The Board of Directors of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, held a regular board meeting at 7 p.m. on November 10, 2010, at the Education Center, 200 North Monroe Street, Eugene, Oregon. Notice of the meeting was mailed to the media and posted in the Education Center on November 5, 2010, and published in The Register-Guard on November 8, 2010.

ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS:
Craig Smith, Chair
Alicia Hays, Vice Chair
Jennifer Geller
Anne Marie Levis
Jim Torrey
Mary Walston

ABSENT:
Beth Gerot

STAFF:
George Russell, Superintendent of Schools
Barbara Bellamy, Chief of Staff and Communications Director
Carl Hermanns, Assistant Superintendent/Chief Operating Officer
Susan Fahey, Chief Financial Officer
Celia Feres-Johnson, Director of Human Resources
Jon Lauch, Director of Facilities Management
Sara Cramer, Director of Elementary Education
Larry Sullivan, Director of Educational Support Services
Kerry Delf, Communications Coordinator
Caroline Passerotti, Financial Analysis and Budget Manager
Brad New, Secondary Education Administrator
Kerri Sage, Coordinator for the Talented and Gifted Program
Christine Nesbit, Human Resources
Joe Alsup, Principal, Crest Elementary School
Larry Soberman, Principal, Twin Oaks Elementary School

STUDENT ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERS:
Lydia Tam, Churchill High School
Jenny Koh, South Eugene High School
Karen McGheehey, IHS, All Campuses
Tobiah Meinzen, North Eugene High School

OTHERS:
Dayna Mitchell, Eugene Education Association
Debra Smith, Budget Committee member
REGULAR BOARD MEETING

CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL AND FLAG SALUTE

Board Chair Craig Smith called the regular meeting of the School District 4J Board of Directors to order. He led those present in the flag salute.

AGENDA REVIEW

There were no changes to the agenda.

ITEMS FOR ACTION AT THIS MEETING

Approve Memorandum of Agreement with Eugene Education Association Concerning the 2010-11 Work Year

Action Proposed: To approve the proposed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the District and the Eugene Education Association (EEA) concerning the 2010-11 work year.

Background: In June, 2010, the District and the EEA agreed that seven (7) work days would be cut from the 2010-11 work calendar. That agreement contained an add-back provision, creating uncertainty about whether the District would be required to add back furlough days, at a cost of $2.25 million dollars, because the state was receiving federal Education Jobs Bill funds that were not previously anticipated. The uncertainty led the District to prepare for mid-year staff reductions.

Discussion: Under the terms of the proposed MOA, no furlough days will be added back during 2010-11, and the add-back provision in Article 10.5.6 of the collective bargaining agreement is a nullity. The proposed MOA also provides that should the District face another mid-year funding cut during 2010-11, the Board will consider every reasonable option to avoid layoffs. It further provides that the MOA is a full and final resolution of the dispute between the District and EEA concerning the District's application of the add-back provision, and that EEA will not grieve or otherwise dispute the District's decision to maintain furlough days.

Approval of the proposed MOA removes the uncertainty about whether the District will be required to add back furlough days and spend $2.25 million dollars.

Recommendation: The Superintendent recommends approval of the proposed Memorandum of Agreement.

Ms. Nesbit presented the MOA, hard copies of which were provided to the board, and reviewed it.

MOTION: Ms. Levis, seconded by Ms. Walston, moved to approve the Memorandum of Agreement with Eugene Education Association concerning the 2010-11 work year.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously, 5:0. (Ms. Hays had yet to arrive.)
Approve Memorandum of Agreement with Oregon School Employees' Association Chapter 1 Concerning the 2010-11 Work Year

Action Proposed: To approve the proposed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the District and the Oregon School Employees' Association (OSEA) concerning the 2010-11 work year.

Background: In June, 2010, the District and the OSEA Chapter 1 agreed that seven (7) work days would be cut from the 2010-11 calendar. That agreement contained an add-back provision, creating uncertainty about whether the District would be required to add back furlough days, at a cost of $2.25 million dollars, because the state was receiving federal Education Jobs Bill funds that were not previously anticipated. The uncertainty led the District to prepare for mid-year staff reductions.

