

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

Date: January 26, 2022

The Board of Directors of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, held a work session 5:30 p.m. via zoom and 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, January 21, 2022.

ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS:

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

STAFF:

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

GUEST:

Brenda Brainard, Facilitator

I. WORK SESSION/MINI RETREAT

Chair Newman called the work session to order and reported that all board members were present except for Mr. Lafer who would hopefully be arriving soon. She introduced Brenda Brainard, Facilitator.

Ms. Brainard made introductory comments and then asked the group to decide the order of the work ahead of them. It was determined that the group would briefly discuss the goals and then move on to the working agreements.

Mr. Lafer joined the meeting.

Chair Newman gave an update on the goals listed in the board packet and below.

1. Conduct a thoughtful national search that resulted in hiring a permanent superintendent. Chair Newman reported that the district was in the middle of the search.
2. Complete a comprehensive and timely evaluation of the interim superintendent's performance. Chair Newman said that there had been an initial meeting, and there would be ongoing additional meetings.

3. Perform our fiduciary responsibilities in a timely manner by participating in the budget committee process and appointing new members to vacancies. Chair Newman shared that new members had been appointed, the group had an initial meeting, and a meeting schedule had been set.
4. Establish the next steps of our multi-year All Students Belong Initiative including the goals and workplan for the year, then implement the workplan. Ms. Newman reported that there would be a work session on February 2 to get an update from SeeChange and the Department of Equity and Inclusion.
5. Create a plan for the North Eugene Region that would include where Yujin Gakuen and Kelly schools would be located, and other programming and planning needs. Ms. Walston and Mr. Lafer were on the subcommittee. ‘

Superintendent Vandercar reported that the staff planned to meet soon and would give feedback on what was needed next. Ms. Rabasa asked whether either she or Ms. O'Rourke, who had become board members after the subcommittee had been formed, could join. Ms. Walston said that the team was a staff workgroup that she and Mr. Lafer attended. She had tried to provide updates after each meeting. She said that the work had not moved as quickly as they would have liked because of the holidays and COVID-19 restraints. Mr. Lafer agreed with Ms. Walston's report and said that he did not think adding another board member would be a problem. He added that it might help to determine what the purpose of the meetings were. Ms. O'Rourke said that she wanted updates of previous meetings. Ms. Walston said that the group had been meeting since March 2020 with a goal towards determining where students would be attending school in fall of 2022-23. She hoped that the scope of the meetings would grow to include regular updates of the building process and highlighting what was occurring in the North Region.

Ms. Rabasa returned to the original question of whether she or Ms. O'Rourke could join the meetings. Superintendent Vandercar said that the intention of the meetings was for regional staff to have a time to plan and was concerned that adding an additional board member might add pressure on the team. She added that the group had not met in a long time and hoped that their next meeting would include just staff and the two board members. Chair Newman summarized that she would add an update from the current work group to the agenda for an upcoming meeting. Mr. Lafer agreed that it would be good to have a report so that the board could get a sense of what was occurring.

Ms. O'Rourke did not understand why an additional board member could not attend. She felt it narrowed the voices of the new board members. She said that since it was a board goal, board members should be actively involved. Chair Newman agreed and said the current board members on the workgroup would give regular reports. Mr. Lafer added that regular reports would allow the board to decide on what the priorities were. Vice Chair Shabram agreed with Superintendent Vandercar's assessment of the purpose of the North Region meetings.

Ms. Hays appreciated the time that Ms. Walston and Mr. Lafer had given to attend the meetings. Ms. Walston said she hoped to close the loop with the North Region voters who supported the bond. She asked that if the board decided to change which members were included, that she, as the sole board member residing in the North Region, continue to serve. Ms. O'Rourke proposed that the board schedule a work session so that members could actively respond to the region team. Mr. Lafer agreed with the suggestion.

Ms. Rabasa asked to whom she would direct the questions and comments she received from constituents. Ms. Walston suggested they be shared with the whole board and with Superintendent Vandercar. Chair Newman thanked the board for their discussion.

6. In conjunction with the Equity Committee, decide on and/or create an equity lens for the district and use it for all decision-making. Chair Newman reported that the board had agreed on a template, and that there would be an upcoming work session to discuss how the board and district staff would implement the equity tool. Ms. O'Rourke said that she had seen the equity tool used sparingly to date. She hoped to change the format so that it could be easier to use. Superintendent Vandercar reported that there would be a training from Lane County on the upcoming Friday. After a brief discussion, Superintendent Vandercar said that she would report on the training at the next board meeting.
7. Identify and implement climate change initiatives, begin the process of inventorying what was being done, and make a plan. Ms. Walston thanked Chair Newman for making the topic a goal of the board. She hoped to focus on what was actionable in the areas of food, transportation and buildings.
8. Create a comprehensive district-wide communication policy that emphasizes transparency with stakeholders and the community and schedule work session to learn what current policies and practices guide our communication strategy. Ms. O'Rourke considered communication to be the district's greatest issue and was concerned that the topic would not be discussed until the middle of March. She said communication was a topic that might take more than one work session. Chair Newman responded that the goal was specifically about communication to district and staff. Ms. O'Rourke wanted to create a comprehensive communication policy. Mr. Lafer suggested that the work session be about where the board wanted to see improvements.

