more. The program is augmented with field trips and workshops.

Our teachers are our most valuable resources. They are dedicated professionals committed to providing quality care and education for all children. The LEAP staff recognizes each child's individuality and importance and strives to allow them to explore new pastimes and ideas in a safe, creative, and supportive environment.

Lincoln Extended-day Activities Program does not discriminate based on race, religion, cultural heritage, political beliefs, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, or disability in its admissions, services to families, educational policies, financial assistance, or otherwise in its operation or management.

Use of Lincoln Town and Lincoln Public Schools facilities:

LEAP maintains a strong working relationship with Parks and Recreation, The Lincoln Public Schools, Magic Garden, METCO, Lincoln Facilities Department, and the school and town administrators. LEAP shares many different spaces throughout the school campus. - Items that LEAP enjoys but are not included:

- snow removal of walkways
- plowing of the shared parking lot
- use of Pods A and B rooms and the LPS gymnasiums (this is all coordinated by the facilities department, with building use request applications that we submit)
- use of playgrounds and outdoor spaces
- Access to LPS administration
- At the end of the school year, LEAP is able to use the Codman pool with scheduling through the Parks and Rec department.
- The Lincoln trail system
- LEAP staff pick up the children each day. The pick-up takes place in the dining commons in the school. LPS has allowed LEAP a space and time to pick up the "leapers"

The following is a look at a schedule for a typical day at LEAP:

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday:

- 3:00-3:45 p.m. Pick up, Meeting, Free-play (recess)
- 3:45-4:20 p.m. Homework time
- 4:30-5:30 p.m. Organized choice activities
- 5:30-5:45 p.m. Free-play and structured activities
- 5:45-6:00 p.m. Clean up, quiet time and prepare to go home
- 6:00 p.m. Parents' pick-up

Wednesdays:

- 12:45 p.m. Lunch
- 1:15-1:45 p.m. Recess
- 1:45-4:00 p.m. Leap-wide theme day, Club activity, or field trip (descriptions below)
- 4:00-4:30 p.m. Snack and Homework
- 4:30-5:30 p.m. Organized activities
- 5:30-5:45 p.m. Free-play and structured activities
- 5:45-6:00 p.m. Clean up, quiet time and prepare to go home

Because Wednesdays are a long day at LEAP, we try to find original and fun ways to spend the extra time. This year we have had various theme days at LEAP, where all students participate in themed activities. On Science Day, a visitor from the Discovery Museum in Acton led a traveling workshop where the children were split into age groups and traveled between different stations, each with a different scientific activity. We also celebrated Halloween, various winter holidays, Valentine's Day, and Dr. Suess Day.

On other Wednesdays, students participate in a teacher-led "club" activity of their choice, such as theater, baking, hiking, Dungeons, and Dragons, or organized sports such as soccer or capture the flag. Depending on the weather, there may be sledding or a trip to Pierce Park or Codman Farm.

LEAP offers an optional, off-campus field trip to age-appropriate destinations one Wednesday a month. This year, we have gone to Apple Picking, Roller Blading, Einstein's Workshop, Movies, and an inflatable theme park. Field trips depart after the children eat lunch and return by 5:00 p.m. Admission costs are included in LEAP's monthly fee.

LEAP's staff ratio to children permits us to offer an array of Wednesday afternoon programs and let students choose their preferred activity. It also enables us to create separate field trip experiences for younger and older students and to permit those who want or need to remain in Lincoln for music lessons or other activities to do so with appropriate supervision.

The following is a brief description of our educational activities and community involvement:

