

MINUTES

Eugene School District 4J Equity Committee
Parr Room—200 North Monroe Street
Eugene, Oregon

January 19, 2011
4:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Marshall Peter, Chair; Carl Hermanns, Co-Chair; Tibor Bessko, Jennifer Geller, Andy Gottesman, Guadalupe Quinn, Linda Smart, Larry Soberman, Brie Stiller, Jane Waite, members; Carmen Urbina, Staff. Lara Beaston-Allen, guest, Richard Densman, Parent.

ABSENT: Remie Calalang, Michael Carrigan, Ann Christianson, Sascha Cosio, Jim Garcia, Linda Hamilton, Alicia Hays, Misa Joo, Sarah Lauer, Joel Lavin, Anne Marie Levis, Charles Martinez, Belinda McClain, Jerry Rosiek, Sarah Ross, George Russell, Linda Smart, Surendra Subramani, Maria Thomas, Peter Tromba, Raquel Wells

I. Welcome and Introductions

Co-Chair Marshall Peter convened the meeting and asked those present to introduce themselves. He clarified that this was not a regular Equity Committee meeting, but rather an opportunity to review the Superintendent's most recent budget recommendations to see if there was anything the committee wanted to communicate at tonight's public hearing. If there was an important message to convey, he was willing to represent the committee at the meeting. He welcomed Ms. Beaston-Allen of the Natives Program.

II. Public Comment

Richard Densman introduced himself as a parent of a kindergarten student. He said he had a lot to learn about the 4J School District and he wondered if there was a representative on the committee for students with physical disabilities. This was an important issue for his family, he said. Mr. Peter responded that he was the committee representative for students with physical disabilities, and that at some point he would like to hand off this responsibility to someone else, perhaps Mr. Densman. Any voice in support of disadvantaged students was welcomed at committee meetings, he said.

Ms. Waite added that the ESD handled all the Life Skill students in the county and that she also had a disabled child, so she could understand Mr. Densman's concerns. She supported the idea of having a specific representative on the committee for students and staff with physical disabilities.

III. Revised Budget Strategies Recommendations Review and Update on the Equity Committee's Recommendations to the Superintendent

Mr. Hermanns reviewed for the committee the points of the Superintendent's final budget recommendations that he felt had implications for this committee.

- **Reduced Staffing Services and Programs**

This area continued to be the biggest concern, Mr. Hermanns commented. When a more optimistic scenario had been received from the state, he said, the target deficit area was lowered to \$22 million, which allowed lowering of staffing ratio and other things. Later news from the Governor made it clear that a more realistic number for this deficit would be \$26 or \$28 million, and Superintendent Russell had now recommended using the \$26 million number. This meant that administrative and classified staff would be reduced by 10%. A "flat 4" staffing ratio across the board was now being recommended, he said.

At every turn, Mr. Hermanns continued, attempts were being made to focus resources on values of what was needed to help all children be successful. It was yet unknown how this staffing ratio could be implemented in ways that would respond to instructional needs at different schools and levels. Staff would be involved in helping to strategize how the ratios would be implemented, he said. Mr. Peter added that a formulaic approach was being sought that would be based on schools with students not meeting benchmark criteria receiving more resources than those with more students who were reaching benchmarks. Mr. Hermanns responded that conceptually this would be the case, although the whole issue needed more consideration.

Ms. Waite noted that this outlook was a very welcomed shift where staffing was considered according to equity. Mr. Hermanns added that this concept had been looked at for a number of years now and had become quite well accepted. Special needs, including benchmarks, were being considered, and a balance was being looked for that would not cripple any of the schools.

- **Fewer Work and School Days**

One furlough day had been added to the previous recommendation.

- **School Closure / Consolidations**

The final recommendation in this category remained the same as the previous recommendation. Mr. Hermanns added that Superintendent Russell had asked that a task force look deeply into the issues of reconfiguration next year. This would give more time, beginning this spring; to look at what the schools should look like, offering the best support for 21st century learning skills.

Another issue, Mr. Hermanns said, was that the board had expressed interest in having a community conversation about language. The language immersion schools were one

kind of alternative school that provided a distinctive pedagogical experience that was different from the regular schools. In one of the public hearings, he said, someone had asked why not have languages in all of the schools. Another issue expressed was that the language immersion schools were isolated in areas where only rich people could access them. It was important to understand what the community wanted in terms of language in the 4J system. Ms. Geller added that a complicating factor involved charter school laws.

- **Shared Services and Contracting Out**

Mr. Hermanns said there was nothing particularly relating to equity in this area, although there would be a meeting with **ESD**, which was hoped to result in a win/win situation around sharing services more effectively.

- **Materials, Supplies and Services**

A 15% reduction in this area was being recommended, with no particular equity implications.

