

MINUTES

School District 4J Budget Committee
Education Center — 200 North Monroe Street

February 9, 2009
7 p.m.

PRESENT: Mary Walston, Chair; Wendy Laing, Vice Chair; Betsy Boyd, Shirley Clark, Eric Forrest, Pete Gribkov, Alicia Hays, Tom Lininger, Debra Smith, Craig Smith, Jim Torrey, Yvette Webber-Davis, members; George Russell, Superintendent; Susan Fahey, Tom Henry, Caroline Passerotti, Barbara Bellamy, Carl Hermanns, Laurie Moses, Jon Lauch, School District 4J staff.

ABSENT: Beth Gerot, Charles Martinez, Jr., members.

I. Roll Call

Ms. Walston called the meeting of the Eugene School District 4J Budget Committee to order.

Ms. Walston called the roll.

II. Items Raised by Audience

Jill Simmons, President of the Oregon School Employees Association, Eugene Chapter 1, recalled past budget crisis during which the district's unions were asked for wage concessions by the district's administration as a means to save jobs. She said that concessions were made that continued to have impact today, but no matter the concessions, the district still had laid people off. Ms. Simmons maintained that the result was a badly devalued classified salary schedule, which made it hard for the district to attract qualified candidates in three job classifications. The district's administration had to request salary schedule adjustments based on the local market to attract qualified candidates.

Ms. Simmons acknowledged the budget crisis facing the district was real but suggested the question was the strategies used by the district to get through it. She was saddened that some in the community believed the district's financial challenges could only be managed by forcing the middle class into the ranks of the working poor, and by eroding the possibility of a middle class wage so that district employees were no longer able to contribute to the community but instead drained its resources. She said the classified union and teachers union were already in discussions with the district about strategies that included shared sacrifices. Ms. Simmons questioned if people understood the level of sacrifice that had already been made, and if they valued public education enough to help fight for the funds the district needed.

Ms. Simmons believed that some would call for privatization; she recalled past attempts at privatization by other Oregon school districts that she averred were not successful. She cited some downsides of contracting with the private sector and said that the impacts on the

community were negative because former taxpayers now had to turn to the public for assistance. She promised to provide the Budget Committee with white papers on the issue. She asked the committee to work with the OSEA on the budget.

Joy Marshall of Stand for Children invited the committee to an upcoming rally in Salem on February 16 to advocate for education funding. She believed more could be done by the Oregon Legislature, which needed to see support for the funding. She believed there were many reasonable actions the legislature could take. She circulated information about the rally, which include her organization's contact information.

Chris Vogue, a parent, expressed surprise that the district had its own payroll system and suggested that it could use "other State agencies" to run such systems. He said such overhead costs did not make sense. He believed there was discussion of opening some more immersion schools, and said the start up costs for that was considerable and he questioned if now was the time to spend such money when the district was closing neighborhood schools. He asked if the district had done any study of its "back office systems" to see if it had optimized its savings. He offered his assistance.

Paul Duchin and **Merri Steele** of the Eugene Education Association expressed concern that the district would make budget decisions without complete information and urged the committee to proceed slowly. They noted uncertainty in the contents of the federal stimulus package. They indicated they were working with their membership on possible solutions

Ms. Walston thanked the audience for its interest.

III. Items for Information and Discussion

A. Review Current Financial Information

Ms. Fahey provided a PowerPoint presentation on the financial update. Members asked questions clarifying the information presented.

Superintendent Russell acknowledged that the figures were daunting and continued to fluctuate. He said that the forecast was projected to worsen. The contents of the education stimulus package and its impact on school districts were still unknown.

Mr. Torrey suggested that the committee's timelines for action should be established and publicized. He thought the district could anticipate a worst case scenario and then establish add-ons or drop-outs depending on the budget outlook. Ms. Fahey said the budget must be adopted by the end of June 2009. The committee would need to approve the budget in May 2009 to meet that deadline. She said staff proposed additional meetings in March and April. Superintendent Russell believed there were some decisions that could not be postponed until May. He thought the best the district could hope for was to have a sense of what the legislature would do with the education stability fund. He thought staff would have to have staffing information by mid-March.

Ms. Hays believed that the district had made choices last year that would help it get through the coming year. She agreed that while the committee needed to be thoughtful, there were

decisions that must be made soon. She did not anticipate that the legislature would produce a budget until summer 2009. She anticipated a “roller coaster ride” given how quickly information was changing.

Superintendent Russell noted that many districts were discussing cuts in the current budget, and he thought that 4J needed to talk with the unions about timing because there were pros and cons to both waiting and moving forward. He thought people would want a sense of the budget implication on their schools and jobs soon. The later that happened, the more difficult it would be to implement committee decisions.

B. Review Results of Budget Priorities and Budget Balancing Strategies Survey

Ms. Bellamy presented the results of the survey, noting two surveys had been done of staff and the community but there was little difference in the results. Copies of the survey were provided to committee members in their packets. She reviewed the top priorities and budget reduction strategies identified by survey respondents.

Ms. Boyd asked if there were differences between high school and elementary school parents or employee groups. Ms. Bellamy said that differences between employee groups were tracked, but those groups were generally consistent in their ratings as well.

Responding to a question from Ms. Walston, Mr. Henry said the data tools used to inform instruction were the assessments given at each grade level. They were done a couple of times a year to benchmark student progress, and teachers had tools for continuous assessment and instruction adjustment, with the intent of monitoring progress year to year.

Ms. Clark asked about the status of the new high school graduation requirements. She asked what was in that “basket” now. She also asked if the district, in comparison to other districts, was ahead of other districts in regard to the requirements or lagging. Ms. Moses responded that many people wondered what the State planned to do. She believed the State was planning to continue with the higher graduation requirements in all areas except for the math essential skill assessment for purpose of obtaining a diploma. Ms. Moses had no sense that the State was changing the time lines for other graduation requirements. She said in terms of the district’s requirements, it had responded to the increased requirements laid down by the State and was in compliance with each requirement. She said the district was not asking more of its students than the State expected. Mr. Henry added that during the current biennium the district added sections of math and language arts at the secondary level to keep pace with increased State expectations. He said that staff cuts would restrict the district’s ability to meet student needs in those areas.

Mr. Lininger cautioned against relying on responses that supported a reduced school year as the areas hardest hit by such a cut were those who had the lowest survey response. He said a shorter school week falls heaviest on low-income families. Ms. Bellamy noted the district’s effort to get representative surveys but the continued difficulty of getting those families to respond. She noted the budget reduction strategy that referenced extra dollars to low-income families, but that strategy was low-ranked by respondents. She agreed that the district had not gotten a representative sample.

IV. Items for Action at this Meeting

A. Approve Minutes from the January 5, 2009, Budget Committee Meeting

Mr. Smith, seconded by Ms. Clark, moved to approve the minutes of January 5, 2009. The motion passed unanimously.

B. Provide Direction for Balancing the 2009-2010 Budget

Ms. Fahey and Mr. Henry shared general information about the district, including enrollment, staffing, achievement, and budget expenditures, and called attention to the 2008-09 board's goals, also provided to the committee, to assist it in a priority setting exercise. Committee members asked questions clarifying the information provided.

Committee members then used clickers to respond to a series of questions designed to provide guidance to staff as it drafted the FY2010 budget.

C. Set Date for Next Budget Committee Meeting

Ms. Walston called the committee's attention to the staff recommendation to meet on March 2 and March 16.

V. Items Raised by Members of the Budget Committee

There were none.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:47 p.m.

(Recorded by Kim Young)