- **Technology** — LEAP has purchased 5 new laptop computers for the students to use. By expanding access to technology, LEAP is now able to support students who use a computer to complete homework assignments and participate in STEM activities. We have 10 computers in total. We will be getting a 3-D printer from a board member.
- **STEM Activities** — LEAP has a variety of organized activities, called “choices,” that children participate in after homework time. In the past, we asked students to choose between Project, Rec, and Elective. However, in 2018 we proudly added STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) as an option for these activities. We have continued this activity for the 2023-2024 school year so that students can develop their STEM skills and engage in new experiments every day.
- **Continued collaboration with Drumlin Farm**—LEAP works with Drumlin Farm to bring farm-related opportunities to our students. For years, we have participated in specialty programs that Drumlin Farm offers. These programs include “Native Pathways” and the “Farm-to-Market” programs. We have another field trip planned for this April, where students will be learning about the “Ecosystems of New England.”
- **Visits from special speakers**—LEAP regularly hosts talks with parents and other guest speakers on topics. LEAP consistently invites the Lincoln Fire Department and Police Department. We hosted a magician this year and plan to invite Lincoln Conservation Director Bryn Gingrich to present. In past years, LEAP has had presentations from a Lincoln drone enthusiast, a professional dance troop, flying frisbee dogs, traveling theater groups, and a musical comedian. These guests allow children to see a wide variety of people pursuing their passions as careers, giving students an opportunity to look “outside the box” for their own futures.

- **Visits from librarians from the Lincoln Public Library**—LEAP has long borrowed books from the library in order to increase the diversity of reading materials for children. We also have coordinated visits with our local librarian, Sara, who comes every week to read and discuss new and relevant stories with the students.

- **Traveling Workshop with Discovery Museum in Acton**—For the past 10 years, LEAP has invited instructors from the Discovery Museum in Acton to teach children about sound, magnets, bubbles, and more with various traveling workshops. These visits from our neighborhood science museum give students an opportunity to learn about science in a fun and safe way while introducing them to a nearby facility to explore their scientific interests further. We are planning another visit from the museum this spring.

- **Field Trips to Decordova Museum**—Every year, LEAP takes children on nature walks through the beautiful woods of Lincoln to our local outdoor museum. During the walking field trip, the children learn about their environment, community, and fine arts. Students explored the museum this past fall, and we plan on returning this spring.

- **Community Service**—Since 2014 LEAP has hosted a community service awareness week, every year. Students ask parents and community members to pledge non-perishable food donations, then run and walk laps to earn those items. LEAP students raised over 500 food items donated to Open Table, a charity right here in Middlesex County that provides food to more than 300 families in Concord, Maynard, and surrounding communities. This is a yearly event. Throughout the year, children also make cards for veterans and the elderly, learn about Random Acts of Kindness, and clean up the campus. LEAP also has a working relationship with the Lincoln Land Conservation Trust. We have had some of our kids help with the pollinator's gardens. We look forward to continue to partner with them in the future.

- **Robotics**- The town's robotics team has been working with LEAP students to guide them through building robots with a computer program and legos. This has been such a positive collaboration with the middle school/high school robotics team. Anne Wang helps facilitate and runs this team.

- **School Vacation Programs**—During the February and April school vacations and the end of school in June, LEAP offers Vaca-Playdays for children in grades kindergarten through sixth grade from 9:00 a.m. To 4:00 p.m. Vaca-Playdays is open to all Lincoln students, not just those who are already enrolled in LEAP.

COVID Protocols:

LEAP continued to be a safe, dependable, and affordable choice for Lincoln families who desired after-school care for their children. Although LEAP looked different the year of COVID-19 we stayed true to our mission to provide K-8 students with an engaging after-school program that offers diverse opportunities for enrichment, exploration, and the development of social skills in a nurturing environment. Here are some of the safety protocols that we put into place to remain open during such an uneasy time:

- We opened our doors to students on September 21, 2020, and were able to remain open without any closures due to COVID-19 successfully.
- Retention of our spectacular staff ensures a high quality of care and provides continuity to our students.
- Created grade level cohorts that were individually staffed to limit staff interaction and prevent mixing of grade levels.
- Purchased large-capacity air purifiers with HEPA filtration to ensure proper ventilation, especially in winter.
- Increased our staff-to-student ratio so staff could self-isolate if necessary but still allow all of our programs to continue even if a staff member stayed home.

Governing Board and Parent Participation:

LEAP's day-to-day operations are managed by one director, who focuses on programming, staff, and operations, with the help of a professional accountant for budget matters. They report to a parent-run board that is currently in discussions about strategic planning and possibilities of improvements in the upcoming years.

