

MINUTES OF THE 4J BUDGET COMMITTEE

School District 4J, Lane County, Oregon
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

May 2, 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; Alicia Hays, Loral O'Rourke, Judy Newman, Gordon Lafer, Maya Rabasa, Keerti Hasija Kauffman, Michelle Hsu, Board Committee members; Cydney Vandercar, Andrea Belz, Holly Langan, Christine Nesbit, Robb Hess, Karen Hardin, staff.

I. Call to Order

Mr. Burstein called the 4J Budget Committee to order.

II. Roll Call

Mr. Burstein called the roll and a quorum was established.

III. Agenda Review

Mr. Burstein reviewed the agenda and noted that the referenced documents and presentations, including responses to committee questions from the previous meeting, were available on the District's website.

Ms. O'Rourke said she had changes she wished to make to the budget and asked at what point on the agenda that could be done.

Mr. Lafer suggested that the action item related to approval of the budget might be the point at which amendments could be proposed and a recommendation forwarded to the Board. Ms. Belz said that typically the Budget Committee would make recommendations to the Board for things that might be changed; it would be the Board that actually made changes to the budget before adoption. She provided examples of Budget Committee involvement in approving changes to the budget after it was adopted, such as the District receiving additional funding or needing to make cuts if funding was lower than anticipated.

Ms. Nesbit said the Budget Committee would approve the proposed budget for adoption by the Board and it was within the committee's scope to make recommendations regarding how funds should be allocated.

Ms. O'Rourke said the committee was responsible for assuring the budget process followed state guidelines. The budget proposed allocations for the coming year, but committee members could recommend changes.

Mr. Lafer agreed that the committee could forward its recommendations to the Board and the Board could accept those recommendation or make its own amendments before adopting the budget.

IV. Items Raised by the Audience

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

V. Items for Information

V.1. Responses to Budget Committee Questions

Ms. Belz said that District staff was available to respond if committee members had questions related to the information provided. She said an additional committee meeting had been scheduled if necessary to complete the committee's work. A public hearing would be held at the June 1 Board meeting to provide an opportunity to people to speak directly to the proposed budget. The goal was for the Board to take action to adopt the budget and declare taxes and levies at its June 22, 2022, meeting.

Ms. Vandercar briefly reviewed the responses. She encouraged committee members, in the interest of transparency, to ask clarifying questions if something was left unanswered. She said staff were available to provide additional information if necessary.

Ms. Vandercar said 4J would receive slightly over \$2 million in one-time funding from the state (through HB 4030) to support staff recruitment and retention. The District is required to submit a grant application with a plan for use of those funds by May 27, 2022. Ms. Vandercar asked Mr. Hess to explain the internal 4J Grow Your Own program which is a potential use of this new grant funding.

Mr. Hess said the Grow Your Own program was focused on diversifying the teaching workforce. A pilot program begun in the current year focused on recruiting education assistants in the District who wanted to become teachers and identified as BIPOC individuals. The pilot was operated in partnership with Pacific University because of the university's flexibility in their design of preparing teachers and the multiple options that were offered. In order to diversify the workforce many strategies were necessary, including tuition support, mentoring and job-embedded coaching. The District also participated in the Lane Pathway Program throughout the county.

Ms. O'Rourke asked if educators were consulted about how the funds should be used for retention. Mr. Hess said the pilot program was begun because it was important to diversify the teaching workforce. The grant funds could be used for a wide range of activities, but the District only recently became aware of the availability of funds and had not yet been able to ask all employees about how funding should be used. A plan for use of the funds had to be submitted by May 27 and the District would be accountable for outcomes. It was important to identify programs that would make an impact in the coming year, identify which worked the best and try to replicate in a future budget.

Mr. Lafer asked if this was the last opportunity to determine how to use the funds for retention. Ms. Vandercar said the grant application had to be submitted by May 27. Ms. Belz pointed out that the funds were not in the proposed budget. A supplemental budget would be proposed for any grants awarded after the budget was adopted.

In response to a question from Ms. Newman, Mr. Hess said the funds would provide tuition support to encourage BIPOC education assistants and other classified employees to become teachers.

Ms. Rabasa offered the following comments and information requests:

- The cost to increase kindergarten education assistants to full days. The kindergarten experience sets the stage for retention of students and families and success during a student's education career.
- Hope for the future of the SIA-funded emergent bilingual program and expansion of the definition beyond a focus on the English language. Celebrating other languages increases bi-literacy and academic success.
- Increase funds for Art Spark by \$25,000 to mitigate the shortfall in funding for art education.
- Are behavior specialists moving away from a behaviorist approach?
- What ratio of teachers to students was needed to encourage interest and maintain the Eugene Online Academy?
- Staff was becoming younger in terms of years in career. What is the difference between the average cost of a full time licensed position cited in response #27 and the growing cohort of staff in the first salary step?

Mr. Lafer asked that staff provide to the Board at its May 18 meeting a draft of the grant application due on May 27 for use of the \$2 million for teacher retention. He requested information on the cost to set \$18/hour as the minimum wage and to increase accessibility to health care for part-time employees and better options than the tiered approach to make better health insurance accessible to more people. He acknowledged that any agreement would need to be bargained in a contract, but there should be no problem discussing options in a public meeting in order for the Budget Committee to determine if it wished to make recommendations to the Board.

