

**MINUTES OF 4J BOARD OF DIRECTORS SUMMER RETREAT
SCHOOL DISTRICT 4J, LANE COUNTY, OREGON
Date: August 1, 2024**

The Board of Directors (BOD) of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, held a summer retreat at 4:30 p.m. in-person at the Education Center, 200 North Monroe Street in Eugene, Oregon. Notice of the meeting was emailed to the media and posted on the 4J website on July 26, 2024.

ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

STAFF:

Colt Gill, Interim Superintendent
Carmen Xiomara Urbina, Chief of Staff
Sherry Moore, Executive Assistant to the Chief of Staff
Debbie McKim, Executive Assistant to the Interim Superintendent and Board

OTHER GUESTS:

Vince Adams, Board Development Specialist, Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA)

EMPLOYEE ASSOCIATIONS:

None.

MEDIA:

None.

I. CALL 4J BOARD OF DIRECTORS SUMMER RETREAT TO ORDER

Chair Jenny Jonak called the Eugene School District 4J Board of Directors (BOD) summer retreat to order at 4:35 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Chair Jonak said the names of the board members and attendees who were present.

III. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Board Development Specialist Vince Adams from the Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) reintroduced himself to the BOD.

1. BOARD MEMBER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Mr. Adams introduced the topic of board member roles and responsibilities and outlined the presentation agenda.

Board members responded to two ice breaker questions, “Why are you here?” and “Why does board culture matter?”

Discussion led to exploring the demographics of Eugene School District 4J’s 15,500 plus students, including their racial and ethnic identities, languages spoken, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Chair Jonak brought up the need for more community support networks for BIPOC students.

Mr. Adams agreed, commenting that it is hard for communities to find affinity.

Regarding the topic of graduation rates, Ms. Munro suggested that an estimated 200 4J students did not graduate high school last year.

Mr. Adams challenged the BOD to think about *why* the students did not graduate. He said that student outcomes can be predicted by social factors; but he asked board members to think about what percentage of students not graduating is acceptable to them.

Board members agreed that any percentage of students not graduating is unacceptable to them.

Ms. Munro responded that 4J offers a modified diploma, so in theory every student should be able to graduate.

Ms. Rabasa offered her perspective that her vision is considering changing district language from “graduating” to “completing.” She said using open language allows for honoring the individual.

Mr. Adams suggested that boards who do not believe that every child can succeed govern fundamentally differently. But when boards do believe that every child can succeed, they live in the realm of possibility.

Mr. Adams presented a graphic showing a district’s leadership team, made up of the school board, superintendent, and an administrative professional. He said if one area is weak, the result is weak leadership efficacy.

Mr. Adams introduced a slide detailing the components of high performing school boards, including vision and goals, climate and resources, data and monitoring, cohesive teaming, community engagement, and policy and accountability. He provided examples of each component.

Mr. Adams introduced a slide detailing the components of low-performing school boards, including that low performing school boards spend less time focusing on student achievement and policy items and its members tend to seek to advance their own agendas.

There are certain responsibilities that a school board has, including: hiring and evaluating a superintendent, developing and adopting policies, tracking district progress, approving a budget, and ministerial functions.

Mr. Adams suggested spending less time on ministerial functions and more time focusing on students.

There was discussion around how recent district history required the board to do more ministerial functions and yet that may shift now as the board builds trust in new leadership positions.

Mr. Adams illustrated that the board provides governance, and the superintendent oversees operations.

Discussion ensued about the governance continuum, including informed oversight (as opposed to micromanaging), strategic goal monitoring, and an instruction and learning focus.

Mr. Adams presented a slide of twelve balanced governance standards:

1. Vision directed planning
2. Community engagement
3. Effective leadership
4. Accountability
5. Using data
6. Cultural responsiveness
7. Culture and climate
8. Learning organization
9. Systems thinking
10. Innovation and Creativity
11. Board Conduct and Superintendent Relationship
12. Budgeting and Finance

Mr. Adams closed the discussion about board members' roles and responsibilities.

2. 2024-25 GOALS FOR THE BOARD, THE DISTRICT, AND THE SUPERINTENDENT

Chair Jonak introduced the topic of reviewing draft board goals, district goals, and superintendent goals for the 2024-25 school year.

Interim Superintendent Gill presented a PowerPoint (along with a handout) detailing his learnings and discoveries, draft superintendent goals, and his focus going forward. Along with the key points, he offered various examples.

Interim Superintendent Gill provided a slide of learnings and discoveries:

- Competent, committed, and caring professionals
- Systems are strained and sometimes failing
- Teaching and learning have not been centered
- Concern about equity being sidelined
- Complaints are crushing leaders, systems, and proactive efforts to improve student outcomes
- Dysfunctional relationships with labor
- Decisions are more focused on emotion and complaints, than data

Interim Superintendent Gill provided a slide of his focus going forward:

- Recenter equitable access
- Build trust and transparency
- Develop systems to create stability
- Honor, maximize, and build the district's leadership
- Name that the permanent superintendent partner with staff, students, and community to set a vision for the district

Interim Superintendent Gill provided a slide of draft superintendent goals:

1. 4J as a Gem – Reaffirm a strong commitment to education excellence through demonstrated community collaboration and policies to support all students
2. Mentor and Affirm the Team
3. Grow Community and Staff Trust and Partnership
4. Secure 4J's Future

Interim Superintendent Gill passionately stated that 4J is a school district which has influenced many other districts in Oregon and nationwide. He said the 4J district is innovative and has shown care because of the equity work the district did early on. He suggested that the board begin celebrating all the district's successes, while working on the challenges behind the scenes. He mentioned the positive praise community members have expressed about the current board, including their transparency. He cited the recent approval of the school levy.

