

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

Date: Monday, April 25, 2022

The Board of Directors of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, held a work session at 4:00 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, April 22, 2022 and published in *The Register-Guard* on Monday, April 25, 2022.

ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS:

Judy Newman, Chair
Maya Rabasa, Vice Chair
Alicia Hays
Gordon Lafer
Laural O'Rourke

STAFF:

Cydney Vandercar, Superintendent
Kerry Delf, Chief of Staff
Brooke Wagner, Assistant Superintendent for Administrative Services
Christine Nesbit, General Counsel
Kyle Tucker, Chief Operations Officer
Lisa Fjordbeck, Executive Assistant / Board Secretary

MEDIA:

KRVM

I. WORK SESSION

II. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL

Chair Newman called the work session to order at 4:00 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to hear from eight finalists for the two open seats on the board. Each candidate would have twenty-five minutes to answer the questions from the board. The first finalist was Keerti Hasija Kauffman.

Chair Newman posed the first question: *What are the most important things you think the board could work on to improve students' experience and outcomes, whether in academics or in their social and emotional lives and how would you measure success?*

Ms. Hasija Kauffman responded that social-emotional learning and academics should not be separated. Students who were suffering from social emotional stressors did not do well academically. She said that measures should be put in place early in a student's education for screening and intervention so that issues could be caught before additional help was needed. She stressed the role of teachers and said that they needed to be equally supported in their own social-emotional issues. Students had emotional connections to learning, both frustration and joy. Ms. Hasija Kauffman suggested making sure that students were engaged in school through

clubs and other activities, teachers were supported, and that families could also learn how to support their students at home.

Vice Chair Rabasa asked the second question: *Part of the board's role is connecting with the community. What does community engagement look like to you and what do you see as being the board's role. What specific ways would you work with the board to engage community stakeholders.*

Ms. Hasija Kauffman said that she would connect with the community through service projects which would help her to meet people that she would not otherwise have a chance to meet. She considered the role of the board to be supportive of the community's goals and outcomes and to be role models. Boards should model dialog and critical thinking skills during board meetings and in all public settings.

Mr. Lafer asked the third question: *People in groups may try to lobby board members to take up issues that are outside of the board's role or authority. How would you handle those kinds of requests?*

Ms. Hasija Kauffman said that her experience in Washington, D.C. had taught her how to redirect. She believed in setting boundaries and would be transparent with the community about what was her role.

Ms. Hays asked the fourth question: *What role do you think staff members voice should play in 4J's policies and practices?*

Ms. Hasija Kauffman said that the board should take into account the opinions of all 4J staff, teachers and other staff alike. She said that staff other than teachers in schools often had more face-to-face time with the public, and added that their roles were to support the functioning and the governance of the schools. She believed it was the board's role and responsibility to be supportive of the whole district.

Ms. O'Rourke asked the fifth question: *Twenty percent of our students live below the Federal poverty line. Describe your understanding of what that means and your experience living or working with under resourced and underserved communities. Share your thoughts about how the board can better serve these students and families.*

Ms. Hasija Kauffman said that stressors were often compounded multiple times for families experiencing poverty. Students had higher absenteeism and drop-out rates, and were disciplined and placed in special education classrooms more often. They also experienced health issues that contributed to their absenteeism. She continued that all those issues effected a student's understanding of what their future looked like and what their role as a community member was and would be.

Ms. Hasija Kauffman continued that she was born and raised in Charleston, S.C., a community that was largely rural poverty. Her mother was a social worker. Ms. Hasija Kauffman was a career mentor for students in D.C. She lived in Latin America in communities that were low income, and created after school programs. She said the most impoverished communities she had lived in were in India. She created policies that took into account the issue of poverty inside

highly affluent areas. She considered the issue of creating systems that improved the mental and physical health of those in poverty in order to increase their ability to learn.