Discussion: See above discussion concerning EEA/District Memorandum.

Recommendation: The Superintendent recommends approval of the proposed Memorandum of Agreement.

Ms. Nesbit indicated that the agreement was the same as the one with the EEA with the exception of the professional development days that were included in the MOA with the EEA.

MOTION: Mr. Torrey, seconded by Ms. Levis, moved to approve the Memorandum of Agreement with Oregon School Employees' Association Chapter 1 concerning the 2010-11 work year.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously, 5:0.

WORK SESSION

Conduct a Work Session on the Superintendent's Sustainable Budget Preliminary Recommendations, Including School Closure/Consolidation Proposals

This work session sought to provide an opportunity for board members to ask questions and talk with staff about the preliminary recommendations for achieving a sustainable budget, which were presented at the November 3 board meeting.

The Superintendent's preliminary recommendations offer a strategy for achieving a sustainable budget that balances operating costs with projected revenues for the long-term. The district's five-year financial forecast showed a 19-27 percent operating deficit for 2011-12 and smaller but ongoing deficits in future years due to increasing costs and decreasing resources.

The preliminary recommendations include:

- Reducing staff, services and programs for $12.2 million in cost reductions, including reducing nearly 100 teaching positions and more than 60 administrators and classified staff across the district;
- Reducing the school and work year to achieve $5.7 million in cost savings;
- Negotiating a freeze on pay and contributions to benefits to achieve $1.5 million in savings;
• Reducing materials, supplies and contract service by $1.5 million in savings;
• Revenue enhancements totaling $1.25 million annually;
• Closing six elementary schools for $1.2 million in cost reductions and reconfiguring some schools as K-3 and 4-8 schools;
• Sharing services or contracting out services for $500,000 in cost reductions;
• Reducing athletics and extracurricular activities by 25 percent for $500,000 in cost reductions and
• Spending reserves and using some of the proceeds from selling surplus properties to help balance the budget in the short-term.

Staff will also discuss plans for seeking public and staff input, including a public input session on November 16, a public hearing on November 17, and a web input form and other options.

The Superintendent plans to deliver a final recommendation at the December 16 board meeting. The board will seek additional input before arriving at a final decision in mid-January.

Copies of the Superintendent’s preliminary recommendations and background on the school closure and reconfiguration recommendations were included in the board packets.

Superintendent Russell reviewed the preliminary recommendations for the board again, with power points, hard copies of which were provided to everyone present. He underscored that while the issues that brought in the most correspondence and communication related to school closures and consolidation, there were other parts of the recommendation that had significant implications and consequences. He also said part of the recommendation was for the board to consider a bond measure.

Ms. Hays arrived.

Mr. Smith stated that the board's ability to bond was limited to capital infrastructure and technology; they would not be able to move much in the way of operating costs to a bond. He said the only ability to raise operating revenue was through a local option levy. He explained that the amount of property taxes that had gone to the local option levy had gone away on his bill and the reason for this was that it was the way the system worked; once the property tax real market value met or fell below the assessed value, there was no local option tax. He stated that the local option tax monies had provided about 10 percent of the district's income, but the district was projecting that significantly less revenue would be coming in through the levy.

Ms. Hays noted that she had just heard similar news from state economists.

Superintendent Russell stated that reduced staffing was the area in which the bulk of the spending reductions would come from. He said they had received a lot of correspondence about the increased staffing ratio and some that suggested that they cut more administration. He related that the staffing ratio was something that would have significant impact. He noted that one of the student representatives had talked about how hard it already was to get electives. He said they were talking about eliminating between 150 and 160 certified Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions to get savings.

Superintendent Russell said one area of concern was the use of reserves and the board had been clear about its hesitance to use them. He had provided a range of scenarios that included using some reserves or using no reserves. He stressed that there were trade-offs: if they took
something out of the recommendation, they would have to replace it with another area of sacrifice.

