

**MINUTES OF THE RETREAT
OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
SCHOOL DISTRICT 4J, LANE COUNTY, OREGON**

August 25, 2021

The Board of Directors of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, held a board retreat from 12:00–6:00 p.m. and an executive session at 6:00 p.m. at the Education Center, 200 North Monroe Street, Eugene, Oregon. Notice of the meeting was mailed to the media and posted in the Education Center on August 20, 2021 and published in *The Register-Guard* on August 25, 2021

ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS:

Judy Newman, Chair
Martina Shabram, Vice Chair
Alicia Hays
Gordon Lafer
Alicia Hays
Laural O'Rourke
Maya Rabasa
Mary Walston (absent)

STAFF:

Cydney Vandercar, Interim Superintendent
Kerry Delf, Chief of Staff
Christine Nesbit, General Counsel
Lisa Fjordbeck, Executive Assistant / Board Secretary

MEDIA: none

OTHER: Sabrina Gordon, EEA President, Imelda Cortez, EEA Vice President

Welcome & Introductions

Chair Judy Newman welcomed board members and introduced Margot Helphand as the facilitator for the board retreat. Chair Newman shared thoughts on her hope that the board does its best work as a whole seven member board, working together as one, and she is looking forward to the work that this board will do together.

Ms. Margot Helphand welcomed and thanked the board for coming together for the retreat and expressed appreciation for the investment of time by the board as they work together to set the goals and plans for the coming year.

Mr. Lafer asked if the board retreat was being broadcast or available on line. Ms. Delf commented that the board retreats are typically not broadcast but are available for in person

attendance by the community.

Mr. Lafer stated that the retreat was broadcast last year and he knows of several people who were interested in listening to the discussion.

Ms. Delf said that last year the community was locked down due to COVID-19 and public access to the board retreat was restricted to only online attendance. Board members also participated virtually and did not meet in-person.

Ms. Hays said she thinks that because we went back to in-person meetings it makes sense that the retreat would go back to the old ways of holding retreats in-person with in-person audience attendance. She said that to make a decision to change the process would take the board having a discussion and making a decision and the board could not do that prior to the retreat without violating public meeting law. However, Ms. Hays said she was open to change and would look forward to discussing process for future meeting.

Ms. Helphand thanked the board for their comments and moved them along to the next activity.

Ms. Helphand led the discussion on “trust.” She asked each person to reflect on experiences around working with a group and how to establish trust.

Chair Newman spoke about creating cohesion with her work team.

Ms. Hays spoke of team building with her staff in her professional life and not having “false harmony” and being authentic in the work.

Ms. O'Rourke, shared that having trust is important and that after a really difficult situation you could lean on your colleagues and feel supported.

Mr. Lafer said shared belief and shared goals is helpful for team cohesion.

Ms. Rabasa shared that a team learns not to make assumptions and clarify intent before reacting.

Ms. Shabram feels lucky that in her work place she has a great sense of trust with her teammates. There is a culture of accountability but also the understanding that mistakes will be made and out of the mistakes could come good things.

Ms. Helphand said that the tone of all the comments was around trust and trust is an outcome of behavior. Ms. Helphand wanted each person to reflect on that and to articulate why they would invest in this.

Ms. Newman said she wanted to work towards more cohesion and she wanted the work to be put in so the board would have that cohesion. Ms. Newman said when the board works as a team, they can do their best work.

Mr. Lafer said that he wants to have healthy discussions on disagreements so that they can come together to be trusting and respectful while disagreeing.

Ms. Hays wants to establish trust but is concerned that it may be difficult to achieve until the board puts in the work to get there.

Ms. O'Rourke said that having accountability would help build trust.

Ms. Rabasa said that she would like to make assumptions that the intent is coming from a good place and not from malintent.

Ms. Shabram said she is reflecting on how to be more trustworthy and to work to have others feel comfortable about trusting.