- **School and Instruction Redesign**

This was the stakeholder task force, Mr. Hermanns explained, about recommending reconfiguration. This would be an important conversation, and he felt the Equity Committee should track it and weigh in on it as it moved along, as there were many options and possibilities. Special Education needed to be very carefully considered, as well as aggregations or disaggregations of poverty. Ms. Waite added that there was lots of current research around this topic. Mr. Hermanns said that for him the salient research was not about configuration, but rather about teaching, learning, and areas such as brain development.

- **Non-Instructional and Student Support Programs**

There would be a 25% cut in athletic and extracurricular offerings. This was another narrowing of children's experience in school, similar to music and PE, Mr. Hermanns noted. It was important to be careful about these reductions.

- **Reserves and One-Time Funds**

Mr. Hermanns stated that it was important to maintain reserves because of unknown factors. For example, last year larger cuts were needed mid-year.

- **Compensation and Benefits**

These issues were all negotiated, Mr. Hermanns said. Teachers had already been sacrificing for the past three years in terms of such things as furloughs. All staff members were being asked to sacrifice further, and it was important to find fair ways to

make these cuts.

- **Revenue Enhancement**

Superintendent Russell recommended that another bond be sought, which was very important since the district was already behind in its bond cycle. This would be a big challenge for the board, Mr. Hermanns noted.

Mr. Peter asked Mr. Hermanns if he saw anything that was particularly important for the Equity Committee to express. Mr. Hermanns responded that it was important to continue with the kinds of stands it was already taking, and to support the idea of trying in all ways to make sure that resources were being aligned with values. As well, he added, it was important to support all students and to make sure that schools with relatively bigger needs received greater support.

Mr. Peter said he wanted to press for explicit instrumentation and how resources were allocated. Mr. Hermanns felt this was conceptually reasonable.

Mr. Peter felt it was important for the Equity Committee to align around a single perspective, as much as possible, which would be represented in tonight's public hearing. With the committee's permission, he would speak to the issue just expressed, the critical need for the district to align resource allocation around values, and more specifically, to tie staffing and other supports in a specific way to instructional need.

Ms. Waite suggested not referring to instructionally needy students because that would put the onus on the student, but rather to address the unfulfilled responsibilities of the system more than the student. As well, it was important to talk about where data would come from. She felt it was very important to address the area of developing a clear mechanism for directing increased financial and instructional resources to students who are not meeting instructional benchmarks and are at risk of not meeting graduation requirements and how that impacted the staffing and the school closures. Staffing and school closures, she said, were the two areas where the Equity Committee had opportunities to point out the effects on students, as shown by specific research.

Mr. Gottesman brought up an issue regarding differentiated staffing. Special Education, he said, was funded by the state at double the rate of regular education, and those extra resources were supposed to go to those students with special needs. As well, Title I funds should go to kids with Title I needs. He wondered what kind of differentiated staffing was being discussed, whether it was putting more resources into smart kids, or into those students who already received extra resources. He suspected that some funds were going elsewhere than where they were meant to go.

Mr. Gottesman said he felt it was not good budgeting to reserve money now for possible future needs. He could not imagine teachers dealing with classes of 35 or more kids. Research showed, he said, that teachers gave up in terms of doing meaningful teaching at a level of 28 kids. He agreed that many kids needed extra help, though he was not sure

that it was truly happening.

Ms. Waite agreed with Mr. Gottesman's remarks about differentiated staffing. She felt it important to spend time brainstorming criteria that would put checks and balances into a formula for such staffing. About reserves, she felt it was scary to not have any reserves.

Ms. Geller remarked that having reserves the past two years was how the district had managed to not need to cut staff. Finance administrators, she said, recommended 5% as a bare minimum, which was the district's current status. The amount of reserve needed depended on how volatile the income streams were. Because of the possibility of mid-year cuts, she said, it was important to have some cushion in reserves.

Mr. Peter said he would be astounded if the funds received from the state to support Special Education services were anywhere near the amount actually spent on those services. *[this might need cutting?]* He believed that the fundamental obligation of 4J District was to assist students to achieve educational benchmarks and be able to graduate from high school. It was most important, he felt, to give struggling students a helping hand, even though it might mean that those with better advantage might not be able to accelerate as much as they were capable of doing. Mr. Gottesman said he had a problem with this way of thinking.

Ms. Stiller said it was important to know how each committee member felt about this issue. Mr. Peter said he felt it was the committee's job to speak for the disadvantaged who were not succeeding. He surmised that most people who would speak at the public hearing were more advantaged and empowered people who could easily express their points of view.

Mr. Soberman acknowledged that there was a formula for differentiating staffing that had been used for years, which had to do with numbers of free and reduced lunches and numbers of Special Ed and Title I kids. He noted that there was unanimous support in the committee for differentiated staffing and that they were fighting over small portions of funding.

