

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

Date: October 27, 2021

The Board of Directors of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, held a work session at 5:30 p.m. at the Education Center, 200 North Monroe Street in Eugene, Oregon. Notice of the meeting was mailed to the media and posted in the Education Center on Friday, October 22, 2021, and published in *The Register-Guard* on Monday, October 25, 2021.

ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS:

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

STAFF:

Karen Hardin, Director of Human Resources
Christine Nesbit, General Counsel
Kerry Delf, Chief of Staff
Lisa Fjordbeck, Executive Assistant / Board Secretary

MEDIA: KRVM

I. WORK SESSION

1. Conduct Interviews of Superintendent Search Firm Finalist(s)
Prepared by: Christine Nesbit, General Counsel and Kerry Delf, Chief of Staff
Presented by: Judy Newman, Board Chair

The services of a consultant are needed to assist the school board with the search plan and recruitment process for a permanent superintendent of schools.

The district received four proposals in response to the RFP. At the October 20 meeting, the Board confirmed which firms would be the finalists to invite for an interview. The purpose of the work session was to interview three finalists. A timeline of the work session was included in the packet. Each interview was 40 minutes long.

Chair Newman summarized the timeline and then introduced Karen Hardin, Director of Human Resources. Ms. Hardin referred to the packet each Board member had received which included the questions that would be asked and a place to write notes. It also included a ranking sheet. She gave additional suggestions for how the Board would use their time between the interviews, and asked the Board to check their assumptions before the interviews began.

Each Board member had been assigned a question to be asked, in order, for each search firm. She also asked the Board not to ask follow-up questions in order to make the interviews fair. However, she did say that reiteration or redirection of the question was allowed.

Director Hardin then showed how to use the ranking sheet and clarified that scoring could change as a result of discussion.

There was a discussion about whether everyone had read the materials and whether they should take time to review them. Ms. Hardin reminded the Board that the notes they took that evening were part of the public record and should pertain to the responses they heard. The notes would be collected.

The first search firm interviewed was Hazard, Young, Attea and Associates.

Chair Newman introduced herself and gave a brief overview of the interview process. Lorraine Garcy, Dr. David Gomez, and Carolyn McKennan introduced themselves.

Ms. Walston asked the first question: What lessons had the search firm learned about working with different stakeholder groups at different stages in the search process. Ms. Darcy answered that the engagement process was one of the most important parts of what they did to learn about the needs of the district. Dr. Gomez enjoyed interviewing the Board members to learn their vision. Ms. McKennan added that after the engagement process was complete, the firm would be able to create a leadership profile.

Ms. Shabram asked how the process might change as a result of COVID restrictions. Ms. McKennan answered they had experience with the issue and had been successful with large group virtual meetings. Dr. Gomez added that they would also use surveys to create qualitative data to accompany what they were hearing in the large group meetings.

Ms. Rabasa asked what methods and data the firm could provide to show their success in engaging candidates who had historically been underrepresented in superintendencies. Dr. Gomez shared a current example in a district in California. He added that they were a national firm and once they had a leadership profile would look for potential candidates. He said that they also recruited applicants who might not have applied. Ms. McKennan added that the firm did have data to prove their track record in recruiting underrepresented groups.

Ms. O'Rourke asked how a candidate profile was developed. Ms. McKennan answered that the first step was to interview constituents and ask three questions: what were the strengths of the district; what were the challenges of the district; and what were the desired characteristics in a superintendent. She continued that from the information gathered in the meetings and surveys, they created a leadership profile with which to find candidates. Dr. Gomez added that each Board member would be interviewed. Once the profile was created, the Board would have the opportunity to refine it during a meeting.

Chair Newman asked the firm for an example of a successful match for a district that had a distinct candidate profile. After clarifying the question, Dr. Gomez gave an example of a situation in California in which the firm was able to find a unique match for a district that was struggling with trust. Ms. McKennan said that the strength of a good search firm was their ability to determine what the Board and community were looking for in the right candidate. Ms. Gary

reiterated that the most important part of the process was determining the characteristics of the candidate based on the feedback of stakeholders.

Mr. Lafer asked for an example of a time when the firm had helped a Board that had significant disagreements among its members to reach agreement and move forward. He asked for details on the conflict and how it was resolved. Ms. McKennan started by sharing information about the selection process. She added that there was a part of the process that included respectful discussion about specific candidate choices to help the Board reach a consensus. Ms. Garcy shared a situation during which a Board had significant disagreement, but were able to reach a decision by following the process. Ms. McKennan warned the Board that there would be many groups trying to influence the Board's decision, but they needed to determine what was best for the district.

Ms. Hays asked whether the firm wanted to share anything else that had not been covered. Ms. McKennan shared that they looked for superintendent candidates who showed an understanding that it was their role to work with boards to get work done, not try to sway boards to their agenda. Dr. Gomez said that it was important to select a superintendent who could make decisions in the best interest of the district. Ms. McKennan added that it was important to find someone who was philosophically aligned with the Board. She, Ms. Darcy, and Dr. Gomez made summarizing comments.