Carl Hermanns, Assistant Superintendent/Chief Operating Officer, explained that as enrollment declined, schools have gotten smaller and the schools were funded based on the number of students that were enrolled. He said as the schools became smaller, they lost more in terms of specialists in music, art, and physical education, and other services. He related that some schools had to have blended classes between grades because they did not have enough teachers. He stated that at a certain point, the schools started to struggle. When that happened, it was the teachers, classified staff, and students that took the brunt. He said staff had tried to figure out how the district could combine its schools in a way that best supported teaching and learning and also set the district up to provide an excellent education for kids into the future. He related that their second concern was that even if the district did get a bond passed, new schools could not be built and opened for at least a couple of years so they had to the school closures into existing buildings. The best way staff had arrived at was to change to a K through 3rd grade school and a 4th grade through 8th grade school configuration. He added that changing some schools to K through 3rd grade would create room for pre-school classrooms and for the school to become more of a community asset in this way.

Mr. Hermanns related that some email communications had expressed concern about "jamming" the 4th and 5th graders into middle school. He clarified that staff were really talking about a primary school and an intermediate 4th through 8th grade school that could actually increase rigor at the same time as serving children well.

Sara Cramer, Director of Elementary Education, said that in all of the conversations staff had, what had seemed to make the most sense were schools that had the pre-Kindergarten through 3rd grade. She related that some districts made 4th-5th grade a separate school, but it did not make sense to add another school transition for students. She reported that staff had found that other districts did not blend the 4th and 5th graders with middle school students. She stated that this set-up would provide 4th and 5th graders interested in joining band or taking a more advanced math class the opportunity to do so. She had been speaking to staff from school districts that had grade 4-8 schools and had solicited feedback from parents of kids who were attending. She indicated that she would have the input soon and would provide it to the board. She commented that this was a "big challenge to wrap our brain around" but it also offered new opportunities for the intermediate 4th and 5th grade students. She pointed out that in talking with elementary principals, that span of Kindergarten to 5th grade was hard to meet instructionally, especially with a special education teacher that was trying to meet the needs of both a Kindergartner and a 5th grader.

In response to a question from Mr. Smith, Ms. Cramer said she was not certain of the timeline but she thought that by the end of the month they would form some focus groups to get feedback from parent groups and teachers about this change.

Mr. Torrey had concluded that the $1.2 million saved from the closures and consolidations was premature to the point that he thought they should not move forward this year. He thought there was an opportunity to do a more thorough analysis. He said a capital measure would be very important to undertake the things they were talking about. He averred that this was not the time to leave the public behind. He felt that for $1.2 million, which he believed could be found from somewhere else, they should not move this quickly on school closures. He did not want anyone to think that the school district would not have to close schools in the future, but they needed solid research on how they could do it. He also felt that if the district decided to go for a bond
measure, it was important not to make the community feel that the district would not listen to them.

Ms. Hays agreed with Mr. Torrey's comments, but said if it really was a $1.2 million decision they could fundraise to resolve the difference. She underscored that what they were talking about was $12.2 million in reduced staffing. She felt this would leave some schools without enough staff to educate the students there. She said they had a $30 million crisis that they needed to come up with; it was a huge budget deficit.

Mr. Torrey said until they looked at the other $28 million, they would not know how the schools would be impacted. He believed that they were suggesting the school closures on such a short timeline that they were doing it too fast to do due diligence.

Mr. Smith stressed that the board was just beginning the process of discussion and should not be taking positions at this point.

Ms. Geller observed that a lot of the schools had empty space and when they were looking at places to make cuts, they had to look at anything that could save a "chunk of money." She asked staff to comment on why the decision was made to look at changing school configurations.

Ms. Cramer stated that as they looked at the staffing ratio increase, an increase of four made the ratio at the Kindergarten through 3rd grade level 27.71 students per teacher, and the ratio at the 4th and 5th grade level 30.21 students per teacher. She said the Churchill area elementary school buildings did not have enough capacity for a consolidation of Kindergarten through 5th grade school. She felt that this preK-3 configuration would allow the district to start its interaction with families even earlier, with pre-school classes.

Mr. Hermanns stressed that staff had looked very closely at the situation. He said in the Churchill area the only way they could have consolidated two of the elementary schools would have been to add on to one of the schools, which was something they were not able to do at this time.