Ms. Hasija Kauffman said that most important was the debate regarding outputs versus outcomes. If students were not attending school, the structures of the district were not important. She said the basis of decisions should be what outcomes the district was trying to achieve.

Chair Newman asked the sixth question: *in what ways has the board worked to expand its and the districts collective focus to eliminate inequities? How do you see this impacting the district and what would you bring to this work?* Ms. Hasija Kauffman said that she would look at what the outcome priorities were. She said that it was important to remove the stress of not having basic needs met. She added that the district should look at one-year and five-year plans for different areas of the district and that compromise would be necessary. If the district focused on an equity lens, they would be looking at impoverished communities. She was extremely passionate about diversity and inclusion, but was also realistic about how much the board would be able to change people's attitudes. She said that she would bring her experience to explore where the gaps existed in equity in the district.

Vice Chair Rabasa asked the seventh question: *How do you think students could engage in the leadership within the district? What would your role be as a board member to help increase student engagement?* Ms. Hasija Kauffman believed that student voices needed to be heard in a real way at a leadership level. She wanted to hear the voices of students who represented the diversity of the community the board wanted to engage with. There were multiple mechanisms she could suggest to increase student voice.

Chair Newman thank Ms. Hasija Kauffman for her presentation and told her that the board would be making a decision on Wednesday, April 27.

Chair Newman introduced the next candidate, Tom Di Liberto.

In response to the first question, Mr. Di Liberto responded that the district needed to continue to concentrate on the social and emotional needs of students and to minimize activities that did not help students to learn and their teachers to teach them. He supported having classified staff assist with activities that would free up time for counselors and teachers to support students.

Mr. Di Liberto said it was important to foster a relational approach between educators and students through cooperative learning activities that cultivated what students were interested in. He said that the approach to teaching and learning supported self-esteem and esprit de corps.

Success would be measured by better attendance, work completion, participation, and creativity along with multiple assessment modes. He cautioned on focusing on a single academic indicator.

In response to the second question, Mr. Di Liberto said that he had learned that all the communities that formed the district had different ways of communicating. He added that board meetings could be frightening. He remembered that the district had used a model in the past that was successful to reach out and should continue to do those activities. Mr. Di Liberto

mentioned that Jim Garcia had been giving talks at different schools in the district. He added that board members should be present at different activities.

In response to the third question, Mr. Di Liberto said that board members needed to ask questions from all stakeholders in order to forward the board's goals. Board members were not employees. Mr. Di Liberto would make it clear that board members were not employees. He knew how to say "no" when it was necessary and recognized that sometimes the board would not be able to solve all problems. He added that there were reasons for the separation of responsibilities and purview, but he had always pressed for better communication between board members and staff. He remembered that staff and the board had regular coffee meetings in the past and wanted to reinstate the practice.

In response to the fourth question, Mr. Diliberto said that staff knowledge and input was indispensable and that the board should not be afraid of hearing it. Staff had the ground level view. For the board to avoid mistakes and misuse resources, they needed to hear from all staff. Mr. Di Liberto added that it was not the responsibility of staff to make decision, but the board needed to hear from staff, and he considered it a benefit to have a prior employee on the board.

In response to the fifth question, Mr. Di Liberto responded that he had seen the demographics and SES of Monroe Middle School change significantly from second highest to second lowest during the time he taught there. Students were unhoused, ill clothed and under significant economic pressure. Poverty was a huge obstacle to a student's success. Teachers often provided snacks to students during the day. Educators tried to minimize poverty's impact by differentiating teaching, by providing extra time, supplying students with materials. Mr. Di Liberto said that the pandemic had made it clear how impacted some areas of the district were by issues of poverty such as food insecurity, sub-par internet and technology access.

Mr. Di Liberto continued that sustained community engagement would help better map where wraparound services would be best utilized, and which areas of a community were in highest need. He said it would be important to continue to partner with charitable organizations.

Mr. Di Liberto said that there was representational inequity on the board and suggested that providing child care and support to persons from communities so that they could be on the board would be important.

