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

November 17, 2010

The Board of Directors of School District No. 4J, Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, held a regular board meeting at 7 p.m. on November 17, 2010, at the Wheeler Pavilion–Lane County Events Center, Eugene, Oregon. Notice of the meeting was mailed to the media and posted in the Education Center on November 12, 2010, and published in The Register-Guard on November 15, 2010.

ROLL CALL

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

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
Laurie Moses, Director of Secondary Education
Randy Bernstein, Resource Principal, South Eugene High School
Larry Soberman, Principal, Twin Oaks Elementary School
Sydney Vandercar, Principal, Cal Young Middle School
Peter Tromba, Principal, Monroe Middle School
Bob Bolden, Principal, Sheldon High School

STUDENT ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERS:
Lydia Tam, Churchill High School
Sun Sun Gan, Churchill High School
Karen McGhehey, IHS, All Campuses

OTHERS:
Marshall Peter, 4J Equity Committee

MEDIA:
KRVM
CALL TO ORDER

Board Chair Craig Smith called the regular meeting of the School District 4J Board of Directors to order.

AGENDA REVIEW

There were no changes to the agenda.

SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

Superintendent George Russell noted that the red folders provided to the board contained the minutes from the November 10 meeting and information on reconfiguring grades so that schools had Kindergarten through 3rd grade and 4th through 8th grade. He had also provided information from examples of districts that employed this configuration. He discussed some of the strategies for having the latter mix of students. He stated that Mr. Torrey had requested that the power point presentation from the Eugene Comprehensive Lands Assessment (ECLA) be included as well.

COMMENTS FROM SOUTH AND SHELDON REGION SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES

Becky Smith, co-chair of the Charlemagne/Fox Hollow Elementary School Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), stated was mother to a 4th grader and an 8th grader. She thanked the board and superintendent for considering their responses as they worked toward a solution to the budget crisis, a solution that would be consistent with the district goals of equity, excellence, and choice. She stated that their schools, like all of the schools in the district, were deeply worried about the effects of the budget proposals: the continued loss of instruction time and the increase in average class sizes. She averred that the loss of over 100 teachers and the loss of administration and support staff would have an enormous impact district-wide. She understood that the budget shortfall required school consolidations and a marshalling of resources to use buildings and staff more efficiently. They were disturbed, however, by the "rushed nature" of the plan. She conveyed their desire to engage in a thoughtful and considered approach that would put the French Immersion program in "synch" with the district-wide reconfiguration and long-term goals. It was their belief that the current proposal would cause a maximum of dislocation and a minimum of cost-savings. They asked that when the configurations were changed, they should happen with the minimum impact and transitions for students. She expressed their particular concern with the 6th through 8th grade portion of the French Immersion School given the scarcity of resources. She said a Kindergarten through 8th grade stand-alone program would be isolated from the other schools in the South Eugene High School region and their kids' experience would be out of "synch" with their neighbors. She said they questioned the creation of a stand-alone program in this district which faced a significant reduction of elementary school choice. She conveyed their feeling that after years of working on a school improvement plan, this would represent a step backward. She stated that the best means of providing excellence and equity at South could only come from a collaborative approach between the three parts of the Kindergarten through 12th grade program: Charlemagne, Roosevelt, and South. They did not want the program to be undermined by discontinuing the immersion program at Roosevelt.

Amanda Hitke, Camas Ridge Elementary School PTO, shared that she had children in Kindergarten and 3rd grade. She recalled the plan to consolidate Harris Elementary with Eastside Elementary school that had come from budget cuts. She underscored that they had done everything the district had asked them to do and that it had been hard work to merge the
two. She related that an advisory committee was formed and the two had become Camas Ridge in 2008/2009. She stated that Camas Ridge had established a school that met the mission of the district, after countless hours of work. She averred that they had risen to the occasion and had one of the best project-based learning schools in the state. She noted that the school had an informal relationship with Pacific University and listed some of the school's accomplishments. She said the school would again do what the district asked of it.