The board is comprised of the following members:

President: Andy Wang

Treasurer: Charlie Knutso

Clerk: Jim Young

Parent Representatives: Sofia Kampoures, Jeff Chabot, Todd Staples, Shira Horowitz, Joe Sullivan, and Heather Sheridan,

The board and staff of LEAP also welcome contributions and support from specialists in our community. We have benefitted from substantial assistance from:

- Sharon Lincoln, LEAP parent, and *pro bono* legal counsel—Sharon is an attorney at Foley Hoag and specializes in non-profit law. She helps the board update documents and improve our corporate governance.
- James Suttie, computer support—James is a member of the IT department at the Lincoln Schools. He helps update the software and safety settings on our computers and laptops, assuring that students are getting safe, fast, and helpful technology.
- Trisha Mcgean, Town nurse—Trisha is our health consultant.

Parents are continuously encouraged to express opinions to staff and directors. All board meetings are open to LEAP parents. Each school year, parents are asked to complete a written survey to discover what is most important to them and their vision for the program's future. We also solicit their general feedback on the program. Parents' comments are consistently overwhelmingly favorable but also offer valuable suggestions that the board and staff work to address. Parents are also invited to the annual board meeting in the spring where we review the year and elect a new board for the coming school year.

Proposed Fee Structure:

Members of the LEAP Board, the director, and the Director of Operations evaluate, yearly the fee structure to ensure best value to all LEAP families.

LEAP continues to provide a universal 25% tuition discount to Lincoln Public Schools employees. As part of our effort to make LEAP affordable, the program provides financial assistance, including vouchers from the Child Care circuit. For the 2022-2023 school year, LEAP gave \$29,000 in financial assistance to over 15 families, allowing more than 25 children to attend this program.

Monthly Rates:

Our regular monthly rates for the 2023-2024 school year are as follows:

\$100 registration fee (covers leaps per child cost of insurance)

Kindergarten

5 days a week	\$793
4 days a week	\$691
3 days a week (including Wednesday)	\$662
3 days a week (without Wednesday)	\$529
2 days a week (including Wednesday)	\$480
2 days a week (without Wednesday)	\$349

Grades 1–8

5 days a week	\$690
4 days a week	\$598
3 days a week (including Wednesday)	\$572
3 days a week (without Wednesday)	\$455
2 days a week (including Wednesday)	\$419
2 days a week (without Wednesday)	\$309

The LEAP board suggests that the program’s rent remain as specified in our proposed licensing agreement.

Following is the recent history of LEAP’s lease payments, which had increased by three percent every year until entering the licensing agreement.

- 2008-2009: \$25,000
- 2009-2010: \$25,740
- 2010-2011: \$26,522.50
- 2011-2012: \$27,318.18
- 2012-2013: \$28,137.72
- 2013-2014: \$31,000
- 2014-2015: \$28,800
- 2015-2016: \$28,800
- 2016-2017: \$30,400
- 2017-2018: \$31,100
- 2018-2019: \$31,600
- 2019-2020: \$31,650
- 2020-2021: \$32,140
- 2021-2022: \$32,150
- 2022-2023: \$33,750

Closing:

In Closing, LEAP has been operating successfully at this facility for over two decades. Our staff, programs, and references speak to the continued achievements of the program. We are focusing our efforts on strategic planning and hiring valuable staff members to continue enhancing and enriching activities for our students. We believe that this facility is an ideal environment for our afterschool program and look forward to growing the community that we have established.

References:

Heather Sheridan and Phyllis Wampler
(LEAP Parents)

We are a family of four living in Lincoln since 2018. We utilize LEAP every day; it makes such a big difference in our lives, not just our kids. The enrichment our kids receive via LEAP is second to none. They do some of the things you'd expect at an after-school program - art, sports, games, etc. - but it's the staff, headed by Katie Hawkins, that makes the difference. Through them, the kids learn about cooperation, fair play, taking turns, dealing with poor choices, and many other life skills. They get a good mix of indoor and outdoor play, which is essential for their growth. As working moms, we couldn't provide what Katie and her team provide each day – a sense of wonder and a chance to just be a kid. We are incredibly grateful to Katie and her entire team for what they offer us and to the community as a whole.