The next search firm interviewed was Alma Advisory Group, represented by Monica Santana Rosen, Kathleen Shiverdecker and Sylvia Flowers. Each of them introduced themselves. Ms. Rosen, the founder, shared that the firm had been in business for five years.

In response to the first question, Ms. Rosen answered that her firm would begin by asking the board who were the key stakeholders, and would give special emphasis to determining which groups might have been excluded and how they could come to the table to be part of the conversation. She added that it was important to get the word out early so that the community could have time to plan to attend. In addition, she shared that it was important to have smaller facilitated conversations so that everyone had a chance to share. The firm would also use surveys to reach those community members who could not or were not willing to attend a meeting. Ms. Flowers added that in person and virtual meetings gave more people the opportunity to participate.

In response to the second question, Ms. Flowers shared that they had run entire searches virtually. They had co-created, with board input, a design for the process that was successful. She added that they used recordings to provide information not in real time. Ms. Shiverdecker said that the student voice was very important and using virtual engagement worked very well with them. Ms. Rosen added that they were creating hybrid environments to ensure that stakeholders could participate in the way that felt the most safe to them. She also shared that the meetings with the community were the core of the job description they used for candidates.

In response to the third question, asked by Ms. Rabasa, Ms. Rosen said that every step of their process was designed to mitigate bias. Once the board determined what skills were the most necessary for the role, the firm ensured that only those skills were measured. They also offered anti-bias training as a prerequisite for being an interviewer. She continued that by being clear on a skillset, the process allowed candidates to focus on their strengths, biases were mitigated,

and more leaders of color emerged. Ms. Rosen shared some data that showed their success rate in promoting finalists of color and that their process was fair and equitable.

Ms. Shiverdecker answered question four. She shared that they wanted to ensure that the focus was on the competencies for the role. Ms. Rosen added that they started the superintendent search process by interviewing each Board member to determine why they had wanted to be a Board member. They then invited stakeholders to share their hopes for the future work of their new superintendent. Ms. Rosen gave an example of a search they had conducted for a district in Colorado. Ms. Shiverdecker added that they wanted potential candidates to see themselves reflected in the job description. This would allow the right persons to apply for the job. Ms. Flowers added that many candidates had been compelled to apply because of the honesty of the job description.

Ms. Rosen answered question five with an example from Denver Public Schools. She shared that there were three important issues that the community faced and were looking for someone who could unify the district. Ms. Rosen described the process that the finalist implemented in order to set himself apart from the rest of the finalists, including the background work he did prior to his interview to familiarize himself with the community, and the grace he showed during interviews with students.

Ms. Rosen began her answer to question six by stating that hiring a superintendent was the most important decision a board would make. She continued that it would be important to spend the time necessary to determine what the board held as common ground, so that later on, if there were disagreements, there was an understanding of the priorities. She said that it was the firm's role to help facilitate the conversations so that the Board could reach shared language to define the skills and competencies they were looking for in a candidate. Ms. Flowers added that boards and search committees that embraced the process learned to return to the evidence seen and heard in the interviews. After determining which candidates had demonstrated evidence of their skills and competencies, final deliberation was to agree on the one candidate that all members could support.

In response to question seven, Ms. Shiverdecker reiterated the firm's fierce commitment to engaging stakeholders who were often not heard in the process. Ms. Rosen added that it was important to lead meetings and have conversations with people in their native language. She challenged the Board to determine what other languages besides Spanish were represented in the community.

Ms. Rosen added that their process seemed simple, but gave space for determining the unique attributes of the district. She shared that their first goal was to learn, and secondly to partner with a district to do their work. She finished by saying that throughout the search process, she hoped the Board would learn skills and adapt them to other situations.

The third firm interviewed was McPherson & Jacobsen, LLC, represented by Steve Lowder, Janet Dixon, Douglas Nelson, and Gustavo Balderas, who introduced themselves.

In response to the first question, Mr. Lowder responded that all student groups would need to be involved in all stages of the process. He had learned throughout the previous year that more of the community could give their voice when meetings were offered virtually. Ms. Dixon added that she been on the school board as part of a search with McPherson & Jacobsen and had

learned firsthand how important it was to hear from all stakeholders, internal as well as external. Mr. Balderas said that it was also important to understand the differences in areas of the community and to seek out input from students who had been marginalized.

In response to question two, Mr. Lowder reiterated that having virtual meetings had enhanced the ability to reach out to more people in the community. Ms. Dixon said that community members could also watch the recorded meetings and give their input through a survey.

Mr. Lowder began the answers to question three by sharing that the firm had 125 consultants across the country who represented diverse backgrounds and were actively engaged in helping find candidates. He said that in the past five years, thirty percent of their applicants had been women and a fourth had been ethnically diverse. In the past ten years a third of the candidates placed had been either women or ethnically diverse. He discussed how critical it was to find a good fit, someone who had the skill set and the sensitivity to the needs of the district, and shared additional statistics to show the firm's track record in placing superintendents who stayed in the job.