Christine Andrews, co-chair of the PTO at Edgewood Elementary School, said they had not had time to come up with a unified statement as of yet. She stated that when the plan had first come out, people had been scared. She related that they had not embraced the ideas that had been proposed, but they were particularly concerned about the staffing ratio. They felt that kids that needed help might not get it. She believed that the "outstanding" faculty of the 4J schools would stand up to this challenge. She hoped this would be an opportunity to reconfigure the schools so that they could achieve a sustainable budget. She hoped they would make their decisions on what would be best for the students and into the future. She related that parents at the school were still scared of the reconfiguration. She believed that if this strategy was the best for the district, the 4th and 5th graders were still children who would need to be treated like children and not middle schoolers. She thought that if reconfiguration was approached in a well-thought-out fashion, it could be workable, but she wanted assurances that it would be thoroughly considered. She added that her son had expressed to her that if the schools were reconfigured he hoped there would be playgrounds.

Laura Illig, representing Edison Elementary School teachers and parents, introduced two others who accompanied her to provide testimony, Jenny Vondercek, a 4th grade teacher, and Jen Berglund, a Kindergarten teacher. Both were also 4J parents. She thanked the board for their service. She said the proposals laid out would significantly impact the future of the community; the decisions the board would make would have lasting implications. She added that how they went about making the decisions would either "pull the community together or tear it apart." She stated that they had four issues they believed should be highlighted:

1. The board should engage in decision-making that was transparent and long-term; families arranged their lives around school decisions. The board should show how the changes being implemented would fit into a thoughtful comprehensive long-term plan.
2. The board should continue to recognize the value of neighborhood schools. She quoted from the Shaping 4J's Future report of 2008 in which small schools were touted to have so many advantages that it was reasonable to maintain them even if it created disadvantages in other areas. They also valued alternative programs and school choice, which they believed generated excellence throughout the district and increased the breadth of options, but programs that were tailored to the needs of a narrow slice of population should not be prioritized over neighborhood schools that are for "all comers."

She stated that Edison School was a neighborhood school that kids could walk, bike, or skateboard to that was diverse and had been serving its neighborhood for 84 years.

Jenny Vondercek continued the presentation:

3. Start from a place of doing no harm, in particular they were deeply skeptical of the proposal for reconfiguration. The details of such a change would take time to determine and undertake and people in the district would need help to understand why this type of change would be beneficial. One possible change would be to make schools so they housed Kindergarten through 3rd, 4th through 6th, and 7th and 8th grades. She thought not taking enough time would ensure the failure of reconfiguration.
Jen Berglund offered the 4th issue:

4. The biggest impact would be the increase in the student teacher ratio. Class size mattered. She related some statistics, including that the national average of teacher to students was 16:1. She said the ratio in Massachusetts was 14:1 and the state's test scores were 10 to 15 points above the national average. She stated that California had a ratio of 21:1 and its test scores were 5 to 10 points below the national average. She observed that the recommendations for the School District 4J would put the elementary schools at a 28:1 ratio, middle schools at a 31:1 ratio, and high schools at 32:1. She underscored that this was two times larger than the national average. She understood that board members did not have the power to levy taxes or raise funds, but the board did have the power to elevate the issues in the community and influence the outcome.

Ms. Illig added that they recognized the need for change and would like to see the change occur more gradually with clear data and evidence that tied the decisions together in a cohesive framework with appropriate deliberation for the long-term impact.

