

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

Date: February 9, 2022

The Board of Directors of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, held a work session at 5:30 p.m. via zoom webinar. Notice of the meeting was mailed to the media and posted in the Education Center on Friday, February 4, 2022 and published in *The Register-Guard* on Monday, February 7, 2022.

ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS:

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

STAFF:

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

GUESTS:

Monica Rosen, Sylvia Flowers, Brian Linn, Alma Advisory Group

I. 5:30 P.M. BOARD WORK SESSION: UPDATE FROM ALMA ADVISORY GROUP ON THE SUPERINTENDENT SELECTION PROCESS

Chair Newman opened the work session at 5:35 p.m. Board members Gordon Lafer and Alicia Hays were absent. Ms. Newman welcomed Monica Rosen, Sylvia Flowers, and Brian Linn from the Alma Advisory Group.

Ms. Rosen reported that the original intent of the meeting had been to share the results of the community feedback sessions, but Alma Advisory Group had decided instead to focus their time on the impact that recurring issues with the board were having with the superintendent search.

Ms. Rosen said that the group had been very moved by the passion of the 4J community and their dedication to a bright future for the students in the district. They enjoyed working with the board as well.

Ms. Rosen continued that hiring a superintendent was the most important thing that a board would do. In order to begin the search in earnest, the board would need to address matters of trust and cohesiveness with each other. The diverse points of view of the board were very important as they helped leadership make better decisions to move the district forward. However, given the issues occurring with trust and relatedness between board members, it would be challenging to find a strong leader or any leader. In order to attract a strong pool of superintendent candidates, the board would need to acknowledge their challenges and to work

to reach shared rules of engagement so that candidates would know the board was working to change. Alma Advisory Group would be honored to partner in the work if the board was willing.

Ms. Rabasa appreciated Ms. Rosen's words. She said that the issues impacted all of the decision-making of the board.

Chair Newman also appreciated the direct and honest assessment given by Ms. Rosen and thanked her for being willing to assist in working through the issues. Ms. Newman was interested to hear what that might entail. She agreed that it would be challenging to ask a candidate to become superintendent under the current circumstances.

Ms. Shabram agreed and wondered what kinds of resources or support would be a good next step. She appreciated hearing an outside perspective. Ms. Rosen responded that dedicated time away from the regular work, deliberations, and decision-making, to work through the board's issues would be important to get clear on how the board wanted to do the work of the district, create rules of engagement and shared agreements, and decide what the role of the board was. She added that a monthly check-in would also be valuable. She reflected that public acknowledgement of the board's intent to move forward would also be important.

Ms. O'Rourke said she considered her role to be a black person pointing out what was happening in the district and at the board level. She said that she would not change her role. She was representing students who looked like her. She said that the system was not transparent. She refused to be silent against structural racism. She gave the example of hiring a new Assistant Superintendent of Instruction from within, instead of having a search in which equity could have been a factor. She considered that her fellow board members did not want to hear her "why," but rather wanted her to keep silent. She stated that she only spoke the truth.

Ms. O'Rourke thought that what Ms. Rosen and Alma Advisory Group were doing was white-washing. Ms. Rosen responded that she wanted Ms. O'Rourke to bring her full self to the board and the reality was that the board had to work as one unified body or they would not be able to get the work done. She questioned whether the board had a shared understanding of how to work together, what the role of the board was, and what the role of the staff was. Her comments were directed to the board as a group and represented what they needed to do to attract a candidate who was committed to racial equity and dismantling systems. Superintendents considered the board to be their partner, not adversarial. She said that each person on the board had their own perspective, but needed to respect each other's point of view.

Ms. O'Rourke wished that her voice could be heard and valued. She felt that the board had the ability, but the culture had to change to accommodate new board members. Ms. Rosen said that board members did not have to be alike. The work had to be both internal and external. She said that if the board did the work suggested, they would attract good candidates.

Ms. Rabasa accepted what Ms. Rosen said, but felt that board members were at a stand-off, waiting for the other to give way. She felt it was unfortunate that there had been no time to get to know each other and build community with the new board members. She considered each board member to be strong, but with different understandings of what community looked like. As a new board member, she found that she was often being only tolerated, and not accepted. She felt vulnerable about how she was being received. She reiterated her concerns about the loss of community building that did not occur at the beginning of her tenure.

Ms. Rosen agreed that the board had not reached a sense of identity as a group and said that it needed to happen.

Ms. Newman agreed that it was a misstep: knowing what motivated each board member took time which had not been provided at the beginning of the season.

Chair Newman reported that general counsel had been consulted to determine how the board could meet together in a private session to do the work that Ms. Rosen was recommending. Ms. Shabram was struggling to determine how the board would have the time necessary to create community with each other and also do a superintendent search. She recognized that there was a suggested calendar for hiring a superintendent. She asked for a calendar check. Ms. Rosen's advised that the board show they were working on their issues so that a candidate could recognize positive movement. She also suggested creating a public statement reflecting the board's recognition of the problem. She suggested taking a month to work on it. Depending on the progress, Ms. Rosen said that interviews might begin in April. Ms. Shabram appreciated Ms. Rosen's delicate response. She also appreciated the suggestion that the board demonstrate to the community their commitment to a resolution.

