MINUTES OF BOARD RETREAT

SCHOOL DISTRICT 4J, LANE COUNTY, OREGON

Date: August 4, 2025

The Board of Directors (BOD) of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, held a board retreat at 8:00 a.m. via live-stream and broadcast on KRVM. Notice of the meeting was emailed to the media and posted on the 4J website on August 1, 2024.

ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:
Jenny Jonak
Tom Di Liberto
Judy Newman
Ericka Thessen
Maya Rabasa
Morgan Munro
Rick Hamilton

STAFF:
Miriam Mickelson, Superintendent
Carmen Xiomara Urbina, Chief of Staff
Matt Brown, Director of Finance
Christine Nesbit, General Counsel
Kyle Tucker, Chief Operations Officer
Kat Lange, Executive Director of Youth and Family Support
Cynthia Calletano, Executive Assistant to the Chief of Staff/Board
Lisa Fjordbeck, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/Board

OTHER GUESTS:
Christy Perry, Retired Superintendent from Salem/Keizer School District

EMPLOYEE ASSOCIATIONS:
Sabrina Gordon, Eugene Education Association (EEA)

MEDIA:
KRVM

I. CALL BOARD RETREAT TO ORDER, ROLL CALL

Chair Di Liberto called the board retreat to order at 8:17 a.m.

II. AGENDA APPROVAL

There were no changes to the agenda.

III. RETREAT AGENDA

1. TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITY

Facilitator Christy Perry introduced herself and provided details about her professional experience, including 18 years serving as a superintendent. She engaged the Eugene School District 4J Board of Directors (BOD) in a team building activity, posing the following questions for discussion:

- What is one of the strengths of the BOD?
- What is one thing the team might not know about you?
- What are three qualities of a great school board?
- What is one area the BOD should work on?
- What are your greatest hopes and aspirations for the BOD?

Each Board member individually responded to the questions when directed at them. A robust discussion took place, centered around the question of "what makes a school board great?"

The BOD set intentions for the school year ahead including, but not limited to, improving employee group relations, improving student enrollment and attendance, honoring student diversity and learning styles, and seeking input from a wide range of community members.

2. WHAT MAKES A HIGH-FUNCTIONING BOARD?

Ms. Perry introduced the following six traits for what makes a high-functioning school board:

1. Shared Focus on Student Learning

- High performing boards prioritize student achievement and equity in all decisions
- They adopt a strategic plan with clear goals and regularly monitor progress
- They focus on outcomes, not operations

2. Strong Superintendent-Board Partnership

- Clear roles and mutual trust are foundational
- The board governs; the superintendent manages
- Productive boards support and evaluate the superintendent using established goals and metrics

3. Collaborative, Respectful Board Culture

- Effective boards build trust, manage conflict constructively, and maintain professionalism
- Members model civility and put district needs above personal agendas

- They disagree respectfully and unite behind decisions once made

4. Use of Data and Accountability

- High-functioning boards use student performance, equity data, and financial indicators to guide decisions
- They hold themselves and the superintendent accountable for progress
- Transparent data sharing builds trust with the community

5. Continuous Learning and Development

- Boards regularly engage in professional development, equity training, and governance retreats
- They conduct self-assessments to improve performance
- They stay informed on education trends and best practices

6. Engage the Community in Decisions of the Board

- Engage the community strategically to inform priorities, support system-level decisions and build public trust
- Use structured methods of engagement (community forums, surveys, advisory groups) aligned to board-level work
- Are transparent with the community about decisions of the Board
- Create clear protocols for engagement and listening

Ms. Perry engaged the BOD in an exercise assessing their strengths and areas for growth as they relate to the high-functioning school board traits. The Board collectively identified the following areas for growth and improvement:

- Develop shared definitions and agreement regarding data
- Develop shared definitions of outcomes
- Do a few things well (select three priorities)
- Vision to meet the outcomes by the Superintendent
- Superintendent evaluation
- Superintendent to have a good boss
- Improve all traits listed under collaborative, respectful board culture
- Humility

Ms. Perry posed the question "what makes effective teams?" She highlighted Patrick Lencioni's book *The Five Disfunctions of a Team*, outlining common barriers to team effectiveness, including:

- Absence of Trust
- Fear of Conflict

- Lack of Commitment
- Avoidance of Accountability
- Inattention to Results

3. SUPERINTENDENT ENTRY PLAN

Ms. Perry introduced Superintendent Mickelson to present the Superintendent Entry Plan via PowerPoint presentation. The document was also included in the meeting packet. Superintendent Mickelson explained that reviewing the Superintendent Entry Plan provides an opportunity to launch into the recommendation and adoption of the strategic goals and priorities. She emphasized that public education is a pillar of a democratic society and that ninety percent of school-aged children in America attend public schools. Superintendent Mickelson acknowledged that public education is facing mounting challenges and committed to fiercely protecting and uplifting it through collaboration. She articulated the following components:

Values-Oriented Leadership

- Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging
- Collaboration
- Compassion
- Longevity and sustainability

Equitable Student Outcomes – The Center of All We Do

- Equitable outcomes are the guiding purpose
- Current district work: MTSS, UDL, Science of Reading, Inclusion
- Superintendent's role: Create conditions for sustainability and scale

Key Focus Areas – Year One

- Strong Board-Superintendent Relationships
- Belonging-Centered Culture
- Systems Alignment and Calibration
- Leadership and Staff Development
- Financial Stewardship

Community Engagement and Learning

- Connecting and Learning Series (July 2025 – June 2026)
- Community Coalition (Launch Fall 2025)
    - Superintendent search panels
    - Advise superintendent on strategic goals and strategic plan development

Deliverables and Timeline

- July 2025 – June 2026: Connecting and Learning
- January 2026: First 100 Days Report
- February 2026: Adopt Strategic Goals and Priorities
- March – April 2026: Draft Strategic Plan Development
- June 2026: Year One Reflection and Draft Strategic Plan
- Summer 2026: Finalize Plan for Fall Launch

Reporting and Reflection

- First 100 Days Interim Report (January 2026)
- Year One Reflection & Strategic Plan Draft (June 2026)

Looking Ahead

- Entry plan launches the adoption of strategic goals and priorities and the implementation of a broader, more comprehensive strategic plan

Ms. Perry opened the floor to questions and suggestions from the BOD.