In response to the sixth question, Mr. Di Liberto credited the district for its work on the new student safety policy. He considered it long overdue. He added that the equity tool was a positive step. He considered sustaining community engagement to be the most important in determining how the equity tool could be applied. He gave the example of translation and interpretation and wraparound services as ways that the district was moving forward with equity.

He said that sometimes the equity lens was controversial. He brought up the example of Buena Vista which had met resistance when it attempted to integrate more Latin-X families, but was successful in the end.

Mr. Di Liberto gave examples of his experience in negotiating and listening.

In response to the final question, Mr. Di Liberto said that he found it a pleasure to hear students at board meetings. He considered their input effective to improve the district. He suggested surveying student groups to get input which could be presented at board meetings.

Chair Newman thanked Mr. Di Liberto for his time and introduced the next candidate, Carlos Sequeira.

After making a brief introductory statement, Mr. Sequeira responded to the first question. He said that respectful, responsible, restorative, and culturally competent schools were necessary. He added it would be important to review policies that created an inclusive environment and to ensure that they were being implemented equitably across the district. It would be important to determine and address what families needed to be successful. He referred to additional funding provided in response to the pandemic that could be used for that purpose.

Mr. Sequeira continued that success could be measured by higher attendance, better grades, and less discipline issues, especially among marginalized students. Mr. Sequeira gave an example of his own experience in school when he wondered whether anyone knew who he was. He referred to street data, information coming from those most affected by the inequities created by decisions made by the board.

In response to the second question, Mr. Sequeira responded that the board played a critical role in serving families and the educational needs of students, and needed to be fiscally responsible. He said that community engagement would consist of welcoming those with whom the board did not agree or look like; modeling civil discourse; listening to understand and not to respond defensively; welcoming those who might not feel safe advocating for their students; and keeping those who did not have students in the district involved.

Mr. Sequeira would go to the neighborhoods to make connection with families instead of expecting them to come to the board.

In response to the third question, Mr. Sequeira said the board had a responsibility to listen to the community, but at times would need to redirect. He added that district staff would be encouraged to match the needs of families to the resources that were available to them.

In response to the fourth question, Mr. Sequeira felt it would be critical that staff associations were the first place to which staff addressed their needs and that there was clear communication between association representatives and the board. Staff knew what students needed and it would be important to ensure that they felt like their administrators were allies and that the board was also supporting them.

In response to the fifth question, Mr. Sequeira shared that he had been a student who lived in poverty. He knew firsthand what it was like to not have the resources he needed to be successful or to have the support of caring parents at home. He understood the experiences of families that were in his situation. He added that implementing the equity lens with consistency and fidelity would be crucial. As a board member he would work to remove barriers to success and to undo the systems that created the barriers. He believed that equity work had been the key focus of his career.

In response to the sixth question, Mr. Sequeira repeated that equity had been the focus of his life work and appreciated that the board was working hard to eliminate inequities. He said that it would be crucial to commit to start at kindergarten with a welcoming community for children of immigrant families, LGBTQ+ families, and those with special education needs. He added that staff of color also needed support. He recognized that the issues required funding.

In response to the seventh question, Mr. Sequeira said he was happiest when he was surrounded by students. He would support increasing the participation of student voice and recognized that the board would need to go to the students. He had promoted youth voice in his work and through a youth equity council. Students had collected and analyzed data and reviewed the inequities that they found. Mr. Sequeira continued that engaging students was an ongoing effort. He had attended many board meetings and seen the effort that boards made to include students in the meetings, but he wondered how students could be more included in the decision-making process. He wanted to be part of a district that promoted students to having an equal voice on the board.

Chair Newman thanked Mr. Sequeira for his time and introduced the next candidate, Andrew Ross.