Lindsay Daggett, a teacher at Parker Elementary School, said Parker was poised to meet the core values of the district. She felt it offered an excellent program in an excellent neighborhood community.” She stated that Parker was ready to grow and to take on the challenges outlined by the district's core values. She understood that Superintendent Russell's proposal was intended to establish financial stability, but the Parker community did not feel it addressed the values of equity, excellence, and choice. They believed the end result of the proposal would be a "splintered fractured system of inequitably funded and populated schools.” She averred that the district should function as a cohesive unit, educationally efficient, financially viable, and well-rounded. She opined that the proposal failed to provide children with a quality education that would foster their strengths and develop skills for the 21st century. She acknowledged that the district was in a financial crisis, but believed it could do better than the current proposal. She did not think the proposed model was educationally sound. She said research showed that class size and age grouping affected children’s learning outcomes. She shared Parker's proposal to have a sustainable district-wide Kindergarten through 6th, 7th through 9th, and 10th through 12th model that could absorb the "ebb and flow" of population and funding. She stated that Parker was poised to embrace such a model and added that they felt that Parker would be an ideal location for a Kindergarten through 6th grade school. She also wondered what the criteria were for closing particular schools and why foreign language, art, music, and technology could not be more equitably and inexpensively integrated into all schools, rather than specialized schools. While alternative programs were valuable, they were a luxury in the midst of the current crisis.

Ron Jerome, Parker parent, understood the urgency of the revenue shortfall. He averred that they could do better than the present proposal. He asked what changes could be made to the school calendar, as an example. Could the school year or school week be shortened in a more consistent way that would be respectful of working families? He thought additional sources of revenue could be researched, such as grants or endowments. He acknowledged that everyone present loved his or her school, their families and their community. He said they were asking them to think critically about how to best educate each child in 4J equitably. He felt they should consider how to use the school spaces in a manner that would be most beneficial to all students. He believed that Parker had been providing a quality neighborhood education for generations and that it continued to offer a rounded education with rigorous core academics. He said Parker had been rated as an exceptional or outstanding school every year since the 2003/2004 school year. He stated that Parker was a neighborhood school with enough room to accommodate change and a group of new students.
Ms. Hays arrived.

Laura Corolla, parent of two 4J students and a teacher at Spencer Butte Middle School, recognized that the district was in a difficult position and that cuts would need to be made. She thought the reconfiguration to a 4th through 8th grade school would bring challenges and also opportunities. She had taught in such a school and her children had attended it. She stated that from the perspective of a teacher and parent, the school had been highly successful and a positive experience for them. She averred that the reason for Spencer Butte’s success was the generous community support, provision of essential classroom resources, appropriate class sizes, and an outstanding staff. She declared that taking even a single teacher out of that dynamic would profoundly affect their ability to make that happen. She believed there would be an immediate negative reflection in achievement rates and the disparity would only grow under the burden of crowded classrooms. She predicted that education would have to be mass delivered to meet the needs of most students rather than meeting the needs of most students and increasing class sizes would eliminate many of the successful programs that had helped to close the achievement gap. She related that she had moved to Eugene six years earlier after teaching in California. She had seen the education system in California “implode on itself” as the consequence of massive layoffs. She believed they had sacrificed educational excellence there as a result. She averred that the experiences her children had going to school at Spencer Butte and South Eugene High School had been “nothing short of extraordinary.” She provided a list of suggestions to consider, with regard to budget cuts:

- Increase temporary furlough days as a means of preserving staff;
- Offer attractive financial early retirement incentives for administrators, certified, and classified staff;
- Spend down reserves to alleviate cuts;
- Sell property holdings and develop other means of income;
- Consider a city tax, levy, or bond to raise funds;
- Consider using $1.2 million from the reserves during the 2011/2012 school year so that sites and families will have time to develop appropriate staffing and building plans to allow the district to reconfigure programs successfully;
- Provide staff with research and best practices for pedagogy for the 4th through 8th grade model;
- Take on reconfiguration in the 2012/2013 after more thoughtful planning and the provision of sufficient funding for building reconfiguration and curriculum development.

She said teachers understood they would have to make sacrifices, but they were not willing to sacrifice the level of excellence they had worked hard to develop and deliver to their students. She underscored that the staff would be the people who would carry out the decisions that the board would make.

Kirsten Haugen, parent of students at South Eugene High and Roosevelt Middle Schools, noted that there were currently 556 students enrolled at Roosevelt. She wanted to recognize the board and superintendent for the hard work they were doing and she wanted to honor the teachers and staff throughout the district for "plugging away through these uncertain times." She offered three suggestions they believed were in the best interest of the schools and students:

1. If it was essential to reconfigure, the district should consider the time and investment this would involve;
2. If Roosevelt dipped below current enrollment levels would require the school to dismantle the current program and create something new - the school would prefer to continue to be a 6th through 8th grade school with the French Immersion program;
3. Roosevelt would like to maintain an enrollment of 600 students or more so that it could maintain the high quality education of kids that "people had come to expect from the School District 4J.