Mr. Torrey asked how the parents and teachers would know what would be left in the schools before the staffing ratios had been applied and were in practice. Ms. Cramer replied that she had calculated this out based on the present year's enrollment. She said she could provide this information to the board. She related one example of a school where there would be two less staff and the grades would have to be combined. She thought it would have one or two singular grades and the rest would be blended.

Ms. Levis asked if there would be opportunities to meet the needs of the Talented and Gifted (TAG) kids and the needs of special education students in the new configurations. Ms. Cramer responded that there would be.

Larry Sullivan, Director of Educational Support Services, stated that about 2,600 students were provided special education services in the district. He said grade configurations or larger schools impacted special education services. He explained that some of the challenges the specialists faced in smaller schools were that the services were exhausted by spreading them around thinly. He stated that the benefit of having bigger schools would be that they could provide a full range of services. Currently they bused a lot of students; fewer kids would be bused if special education services were consolidated. He related that transitions were harder
on special needs kids. He believed that a 4th through 8th grade environment would help students keep from falling farther behind.

Ms. Walston asked for staff's thoughts on the Kindergarten through 8th grade model. Ms. Cramer replied that it posed a capacity issue for some of the smaller sites. She said the Arts and Technology Academy (ATA) was located in Jefferson Middle School, which was pretty large.

Mr. Torrey asked how long staff would have spent analyzing the reconfigurations if the district was not in a situation in which $30 million had to be pared from the budget. Mr. Hermanns responded that if the schools were holding at a level resource capacity, they would still be talking about how best to teach and support 21st century skills. He did not know if they would be looking at making a Kindergarten through 3rd grade/4th through 8th grade split.

Mr. Torrey said from the perspective of consolidation and configuration, it seemed to him that the $1.2 million in savings would all come from consolidation. He agreed that they would have to ultimately close some schools, because the community had grown and expanded away from them and there was not the student base to support them anymore. He was struggling with whether they should be discussing closing schools before they adjusted the staffing ratio and whether they should be discussing reconfiguring schools at this time, because to him the two were different things. Ms. Cramer responded that when the district held the Schools of the Future process there had been a grade level configuration committee that had recommended a split. She had polled some other districts that had the grade split they were proposing and the schools that housed 4th through 8th grade expressed no desire to change.

Ms. Hays appreciated the work that staff had done and Mr. Torrey's question of whether the district is looking for a quick fix or not. She acknowledged that this process was happening very fast. She underscored that they were looking for the best thing to do, but they were trying to undertake a great deal of work in a very short amount of time.

Superintendent Russell said they needed to think about the magnitude of the cuts and what would maintain the strongest focus on teaching and learning in the face of such deep cuts. He observed that there could be some presumptions that the other $28 million in cuts would be "easy to come by." He underscored that there would be challenges in all of the cuts. He stressed that they were asking employees to give up compensation and they were considering cutting the school year.

Mr. Smith had started a list of what was solely in the board's control to do, based on Superintendent Russell's list. He thought they could increase user fees. He said they could control the terms of a lease for school property but that would not guarantee that someone would want to lease the property. He observed that if they sold property in the present market it would be akin to a fire sale and even so, this would not guarantee a buyer in the short-term. He stated that they could reduce classified and administrative staff by 10 percent, cut supplies, increase online learning, and reconfigure schools, among others, but he did not think that would add up to $30 million. He pointed out that the district could not control whether the community approved a bond and could not count on that as a revenue source. He said they could not make substantial cuts without affecting class sizes.

Mr. Torrey also had started a list, which he noted was all up for negotiation. He stressed that $1.2 million revenue could not be counted in the budget in January because it was against the balanced budget law in Oregon. He had taken all of the proposals and selected the staff
reduction and reduction in services and programs for $12.2 million in cost reductions, including reducing nearly 100 teaching positions and more than 60 administrators and classified staff across the district, reducing the school and work year to achieve $5.7 million in cost savings, and negotiating a freeze on pay and contributions to benefits to achieve $1.5 million in savings. He stated that all of those things related to the staffing ratio, which could only be "cut so many ways." He said they did not have the money and by law had to balance the budget. He also did not even know whether the district had begun to discuss these cuts with its bargaining units.