In response to the first question, Mr. Ross said he would measure success by the word “thriving.” He considered mental health and social emotional learning to be just as important and should be intertwined in all subjects. He reported that Florida had banned certain math texts because they included social-emotional learning. He also considered that teacher retention was important because of the relationships they could make with students over time.

In response to the second question, Mr. Ross said that it would be very important to have a standing agenda item at the board meetings for the community to come and make their concerns and opinions known.

In response to the third question, Mr. Ross said that he would respond to individual lobbyists by saying their requests were outside the role of the board’s authority. He added that he would listen and if possible, he would discuss issues with them as a citizen and not a board member. He would want people to feel heard.

In response to the fourth question, Mr. Ross considered that staff voice was very essential. Staff in buildings were the front lines of the district and their concerns should be listened to.

In response to the fifth question, Mr. Ross answered that offering free and reduced lunch to all students was an example of the ways in which the district created a safer environment for under-resourced students. He had been a criminal defense attorney and served as a court appointed counsel for many young people in poverty. He opined that many of the legislative measures were heavily biased to deliver longer sentences to those in poverty. He said he was often the first person of a middle-class background who cared what happened to his clients. He added that the burdens placed on the parents of under-resourced students made it more difficult to be involved in their children’s education.

In response to the sixth question, Mr. Ross recognized that there was a nationwide diversity and equity problem. People were trying to erase the racist past of the nation under the guise of certain policies. He referenced how many books were being banned by parents because the

stories represented black or gay and lesbian students. He relayed stories from his youth that formed his beliefs in equity.

In response to the last question, Mr. Ross said that the board needed to offer activities and a time to listen to the needs and voice of students. He had enjoyed hearing the student representatives report on their school's activities.

Chair Newman thanked Mr. Ross for his time and announced that the board would take a recess to attend the Budget Committee Meeting and would resume the interviews at 7:45 p.m.

At 7:45 p.m. Chair Newman reopened the board candidate interviews and welcomed Michelle Hsu.

In response to the first question posed by Chair Newman, Ms. Hsu responded that the board could provide the resources needed to implement House Bill 2845 before the 2026 timeline. Representation in the curriculum of historically marginalized persons would create a wider range of lived experiences, and could create safe spaces for students. Ms. Hsu continued that success would be measured by a decrease in incidents of bullying and harassment and an increase in curiosity and empathy. Ms. Hsu's second suggestion was to bring back librarians in every school to assist students in finding accurate information online and in books. She said it was important for students to learn how to determine misinformation and disinformation online. Students experienced all forms of connection, positive and negative, with each other online. Success would be measured in a student's ability to cite references, an increase in the accuracy of student work, and a decrease in the time it took for students to finish assignments.

Ms. Hsu added that students were experiencing a crisis of despair. The district needed to destigmatize mental health issues and to give students the opportunity to share their vulnerability. Success would be challenging to measure, but would mostly be determined over time. She said mental health issues should be of the greatest concern to everyone in the community.

In response to the second question, Ms. Hsu said that community engagement was to listen and ask questions to determine what the community needed. The board's role would be to accommodate students and staff by prioritizing needs. She would be able to use her language skills and cultural background to connect with Asian and Desi communities and was adept at connecting to persons of all backgrounds.

In response to the third question, Ms. Hsu said that if she was lobbied by people or organizations, she would let them know that it was outside the scope of her work, but would work to determine who might be able to assist them. She would direct them to the website which stated board members' roles and authority.

In response to the fourth question, Ms. Hsu said she believed in trusting district staff and did not believe in micromanaging. The board was a policy making entity and implementation was delegated to the superintendent.

In response to the fifth question, Ms. Hsu shared her experience growing up in New York with limited resources. She had a long record to assisting those in need. She said that the board could continue to provide assistance in a dignified and culturally responsive way.