She concluded by stating that the staff and parents of Roosevelt recognized that the students' education and well-being was profoundly affected by the well-being of the district at large and this was a community concern that reached beyond families with children.

Randy Bernstein, principal of South Eugene High School, expressed appreciation for the work they were doing. He hoped they were looking for any opportunities possible for both short-term and long-term sources of revenue, working at the state and/or local level. He hoped the community understood that everyone would benefit from good schools and not just people with children; good schools were integral to attracting new businesses and services. He stated that one of their main concerns had to do with the increase in the student/teacher ratio and noted that currently the average class had a ratio of 31 students per teacher. He projected that the proposed increase would take the ratio to approximately 40 students per teacher and would impact the teachers' ability to provide rigorous appropriate curriculum for all of the students. He hoped they would not have to go this far, but he believed this could lead to considering limits on course enrollment. He thought they might have to talk to students about the courses they could take beyond the minimum requirements for a high school diploma. He underscored their desire to minimum budgetary impacts on the classroom, but this often led to people pointing to extracurricular activities such as athletics. He recognized that many students maintained their connection to school primarily through these types of programs. He felt that whatever the grade configurations ended up being, the high schools could work well with their "feeder" schools to ensure students were on their trajectory so that they could meet the increasingly challenging graduation requirements. Regarding the new requirements, he underscored the need to maintain or increase support for intervention programs. He pointed out that at present there were 11th graders who had not met the reading benchmark and, should they not be able to meet it by the following year, they would not be allowed to graduate. He cited several other examples of programs they were using to help students achieve benchmarks, all of which required Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees. He said he had teachers who were ready to start employing cutting edge learning strategies and online learning and it could be time to scale some of these things up. He felt the sooner they knew what direction the district was heading in the better, so that they could get to work on implementing the changes they needed to make.

Mr. Smith called for the representatives of the Sheldon High School region to speak.

Judy Volta, Mayor of Coburg speaking on behalf of Coburg Elementary School, stated that the school had begun in 1862 and in 1962 had merged with School District 4J; the 'J' stood for joint. She acknowledged that they had talked before about the potential closure of Coburg Elementary. She pointed out that the businesses in the community had provided funding to the school, and asked the board to consider its unique characteristics. She related that they had held a town hall meeting, worked through the summer, and had a Ford Family Foundation Grant to develop their application to be a charter school. She believed they had developed an excellent application. She said the community was "sickened by the plight" the district found itself in. She underscored their desire to continue as a fully operating school within the district, but should the district decide it needed to be closed as a traditional neighborhood elementary school, they asked that the board strongly consider approving the charter application.
Jerry Baney, Coburg City Councilor, asked that the board consider the future of Coburg and that the projected population, over 3,000 more people by 2025. He stated that to accommodate the growth and address groundwater pollution, Coburg was constructing a wastewater treatment system. He said this was a component needed for sustainability. He averred that a quality community school was also necessary to support the changes coming to Coburg. He noted that the Coburg school had been on the list for closure for the past several years and each year the Coburg City Council, the community, and the school board had stepped up to keep the doors open. Now it appeared the school had run out of time and money. He strongly encouraged the board to approve the charter school application should they deem it necessary to close the school. He declared that now, as they made progress toward future growth, was not the time to let this "rich heritage" disappear.

Leah Claypool stated that her children were the third generation to attend the Coburg Elementary School. She appealed to the board to keep the school open. She lauded the unique qualities of the school, in that it provided academic excellence rooted in a community-based learning environment. She believed that a charter school would provide the opportunity for the district to keep students in the district and provide educations for new students. She averred that the school would provide education within a community that would "nourish kids' minds and hearts."