Mr. Torrey was concerned about depending on revenue from selling properties given that the market was terrible at present. He wondered if it would make more sense to hold on to district assets and borrow against them. He thought leasing out assets made more sense. Ms. Fahey thought the district could borrow against its properties, but her recommendation would be for the district to loan itself money. She was not certain this could be a long-term solution.

Mr. Torrey was prepared to use $5.7 million from reserves. He declared that if ever there was a time to use reserves, it was now. He thought that if they sold Civic Stadium, the revenue could be used to restore reserves. He also brought up that by law the district could not outsource its labor if compensation and benefits was not considered.

Ms. Levis asked what had contributed to the decision to recommend closing one school over another. Mr. Hermanns replied that staff had begun by looking at the schools that were so small that if the staffing ratios changed any further it would harm the education the schools provided. He liked small schools and if the district had the ability to afford them, he would prefer to keep them open. He said the district had been buffering the enrollment decline by shifting resources but when they had to cut the budget by $21 million the previous year they could not do that anymore. He related that when looking at the staffing ratios for the next year it appeared that some schools were in real trouble.

Ms. Levis asked what the process was for a school that was at the "tipping point." Mr. Hermanns responded that first they tried to figure out how they could make it work. He said they had the situation in the Churchill region where Adams, Cesar Chavez, and the ATA were located close together and serving elementary kids. He related that they were trying to figure out how to have strong schools in coherent feeder patterns.

In response to a follow-up question from Ms. Levis, Mr. Hermanns clarified that the reason for choosing Adams Elementary over Crest Elementary was that Adams had a greater capacity. Adams capacity was 350 to 425 students and could support a "more robust school."

Mr. Torrey asked how school choice fit into the situation. He observed that school choice worked well for those who could afford it and not for those who could not. Mr. Hermanns affirmed this. He said staff was in discussion about this very issue and planned to discuss it further with the board.

In response to a question from Ms. Geller, Superintendent Russell clarified that the proposed $4 to $6 million was in the compensation package and would assume that the employee would pay half of the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) pick-up.

Ms. Geller asked what had happened the last time the district had offered early retirement. Celia Feres-Johnson, Director of Human Resources, responded that the district had offered early retirement packages two years earlier and approximately 32 teachers had taken advantage of it. She said they were in the process of developing a proposal to offer early
retirement to employees. She stated that one implication of retirements was that the funding formula was based on a teacher experience component, among other things, and after the teachers retired two years earlier the funding calculation had been reduced because of this.

Tobiah Meinzen, student representative from North Eugene High School, related that he did not know if it would make much difference to transition from one school to the next level if it occurred at 4th grade or at 6th grade. He said it still amounted to the same number of transitions.

Mr. Smith thought there was a critical time around 6th grade and the impacts caused by transitioning at that time would be reduced by a 4th through 8th grade school.

Mr. Torrey noted that the Bethel District had two Kindergarten through 8th grade schools. He suggested that staff ask the superintendent there how those schools worked for kids. He wondered how many students might switch from Roosevelt Middle School to Parker if the schools were reconfigured as proposed. Ms. Cramer did not foresee this as being much of an issue. She also thought that the shift would be phased in.

Jenny Koh, student representative from South Eugene High School, thought that some students were concerned that they would have fewer opportunities.

Mr. Hermanns noted that administrative staff had met with all of the principals of the schools that would be affected by the proposal.

In response to a question from Ms. Levis, Ms. Cramer agreed that the configurations and how teachers would have time to collaborate presented a challenge. She thought there were options available in a 4th through 8th grade school that might not be found in a Kindergarten through 3rd grade. She felt that 4th and 5th grade teachers could collaborate on who taught which subject and this could address the needs of the kids. She added that she was concerned that the increased staffing ratio would substantially reduce the available time for teachers to participate in professional development.

Lydia Tam, student representative for Churchill High School, said the maturity level of kids needed to be considered when placing 4th and 8th graders in the same facility. Ms. Cramer replied that there would not be a lot of interaction between the 4th and 5th graders and the kids in the 6th through 8th grades. She related that she had spoken with a principal of a 4th through 8th grade intermediate school in Rhode Island and he said parents had brought up that concern but the grades not only had separate schedules including arriving and leaving at a different time, the 8th graders were really not interested in the 4th graders.

