

MINUTES OF THE 4J BUDGET COMMITTEE

School District 4J, Lane County, Oregon

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

March 14, 2022

6:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Josh Burstein, Chair; Dakota Boulette, Gary Campbell, Tom Di Liberto, Anne Fifield, Ericka Thessen, Juan Carlos Valle, Appointed Committee members; Loral O'Rourke, Judy Newman, Gordon Lafer, Maya Rabasa, Mary Walston, Board Committee members; Cydney Vandercar, Andrea Belz, Brook Wager, Kerry Delf, Jeffry Johnson, staff.

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mr. Burstein called the 4J Budget Committee to order and called the roll. A quorum was established. Mr. Burstein reviewed the agenda.

II. Items for Action at this Meeting

1.a. Approval of Minutes for the January 24, 2022, Budget Committee Meeting

MOTION: Ms. Thessen moved, seconded by Mr. Valle, to approve the January 24, 2022, Budget Committee meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Items Raised by the Audience

Mr. Burstein determined there was no one wishing to speak.

IV. Budget Committee Discussion.

1. Opportunities to Strengthen Community Engagement Activities in the Fall

Ms. Belz provided an overview of the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) guidance document entitled *Aligning for Student Success* that had been distributed to committee members. She invited questions and comments on the community engagement section, particularly regarding previous community engagement processes and where improvements could be made to strengthen future community engagement activities.

Mr. Valle thought the document section on community engagement was well crafted. He hoped the committee could focus its discussion on how previous community engagements had been conducted and how groups and individuals had been involved. He wanted to build upon previous activities instead of starting over. He said the term "systemic racism" was used frequently and while he understood that, he asked when and how the transition from systematic racism to systemic racism occurred and what impact that would have on the District's activities with respect to racism.

Ms. Vandercar said she did not know when the change in terminology had occurred. She said 4J's previous public engagement presentations and outreach strategies were considered a good model and the District had been asked to share them with other districts. Ms. Wagner described the types of outreach activities that were conducted. She would raise Mr. Valle's question with ODE as staff began to receive training on the new guidance.

Mr. Di Liberto commented that the outreach activities were conducted for the Student Investment Account (SIA) funds and he was pleased to see that happen, including connecting with

stakeholders in the District. He said there was still much improvement needed and the District could no rely on the same methods as it emerged from the pandemic. He agreed comments at earlier committee meetings that it was essential to go out to communities and groups instead of just making it easier for them to come to the committee. He said outreach efforts should be redoubled as use of one-time funds was being considered and those efforts sustained during future budget cycles so people in the community understood how the District would connect with them.

Ms. Newman agreed that the previous community engagement addressed the SIA, one of the six initiatives, and was pleased to see the effort to pull all six plans into one strategic plan. She asked for a brief description of the other five plans, particularly Every Day Matters, Early Indicator and Intervention Systems, and Continuous Improvement Planning. Ms. Wagner said as staff received more state guidance and became more familiar with the other initiatives they would share that information to the committee.

Mr. Lafer said in his opinion the public input on budgets in past years had little meaning despite the extensive outreach. It generated an enormous word cloud that indicated everyone wanted more of everything. He said in order to obtain meaningful input from the community District staff needed to provide in advance of outreach ideas for the best and smartest use of funds. The public needed to understand the tradeoffs involved and how making greater investments in areas such as library staff and suicide prevention programs would impact other areas of the budget. That would form the basis of initial conversations with the community and lead to discussions of what else should be a priority instead of just a list of improvements to all areas of the education system. He said that should be the process in future budget cycles as the proposed budget was already before the committee.

Mr. Lafer asked staff to provide ideas for how to fund a pilot program in the proposed budget to put librarians back in a small number of Title 1 elementary schools in ways that would be minimally disruptive to District operations. He noted that the child development center in South Eugene High School might soon be down one staff person and would be interested in how funding could be restored. He also asked for proposals at the next committee meeting to add funding for additional mental health support services.

Ms. Rabasa pointed out that beginning on Page 22 of the guidance document there was a summary of each of the six initiatives, how they were integrated, the intent of each one and the permitted use of funds.

Mr. Burstein was pleased to see schools listed as an outreach location because parents were familiar with those facilities. He had attended sessions at his children's schools and there was good attendance and the meetings were helpful. He said there was an urgency associated with connecting with the community and while there was a limited amount of time for outreach in the current budget cycle, robust outreach strategies should be used in the next cycle.

Ms. Fifield agreed with Mr. Lafer that when people were asked generally about their priorities it generated a word cloud in which everything was a priority. Further complicating the discussion was the fact that requirements attached to funds often limited how they could be used and allowed little flexibility.