Chair Newman continued with tasks that could be worked on during that year.

1. Integrate the goals, activities and outcome measures of the High School Success Plan, the Student Success Plan and the 20/20 Strategic Plan. Chair Newman reported that she had met with Superintendent Vandercar regarding the topic and agreed that prioritizing the item with respect to the other tasks in the district would be important.
2. Expand student engagement and voice in the district- New process to select student representatives for the School Board and expand their participation on the Board.

Chair Newman shared that the subcommittee in charge of this item--Ms. O'Rourke, Ms. Hays, Ms. Rabasa, and Vice Chair Shabram—had given a good orientation to the student board representatives. There would also be a work session to hear from the Affinity Groups. The Equity Committee would also be adding students to their group. Ms. O'Rourke added that student interaction with the board was one small part of creating access for students. Chair Newman suggested that the subcommittee meet and bring forth a plan to the board.

3. Create a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) that will work for the School District. Chair Newman reported that a CBA had been completed. Ms. O'Rourke asked whether the CBA would be integrated into district process. Mr. Lafer responded that the CBA would be used during the Camas Ridge Elementary School bidding process as a test.

Chair Newman continued that there were additional goals in the packet but she would not share them because they were to be considered later. Mr. Lafer said that he understood that the first additional goal: to create a metric for teacher morale and retention, was not possible at the moment because of staff overload, but he was concerned about the subject, and the rate of resignations, and wondered whether an exit survey could be created to learn more about why staff were leaving. He wanted to identify whether there were actions that could be taken to retain staff. Chair Newman asked Superintendent Vandercar to address the topic in a Friday memo.

Chair Newman thanked the board for their input and reintroduced Ms. Brainard to guide them through the Working Agreements.

Ms. Brainard hoped to focus on making resolution in the areas of the working agreements that were causing concern, mostly in the area of communications. She asked each board member to think about what they wanted and ask themselves whether it could be achieved in terms of line of authority. She referred to Oregon statute which outlined how board members could and could not meet and what they could discuss when meeting.

Ms. O'Rourke suggested removing detailed language from areas of the working agreements and inserting that the board was subject to Oregon public meeting laws.

Vice Chair Shabram agreed that the law was specific and added that outlining the law in the working agreements helped the public to understand that the board was adhering to it. Ms. Brainard agreed with Ms. Shabram.

Mr. Lafer gave input on specific areas of the document that referred to deliberation and discussion amongst a quorum of board members.

Ms. Brainard added that including the language in the working agreements would be beneficial to new board members who had not yet had the time to review the Oregon statutes.

There was additional discussion about the topic.

Ms. Brainard continued to the next section, which included procedure for communicating with the superintendent.

Mr. Lafer wished to have more open and robust communication in general, but was concerned that the language restricted the ability of the board to have open conversation with constituents. After additional feedback, Ms. Brainard suggested to clarify that board members could only pass on complaints and requests to the superintendent. Mr. Lafer added that issues could also be raised during a board member's comment time in a board meeting. Ms. Rabasa hoped to make the language as clear as possible so that the message could be easily conveyed. Vice Chair Shabram clarified that the section meant to regulate situations when constituents expected a board member to personally fix an issue, instead of passing on the concern to the superintendent. She offered new language which read "When a board member receives information about a concern or complaint from a stakeholder, they will not seek to address those issues directly with staff member such as by requesting reports, etc. and instead shall relay that information to the Superintendent. This only applies when a board member is acting in their official capacity, not informal conversations that board members participate in as friends and community members." Chair Newman suggested that when a board member heard frequent complaints about an issue, they might want to contact the Superintendent to learn whether there was additional information or background that would be pertinent.

In response to comments by Ms. Hays, Mr. Lafer said that he had experienced several situations where he had been approached by groups of parents with concerns and opined that the suggested language might restrict him from continuing to meet with parents in the future. He understood that the language did not apply to parents with personnel issues. There was additional discussion about some of the language.

Vice Chair Shabram suggested that the board move on to another topic. She agreed to return with a final draft. Ms. O'Rourke and Mr. Lafer gave additional input.

Section 3 referred to requests for information. Vice Chair Shabram shared that the section was added to ensure that staff time was protected for requests for information that were approved by a majority of the board.

Mr. Lafer and Ms. O'Rourke supported the distinction between individual requests and requests from majority of the board.

Section 4 reminded the board to be conscious of their position as board members. Ms. O'Rourke considered the section to be a limit of freedom of speech. She had been called rude because of some of her comments. Ms. Brainard did not consider it a prohibition of speech, but rather a reminder to be respectful. Ms. O'Rourke said that respect could be defined differently by different people. Ms. Brainard suggested that leaders should model positive and respectful behavior. There was further conversation about how communication could be perceived as disrespectful. Ms. Rabasa said that the word respect was ambiguous. Mr. Lafer agreed, but suggested that the section referred to keeping in mind the community's impression of the board's authority. Chair Newman agreed.