Karen McGhehey, student representative from the International High School campuses, asked if there was anything to be gained by having more students take classes at Lane Community College and the University of Oregon.

Mr. Meinzen related that he had tried to sign up for a calculus class at the University and the logistics of it were daunting. He could not transport himself to the class without eliminating two class periods from his day.

Ms. Hays agreed that transportation was an issue. She had spoken with Ms. McGhehey at the previous board meeting and was concerned by the classes that she was unable to take and how this affected her ability to get into certain schools.
Mr. Torrey asked if there were other high schools that could provide Mr. Meinzen with the classes that he needed. Mr. Meinzen replied that he was not certain.

Ms. Cramer noted that the district did have an agreement between Cal Young and Monroe Middle Schools for students to attend classes at the other school.

Mr. Meinzen recalled that when he started Kindergarten there had been 16 kids in his class, but now he had some classes with 35 or 40 kids. He said they were facing a huge cut and wondered what things they were facing that were pushing this over the top. Ms. Cramer responded that Kindergartens would start at about 27 students per class, but if a school added FTE in physical education or music it would increase the ratio. She commented that it was a critical question; not only was class size a concern, they had to combine grade levels in some schools and some did not have any music or physical education time. She questioned whether teachers could meet the needs of students if they had to do both 3rd grade and 4th grade curriculum, as an example.

Ms. Hays thanked staff for putting the proposal together with options. She said cuts in compensation and benefits were asking teachers and staff to give back. This was a loss of income for them. She pointed out that teachers and staff were taking an unpaid furlough day on November 12. She also noted that one proposal sought to reduce athletics. She remarked that her son considered himself an athlete-student and not a student-athlete and he was not likely the only one who felt that way. She related that Kidsports had experienced an increase in kids who needed scholarships because of the economy. She said they had no easy answers for the situation they were in.

Mr. Torrey said having been in some of the high school classrooms and having seen how crowded they already were he wondered if staff had looked at the cost of getting the kids physically into the classroom. Superintendent Russell replied that staff had not addressed this yet; it was a cost that was yet to be figured out. He agreed that it would be difficult to get more students into some of the classrooms.

In response to a question from Mr. Smith, Ms. Cramer affirmed that there would be some initial costs. She said Mr. Lauch was looking into bus routes and whether they would have to add any.

Jon Lauch, Director of Facilities Management, did not foresee much in the way of added expense for any reconfiguring of the schools.

Mr. Torrey said they had a $30 million deficit and asked if there were certain costs, such as from the capital reserve that they should not touch. Superintendent Russell responded that there would be some one-time costs in moving. He anticipated it to be somewhat included in the $30 million scenario.

In response to a question from Mr. Smith, Mr. Lauch stated that there would be some added transportation costs with school consolidations. He said they had some capacity to absorb that already. He indicated that he could provide more information on costs, but he considered costs to be modest in comparison with the savings brought about by consolidation.

Ms. Walston asked for information on staging some of the changes that were proposed to be instituted. She also requested more information on the 4th through 8th grade school structure.
Ms. Levis asked for information on closing a high school and whether this was an option and how it would change the proposal. Superintendent Russell responded that when he had made a comment to that effect as a part of the Shaping 4J discussion, the board had talked about continuing to have four high schools and four high school regions. Ms. Levis observed that some people had asked why the board did not wait until a new superintendent had been hired to make these decisions. She wanted to clarify, as co-chair of the superintendent search committee, that the district could not wait. She felt it had been very courageous of Superintendent Russell to stay on long enough to make these changes. She wanted to make sure that people understood that he had stayed for one more year to help them through this.

Superintendent Russell clarified that he was not making the decisions; that was the purview of the board.

Mr. Smith underscored the need to do as much as the district could for as many kids as it could.

Ms. Walston said she wanted to mitigate the chaos brought about by the budget deficit as much as possible.

