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

Date: January 19, 2022

The Board of Directors of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, held a work session 5:30 p.m. via zoom webinar. Notice of the meeting was mailed to the media and posted in the Education Center on Friday, January 14, 2022 and published in *The Register-Guard* on Monday, January 19, 2022.

ROLL CALL

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

STAFF:
Kerry Delf, Chief of Staff
Lisa Fjordbeck, Executive Assistant / Board Secretary

I. WORK SESSION

Conduct XXXXXX

Chair Newman called the work session to order and explained that the purpose was to learn how to conduct a superintendent search with as little bias as possible. She introduced Ms. Monica Rosen and Sidney Kubote and said that Ms. Sylvia Flowers would be joining them later. Chair Newman thanked the group for conducting a session that complied with the public meeting laws in Oregon.

Ms. Rosen made brief introductory remarks. She had appreciated how active and engaged the community had been with the superintendent search process to date. She said that the work session would be about managing bias: what it was; how it occurred; how it was revealed in the superintendent search and in the workplace as well. She added that the conversation they were about to have was usually not done in a public setting. She cautioned that the board might find themselves feeling vulnerable. She hoped to have dialog with all board members over the course of the meeting.

Ms. Rosen shared a document that reviewed the evening's goals. She said that the most important factor in managing bias was to ensure that the board was in agreement with the responsibilities and competencies of the position of the superintendent.

Ms. Rosen described the work of Alma Advisory Group—to assist school districts meet their goals for their students. Alma meant "to foster" in Latin, and described the work of their

organization. They believed that the best solutions came from the people on the front lines, living the work, with the most at stake. She then introduced Mr. Sidney Kubote.

Mr. Kubote introduced himself in his native language. He was a key facilitator for Alma Advisory Group and was also a strategic planner for organizations in his native Indian tribes and country. He hoped to build consensus and give voice to those who had been historically marginalized.

Ms. Rosen said that Alma Advisory Group found Glenn Singleton's work "Courageous Conversations about Race" to be foundational to their work. She continued by introducing a list of working agreements for the board to review: to stay engaged even when things were uncomfortable; name discomfort and experience it; speak truth; and expect and accept non-closure. She added that everyone had bias and should not expect to be rid of their bias at the end of the evening.

Ms. Rosen then asked everyone to relax and be a learner. No decisions would be made that night. She requested that any comments made that evening not be held against the person who made them, and asked that everyone assume positive intent. She then asked the group which agreements resonated with them, and was there anything they wanted to add.

Ms. Rabasa said that she often had difficulty accepting non-closure and had to understand that it was more likely than not.

Ms. Shabram agreed that she had had challenges with the same issue for different reasons.

Chair Newman said that although it wasn't one of the four specific agreement, she hoped to be able to assume positive intent.

Mr. Lafer referred to the issue of non-closure. He understood that there were many topics which the board had not made progress on and he struggled with not finding closure and wondering when it would happen. Ms. Rosen suggested that if one of the topics arose, they could explore it in the moment, or choose a time to address it later. She hoped that the board would end the evening with more tools to use going forward.

Ms. Rosen asked if there was anything to be added.

Ms. Hays shared that she would find it challenging to be engaged and to assume positive intent because of the nature of the evening's meeting: the board was being asked to engage in personal dialog in a public meeting which anyone could attend. She expected she might be extra quiet, and to pretend that it was "all good" and there was no discomfort would be a challenge.

Ms. Walston agreed with Ms. Hays. She did not believe that there was common trust amongst the board, and hoped that everyone treat others with respect. She said that it was challenging to speak truth in some circumstances. She hoped that what the board learned that evening would be applied to all the work they did.

Ms. Rosen responded that she appreciated how honest Ms. Hays and Ms. Walston had been.

Ms. Rosen then continued that candidates watched the engagement of boards in districts where they were applying for the superintendency. She acknowledged the understanding that trust was an issue. She gave the example in Denver, Colorado, where the board engaged in work to become more aligned and trusting.

Mr. Lafer asked what the process might look like to further the board's agreement on rules of engagement and trust. Ms. Rosen said she would work with Chair Newman to further that conversation. She suggested that agreeing on engagement for the search would be a good positive step.

Ms. Rosen displayed the purpose statement on her computer screen:

> The goal is to recruit screen and select the next permanent superintendent for the district. The shared purpose is to lead a transparent search process guided by the input of the board and the community with a design to mitigate bias every step of the way.

Ms. Rosen pointed out that the decision lay with the board, but that the input of the community was important. She added that the community would have access to the process and be able to give input along the way.

In response to requests for input on the statement, Ms. O'Rourke asked to add a description of communication to the statement, or explain what transparent meant. She suggested to add "to communicate clearly" before "to lead a transparent…" Further discussion ensued regarding the concept of transparent communication. Ms. Hays suggested that the board have further conversation.