Chair Di Liberto suggested that the First 100 Days Interim Report include constructive feedback in addition to what is going well.

Ms. Newman asked if the executive team has a role in the Connecting and Learning series.

Superintendent Mickelson responded affirmatively.

Ms. Munro suggested a participatory budget and strategic plan process including timelines. She recommended communicating early wins to help build reputation.

Ms. Perry asked Superintendent Mickelson what the process of getting to strategic priorities looks like.

Superintendent Mickelson responded that the process should be deliberate, intentional, collaborative, and slow, but not unnecessarily so. She spoke about the budget process and budget development timeline for fiscal year 2026-27. The strategic plan will parallel the budget process. She added that partnerships with employee groups are important, including providing them with information when they request it and holding ongoing, regular meetings.

Mr. Hamilton asked Superintendent Mickelson to identify one or two obstacles she is challenged with when facing her district goals.

Superintendent Mickelson responded that understanding how Oregon funds public schools is complex and convoluted. She said another challenge is understanding the

district's budgetary inefficiencies and redundancies, understanding enrollment decline, and addressing staffing and low enrollment.

Mr. Hamilton asked Superintendent Mickelson to describe her expectations of district and building leadership.

Superintendent Mickelson responded that she expects leaders to advocate for the needs of their buildings, departments, students, and staff. She expects them to allow central office to do their jobs and consider the totality of the needs of the whole district.

Mr. Hamilton asked Superintendent Mickelson if district communications are a significant obstacle to getting things done; and if so, what can be done to improve district communications?

Superintendent Mickelson agreed that good communication is critical. She said to better support that goal, Chief of Staff Carmen Xiomara Urbina recently developed a Communication Playbook (i.e. framework).

There was consensus to shift finalizing the strategic plan from summer 2026 to fall 2026, along with a commitment from the superintendent to provide ongoing progress and milestone reports.

Ms. Perry asked Board members what a successful first year would look like. The following responses were provided:

- The superintendent will have a clear understanding of the district and how to move the district forward and improve academic achievement as evidenced by her monthly superintendent reports and 100 Day Report.
- Aligned, empowered, and effective centra leaders and administrators
- Improved communication channels with staff, families, and the community
- Literacy: assess the status of literacy results and the implementation plan to improve reading for all students in the district

Ms. Perry asked Board members what they are hoping will improve (i.e. outcomes). The following responses were provided:

- Joyful readers, improved literacy
- Setting the stage for leadership longevity
- Cultivate a culture of joy
- Shared vision and definition for inclusion throughout the district
- Transparent budget process
- Improved communication to build a positive district culture
- Literacy and reading

- Improved special education experience – IEP timelines, how faithfully are we following the IEP
- Attendance and absenteeism: why aren't students coming to school?
- Liaison to employee groups for the goal of improving the Board and district's relationship with employee groups
- Revisit meeting structure

Ms. Perry asked Board members to identify governance goals. The following responses were provided:

- Putting policies in place to allow the superintendent and staff to do their job
- Improve our manner from getting public comment to getting public input in a real, authentic way
- Develop a few goals, make the hard decisions on a few goals
- Clarify superintendent and board roles and how we succeed together
- Professional development beyond OSBA
- Successful year long cycle with the superintendent evaluation
- Figure out shared leadership structure on the board
- Address sensitive issues along the way

4. SUPERINTENDENT-BOARD COMMUNICATION

Superintendent Mickelson outlined the following Superintendent-Board communication protocols. A full draft of the Communication Protocol was provided separately.

- Emergency communication
- As per Board Policy BG/BGD – Board – Staff Communications, the basic line of communication between the Board and district staff will be through the superintendent

5. BOARD COMMITTEES

Ms. Perry engaged the BOD in reviewing Board committees. They discussed which committees to keep or reimagine and considered ad-hoc committee protocols and charter requirements. Finance Director Matt Brown, Chief of Staff Xiomara Urbina, and General Counsel Christine Nesbit all provided input on committees involving their roles and departments. The BOD refined the scope of Board committees ahead of the 2025-26 school year.

6. AFTERNOON WORKING SESSION/EUGENE SCHOOL DISTRICT 4J GOVERNANCE GOAL

The BOD briefly reviewed a rough draft of successful first year recommendations, outcomes for the district, and governance goals, which was produced during the Board

retreat. Designating a Board member to serve as a liaison to employee groups was proposed as an addition.

The next Board retreat will be held on Monday, August 11 at 8:15 a.m.

IV. ADJOURN

Chair Di Liberto adjourned the board retreat at 2:26 p.m.

(Recorded by Terah Van Dusen, LCOG)

Dr. Miriam Mickelson	Tom Di Liberto
District Clerk	Board Chair