Ms. Helphand asked for one commitment that each board member would be willing to make to make this board more affective:

Mr. Lafer said he would be more aware of situations and be more supportive of the board chair.

Ms. Rabasa said she was committing to being genuine, honest and straightforward with questions, insight and information.

Ms. O'Rourke said she had willingness to be okay with mistakes of her own and being open to learning. She gives herself this grace and extends it to others.

Ms. Hays recognizes that the board had conversations many years ago and she's looking at ways to bring that information in to the new board. She wondered how does the board bring the info from previous conversation and then include it in the new discussion to see what is still of value and what needs to be reconsidered. She recognizes that new board members may not have the context on information and decisions that were made before they were elected.

Ms. Shabram said it's important to be aware outside of the room as well as inside the room. There is vulnerability with the current political climate. She is hopeful that even when board members disagree, they are backing each other up and not undermining the trust.

Ms. Helphand thanked the board for sharing openly.

1. Role of the Board: What's My Lane??

The board does the "what" and the superintendent does the "how."

Ms. Helphand led the board through a discussion to define what is the role of the board and what is the role of the superintendent. She gave examples of "creating the high school student handbook" is that the role of the board or the role of the superintendent"

The board sets the policy and the superintendent creates the handbook outlining how the district ensures the board policy is upheld in the student handbook.

Mr. Lafer asked about clarifying the role of the board in setting budgets and used the Student Investment Account (SIA) funds as an example. He said that the board didn't get into the details of the SIA budget setting and he feels that the board should have more involvement than what they ended up doing.

Chair Newman said on the board meeting agenda, the consent agenda is intended to move the meeting along and allow for efficiency. The district budget was set by the board and the items being brought forward are part of the budget that has already been set. She said having

extended conversation on budgets already set is frustrating. She acknowledged that perhaps the board needs to get in front of this with better prioritizing and goal setting.

Ms. Helphand said that goal setting is the key to establishing priority and directing the superintendent to make it happen when possible and if not possible having that discussion with the superintendent.

Chair Newman said the board acts as the checks and balance in the running of the district and the board can ask the superintendent clarifying questions around accountability.

Ms. Hays said she was checking to confirm is this the boards work to own or is this staff/superintendent?

Ms. Hays said that this board will find times where they absolutely will disagree, but if nothing else is accomplished from this retreat, it is to find a place where we can disagree and be okay with that, but not let that disagreement stop the work.

Ms. O'Rourke said she needs to have the complete picture to make a decision.

Ms. Helphand walked the board through calendaring to their board meeting schedule. She encouraged the board to look at projected agenda items and determining the importance and placement on the meeting schedules to assess what the board needs to do. Some agenda items are required, like passing the budget and Division 22 reporting, and what the board *needs* to do. Some things have to happen and some things the board gets to choose what they want to work on.

Ms. Shabram said that the board needs to be realistic on how they spend their time and they need to recognize board member time limitations. Ms. Shabram said there is only so much time and the board needs to prioritize their time accordingly.

Ms. Helphand gave the board an assignment for part two of the retreat scheduled for Saturday, August 28. She asked that each board member think about "what do you bring to the board." "What is your gift?"

Recap: What went well today and what do we need to change?

Feedback:

Ms. Rabasa said she appreciated the flexibility of the agenda to dig deeper in issues and hard discussions.

Ms. O'Rourke said she appreciates having the hard discussions.

Chair Newman said she appreciates everyone showing up and being present and having good conversations.

Ms. Hays said she appreciated the opportunity to spend time together with her fellow board members.

Mr. Lafer said he was appreciative of the time spent.

Ms. Shabram said she appreciates Superintendent Vandercar for being willing to jump in and share perspective . She thanks to staff and union leadership for being present for the retreat.

The board agreed to make the meeting on Saturday accessible via zoom.

Chair Newman adjourned the board retreat at 8:00 p.m.

Cydney Vandercar
District Clerk

Judy Newman
Board Chair