Ms. Walston shared her reluctance to speak to an audience that included those asking her to render her resignation. She said that her desire had always been for new board members to succeed because when each succeeded, so did the group. She remembered having the conversation with board members Rabasa and O'Rourke to share what she had learned during her tenure on the board. She recognized that it might have seemed patronizing but her intention was to reach out to new members in mentorship as she had done in the past. She regretted that her health had made it challenging for her to attend meetings in July and August.

Ms. Rabasa asked that the board also take command of the narrative around the board. She said that although she heard the word dysfunctional to describe the board, she wanted to point out all the positive work that the board had done unanimously which was not being brought into the narrative. She said that the difficult moments and disagreements were important and led to greater understanding. She asked the board to reconsider how they saw themselves and presented themselves to the community. Ms. Rabasa continued that she considered the reputation had gotten away from the board and that the board needed to reclaim it. She mentioned how much her meetings with her board mentor mattered to her.

Ms. O'Rourke agreed that she took exception to the word dysfunctional. She did not consider disagreement to be dysfunctional. She said many board members worked well together. She asked Ms. Rosen to describe why she did not consider the board able to do the work. Ms. Rosen acknowledged that as a group, there were issues with organizational trust and the way the board interacted with each other which affected the ability to attract a strong candidate. It would be important for the board to publicly acknowledge the dynamic and work on moving forward.

Ms. O'Rourke said that there would not be enough time to eradicate the structural racism and inequities before they moved forward with hiring a superintendent. She was disheartened to hear that Alma Advisory Group did not consider the board able to continue.

Ms. Rosen reiterated that the issue was about the board working together. The board could choose to move forward without addressing it, but it would have an impact on who they were able to attract. Alma was committed to having a strong pool of candidates who desired to work in the district. She repeated it was not work done overnight but needed to begin as soon as possible. She said it was the board's choice. She agreed that disagreeing and having different viewpoints were not the problem, but rather being able to understand better how to work as a unified group.

Chair Newman agreed that it was not differences of opinion but how to learn better from each other in a different way. She acknowledged how challenging it would be for Ms. O'Rourke to show up for meetings if she felt like people were trying to get rid of her. Chair Newman reflected on the comment regarding the ways in which the board interacted with staff. She recognized that together the board and staff were a team.

Ms. Rosen said that the board needed to determine how to move forward. Vice Chair Shabram did not feel they could make a decision without all board members present. Chair Newman agreed. She said that she would ask the absent board members to listen to the recording of the meeting and together a decision would be made at the next meeting. She added that the board might not be able to change structural racism, but they might be able to decide that it was a focus of their work and to create a plan.

Ms. Walston said that stability for staff was needed. She added that she thought Ms. Rabasa's comments about the positive work that the board had done was true, and referenced the recent meeting with SeeChange. She said it was important to respect the professionalism and integrity of the staff. She was also trying to be practical about the timeline.

Ms. O'Rourke wanted to move forward and to not pause because it left too much up in the air. There were a lot of people with hope and the community was participating. She added that disagreeing with staff was not an attack. She believed that moving forward could happen. She considered that hard work was the most worthy work to do.

Ms. Newman asked for clarity whether Ms. O'Rourke was discussing meeting together as a board, or to stop or continue with the search. Ms. O'Rourke said she would want to meet but would want to know who the facilitator was. Ms. Newman thought she had heard Alma Advisory Group offering to facilitate.

Ms. Rabasa wanted to be thoughtful about where the meeting might be and hoped there would be spaces to retreat to privately. She was also interested in learning more about the time commitment and the activities that would lead the board to a new place. Ms. Rosen gave some examples of the activities and prep work that might happen. She said that over the course of two days, the board would get to know individual priorities and purpose and also determine what the purpose of the board as a group would be. Nothing would be connected to decisions, but to how to work together to be successful.

Ms. Rabasa asked for clarification that the meeting could happen in private. Chair Newman said the board would not discuss current or upcoming decisions that the board would make. General Counsel would coach the board to remain within the boundaries of public meeting laws.

Ms. O'Rourke saw the importance of meeting together and was willing to take the time to connect. She was aware that it would not be easy.

Ms. Walston shared her concerns that the board was discussing plans for a retreat without the input of the full board. She also wanted to be aware of the additional staff time that planning a meeting would take.

Ms. Rosen agreed that the discussion and details would continue when the whole board was together on February 16.

After a comment by Chair Newman in which she agreed with the next steps, Ms. Rosen thanked the board for their willingness to take time together in the future. Ms. Rabasa said that the board would work to ensure that staff were not burdened with additional planning.

Vice Chair Shabram hoped the board would prioritize their work and said they might have to set aside some other issues they were working on. She hoped that doing so would not be called a lack of commitment or caring.

Chair Newman thanked Alma Advisory Group for their honesty and communication. She also thanked the board members present for their honest responses.

II. ADJOURN

Chair Newman adjourned the work session at 7:02 p.m.

Cydney Vandercar
District Clerk

Judy Newman
Board Chair

(Recorded by Eliza Drummond)