Ms. Geller suggested that the board could revisit the formula if the principals felt that it needed adjustment. Mr. Soberman noted that, being in a Title I school, they were fortunately already differentially staffed, and he understood this was not true for all schools. He trusted the formula, which he believed to be based on sound factors. If the pot of money got much bigger, he said, he guessed the formula would still work.

Mr. Peter stated that Mr. Hermanns had spoken about figuring out the balance between rating schools with highly successful students, how far they could be differentiated without destabilizing the schools. Ms. Geller added that if class sizes grew too large, only those students with adequate parental support would be successful.

Before Mr. Soberman needed to leave the meeting early, he pointed out that there was an article in today's paper about Nancy Willard filing an OCR about closing neighborhood

schools. Mr. Peter added that the OCR basically stated that the impact of the Superintendent's recommendations would penalize schools with struggling students in order to support schools that were not diverse.

Mr. Peter remarked that there seemed to be one theme the committee wished to express. He wondered also if it would be good to appreciate the board and superintendent for making hard decisions in such difficult times. Ms. Quinn added that it was important to acknowledge that the board and Superintendent were doing the best they possibly could within the circumstances.

Ms. Waite added that the Equity Committee had been heard and acknowledged and that the board had kept an "equity lens" in place during its deliberations.

It was agreed that it was important to reiterate the key points that were important to maintain for equity.

Mr. Gottesman suggested the importance of asking the board and new superintendent to look more towards the future. The current crossroads, he said, included less money, reduced enrollment, and an increased number of students not being successful.

Ms. Stiller added that the instructional model was outdated and needed to change. It was scary to see how many kids did not want to be in school. For some students school was too difficult, and many were not making the connection between what was going on in high school and what would happen after high school.

The previous remarks created by the group were reviewed and edited to add support for the recommendations being made by Superintendent Russell and the board. Mr. Peter suggested that it was important for the community to hear that there was a strong, collective voice insisting that these pre-eminent values would continue. Following is the edited version of the committee's comments:

To: George Russell, Superintendent and 4J Board Members
From: Eugene School District Equity Committee
Date: January 19, 2011

Diminished educational opportunities for African American, Latino, Native American, GLBTQ, and other vulnerable students result in negative outcomes in Eugene School District including lower academic achievement, disproportionate likelihood of suspension and other disciplinary sanctions and increased likelihood of bullying and harassment. Unemployment, reduced access to social services and other risk factors are combining to exacerbate the opportunity gap that many students already experience in school. In times like these, it is particularly important that schools take strong measures to ensure that students who are not reaching critical benchmarks receive services and supports that ensure they will have the same level of access to future opportunities as their peers.

The committee is deeply appreciative of your willingness to use equity as a lens through

which decisions are made. We urge you to continue on this path. In that spirit, we offer the following recommendations:

Things you should do:

- Ensure that differentiated staffing is a transparent and effective mechanism for directing increased financial and instructional resources to students who are not meeting instructional benchmarks and are at risk of not meeting graduation requirements.
- Centralize decision-making, increasing capacity to uniformly implement equitable classroom practices and other equity initiatives including accountability for fidelity of implementation of efforts such as IIPM/IPBS.
- Create transition plans that allow all stakeholders to come together, minimizing disruptions and supporting the best possible educational outcomes during complex school consolidations.
- Partner with collective bargaining units to maintain your commitment to highly qualified, culturally proficient and diverse staff and to the maximum extent possible minimize the negative effects that could come as a result of staffing reductions.
- Maintain your current investment in Equity and Diversity support systems.
- Consolidate smaller schools into large schools that can be balanced for race, socio-economic status, and that can leverage specialized staffing, increasing the ability of the system to respond to the needs of all students.
- Maintain your current commitment to CFEE/Taking It Up and GLBTQ-Training.
- Continue to invest in IIPM/IPBS and school climate assessment and improvement activities.
- To the maximum extent possible, ensure that physical classroom space is sufficient to accommodate increased class size.

Questions you should continue to ask:

- What will be the demographic compositions that will result from changing school configurations? Will plans increase racial and socio-economic segregation? The current regional configuration should not be an important determinant of future configurations.
- Will the reductions you are pursuing perpetuate or increase negative outcomes for students whose needs are not being met in the present educational system?
- How will the reductions you make affect 4J's capacity to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student body and our commitment to closing the educational opportunity gap?

In these terribly difficult times, we find hope in your longstanding commitment to elevating educational opportunities for students who are not succeeding in our current educational

system. Thank you so very much for your courageous leadership and for all the time and energy you are devoting in these unimaginably challenging times to making the best possible decisions for the students of Eugene. We are fortunate to have you at the helm.

Mr. Peter again welcomed Lara Beaston-Allen from the Natives Program. Richard Densman was also welcomed. It was agreed to recommend to Superintendent Russell that a representative for disabled students be added to the Equity Committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

(Recorded by Judy Burton)