

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

Date: February 25, 2025

The Board of Directors (BOD) of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Oregon, held a special board meeting at 8:30 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 February 24, 2025.

ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jenny Jonak, Chair

Tom Di Liberto, Vice Chair

Maya Rabasa

Ericka Thessen

Judy Newman

Morgan Munro

Rick Hamilton

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

None.

STAFF:

Colt Gill, Interim Superintendent

Carmen Xiomara Urbina, Chief of Staff

Christine Nesbit, In House Counsel

Debbie McKim, Executive Assistant to the Interim Superintendent and Board

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES:

None.

EMPLOYEE GROUPS:

None.

OTHER GUESTS:

None.

MEDIA:

KRVM

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Jonak called the special board meeting to order at 8:34 p.m. She said the names of the board members who were present.

II. AGENDA APPROVAL

The agenda was approved as presented.

III. CONSIDERING LITIGATION

Chair Jonak explained that on February 14, 2025, Eugene School District 4J received a “Dear Colleague” letter from the United States Department of Education (DOE) setting a deadline of February 28, 2025, to eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices or face the loss of federal funding.

Chair Jonak declared that the notice is problematic on a number of levels. First, 4J is built on a commitment to help every student succeed. The district wants to remove obstacles and provide support so that every child, regardless of background, can reach their potential. 4J values the strength that comes from different perspectives, helping all feel invested, valued, connected, and engaged. She stated that diversity, equity, and inclusion are important values for ensuring that every student has a fair opportunity to succeed. The letter received from the DOE puts that mission at risk and calls for the district to move away from stated values. She said 4J’s first priority is the success of students, including marginalized students. She pointed out how problematic it is for the district to sacrifice any group of students in exchange for funding. Secondly, she said the guidance is vague and unclear as to what is considered equity-related versus diversity-related. As a result, it is impossible for the district to know what the government considers lawful and thus puts the district at risk. She added that state and federal rules do not line up.

Chair Jonak cited a recent federal court ruling weighing in on recent executive orders, specifically that the orders fail to define key terms and identify the types of programs or policies that the administration considers illegal.

Chair Jonak further stated that the federal directives are unconstitutional. She said it will be important for courts to consider the impact, as uncertainty about funding puts district operations and the ability to serve students and staff at risk. She explained that 4J has an opportunity to be part of a litigation as the first K-12 public school to challenge the DOE letter. If sought, the legal services would be provided pro-bono. Chair Jonak recommended that the Board of Directors (BOD) consider litigation to defend values, support staff, and protect students.

Ms. Munro expressed that as school board members it is their job to ensure that the district has clear, effective policies and prudent financial oversight. She said that having read the “Dear Colleague” letter, she does not know how the district would craft clear policies to set staff up for success. She mentioned confusion about direction and enforceability. She added that the letter comes with the threat of losing over \$20 million in federal funding for the district – funding tied to special education services, free lunch programs, transportation, and more. Ms. Munro expressed her support for joining the lawsuit to seek clarity and defend civil rights.

MOTION: Vice Chair Di Liberto moved to approve Eugene School District 4J joining a lawsuit to challenge the legality of the “Dear Colleague” letter from the Department of Education (DOE) and retain Democracy Forward to represent it on a pro-bono basis. Ms. Rabasa seconded. **The motion passed unanimously, 7:0:0; Chair Jonak, Vice Chair Di Liberto, Ms. Rabasa, Ms. Newman, Ms. Thessen, Ms. Munro, and Mr. Hamilton all voting in favor.**

IV. ADJORN

Chair Jonak adjourned the special meeting at 8:43 p.m.



Colt Gill
District Clerk



Jenny Jonak
Board Chair

(Recorded by LCOG)
Approved on 04/16/2025