

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR BOARD MEETING
OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
SCHOOL DISTRICT 4J, LANE COUNTY, OREGON**

Date: May 15, 2024

The Board of Directors (BOD) of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Oregon, held a regular board meeting at 7:00 p.m. in-person at the Education Center, 200 North Monroe Street in Eugene, Oregon, via live-stream and broadcast on KRVM. Notice of the meeting was emailed to the media and posted on the 4J website on May 10, 2024.

ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Maya Rabasa, Chair
Jenny Jonak, Vice Chair
Ericka Thessen
Judy Newman
Tom Di Liberto
Morgan Munro
Rick Hamilton

STAFF:

Colt Gill, Interim Superintendent
Matt Brown, Director of Finance
Bob Blyth, Assistant Director of Finance
Seth Pfaefflin, Director of Student Services
Adrienne Pierce, Curriculum Administrator, Instruction Department
Lynette Williams, Teacher on Special Assignment
Brooke Wagner, Director of Human Resources
Sherry Moore, Executive Assistant to the Chief of Staff
Debbie McKim, Executive Assistant to the Interim Superintendent and Board

EMPLOYEE GROUPS:

None.

OTHER:

Sheridan Schilling, Churchill High School
Carmen Gonzalez Valle, Sheldon High School (online)

MEDIA:

KRVM

I. REGULAR BOARD MEETING

II. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, FLAG SALUTE, LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chair Maya Rabasa called the regular board meeting to order at 7:07 p.m. She said the names of the board members who were present. Interim Superintendent Colt Gill led the flag salute and Chair Rabasa read the land acknowledgement statement.

III. AGENDA APPROVAL

The agenda was approved as presented.

IV. INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS AND SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Interim Superintendent Gill explained that during the meeting there will be a budget presentation followed by a public hearing on the proposed 2024-25 budget. He shared a video illustrating that schools across Oregon are beginning to experience extreme budget challenges. He detailed several contributing factors and said there is no one single place to lay blame for Oregon's school funding dilemma. He emphasized how critical the upcoming 2025 legislative session will be as legislators will set the budget for the next biennium. Eugene School District 4J will continue to add positions, relying on general fund dollars when COVID relief dollars run out. 4J has a significant reserve, but like a household savings account, it is good to cover one-time expenses, but does not go far when applied to ongoing expenses. He cautioned that if ongoing, the reserve funds will be spent down, and the district will need to look for additional revenue. Interim Superintendent Gill shared a video of superintendents across the state of Oregon speaking of significant economic shortfalls. The video can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tLsWOen_5Q He emphasized that while this is not the current experience at 4J, it could be in a year or two. The outcome may be determined during the spring 2025 legislative session.

Relating to the current proposed 2024-25 budget, Interim Superintendent Gill stated that last week, the Budget Committee forwarded a set of recommendations to the 4J Board of Directors (BOD). They are as follows:

1. Seek clarity on budget/spending priorities
2. Carefully review and consider expenses
3. Initiate a board discussion and approval of an updated reserve policy
4. Review and approve the budget process for the future

He said recommendations one, three, and four can be addressed over the next three to six months. The second recommendation will require more direction from the board. He suggested the BOD communicate the options they would like to see district staff deliver at the June 5, 2024 meeting; ahead of budget adoption on June 30, 2024. He provided examples of options, such as naming specific areas of spending to be reconsidered, providing criteria to guide staff, and naming existing goals and priorities.

V. RECEIVE REPORTS FROM HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Sheridan Schilling provided a report from Churchill High School. She explained that students have been busy with academics and sports. Last week AP testing began across the school and IP students are continuing testing. Students and teachers reported less time to prepare given the new schedule. The play, Mean Girls, opened to their largest attendance yet. Final performances are May 16-18. Boys and girls track and tennis are performing exceptionally. Churchill High School graduation is on June 11. Ms. Schilling highlighted Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. Churchill is holding a celebratory assembly.

Carmen Gonzalez Valle provided a report from Sheldon High School. Boys track is going to state. The boys baseball team went to playoffs. The girls lacrosse team placed second in their league. Students are looking forward to a weeklong Spring Fest. AP and IP exams are coming. Ms. Gonzalez Valle recognized May as Asian Pacific Islander Month and Mental Health Awareness Month.