Mr. Valle pointed out that on page 104 of the guidance document there were steps for getting started and three could be implemented immediately. He said the second step was getting clear

on the core engagement team and that was the one that should be revisited. It was important to make expectations of the team clear and that the community's input would be valued, listened to and implemented. Page 105 identified specific student populations and a wide range of focal groups, including students and their families and District staff. He hoped the committee could discuss how to support the families of those students and staff. A chart on Page 110 indicated levels of community engagement and strategies, but missing was returning those groups that had been engaged in the outreach process and informing them about the information captured from their feedback and what would be done with that information. He said that step had also been missing from previous public engagement processes.

Mr. Di Liberto cautioned that input should not be solicited for things that could not be changed; the focus should be on areas of discretion in spending. Be clear with the public on funding streams that were targeted or restricted to certain uses. Do not give people the impression that they could have input on everything in the budget and identify the ways in which discretionary funds could be used. He also wanted to see some meetings focus on a specific issue and involve stakeholders with an interest in that topic. For example, if the topic was special education, it would be useful to invite parents of students with special needs and staff that were engaged with those students and invite them to discuss the best ways to use special education resources.

Mr. Burstein suggested beginning outreach with schools with the greatest needs to help achieve equity.

Ms. O'Rourke thought that currently one of the biggest issues was student suicide and if the District wanted to facilitate a zero tolerance policy on losing children to death by suicide, it would need to be a funding priority. She wanted the Budget Committee to have that discussion. Having mental health counselors in schools to deal with emotional and behavioral issues, support staff and remove barriers to accessing mental health services should be a focal point of the committee's budget work this year.

Mr. Boulette said when he had been a student in 4J schools he had seen or experienced many of the issues, such as access to free or reduced lunch and mental health services. Universal free lunch and in-school access to mental health services were needed in the schools and should be a funding priority.

Mr. Campbell said the previous superintendent had developed a formula for identifying staffing needs in schools when additional funding was available. He asked Ms. Belz and Ms. Vandercar to discuss in their presentation of the budget what model was used to making decisions about staffing in schools and any increase in staffing at a school. He agreed with Mr. Valle that it was important to return to those groups that provided input and let them know how that information was used. Another opportunity in the current budget cycle was to discuss how decisions were made based on community input in the previous SIA cycle and how conversations with the community affected District priorities.

Ms. Thessen asked about the level of community engagement achieved through surveys. She strongly urged the District to consider providing food and child care for in-person meetings. She said as a single parent she would be far more likely to participate in such an event if food and child care was available. Making food available could also encourage participation of students.

Ms. Rabasa felt it was important before beginning a new round of community engagement activities to reflect on past processes and determine if they were successful from the

community's perspective. Some people had felt disenfranchised when participating in the last SIA public engagement process when they did not feel their input was reflected in decisions that were made.

Ms. Newman said one way to avoid problems with past community engagement processes was to identify the resources available and those issues and problems the District wanted to address. That would focus the conversations on priority areas and avoid generating a word cloud in which everything was a priority.

Mr. Di Liberto agreed with Ms. Newman's suggestion to focus discussions at meetings on certain topics. He also felt there should be opportunities for other issues and areas of concern to be raised by the community. A two-way communications conduit with the community should be maintained on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Burstein said it would be helpful for the committee to have an understanding of one-time and ongoing funding streams and any restrictions on the use of those different funds.

In response to a question from Ms. O'Rourke, Ms. Belz said the discussions of community engagement and incorporation of equity-based processes and decision-making into budget development were not applicable to the current budget cycle. They were to prepare for implementation of those concepts in the fall of 2022 in the next budget cycle.

Ms. O'Rourke said she was interested in knowing if mental health counselors in all high schools and a base wage increase for all employees could be funded in the budget currently under discussion, whether with one-time or ongoing resources. Ms. Belz said a discussion of different funds and how they could be used was scheduled for the next Budget Committee meeting.

Mr. Lafer asked if the Budget Committee could direct staff to determine how to fund more mental health support and more librarians in the least disruptive way in the budget to be adopted in May. He said the committee would need that type of information in order to inform potential recommendations to the Board.

Mr. Valle again stressed the importance of informing the community of what the District had heard from them and what was being done with that feedback. He said the committee would need to be cognizant of where funds would come from if it was going to discuss issues such as increasing mental health services and library staffing. He said teachers needed more tools and those should not be provided as a Band-Aid through one-time funding; it required ongoing support.

Ms. Thessen asked if the Budget Committee was capable of making a change in the upcoming budget to provide more mental health services.

Mr. Campbell said the Budget Committee was interested in discussing prioritizations in the current budget and that had not occurred in the committee's meetings to date. He was interested in scheduling time for that discussion prior to staff presenting the budget. He said the committee would need a framework of how to fit the funding pieces together, identify one-time versus ongoing funding and eligible uses for available funds.

Ms. Rabasa agreed with Mr. Campbell that the committee needed to devote some time to discussing priorities and how mental health support could be tackled now and what could be done next year.