Mr. Lafer said that the search might be challenging because there was an internal candidate. He worried that some candidates might consider that the search was not open, and that the staff or board might undermine the process of a transparent and open search.

Ms. Rosen shared that the Alma group was always very careful to treat internal candidates the same as any other candidate. Ms. Rosen added the words "genuinely open search" to the statement in place of "recruit, screen and select." Mr. Lafer added that he wanted to ensure that the interim superintendent was honored and respected throughout the process.

Chair Newman commented that she struggled to understand what the 4J community was comprised of. She asked how they would know that they were getting a broad and fair view of the community. Ms. Rosen said that it would be important to hear from those whose voices were not typically included. Ms. O'Rourke suggested putting the community first. She asked for clarification from Ms. Newman. Ms. Rabasa agreed with the changes and added that it would be important to be clear to the community that all voices mattered.

Ms. Hays commented that the board should be ready to hear from those who did not feel heard or valued. She commented on Mr. Lafer's concerns about an open search. She would work to ensure that the process was fair and open.

Ms. Rabasa said that she had not received any communication indicating who had applied for the position. She was concerned that confidential information might be shared prematurely and

cautioned not to take for granted that any particular person was applying or that the interim superintendent was applying for a permanent position.

Ms. O'Rourke added her support for the words "fair and open search process."

Ms. Rosen continued with the presentation. She said that in December they had sent out a posting based on input from the board. She said that Alma was recruiting candidates and would also be focusing on the community meetings. She appreciated the input that Alma had already received regarding how to engage the community. She continued that January and February were top recruitment time and gave some details about how they were doing recruiting.

Ms. Rosen said that she hoped that they would start interviewing candidates in February and identify finalists mid-March. The community would have an opportunity to meet and interview the finalists. Alma would hope to be able to announce the selection in April.

In response to a question by Mr. Lafer, Ms. Rosen said that Alma would discuss the details of the screening process and any potential visits to the home districts of finalists at a later time.

Ms. Rosen continued by explaining the steps that had already been taken. She said that over 1700 surveys had been completed. Alma would explore the demographics of those who had participated and would determine whether outreach to certain groups was needed. Two of five community groups had been completed. Focus groups were being formed with the help of the communications department. She said that any format for input was welcome. An upcoming monolingual Spanish community event would be led by Ms. Rosen.

Ms. Rosen continued by describing how Alma Advisory Group used the information they received from the community.

Ms. Rosen then moved to the anti-bias training portion of the evening. She explained that she was using material created by Facebook that was available at http://managingbias.fb.com.

Ms. Rosen then led the board through an exercise designed to education them on their internal bias. She asked the board to consider their first impression of each of five persons shown in a video. Each board member then shared whom they had selected and why.

After hearing from each of the board members, Ms. Rosen explained the function that the subconscious and bias played in our daily lives to presumably keep us safe. She also shared how the media created images that often played into people's internal biases. She gave a personal example of being mistaken for a worker in her home instead of the owner of her home. She said that white men were portrayed as strong leaders and often not questioned as much as female leaders or leaders of color.

She said that the biggest danger in bias was not trusting someone to make the right decision. She then listed major biases: performance bias, bias based on stereotyped expectations of performance in which someone was not given credit for their successes or was given false credit based on their race or gender; competency and likeability tradeoffs in the forms of expected and unexpected behaviors—Ms. Rosen gave a personal example of a coaching session in which she was critiqued for her competence as a women. She asked the board to discuss how the examples she gave might come up in a hiring situation.

Ms. Shabram shared bias that she experienced because of her age and that she had no children. She understood that her own discomfort and experiences created her own biased actions in many situations. Ms. Rosen responded that sometimes response to bias was in the form of defensive actions taken to overcome the perceived bias. Ms. Shabram realized that the actions were in response to the performance and likeability tradeoff.

Ms. Flowers commented that often when some people were being interviewed, their performance was taken for granted while others needed to give many examples of performance in order to satisfy the interviewers. Ms. Rosen agreed that oftentimes evidence was applied in different ways based on bias. She said it was difficult to separate what a person was saying and doing from how they made one feel.

Ms. O'Rourke said that she had dealt with a lot of bias since she had arrived on the board five months ago. She said that people did not want to hear what she had to say. She understood that the training that evening was about bias in hiring a superintendent, but she considered more training was needed for the board.

Ms. Rosen appreciated Ms. O'Rourke's comments and asked for response from the board. She added that a person's experience was theirs and it was important to hear when someone felt a certain way. Chair Newman said she needed to understand how someone's voice felt elevated or welcomed or honored to her, but not to the other person. She wanted to learn her role in the communication. Mr. Lafer said that he had seen some of the actions Ms. O'Rourke referred to and described them as condescending. Ms. Rabasa spoke about the dominant white culture which directly influenced the systems and the structure of board work in general. It was also patriarchal. While she wanted to assume the best in people, she recognized that a new culture might need to be created. Ms. Hays agreed that a lot of work was necessary and that the board was on the cutting edge by recognizing it and agreeing to make change. She gave a personal experience. She then said that some parts of structures could not change and that needed to be recognized, but it was necessary to set an example by making changes when possible.