Nellie Schmitke-Rosiek provided a report from South Eugene High School via Ms. Thessen. The CTE programs end of year showcase happened on May 14. CTE catering students served an excellent buffet at the event. She hopes the CTE showcase becomes a regular event, it was a wonderful way to display and celebrate student work.

VI. CONDUCT PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED 2024-25 BUDGET & BUDGET PRESENTATION

There were no individuals present for public comment specific to the proposed 2024-25 budget.

Finance Director Matt Brown, Assistant Finance Director Bob Blyth, and Director of Student Services Seth Pfaefflin provided a PowerPoint presentation of the proposed 2024-25 budget.

For fiscal year 2024-25, the overall budget is \$601,767,487, a decrease of \$47 million from the current year. A majority of the decrease comes from a lower beginning fund balance from where the district started the 2023-24 budget.

Mr. Brown presented a list of all district resources: beginning fund balance, property taxes, local option levy, other local sources, intermediate sources, federal and state sources, interfund transfers, and other resources. The beginning fund balance reduces by 22% overall. Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds end on September 30, 2024.

On the expenditure side, FY 2024-25 notable increases include adding educators, counselors, nutrition services, custodial supplies, utility costs, unemployment, and salary increases. Mr. Brown highlighted enrollment trends, indicating that 4J could lose up to

2,000 students. He reiterated that student enrollment dictates what the district receives in State School fund dollars.

Ms. Newman asked where the enrollment projections come from.

Mr. Brown responded that the projections are produced internally by the Research and Planning Department. He offered to follow up with more information.

Mr. Brown presented a slide showing an increase in district staffing over the past several years; from 1,629 staff in 2021/22 to 2,152 staff in 2023/24. He said the district is adding 57 FTEs—mostly counselors, teachers, and licensed professionals.

Mr. Brown explained that during the previous Budget Committee meeting, there were questions about special education (SPED) spending. He introduced Mr. Pfaefflin to discuss the topic further with the Board of Directors (BOD).

Mr. Pfaefflin referenced a handout detailing the use of state and local sources to support SPED in the district. He said spending and costs have steadily increased. He provided a spreadsheet showing five years of staffing data. He noted there is a funding cap in the state of Oregon of 11%. Eugene School District 4J sits at roughly 13.5%.

Chair Rabasa requested that the information presented in the handout be provided for public viewing.

Mr. Brown responded affirmatively.

Ms. Jonak asked Mr. Pfaefflin if, other than FTE licensed, there are other categories that are increasing positions for next year.

Mr. Pfaefflin responded that it is still being determined.

Ms. Newman asked why the SPED child count went down by 150.

Mr. Pfaefflin responded that SPED didn't decrease as much as general enrollment, in fact they have remained roughly even with the percentage of students in SPED.

VII. ITEMS RAISED BY THE AUDIENCE

Allison Kreider (online), teacher at Howard Elementary School, brought up challenges filling certified positions. She asserted that the district is denying the impact. Over the past thirty days they have experienced a shortage of sixteen certified positions that remain unfilled. It has resulted in increased workloads for other teachers without additional compensation. She said many times teachers/classrooms absorb additional students for the entire day, causing disruption. Specialists in the school have had to cancel their classes and take over other classrooms. SPED and other specialized classes have been impacted. She provided a recent example of staying home from work ill and learning that no substitute was available to cover her class. A reading specialist and other

staff took on the extra work. She urged how critical it is to address the issue, not just at Howard Elementary School, but across the district.

VIII. COMMENTS BY EMPLOYEE GROUPS

None.

IX. COMMENTS AND COMMITTEE REPORTS BY INDIVIDUAL BOARD MEMBERS

Chair Rabasa prefaced by stating that at a recent retreat, the BOD discussed centering stakeholder voices by reducing the time for individual board member comments during a regular board meeting to approximately two minutes.

Ms. Newman shared that she spent a day in the office at Edgewood Elementary School. She observed lots of regulating, staff supporting students, volunteers, and other activities. She attended a Community Circle at Cal Young Middle School, commenting that the community building and belonging she witnessed was impressive.

Mr. Hamilton attended the district's spring Professional Development and Awards Ceremony.