Mr. Boulette asked if nutrition and administrative staff are aware of the "no lunch shaming" policy and was it being enforced in 4J schools. Ms. Langan said staff had received training and the practice of taking food away from students had been abolished. Mr. Boulette said his concern was that violations were not being reported. Ms. Langan replied that she had not received any reports of violations from parents, students, principals or other staff.

Ms. O'Rourke asked how students who did not intend to go to college are being prepared for life after school, including what services were available and how were they being funded. She was disappointed with the response to how the success of an equity/inclusion initiative would be measured. There should have been responses about how marginalization of students of color and others was being mitigated.

Ms. O'Rourke asked how many students were involved in the College Now program and if it was available to all students, including those who would go on to career and technical programs. She noted that a list of all mental health support positions and services that would let teachers and families know what resources were available had not been provided. She said the best strategy for increasing the base wage to \$18/hour was to know the actual amount it would cost so it could be approved in the budget, and then fine tuning could occur during negotiations. She reiterated her request for an estimate of the cost.

Mr. Valle thanked teachers for their service in recognition of Teacher Appreciation Week. He welcomed new Board members Ms. Hsu and Ms. Kauffman. His interest in equity and inclusion related to the composition of mentors and their impact. He asked how many mentors were BIPOC and what steps were being taken to provide those of color the opportunity to be mentors. He also asked how many teachers on special assignment (TOSA) were in the District and their

composition. He appreciated receiving information on the cost of a full-time licensed staff and asked if that figure was the total compensation package. He looked forward to the Board's discussion of how to use the grant funding.

Mr. Valle suggested the Board consider providing guidance to staff on which grants and funding sources were necessary to fund programs of interest in order to avoid future disagreements or misunderstandings about how funds would be used. He urged consideration of how efficiencies could be achieved in mental health services decision-making to reduce redundancies and potentially realize some savings.

Ms. Thessen urged consideration of an \$18/hour minimum wage for District staff. She asked if the suicide prevention and safety assessment specialist and behavior threat assessment specialist positions were categorized under health care/behavioral health services or were they under law enforcement. She wanted to assure that the approach to suicide prevention and behavioral issues was not from a law enforcement perspective, but rather from a trauma informed and behavioral health standpoint.

Ms. Thessen asked for assurance that funding in the budget was not being allocated to an applied behavioral approach as that was considered harmful to many students who were neurodivergent and had autism. She also expressed her gratitude for the work of teachers.

Mr. Di Liberto asked if exit surveys of teachers of color were being conducted and whether that was planned for the coming year as he did not see a specific reference to that activity. He felt the survey was a valuable tool to diagnose how the District could improve its retention of BIPOC teachers. Ms. Hardin said that every employee who left the District was offered the opportunity to complete an exit survey. Exit interviews were not conducted but that was something that could be explored. She said feedback provided when employees left was provided to administrators, managers and supervisors. She said stay interviews presented a larger capacity issue as those could not be done by Human Resources staff. The employee would need to trust and have a relationship with the interviewer. Stay interviews were something it would be worth investing time and energy to determine how to implement.

Ms. Hsu agreed with the value of stay interviews, but suggested the District first try exit interviews as a tool to retain staff. She said equity could be defined narrowly or broadly and in broad terms there were areas within 4J that did not look equitable in terms of the resources they received. She hoped to see equity defined in very broad terms in the entire District.

Regarding retaining a diverse workforce, Mr. Campbell asked if the District had considered using any of the ESSER funds related to educator retention to paying off student loans, which was an eligible activity. He urged staff to consider implementing exit interviews immediately.

Ms. Newman agreed that stay interviews were very valuable and sent an important message to staff of color. She suggested that staff research the option of a partnership using University of Oregon resources to conduct those interviews.

Mr. Valle saw a high value to conducting exit interviews and said those should be crafted carefully in order to extract information. He said information provided in exit interviews would be influenced by the employee's concern about their next job and references. He wanted a greater focus on retention and development to prevent employees from leaving and efforts to recruit staff of color.

Ms. Kauffman concurred with previous remarks regarding retention of an equitable workforce and an increase in teacher pay. She supported efforts to help students look at options other than college after graduation. That would provide hope and diverse options for communities. She also hoped that increased funding could be found to support the Art Spark program. Language acquisition and academics were also ways to increase diversity and equity in education programming.

Mr. Lafer said there were likely many employees who were considering whether to leave the District or stay and the District needed to know if there were things that could be done that would make a significant difference without being excessively expensive. He was interested in Mr. Campbell's suggestion of paying off student loans. He wanted to see interviews implemented, particularly with employees of color, those who were close to retiring and those in the first five years of teaching. The goal should be to discover things that could make a difference and were affordable.

V.2. Budget Committee Discussion

V.2.a. Follow-up Questions for 4J Staff

Mr. Burstein said a number of questions were raised during the previous discussion of responses from staff.

Mr. Burstein asked what the next step in the process was if the committee was not ready to take action on the proposed budget. Ms. Belz replied that another committee meeting was scheduled for May 16 and action could be delayed until then. That would still allow sufficient time to meet budget publication requirements prior to the Board's June 1 meeting. She asked that follow-up questions be forwarded to staff through committee leadership so responses could be provided at the May 16 meeting.

VI. Items for Action

VI.a. Approve 2022-23 Proposed Budget

This item postponed to the May 16 meeting.

VI.b. Declare Tax Rates and Debt Service Levy

This item postponed to the May 16 meeting.

VII. Adjourn

Mr. Burstein thanked everyone for their participation in the budget process and adjourned the meeting at 7:37 p.m.

(Recorded by Lynn Taylor)