Ms. Volta invited the board to attend a town hall meeting on November 18.

Stacy Ellidge, board member of the Meadowlark Elementary School PTO, expressed the Meadowlark parents' appreciation for the dire situation the district found itself in and the difficult decisions the board faced. She said they felt strongly that school restructuring required a more deliberate approach than what had been proposed, one that included strong public participation. She said the collocated schools, Buena Vista and Meadowlark, operated at near capacity in their current form. She underscored that the Meadowlark population had been "artificially reduced" to support the existence of Buena Vista in the building. She related that at the time they had been told that Buena Vista would not be placed in jeopardy as the result of this coexistence. She said the reality was that Meadowlark had to turn students away. She conveyed the school community's recommendation that the district reconfigure the geographic region in which the school was located and moving the Buena Vista school to the Monroe Middle School building where they believed there was room to accommodate a Kindergarten through 8th grade program. She acknowledged that much of the public focus had been on closures and reconfiguration but felt that the teacher student ratio was a more important factor in the budget equation. She averred that there was a bias in teacher/student ratios in the language immersion schools and that the FTE should be reallocated more equitably. She related their suggestion to form a volunteer panel to determine how to deliver services to the children that would be otherwise lost because of the budget reduction. They also recommended that the board charge the staff, site council members, and PTOs of each of the four school regions to meet over the course of a year and devise a unified proposal for restructuring each of the area schools within parameters established by the board. She predicted that resolutions would emerge from this. She averred that the primary strengths of schools lay in the quality relationships between students, staff members, and families and asked that the district keep this intact.

Cydney VanderCar, principal of Cal Young Middle School, reminded the board that their classrooms held 38 kids and that most had up to 40 textbooks. She said sometimes they did not have enough chairs or room in a classroom and some of the books were tattered. She related that the faculty wanted to remind the board that they would do anything that was asked
of them; they would continue to try to raise every test score, so that everyone had the same education opportunities across the district. She recalled that she had started as a student teacher in 1990 and had worked in every region in 4J. She had never been prouder of the district than she was at present because of the number of people who wanted to participate in the meetings. She stressed their support for the board and for the students.

Peter Tromba, principal of Monroe Middle School, said they had engaged in a lot of discussion about the sustainable budget proposal. He shared several points of view that had been expressed by parents and staff in his region. The number one issue for them was the staffing ratio and if there were ways to adjust the other components up or down so that the ratio would not be so adversely affected, the district should look for it. Regarding the Spanish Immersion program, he related that if it was made into a Kindergarten through 8th grade program this should be undertaken over a two to three year period. He had spoken to 6th graders several days earlier and they had been split on whether having the program be from Kindergarten through 8th grade was a good idea but all had expressed that they did not want to be a part of it. He related that there was a concern about isolation from other kids their age in the K through 8 model. He added that, for him personally, there would be a lot of heartache if they lost the Spanish Immersion program as they would lose staff that played "an integral part" in the building as a whole. He said there was a lot of excitement and fear with regard to the suggested reconfiguration to a 4th through 8th grade model. He related that there had been a lot of thoughts about the facility such as the potential loss of computer labs and how they would fit larger classrooms in. He stated that they had a Life Skills program and a comprehensive learning center. He had not heard much talk about those classes and how they figured into the building capacity. He noted that the Life Skills program, though staffed by Lane Education Service District (ESD), was a partner and their staff members were considered to be part of the school. He related that with declining electives, the Life Skills program took on students as interns and this provided placement for some of the students they struggled to find electives for. Also regarding facilities, he related that people had expressed concern over whether the school would receive portables, whether the gym space was adequate, and whether the addition of younger students would bring with it a playground (preferably covered). He said another concern lay around where teachers could prepare for classes. He had heard some positive feedback about curriculum in that configuration in that there would be more articulation, more hands-on science, more common vocabulary for kids, and the 4th and 7th grade writing assessment would be going on at the same time. He stated that there were other things they could align, such as the response to intervention. He presumed that the times for arrival would be staggered so that younger students arrived at a different time. He commented that in construction it was said that they could have anything they wanted as long as there was time and money to do it with. He averred that of course they could configure the grades differently and he would take offense at anyone who thought they were just going to throw the kids in together without careful planning. He underscored that the real question was whether they would have the resources to do it the "right" way. He related that people had questioned why they were not considering Cal Young for changes because they were sister schools and shared a lot in common including schedules. He said if Monroe became a 4 through 8 school and Cal Young remained a 6 through 8 school people wondered if Cal Young would be more akin to Spencer Butte, Kennedy, and the Arts and Technology Academy (ATA). He said there were also questions about transfers; people wondered if families would want to transfer out of Monroe and whether that was allowed and to what extent it was allowed it would cause inequity because only certain people had the ability to transfer and transport their children across town to a different school. He noted that one staff member suggested that they make Cal Young a 4 through 8 school and another suggested closing a high school and changing the middle schools back to 7th through 9th grades. He said the other thing that was most commonly mentioned in
the Sheldon region was an attendance boundary change in order to maintain a similar size in all of the feeder schools. He noted that he had children attending school in the district. He thanked the board for their effort.