Ms. Thessen spoke to students who do not yet have plans for after graduation. She said success looks different for every student. For some, their biggest accomplishment may have been showing up at school and surviving. Ms. Thessen highlighted CTE programs and gap years. She encouraged the district to continue raising up all students, not just the ones with high GPAs and traditional paths.

X. CONSENT GROUP – ITEMS FOR ACTION

MOTION: Vice Chair Jonak moved to approve the items on the consent group. Ms. Newman seconded. **The motion carried unanimously, 7:0:0; Chair Rabasa, Vice Chair Jonak, Ms. Thessen, Ms. Newman, Mr. Di Liberto, Ms. Munro, and Mr. Hamilton all voting in favor.**

XI. ITEM FOR INFORMATION

None.

XII. ITEMS FOR ACTION

None.

XIII. ITEMS FOR ACTION AT A FUTURE MEETING

1. MIDDLE SCHOOL SPANISH DUAL LANGUAGE AND IMMERSION

Curriculum and Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Administrator Adrienne Pierce and DLI and World Language Specialist/Teacher On Special Assignment Lynette Williams provided a PowerPoint presentation on Middle School Spanish Dual Language and Immersion.

Ms. Pierce noted that the curriculum will be the first viable Spanish immersion program for both Kelley and Monroe middle schools. They piloted the program with existing dual language and immersion educators.

Ms. Williams explained that in addition to meeting the language arts standards, the district needed to incorporate a world language component. She emphasized the talent necessary to teach to both of those criteria in a language arts program. She noted that historically it was difficult for educators to find a program suitable for middle schoolers.

Ms. Williams explained that the piloting phase led to identifying a program suitable for sixth graders, known as Benchmark, and a program suitable for seventh and eighth graders, known as Galeria A. When the teachers piloted the programs, they were unanimous in their feeling that Galeria A was more worthy of adoption because it had clearly articulated its connection to the language arts standards, was more robust, and user-friendly. Both programs had a good digital website, but Galeria A integrated more easily with Canva. Educators who piloted the program expressed 100% support of Galeria A.

Ms. Pierce explained that the cost breakdown is \$175,000, or approximately fifty dollars per student annually. Additionally, there are professional development costs amounting to roughly \$18,080.

Ms. Newman asked if the budget covers seven years.

Ms. Pierce responded affirmatively.

2. BOARD MEMBER CALENDAR DRAFT FOR THE 2024-25 SCHOOL YEAR

Interim Superintendent Gill presented the board member calendar draft for the 2024-25 school year. He explained that traditionally the BOD meets the first and third Wednesday of the month. The calendar draft for the 2024-25 school year reflects that. Due to an occasional executive or work session, board members are asked to set aside every Wednesday should a meeting be called. Interim Superintendent Gill mentioned the potential of alternating the board calendar for the next year or beyond. He collected some information pertaining to other school district calendars.

Vice Chair Jonak asked Interim Superintendent Gill to elaborate on comparisons with other school districts.

Interim Superintendent Gill said he went on the websites of neighboring or similar school districts and the vast majority hold one meeting per month as a regular board meeting and one meeting per month as a work session. They are on the same cycle of two days per month. One district has a model similar to 4J, a work session followed by a regular board meeting, but they have fewer meetings throughout the year. In another example, school

board members met in committees frequently throughout the year, in addition to their regularly scheduled board meetings.

Ms. Munro brought up that at their recent retreat, the BOD discussed opportunities to make best use of meeting time. She encouraged moving towards considering the opportunity to have a work session and regular meeting as the monthly structure.

She explained, for the listening audience, that work sessions can begin as early as four p.m. and regular sessions begin at seven p.m. She suggested that a structured work session will actually allow for more discussion.

Chair Rabasa responded that if the one work session/one regular session per month model were considered, it is important to know that 4J policy states that decisions cannot be made in work sessions. She pointed out that it already feels like things move slowly with the current model.

Ms. Newman inquired about the board practice of requiring three reads, stating that if the board only meets once per month to make decisions that could get truncated.

Ms. Thessen expressed general support for the one work session/one regular session per month model. However, because it will reduce the public's ability to give comment, she suggested holding quarterly public comment sessions.

Chair Rabasa responded that receiving public comments during a work session is also an option.

Vice Chair Jonak expressed general support for the alternate meeting model. She suggested creating a different format for public input, in addition to holding quarterly public comment sessions.