Mr. Adams transitioned the group into a review of draft district goals:

1. Increasing Equitable Outcomes and Achievements
2. Safety and Wellbeing of Students and Staff
3. Proactively Engaging Community

Board members discussed various aspects of the district goals, including ongoing tracking to support the goals.

Interim Superintendent Gill explained that there are interim academic measures that occur regularly throughout the school year which may provide more information. He added that 4J is the seventh largest school district in Oregon and kindergarten through eighth grade is among the top three in performance for academic outcomes; yet by the end of high school, 4J graduation rates are in the bottom two to three percent.

Board members voiced agreement that the academic outcome gap needs attention.

After refining language to reflect intentions of draft district goals, the group transitioned to a brainstorming session for long-term planning and policy areas.

3. BRAINSTORMING FOR LONG-TERM PLANNING AND POLICY AREAS

Interim Superintendent Gill introduced a brainstorming session for long-term planning and policy areas. He clarified that the purpose of the exercise is to identify topics of importance. Nothing is confirmed, and the topics will be further reviewed for ultimate determination. Interim Superintendent Gill reframed the assignment by asking board members to identify the topics that keep them up at night. Each board member was provided with fourteen tags for long term planning, fourteen tags for policy exploration, and seven tags for parking lot items.

The following are examples of topics that board members identified across the three categories: financial stewardship, board elections, districtwide engagement of parents towards student success, pre-k plans to developmental kindergarten, safety plans, community health centers in every region with expanded mental health services, inclusive practices, sustainability, equitable school choice, cultivating joy/play based learning, complaint process, cellphone/social media policies, campus safety improvements, sanctuary district, “no out” district, revolutionize physical education, relationship-based problem solving, and equitable sharing of individual school fundraising.

Board members rated the topics by level of importance. Staff will collate the results and follow up with the BOD.

4. SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH COMMITTEE PREPARATION DISCUSSION

Chair Jonak introduced the topic of developing a superintendent search committee. They discussed the scope of the committee’s work, membership, and other specifications.

Chair Jonak posed six questions to consider for discussion:

1. Who will be responsible for determining candidate qualifications—the BOD or committee?
2. Who will be responsible for selecting a search firm—the BOD or committee?
3. Who will be responsible for creating a position description—the BOD or committee?
4. What will be the process for determining community input?
5. Will committee membership be limited to BOD members, or will it also include community members?
6. Will it be a closed or open interview process for candidates?

Ms. Rabasa advocated for forming a committee. She explained that she was on a previous committee to hire a search firm for a superintendent search. She said in her experience the search firm facilitated the processes, including the job description.

Ms. Newman voiced her support for forming a committee. She suggested that the committee could possibly do the initial screening/interviews. She advised against rotating committee members. She urged that employee groups, and the broader community, be involved in the process.

Ms. Munro said she is in support of forming a committee if it is largely administrative; and the BOD is involved every step of the way and makes the final decision.

The BOD reached consensus for forming a standing superintendent search committee.

Interim Superintendent Gill offered his perspective that setting a proposed timeline is crucial. He explained that the superintendent pool is competitive and being early is key. He also suggested thinking about how the BOD want to use staff—he said they could use him in strategic ways, or not. Typically, a superintendent is not involved in the hiring process, but the circumstances do allow for his input, specifically with the onboarding process.

Ms. Munro voiced encouragement for Interim Superintendent Gill continuing in his district leadership role beyond the currently contracted end date, if he were inclined.

The BOD voiced general support for Ms. Munro’s statement.

5. UPDATE ON EMPLOYEE GROUP MONTHLY MEETINGS

Chair Jonak explained that there is an historical tradition of holding regular monthly meetings with employee groups, specifically the Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA) and Eugene Education Association (EEA). The meetings are poised to begin soon and both employee groups have communicated proposed meeting dates.

She referenced a document of guidelines for the BOD during a bargaining year with EEA. She posed a series of discussion questions for the BOD, such as: should EEA meetings continue leading up to bargaining, should the superintendent be included in the meetings, and identifying the intent and purpose of various meetings.

Vice Chair Di Liberto suggested reviewing what has been tentatively agreed to with employee groups.

Ms. Rabasa shared her perspective that if the superintendent is present during meetings with employee groups, then the likelihood that a topic that should not be discussed is discussed is much lower. She said having experienced the meetings both with and without the superintendent, while she does not think it anybody's intention, it is easy to create habits of triangulation when the superintendent is not present.

Chair Jonak asked Ms. Rabasa a clarifying question: when historically has the superintendent attended meetings of employee groups?