Ms. Rosen recognized the discomfort. She referred to the murder of George Floyd after which she realized she could no longer be silent when she noticed bias. She said that recognizing bias and how a group responded to it needed to be a shared value. She acknowledged the openness of the board: it boded well for their work in the future.

Ms. O'Rourke appreciated anyone who was willing to be in the arena. She said it was not easy to be quiet when bias was present. She believed her voice could be heard and she would speak out when necessary. She wanted equity to be about issues besides skin color.

Mr. Kubote said that the posturing of the mainstream was about infallibility and invulnerability. Expressing emotions were often seen as a sign of weakness, so they were left out of many conversations. He added that there was no way to strip bias from any experience or any conversation especially when decisions were being made. He said that some structures in society did force people of color to push harder than others to be equal. It was impossible to pretend that everyone was on equal ground. He recognized the distrust and vulnerability in society. He added that it was necessary to have humility and be vulnerable in order to create a society that was *safe for children.*

Ms. Rabasa asked the board to dig deep into bias and to recognize that a new narrative might be necessary. She suggested that traits often considered negative such as motherhood and aggression should be celebrated as strengths.

Ms. O'Rourke said that biases triggered responses that needed to be recognized. She gave a personal example of someone who suffered from trauma after being in the military. Chair Newman agreed that triggered responses often were places for the most learning. She added that the board needed to look at traits that they valued and to recognize that people often acted in a way that they thought others expected them to act.

In response to an offer by Ms. Rosen to share her thoughts, Ms. Walston said that she wanted to focus on the work of the superintendent selection process instead of personal issues. She referred to the action she had taken in December which was a result of disrespect and injustice she saw being done to 4J staff and for which she could not remain silent.

Ms. Rosen returned to how the process the board chose for a superintendent search could mitigate bias. She said the best ways to address bias were: to name it when it was happening within oneself, and to keep focused on the evidence—what was said and done by a candidate. She asked the board to take notes during interviews. She expressed her own personal bias based on her experience with her son, through which she recognized that she had been make assumptions about a candidate.

Mr. Lafer asked Ms. Rosen how to assess skills that might not be supported by data, such as effective communication skills. Ms. Rosen said that communication styles were a challenging skill to assess. She said that a well-designed screening process that was evidence based would give a candidate the opportunity to show their best selves and create a process that was fair.

Ms. Rosen continued that a competency driven process elevated the rigor of the screening and as a result, more diverse candidates made it through the stages of the process. Assessing a candidate became less about their style and more about evidence. She added that having multiple interviewers and different ways of assessing candidates would create a well-rounded picture.

Ms. Rabasa called attention to the fact that Ms. O'Rourke had left the meeting. She was concerned that harm had been caused and was concerned about moving forward if the group could not extend courtesy to each other.

Ms. Rosen asked the board what next steps should be taken.

Ms. Hays and Mr. Lafer both commented on the discomfort expressed prior in the meeting. Ms. Hays suggested that the board have a retreat during which they could discuss the hurt that was being experienced. She expressed her own hurt feelings after a meeting in which she felt dismissed when she asked to add LGTBTQ. She suggested taking a break and trying to get Ms. O'Rourke back to the meeting.

Ms. Newman said that Ms. O'Rourke felt the comments that Ms. Walston had made were an attack. Ms. Walston said she was not trying to characterize anyone and she wanted to move forward as a board and work together. She apologized if Ms. O'Rourke took her comments negatively. Mr. Lafer and Ms. Walston disagreed on the nature of Ms. Walston's prior

comments. Ms. Hays said that she was uncomfortable with continuing without Ms. O'Rourke present, and referred to negative comments made on social media that were suggestive without naming anyone. She asked to regroup at a later date. Chair Newman agreed that the meeting should be postponed and wondered how they could avoid getting to the same place of discomfort in the future. She saw the issues between board members as a barrier to continuing.

Ms. Rabasa suggested the board would benefit from having some anti-racist training with Ayisha Elliot. She recognized that the board was not a united group. Chair Newman suggested that instead of calling people out for their behavior, she wanted to reframe it as calling in. She added that the board had come that evening to receive training, and in order for the training to be effective the board also needed time to work on other issues.

Ms. Rosen said that the board would have more conversations to design the screening process. She added that the Alma Group would send out some articles in advance of the next meeting. She said it would be important to review the job description as posted and share their thoughts through email on the competencies.

Ms. Rosen thanked the group for exploring difficult topics together. She said the naming of the issue was the first step to overcoming it and becoming a team.

II. ADJOURN

Chair Newman adjourned the meeting at 8:08 p.m.

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Cydney Vandercar	Judy Newman
District Clerk	Board Chair

(Recorded by Eliza Drummond)