There was consensus that the Community Input Committee, made up of Chair Rabasa, Mr. Di Liberto, and Ms. Thessen, will coordinate a time to select dates for the board member calendar draft for the 2024-25 school year.

3. 2024-25 BUDGET PRESENTATION DISCUSSION

Finance Director Matt Brown and Assistant Finance Director Bob Blyth received questions from the BOD regarding the 2024-25 budget.

Ms. Newman cited 57 FTE and questioned the rationale for increasing staff alongside dwindling resources. She expressed concern that the positions might eventually be cut.

Chair Rabasa said to consider how many of the 57 FTE have already been hired.

Mr. Di Liberto shared his perspective that he wants the district to spend money on students the best way possible and treat employees correctly.

Vice Chair Jonak brought up the district goal of increasing equitable outcomes and achievements. She noted that a priority effort was professional development for training and staff. She commented that professional development and training, which does not necessarily consume additional resources, may be a way for the district to invest that makes sense and supports efforts without having to hire new employees.

Mr. Hamilton echoed concern about the issue of hiring staff that potentially cannot be sustained by the budget.

Ms. Munro stated for the listening audience that the 2024-25 budget proposes using a massive amount of district savings (2/3 of savings in one year) in a way that does not feel sustainable to continue the following year. She asserted that the district would go from having a savings of approximately 66 million to zero within 18 to 24 months. She said Oregon's funding model forces the district to determine how use the limited resources in the best way possible. Ms. Munro suggested the district make changes in ways that are steps down instead of a cliff. She is concerned with the potential for the district to spend 40 million dollars on investments that cannot be repeated next year, for example, new employees. She suggested that the district consider how to best spend its reserves and to view programs like the free and reduced lunch through a new lens.

Chair Rabasa responded, regarding the free and reduced lunch program, that there is nothing preventing families who can afford to cover the cost of their children's lunches from donating money to 4J. She suggested a potential communications solution.

Chair Rabasa asked, out of the 40 million, how much is contributing to getting district reserves at a healthy level?

Ms. Newman requested information about hiring 57 FTE with use of reserves.

Ms. Thessen asked the approximate monthly cost of payroll.

Ms. Blyth stated that payroll is just under 11 million.

Vice Chair Jonak added that she has mixed feelings about hiring staff that may not be employed in the future because she feels that students do have immediate needs. She suggested exploring the topic of hiring and retention with the employee union groups. She voiced her concern about the district spending 13.5 million on Wells Fargo building, including the ongoing operational costs of approximately half a million per year.

Ms. Schilling offered that it is important to think about longevity and the future. She wants to make sure that her younger brother gets the same opportunities that she is getting in high school. She said that the budget potentially plummeting is terrifying. She said sacrifices have to be made, and suggested thinking about the long term, not just today.

Ms. Thessen asked, regarding the free and reduced lunch program, if there is a discernable difference if a student took lunch but not breakfast.

Mr. Brown responded that he will check in with the Nutritional Services Manager and follow up with the information.

Ms. Munro commented about the budget versus the actual spent and how many positions go unfilled. She questioned the manner the district determines which position gets hired and which position does not. She requested more information about the process and suggested that if it were done intentionally and strategically it could result in a more realistic budget projection.

Ms. Newman asked if the money for the Wells Fargo building renovation is reflected in the proposed budget.

Mr. Brown responded affirmatively.

Interim Superintendent Gill summarized the questions outlined by school board members. The Finance Department will follow-up during an upcoming June school board meeting.

Ms. Munro asked if the proposed budget includes the passing of the local option levy.

Mr. Brown responded affirmatively.

Ms. Newman asked about a possible option to direct the district to underspend.

Mr. Blyth responded that the information being presented is the district's appropriation levels, once that is set, the budget can be adjusted to reflect lower spending levels.

Mr. Brown and Mr. Blyth wrapped up the discussion with a commitment to follow up with the BOD at their upcoming June school board meeting.

XIV. SUGGESTIONS BY THE BOARD FOR CONSIDERATION OF ITEMS AT A FUTURE MEETING

There were none.

XV. ADJORN

Chair Rabasa adjourned the regular board meeting at 9:30 p.m.



Colt Gill
District Clerk



Maya Rabasa
Board Chair

(Recorded by LCOG)
Approved on 06/05/2024