Mr. Smith provided two web addresses for people interested in networking to help address the school budget issues: a Facebook page with the address We Support Eugene Schools and a webpage called wesupporteugeneschools.blogspot.com.

**ITEMS RAISED BY THE AUDIENCE**

Mark Callahan said he was a 4J parent with two daughters attending Bertha Holt Elementary School. He had brought them to the meeting as a "rallying cry" to the board for their future. He was concerned about the drastic effects of the budget cuts. He considered the kids to be the primary stakeholder group. He attributed the shortfall to "petty partisan politics" that interfered with "true leadership" and a lack of fiscal responsibility in the past. He challenged the board to come up with creative solutions to really get some things done. He urged the board to seriously contemplate and take action upon the tenets of fiscal responsibility so that a $30 million cut would not happen again.

Tanja Jenson did not understand why Parker Elementary School was on the list of schools that were proposed to be closed. She felt Parker parents were very supportive and would do what they could to help keep it open. She noted that Mr. Hermanns had explained that the decisions were based on capacity. She said Parker had the capacity and she did not understand why it would be considered for closure. She thought that increasing classroom size would close the achievement gap by lowering the top scores. She did not think this was the time to look at restructuring. She provided her comments in writing.

William Perreault declared that they needed to move past the Kindergarten through 3rd grade/4th through 8th grade argument. He felt that the district gave its teachers pennies and broken pencils and they turned out "astrophysicists and mayors. He had attended Kindergarten through 7th grade and 8th through 12th grade schools and it had worked because of the teachers and administrators. He said given that the split was just a preliminary proposal with the details yet to be worked out, it would be difficult to argue on the merits of it. He asked if staff had created the model for how the closures and reconfigurations would work first or had they determined which schools were not working and created the model from there. He thought they
might need to rerun the numbers. He asserted that there were schools that were not on the list that had capacity and some on the list to be dropped that were nearly at their capacity. He said when he went to school and the school needed to cut its budget, music had been cut. He averred that when facing a budget deficit they should not cheat the neighborhood schools and keep the charter schools whole. He considered charter schools to be a luxury item.

Annette Liebhardt said she was a parent of two Family School children. She stated that the Family School would gladly combine grades and shared spaces, principal, and facilities and would be willing to take on more kids. She was concerned that the district would do away with Family School because it was an alternative school. She felt that they were doing what the district wanted them to do. They had parents in the classroom all of the time, they raised their own money for a physical education teacher, and they were a Title 1 school. She said if the school was dispersed to other schools, their kids were not likely to go to the schools they were assigned to.

Sarada Thomas said she was a parent of a child whose school was not on the list for closure, but she had no doubt it would eventually be included in that list. She averred that education was not just about facts, it was about socialization, community, and interpersonal skills. When she had read about the school consolidation proposal, her immediate concern had been for the social, maturity, age gap, and community aspects for the school. She felt that the world was much different for kids now than it had been when the adults in the room had been children. She said the district had beautiful newer middle schools and suggested that, if it was possible, the district move to a Kindergarten through 6th grade and a 7th grade through 12th grade configuration. She stated that this would keep a community together. She thought that 7th and 8th grade students should be schooled in a separate wing because of the maturity gap. She believed that taking this tack would allow them to close down two old buildings and keep the community together.

Pamela Lamblin said she only wanted to ask this question: with the current proposal what was intended to happen with students who live in the neighborhood where the elementary school was Adams and the middle school was Roosevelt?

Kathryn Rainville stated that she had a student in the Sheldon and Monroe area. She asked if the district had done an independent audit, building to building, to figure out how staff could be moved around. She declared that most businesses, in a tough economic time, tried to figure out where they could consolidate services. She thought that in looking at the buildings and how they were staffed, the district could maybe utilize staff in a different way and would not need to follow through with the current proposal. She had been shocked to learn that the auditing was done by individual principals of the schools. She likened that to getting audited by the IRS and responding to the IRS that you would conduct the audit yourself. She felt that doing a 4th through 8th grade program at Monroe Middle School would place the school's students in competition with students from Cal Young Middle School for high school programs at Sheldon High School. She opined that it was "abominable" to have a child compete to get into a high school program. She asked how her younger student could compete if the new 4th through 8th grade program was instituted at Monroe Middle School and the district was just working the kinks out of it. She did not want her child to be a guinea pig.