Ms. O'Rourke asked question four. Mr. Lowder began by saying that instead of developing a profile for a candidate, the firm tried to match a skill set, qualities and characteristics, experiences and traits of the individual with a district's needs. They would look for candidates and individuals who met the needs that were developed through the process. Mr. Nelson added that the firm would work with the board and stakeholder groups that would develop the skills and characteristics.

In response to question five, Mr. Lowder shared a story about finding a candidate for a school district in Vancouver. The candidate was selected because of his track record in the community and his skillset. His work was known to the groups and he was the unanimous choice. Ms. Dixon gave an example in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Mr. Balderas added that it would be important to find a leader who is valued by the employee groups.

Mr. Lafer asked question six. Mr. Lowder shared a story about Valdez, Alaska. The community was split between two very different candidates. He shared that the most important relationship would be between the board and their superintendent. Any weaknesses of a candidate would be supported by staff. Mr. Nelson shared that sometimes the best thing for a search firm to do was to support the board in working through their issues. Ms. Dixon added that although some boards could not get along, they were able to come together when the best choice of superintendent to support the students was clear. Mr. Balderas continued that if the fit was right, the board would coalesce around the bigger objective.

Mr. Lowder finished by saying that it was about serving all students, ensuring that all employee and community voices were heard, with the outcome of them being ready to support their new superintendent. Mr. Douglas said that they did not have a group of candidates from which they always pulled, but would actively recruit candidates that met the criteria provided by the district. Mr. Balderas said a good superintendent would be an equalizer and a champion for the unique educational needs of the community. Ms. Dixon shared that if their firm was chosen, they would be the most hard-working team ever.

After hearing from the three firms, the Board began their discussion. Ms. Walston asked whether they would be using the equity tool to guide their thinking. Chair Newman said that it

would be important to use the equity tool, even though they had not received training. Ms. O'Rourke agreed.

After discussing what voting system the Board would use to indicate their choices, Ms. Hardin asked everyone to raise their hand when she called the name of each firm to indicate whether they had ranked it third. After the initial round of voting, it was determined that Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates was no longer a candidate.

Ms. Hardin then gave each member of the Board one minute to share their thoughts on Alma Advisory group, after which the Board did the same for McPherson & Jacobsen. Ms. Hardin then asked the Board to compare and contrast specific issues for each candidate to see whether they could come up with a clear choice.

Ms. Hays asked whether it would be possible to move forward two candidates in case one of the candidates did not pass the reference check or determined that they did not want to assist in the search. Ms. Newman agreed that she thought the Board would be forwarding two candidates. She added that she hoped to have more time to reflect on her notes.

Ms. O'Rourke expressed interest in discussing the Board's concerns about each candidate. There was a discussion about Alma Advisory Group's lack of experience hiring superintendents. There was also continued discussion about how the Board would use the equity tool during the process.

Ms. Hardin clarified that when calling to get references, it was a good practice to have general questions asked about both firms, and then some targeted questions to learn more about each candidate.

Chair Newman summarized that there was concern among some Board members about the reach and capacity of Alma Advisory Group, and asked whether there were any concerns about McPherson & Jacobsen that could be clarified during the reference check. Ms. O'Rourke shared that she wanted to learn how the firm addressed equity in the process they used. She added that she wondered why the firm felt the need to share that they had experience doing searches in Oregon. Ms. Newman said she felt that understanding the nuances of districts in Oregon was a plus. Ms. Walston expressed concern that other board members had suggested that Dr. Balderas, the past superintendent, had a conflict of interest in being part of the McPherson team. She said the fact that Dr. Balderas was the Oregon Superintendent of the year and the National Superintendent of the Year were large pluses for her in consideration of the response from the McPherson proposal.

Ms. Rabasa then encouraged that the reference questions be framed in specific examples. Mr. Lafer suggested asking groups in Vancouver what their experience had been with McPherson & Jacobsen. Ms. Walston expressed her concern with getting reference checks done before the next Board meeting on November 3.

Ms. Shabram proposed to the Board the following questions be asked during references checks, along with the specific questions for each firm: please give us examples of how the firm dealt with conflict resolution; would you hire the firm again; what was your biggest concern going into the search and how did the firm address the concern? Additional questions were offered during the discussion that followed: did the firm find candidates that matched your specific profile; what community groups were involved and who was on your search team?

Chair Newman clarified that the Board would receive anti-bias training before they started the superintendent search process, regardless of what search firm they hired.

Chair Newman summarized that the next steps would be to have an executive session prior to the Board meeting on November 3 to get the feedback from the references they had contacted for each candidate. They would ask an equal number of references. The Board would also share how they had used their preferred equity tool to reach their decisions. Ms. Shabram added that the executive session would be before the regular Board meeting, during which they would vote.

Ms. Hardin reminded the Board that all their notes were part of the public process and needed to be collected.

II. ADJOURN

Chair Newman adjourned the work session at 9:25 p.m.

Cydney Vandercar
District Clerk

Judy Newman
Board Chair

(Recorded by Eliza Drummond)