Ms. Walston said a discussion of increasing mental health services should begin with understanding what resources already existed in the District. She said the pandemic and other factors had resulted in a lot of despair in the world and lack of counselors in schools should not be blamed. Schools were not in a position to provide the type of professional support that some students needed, nor was Lane County Mental Health able to address all of the needs. The District had done considerable work during the past two years to provide more services, but the problem was much larger than not having counselors in schools.

Ms. Newman said it was necessary to identify gaps in counseling services in order to inform any targeted decisions about the budget.

Mr. Lafer said there was no intent to blame suicides on deficiencies in schools, but rather to recognize the scale of the crisis and try to act as quickly as possible. He suggested a task force of District leadership, educators close of the problem, and parents to come up with the best recommendations for trying to address the problem.

Ms. Rabasa agreed with Ms. Walston that it was necessary to understand what mental health services were currently available before calling for new things. She appreciated the District's recent efforts to add counselors, particularly in elementary schools. She noted that the counselors in elementary schools were entirely dedicated to mental health support and did not have to worry about students' academic issues. She said that dedication of staff to solely providing mental health support was needed at middle and high schools and if there was agreement that this was a priority it would benefit the Budget Committee to conduct an inventory of what was in place and understand what was working well and what could be improved.

Mr. Burstein agreed with Ms. Walston and Ms. Rabasa on the need to understand what was in place in the District and where more resources were needed. The committee had also discussed other needs such as free lunch for all and more librarians in schools. He said committee members, whether elected or appointed, represented the public in different ways and should remember who was not at the meeting.

Ms. Belz stressed that one of the Budget Committee's most powerful tools was the ability to ask questions and receive answers. The next meeting would provide information from people working in the system about what services were available and where there were gaps so the committee could continue its analysis.

Mr. Valle said the committee should provide specific guidance to staff before adjourning concerning the information it wanted to receive, such as how many mental health counselors were in the District currently and options for providing funding to add more counselors. This would allow the committee to give advice to the Board, which would make final decisions on the budget.

Mr. Di Liberto said he was interested in hearing from staff that made decisions about mental health services about current resources and what resources might be available to expand those services. However, the committee had limited time and could not examine all aspects of District

operations. He would like to hear from experts about what areas they would improve if more resources were available.

Ms. Fifield asked if the Budget Committee could make changes to the proposed budget and what procedures that would involve.

Ms. O'Rourke said her understanding was the Budget Committee made recommendations on the budget to the Board. She said in the past the committee had reviewed the proposed budget and agreed with staff. This year the committee had asked about needs that were not being addressed and how those needs could be met.

Ms. Vandercar appreciated the committee's questions about existing needs and available resources. She said staff would work with the committee to identify those issues it felt were most important. She said a majority of the budget was personnel and most of the current staff would be working for the District next year; otherwise due process would have occurred to let employees know contracts would not be continued. Any plans for major changes would have to be for the following year. She appreciated the recommendation to return to the community after public engagement to let people know what was heard and how funds would be spent. She said staff was already considering how middle and high school counselors could be given more time for mental health by shifting some duties to other staff. She said it was challenging to find qualified applicants for mental health services positions.

Ms. O'Rourke said she wanted clear information on the funding available this year and how it could be spent. She said wages should be high enough to attract seasoned mental health counselors. The current system was not working and students were dying. Students were in schools for seven hours a day and the District should reduce barriers to students seeking help. The District should adopt a zero tolerance for student suicide and while free lunches and more librarians were desirable, they did not represent lives. Counseling functions should be separated to allow for a focus on mental health support. She said there were very limited mental health services available in the community.

Mr. Lafer said the Budget Committee existed to obtain feedback from the community on priorities for use of funds and make recommendations to the Board. The Board made budget decisions. He felt there was more that could be done immediately to increase mental health support in schools and that some funds could be found in the current budget. He would also support using Elementary And Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) dollars for mental health services even if it meant those staff would only be there two years in order to address the current situation. He wanted to hear from staff where resources could be found in this year's budget to address the mental health crisis.

Ms. Thessen described how Lane County Mental Health and PeaceHealth partnered with the health centers at North and Churchill high schools to provide nurse practitioners and counselors. There could be other strategies to address the crisis such as expanding those partnerships and incorporating mental health services into the mandated health classes.

2. Opportunities to Incorporate Equity-based Processes and Decision-making Into Budget Development

This topic was postponed.

V. Budget Committee Wrap-up

a. Items Raised by Committee Members

b. Items for Next Meeting

The next meeting agenda could include an Other Funds budget presentation, continued discussions of Opportunities to Strengthen Community Engagement Activities in the Fall and Opportunities to Incorporate Equity-based Processes and Decision-making into Budget Development, responses from staff to questions from the committee about areas of interest and priorities and an open discussion about priority areas.

VII. Adjourn

Mr. Burstein thanked everyone for their participation in the budget process and adjourned the meeting at 7:38 p.m.

(Recorded by Lynn Taylor)