In response to the sixth question, Ms. Hsu referred to the district's Equity Committee, which was a model for the state and which had prompted the Department of Education to mandate similar committees in all districts. She said that the district had elevated the voices of all communities and had also passed a racial harassment policy which was centered on those experiencing harm. She said that the work was ongoing. There would be trainings to foster an environment of inclusion. However, Ms. Hsu said that policies alone would not eliminate inequity. She would raise issues to the board as they came to her attention.

In response to the seventh question, Ms. Hsu said she was glad to hear that students would be members of the Equity Committee. It was important to hear student voice as often as possible. Ms. Hsu would work to promote student empowerment.

Chair Newman thanked Ms. Hsu for her time and introduced the next candidate, Jenny Jonak.

In response to the first question, Ms. Jonak said that it would be most important to involve the opinions of stakeholders who would be the most impacted to determine what success would look like. She wanted to get away from using standardized testing and instead find out from students what they considered success looked like. Ms. Jonak suggested that teacher retention was also important as a measurement of success, along with graduation rates in underserved communities such as Special Education. She added that she wanted to identify students who were in need of support early in their careers. She also wanted to increase social and emotional support services and to engage students in developing curriculum.

In response to the second question, Ms. Jonak said she saw the board's role as setting policy and policy goals. She would want the community to be invested in the policies that affected schools and to seek out representation for underserved communities. She wanted to meet with students and parents and engage in board community groups. The more equity the board could achieve in areas, the greater confidence the community would have in the district.

In response to the third question, Ms. Jonak responded that if someone was lobbying her, she would ask them to express their concerns to the whole board, so that together they could determine whether the need was in the scope of the board's authority and role. In her role as an attorney, she had experience responding to concerns of conflict of interest.

In response to the fourth question, Ms. Jonak said that the voices of staff were the most direct way the board could determine teacher satisfaction. They saw issues at a ground level that were not always contained in a report. She added that teachers also were aware of the unintended consequences of policy decisions and could suggest changes.

In response to the fifth question, Ms. Jonak said she had a lot of experience doing pro bono work for underserved communities and gave some examples. She was a teenage mother who had lived on welfare and understood the struggles of living below the federal poverty line including the daily stress that affected mental health. She said that half the country struggled to make ends meet and wealth inequality was growing. She added that the board needed to ensure that a student's educational experience was not affected by access to things that most people took for granted, such as technology and transportation and even wraparound care. She said that the board should always consider the hidden impacts of policies and to vet them through community stakeholders.

In response to the sixth question, Ms. Jonak thanked the board for passing the racial harassment policy and said that more could be done. She wanted to engage leadership in teachers of color and honor the histories of people of color and indigenous persons. In her childhood, she had not learned about the issues that impacted her own Asian culture. She said it was important to create spaces to talk about issues and to ensure that discipline systems were free from bias. She also wanted to bridge special education caps and invest in student support for mental health.

In response to the seventh question, Ms. Jonak responded that the pandemic had brought to light the issues of mental health that students struggled with. It also created disparity between student groups and a gap in the support systems that students received at school. She recommended involving students in as many decisions as possible to allow them to feel heard. She also suggested promoting students in journalism as a way to increase student voice on campus.

Chair Newman thanked Ms. Jonak for her time and introduced the next candidate, Daniel Patrick Isaacson.

In response to the first question, Mr. Isaacson said the single greatest impact to student success was the health of students, mentally and physically and gave the example that a student struggling with food insecurity would not come to school as ready to learn as someone who did not face the same challenge. He said it would be important to focus efforts in the district on mental health and secure the resources that students needed.

In response to the second question, Mr. Isaacson said that board members were the ambassadors of the district both in public and in the board room. Board members needed to be able to discuss the issues of the district at all times in a way that fostered trust. He added that board members should take a more active role in schools and suggested having forums throughout the region with mental health experts to create solutions.

In response to the third question, Mr. Isaacson said that lobbying for one's interests was natural and expected. He said that he would direct persons to the agency or group that could provide more information without being dismissive. He did not want to stifle activism.