Vice Chair Shabram suggested changing a portion to read "Understanding that as a member of the board their public comments may be perceived as having more influence or power than they intend, board members will be mindful of their status as elected leaders and how they may be perceived when speaking publicly."

Ms. Rabasa said that the word “mindful” was the point being made, for a board member to be mindful of the status they possessed. Mr. Lafer was concerned that the intent of the phrase might be misused against each other. It was agreed that the Chair and Vice Chair would work on rephrasing.

Section 5 referred to concerns that board members might have about agenda items. Ms. O’Rourke asked whether a phrase could be added that a response would be given to a board member’s concern. Mr. Lafer understood the meaning of the section to be that a board member would alert the Board Chair and Superintendent if they intended to raise concerns about a topic at the meeting. In response to a comment by Ms. Rabasa, Chair Newman agreed that a response to a board member who had concerns was mentioned in another section. She apologized for not responding when she was supposed to.

Ms. Hays remembered that the reason for the section was what Mr. Lafer was referring to: that a board member would alert the Chair if they intended to raise concerns about an agenda item at the meeting.

Section 6 stated that the Board Chair or designee was the official spokesperson for the board, and any comments made by other board members to the media were to be considered personal response.

There was discussion about the use of this section in real life situations. The importance of letting the Chair know after a board member had spoken to the media was emphasized.

Section 7 stated that the Board Chair would be the official written correspondent of the board, and would carbon copy all board members and cautioned that email correspondence could be considered a serial meeting. There were no additional comments about the section after a typo was corrected.

Section 8 referred to prior relationships board members might have with persons or entities and asked the board member to let the Chair know if they regularly visited schools. Ms. Rabasa said that being cognizant of one’s role was key and was concerned that the language was restrictive. Ms. Brainard suggested language to clarify the intent.

Vice Chair Shabram and Chair Newman offered that Section 8 had been added to the working agreements to help clarify when board members were in schools because of their work, whether they were attending as a volunteer, or visiting in their official capacity as a board member.

Ms. O’Rourke did not consider the section necessary because the language was covered in other sections of the document.

Vice Chair Shabram said that the section protected board members when they were in the building on work-related business and asked that it be kept should the need to use it arise in the future.

Chair Newman interjected that she and Vice Chair Shabram would work on alternative wording for the section.

Section 9 referred to board members who wished to visit a building. Mr. Lafer asked that the section be deleted. He was concerned that it might be too restrictive. Ms. O’Rourke agreed and

added that public meeting law already covered areas of the section. Ms. Rabasa shared her thoughts regarding the subject of board members in buildings. Mr. Lafer was concerned that punitive action might be made if a board member reported their visits with staff. Chair Newman suggested that private conversations be held outside the school. Ms. Brainard suggested splitting the section into two parts to clarify the intent.

Ms. Hays thought that a policy existed regarding board members visiting schools.

Ms. O'Rourke reiterated her concern that the section was a form of gatekeeping. She was also concerned about the general wordiness of some of the sections.

Superintendent Vandercar confirmed that there was indeed a policy (BC-GBD Board-Staff Communications). It was suggested that Section 9 refer to the policy.

Mr. Lafer agreed with Ms. Brainard's idea of splitting the section. In addition, he considered that there was too little communication between the board and schools. He did not want to limit staff's desire to have a conversation with a board member.

Ms. Brainard commended the board for their wish to have meaningful conversations with staff.

The board agreed that Section 10 could stand as is.

Section 11 referred to bullying and harassment of board members. Ms. O'Rourke asked that if a concern was voiced, a response be given.

Mr. Lafer remembered that the section had originally been written to show solidarity amongst board members when one was being discriminated against. He said that the section as written also applied to discrimination by a board member to another board member. Ms. Brainard suggested that the real issue of the agreement was to have a satisfactory resolution to concerns of discrimination. She suggested a phrase such as "Leadership and the Superintendent will decide on appropriate action."

Superintendent Vandercar said that current policy applied to staff and students. Ms. Brainard suggested adding board members.

Vice Chair Shabram suggested doing more research into existing policies and practices, and also asking counsel, before returning with suggested language. Ms. Brainard added that the board might want to have additional discussion amongst themselves how to resolve the issue to which the section referred. There was additional discussion about the topic.

Vice Chair Shabram summarized that she and Chair Newman would work on Sections 3,4,5,8, and 9 and added that Section 11 would be removed for additional work amongst the board.

Ms. O'Rourke asked to add to the board working agreements that a summary of Robert's Rules would be given to each board member who would then follow them. She appreciated that Robert's Rules gave everyone voice when they were used correctly.

Ms. Hays reported that copies of the Rules were included in board member's binders.

Chair Newman agreed that they would continue to be included.

Ms. Brainard suggested some areas of the agreements where Ms. O'Rourke's request might be included and said that the language could be helpful, not accusatory.

Chair Newman brought the meeting to a close and thanked Ms. Brainard for her time. Ms. Brainard thanked the board for their time with her and asked that if the board had questions, they ask them to her as a group.

II. ADJOURN

Chair Newman adjourned the meeting at 8:50 p.m.

Andy Dey
District Clerk

Maya Rabasa
Board Chair

(Recorded by Eliza Drummond)