Ms. Rabasa responded that it has largely depended on Chair and BOD preferences.

Ms. Newman responded that the superintendent attended meetings when she first began serving on the BOD.

Group discussion determined that the standard practice has been inconsistent.

Ms. Rabasa added that the only consistency has been one monthly meeting.

Vice Chair Di Liberto urged a discussion with employee group leaders to gain a better understanding of their preferences.

Ms. Munro shared her concern that she rarely has answers to the questions posed in employee group meetings. She said the meetings would potentially have more utility with the superintendent present.

Interim Superintendent Gill suggested that the BOD has work to do restoring a relationship with employee groups. He advised that the superintendent be present at employee group meetings so that they can gain a deeper understanding of the issues. He added that if there are any concerns about the superintendent, the BOD may want to hold separate meetings with employee group leadership to determine their feelings related to the superintendent's performance. He cautioned against board members providing feedback in employee group meetings without the representation of the full board.

Chair Jonak asked Mr. Adams for his feedback pertaining to employee group meeting policies and practices.

Regarding holding meetings during bargaining, Mr. Adams advised against it. He said it invites side bargaining and erodes the authority of the superintendent in negotiations. He

strongly advised having the superintendent present at meetings, adding that meeting with union leadership to discuss district operations violates policy.

Ms. Thessen asked if any other districts use a model where employee groups participate more in BOD work sessions.

Mr. Adams responded affirmatively.

Chair Jonak requested more information about the purpose and intention behind 4J and employee group meetings.

Interim Superintendent Gill responded that there are five regularly scheduled meetings (monthly or bi-weekly) including, but not limited to, one meeting with the superintendent, one meeting with Human Resources, one meeting with the Contract Maintenance Committee (CBA), one meeting with the BOD, one regular BOD meeting, and listening sessions. He stated that 4J is the third largest employer in the county and has 3,500 employees. Interim Superintendent Gill agreed with Chair Jonak about gaining a better understanding of the purpose of the meetings but advised against removing any of them.

Ms. Newman asked if the five regularly scheduled meetings are with both employee groups, resulting in ten separate meetings.

Interim Superintendent Gill responded affirmatively. He added that they also meet with Managers, Administrators, Professionals and Supervisors (MAPS), but their meeting schedule differs.

There was BOD consensus in support of having the superintendent present at employee group meetings.

There was BOD consensus in support of continuing employee group meetings during bargaining so long as the superintendent is present.

Board leadership committed to connecting with employee groups to discuss further.

Interim Superintendent Gill committed to connecting with employee groups to explore the purpose of meetings.

6. EFFECTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

Mr. Adams introduced the topic of effective board meetings. He provided a handout titled “Effective and Efficient Meeting Suggestions” with four steps:

1. Establish Meeting Norms
2. Effective Meeting Facilitation
3. Set Clear Agendas
4. Time Management

Mr. Adams provided key points for each step, such as enforcing norms for meeting conduct, distributing a detailed agenda ahead of time, and good time management.

Mr. Adams presented a slide about formative processes. He said school boards are being tasked with complex issues that a linear process is not equipped to deal with. He explained that there are five steps to utilize: get clear on desired outcomes, build a plan and be prepared to change it, get comfortable with going slow to go fast, do work with care and respect, and expect non-closure.

Mr. Adams provided a handout titled “School Board Work Sessions,” outlining the characteristics and protocols for simple meetings v complex meetings. He said the main difference is how the meetings are managed or facilitated.

Ms. Munro explained that work sessions have felt as if the BOD is receiving information and there is not a lot of discussion. On the other hand, board retreats have allowed for more discussion.

Ms. Newman agreed, adding that work sessions have often preceded a regular meeting with a deadline/decision; but the board does not always have adequate time for discussion.

There was discussion around voting in work sessions, including the value in noticing topics, and using discretion about which topics are appropriate for work sessions v regular meetings.

Mr. Adams provided a handout titled “Role of the Board: The Focus Framework,” a tool that can be used as a framework for having conversations around challenging topics in work sessions. He said if board members stay within the boundaries, they will always remain in their governance role.

Mr. Adams presented a slide about board member reports during regular meetings, emphasizing that board member reports are not for formal information requests, conversations, or impassioned speeches. He encouraged focusing on relevant information aligned with district priorities.

There was discussion about creating a spreadsheet tracking BOD activities and linking it publicly.

Chair Jonak mentioned the possibility of it appearing in a corner of the 4J newsletter.

Ms. Rabasa suggested having one spokesperson report on board activities during a regular meeting.

There was BOD consensus to experiment with committee reports occurring at the end of the meeting and limiting speaking time to two minutes.

There was expressed interest in creating a district policy to properly observe historic celebrations through resolution, such as Black History Month in February.

Mr. Adams closed the discussion by stating it was an honoring working with the Eugene School District 4J BOD and to remember that school boards have a profound impact on student outcomes.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Jonak adjourned the 4J Board of Directors summer retreat at 9:58 p.m.



Colt Gill
District Clerk



Jenny Jonak
Board Chair

(Recorded by LCOG)
Approved on 09/04/2024