Donna McFarland was a Crest Elementary School parent. She acknowledged that Crest had been referred to as one of the schools that was "at the tipping point" of not being able to provide
an adequate education. She disagreed with that assessment, stating that she was "thrilled" with the education her son was receiving at the school. She hoped that they would give the smaller schools a chance to see what they could do, even with new larger class sizes. She had attended a 4th grade to 8th grade school with a school population of about 600 students. It had been a profoundly negative experience for her. She requested that the district at least delay the decision to close and reconfigure schools.

David Wines said he was a teacher. He felt that the collaboration between a 3rd and 5th grade teacher was no less valuable than the collaboration between a 4th and 6th grade teacher. All of the supporting points for the proposed split between grades became moot for him. His larger concern was with the impact this would have on teachers. He pointed out that they were already facing "ridiculous cuts" and they had to face them because of the situation the district was in. He had not been asked his thoughts on changing the configuration to a Kindergarten through 3rd/4th through 8th grade configuration. He worked at a school that would close and questioned how staff would respond, not only to the cuts, but to reconfiguring every program when they were already burdened with all of the other things that were going to be happening. He said he personally would feel better positioned to stay with a community and deal with the situation with the group of people that he had been working with rather than being thrown into a new situation. He questioned how well the change could be implemented in the proposed timeframe.

Mr. Smith closed the public comment period. He stated that the district planned two public meetings in the following week, on November 16 and 17. He encouraged everyone present to attend.

COMMENTS BY EMPLOYEE GROUPS

Dayna Mitchell, Eugene Education Association (EEA), observed that the board had spent time at the present meeting asking questions, clarifying information, and listening in order to begin the process of responding to Superintendent Russell's preliminary proposal. She stated that 4J teachers and specialists were asking the EEA what position it had taken on the proposal, but at this point the EEA had not taken a formal position on it. She said the EEA felt strongly that it needed to be highly involved throughout the process. She conveyed the EEA's commitment to continue representing teachers at the various input and decision-making points. She noted, as Mr. Wines mentioned, that teachers had not been asked what they think about the proposals. She said they needed more detail and specificity in order to provide informed positions. She agreed with Superintendent Russell that the "devil was in the details." She averred that teachers and specialists were the vital component to students and having the EEA's involvement as the district moved forward was essential.

COMMENTS AND COMMITTEE REPORTS BY INDIVIDUAL BOARD MEMBERS

Ms. Levis underscored that the board was reading emails and listening to input. She believed that a community that was this involved and this intelligent could come to a good solution. She acknowledged that this did not mean that the budget cuts would not hurt, but she believed that the more they thought about it and discussed it, the better the end result would be.

Ms. Hays reported that she had the opportunity to attend the Stand for Children breakfast earlier in the day. She appreciated all of the emails she was receiving from members of the community regarding the budget cuts. She applauded the creativity and thoughtfulness that was evident in them.
Ms. Geller thanked the School District 4J administration and board members who had attended the Stand for Children scholarship breakfast. She said students honored with scholarships were local young people who had achieved in spite of challenges in their life. She had been reminded of the importance of graduating students who were "college-ready." Regarding the matter at hand, she stressed the difficulty of the task. She said they needed to be thinking about how to rally around schools longer-term.

Ms. Walston expressed appreciation for the feedback.

Ms. Walston also had a certificate from United Way to present to the Chair of the School Board in recognition of the efforts made by the School District 4J volunteers on the Cesar Chavez Elementary School garden for the United Way Day of Caring.

Mr. Smith thanked the students for their participation. He also thanked the members of the community for their input.

ADJOURN

Mr. Smith adjourned the meeting of the School District 4J School Board at 9:40 p.m.

_______________________  _______________________
George Russell          Craig Smith
District Clerk          Board Chair

(Recorded by Ruth Atcherson)

Attachments to Official Minutes
1. Memorandum of Agreement Between Eugene School District 4J and Oregon School Employees’ Association, Chapter 1