In response to the fourth question, Mr. Isaacson answered that everyone's voice mattered and everyone deserved to be seen. He added that staff needed to trust the board to create a vision that could be implemented and in which the board were allies. Staff were at their best when they had insight into what was working and the vision of the board had broad community support.

In response to the fifth question, Mr. Isaacson responded that twenty percent of students in poverty meant that they were experienced food insecurity and unequal access to technology, among many stressors. He added that the board needed to recognize that not all students started the race at the same place with the same equipment and to do everything they could to increase equitable access.

In response to the sixth question, Mr. Isaacson said that the biggest problem of addressing inequity was how people thought about it and each other. To many, differences were more important than common humanity and the only thing that mattered were the distinctions they

could find. It would be important to understand what people had in common, and to recognize that everyone was caught in an “inescapable web of mutuality”.

In response to the seventh question, Mr. Isaacson responded that he wanted to hear from the students who did not raise their hand. He wanted to encourage students to engage others by fostering multiple lines of communication and arming them with the right tools.

Chair Newman thanked Mr. Isaacson for his time and introduced the next candidate, Thomas Hiura.

In response to the first question, Mr. Hiura responded that the important issues were connected to one another. The first issue that came to mind for him would be student health and wellness, which led to attendance issues, which ultimately led to an us versus them mentality that continued to impact student mental health. He referred to a forum that would be occurring later that day at Sheldon High School as an example of the ways that the district could use partnerships to support mental health.

Mr. Hiura continued that if a student had more control over their learning, they would be more interested in attending school, which would increase curiosity and mental well-being. He suggested decoupling mental health and mental crisis. He added that people of color were often not taken seriously in clinical settings and their pain was minimized. He reported that he had gotten a medical amnesty policy passed at his school to protect students who were self-medicating and were afraid to call for help when they needed it.

Mr. Hiura told a story about his experience of testing in school. He suggested that success would be better demonstrated by a variety of creative ways in which a student could show what they had learned. He added that illiteracy resulted in many issues later in life, including incarceration and violence.

In response to the second question, Mr. Hiura said that he would lead by example by visiting schools constantly. He had already reached out to schools to find out what their experience of the board had been so far. He had time to devote to a board position. He planned to work for the collective good. His memories of board members were either from graduation or rare visits to board meetings. He shared that he had support from many diverse communities for his candidacy.

In response to the third question, Mr. Hiura said his response would be to let the person know that they had been heard and then to assist them in finding the best person to direct their concerns. He said that he would not try to give persons the run around, but to try to assist them. He gave many examples of his legislative experience.

In response to the fourth question, Mr. Hiura said that everyone should feel that their voice mattered, but no group should be able to wield power so that their influence marginalizes another. He would fight for a living wage and try to create relationships that were built on trust so that he could learn what persons felt like they needed to improve their job. He added that it would be important to learn how best to solicit feedback.

In response to the fifth question, Mr. Hiura shared the ways in which he had been personally impacted by poverty. He then shared his thoughts about promoting ways in which students

could be successful after high school without having to attend college. He said that ambition and success should not depend on paying for college. He also shared his belief in labor unions and the rights of workers, and that no one's voice should be shut out, including those of students.

In response to the sixth question, Mr. Hiura recognized the work that the district had already accomplished including the rights of gay and lesbian students, and those who were multilingual. He considered equity to be his life work, and to get people to talk about equity without knowing they were talking about it. He added that it was his duty to undo the white supremacy that he may have been a part of. At the same time, he did not believe in cancel culture as a solution.

In response to the seventh question, Mr. Hiura recognized that issues that affected him in his youth had become more serious and that it was up to the adults to engage students who felt marginalized because of the ways that they were different. He was hoping that the board would give him an opportunity to represent the younger generation on the board.

III. ADJOURN

Chair Newman adjourned the meeting at 9:07 p.m.

Cydney Vandercar
District Clerk

Judy Newman
Board Chair

(Recorded by Eliza Drummond)