Sincerely,
Heather Sheridan and Phyllis Wampler

Dear School Committee Members,

We cannot speak highly enough about our experience with LEAP, the after-school facility that has truly become the highlight of our daughters' days. From the moment they step through the doors, our girls are greeted with enthusiasm and warmth that immediately sets the tone for a fantastic afternoon.

Our daughters often report on LEAP as the best part of the day, and we couldn't be happier with the positive impact it has on their overall well-being. The staff at LEAP is not just present; they are consistently engaged and go above and beyond to create a nurturing environment that fosters both learning and fun. It's evident that they genuinely care about the children's development and happiness.

LEAP has become an invaluable resource for our family, making it easier for us as parents to focus on work with the peace of mind that our daughters are in capable hands. The welcoming and engaging atmosphere provided by LEAP is a testament to their commitment to creating a supportive community for both children and parents alike.

One measure of LEAP's success is that our daughters are often upset when we pick them up early because they are so engrossed in the variety of activities offered. It's heartwarming to witness their enthusiasm for learning and play, and we credit LEAP for fostering this love for education and social interaction.

Sincerely,

Ryan Bouldin and Elizabeth Levy
Parents for Flory Bouldin (6th grade) and Perrin Bouldin (3rd grade)

Dear School Committee-

I am a first-year leap parent. Last year when weighing the options on what to do with my soon-to-be kindergartener after school I asked around. The consensus from most parents was to have her go to Leap. When looking into it, the program seemed great, a seamless transition from school to the leap space on campus, great activities, field trips, times (which was very important with a household of two working parents), and of course the Friday fun night component.

Once I had learned that my daughter had secured a spot in the program I was nervous, was sending her after school too long of a day? How will she know where to go after school? Will she get lost in the crowd? After the first day all my fears melted away. After the first week they were family. They knew who I was, my husband was and even my younger child's name. We would walk in for pickup and know which kid I was getting and where they were even though there were multiple rooms and tons of parents and kids running around.

Being someone that needs to know people for a living, it fascinated me that Katie and her staff could already recognize and know not only the kids' names but the families of the kids so quickly.

My daughter has been obsessed with leap since day one. She loves her down time and the worry that she would be overstimulated and exhausted after school was a great concern for us. She prefers to go there rather than school. The main reason for that is the teachers and activities offered. There is a schedule but she is given the opportunity to choose her activities she does every day which has given her more confidence in decision making.

As a parent the biggest thing for us is that our child is happy and safe. Leap provides that and more. They have been critical in helping build up our daughter's confidence and creativity among other things. I am extremely excited to have found the Leap program and to have this as a safe and loving place for our children to go through their Lincoln school journey.

I would be happy to elaborate more or give specific examples to anything I spoke to above. Ultimately, the program has been amazing for my new kindergartener and we are so thankful for Katie and the staff for all they do!

Sincerely,

Alanna Conant (mother to Georgia Conant)

Dear School Committee Members,

Throughout my childhood, I attended a wonderfully vibrant after-school program called LEAP. At LEAP, I learned that people who may seem different from me in one setting can feel much more similar in another. For example, at school, I rarely interacted with kids who weren't my age, but at LEAP, I had many opportunities to get to know younger and older kids. United by a shared after-school experience, I developed meaningful relationships with older kids who served as role models and who motivated me to set positive examples for younger kids. I learned how connecting with different age groups can create communities where everybody plays an important part in taking care of one another.

Additionally, LEAP gave me opportunities to develop caring relationships with adults of different races, religions, genders, and ages who came from outside the "bubble" of my town. At LEAP, everyone's unique cultures and differences were celebrated and shared. For example, knowing my passion for origami, the staff encouraged me to lead an arts and crafts origami lesson for the other kids. They helped me plan the lesson, allowing me to share a piece of my Japanese culture. Through caring and acceptance, LEAP fosters a community where people are able to be their authentic selves. This is evident upon walking through LEAP's doors; it's a lively and happy place, bursting with love, respect, and all types of unique personalities. LEAP shaped who I am today in that I have learned to genuinely appreciate differences and recognize how inclusion strengthens communities.

Sincerely,

Marielle Soluri (past LEAP student, present Assistant LEAP teacher)