Bob Bolden, principal of Sheldon High School, noted that he had worked in a number of different grade configurations and he had also "had the opportunity" to supervise 35,000 students as an executive administrator for school support in Beaverton. He felt he had a lot of experience relative to research and best practices. He was also the parent of an elementary student, a middle school, and a high school student, as well as a younger child who would be starting Kindergarten soon. He stated that there was a lot of concern about the change in the student teacher ratio. He pointed out that Sheldon's ratio had been increased by one a year earlier and the school had lost three teachers. If the ratio was increased by six could result in the loss of nearly 18 teachers out of a staff of 58 FTE. He stressed that this reduced the teachers' ability to provide rigorous and relevant high quality education that would address the learning needs of each and every student. He said this would also have a dramatic impact on the school's ability to provide a wide range of offerings including some advanced placement courses. In terms of athletics, he knew they all shared the core value of providing students with ample opportunities to participate in athletics and extracurricular activities. He understood that the board was aware that many students were positively connected to high school because of these programs. He expressed concern that if the programs were drastically reduced or cut, students might withdraw from the district to attend elsewhere. He stated that the average grade point of student athletes was 3.31 while the average for the entire student body was 2.91. He also noted that 68 notices had been sent out for excessive absences, but only three of them had been to student athletes. He said they could also argue that students involved in the programs had less behavior referrals and higher graduation rates than students who were not involved in extracurricular activities. He pointed out that the cost of the athletic programs for the district accounted for less than 1 percent of the overall budget. He stated that approximately half of Sheldon students were participating in extracurricular activities. He related that he had received a call from the athletic director in Redmond who had shared with him that surrounding communities had reduced athletic programs, causing an increase in enrollment for Redmond schools. He also wanted to talk briefly about grade reconfigurations. He said the community he was speaking for were concerned about what appeared to be inconclusive research on the 4th through 8th grade configuration. He understood that high schools already had a difficult time dealing with incoming 9th graders with a wide range of abilities and interests, due in part to the fact that middle schools did not offer the same curriculum and course sequence. He predicted that having one middle school become a 4 through 8 schools while having others remain 6 through 8 would exacerbate this problem. He concluded by saying that whatever the board decided, Sheldon High School was committed to working with its feeder schools to ensure that incoming students had the appropriate academic rigor, guidance, and support to enable them to meet the increasingly challenging graduation requirements. He said a lot of the people in the community did not believe that the district had an unsustainable budget, rather it had an unsustainable revenue stream that had to be addressed at the state level of government. He stated that many in the Sheldon community were looking for a proposal that appealed to both head and heart.

Jeannine Ervin, Buena Vista site council representative, shared the concerns of everyone in facing the deep budget cuts. She said they had deep concerns with their friends at Meadowlark Elementary, who they had shared a building with for 25 years. She related that the proposal to make the Buena Vista program into Kindergarten through 8th grade had piqued their interest. They wanted to be part of the dialogue and wanted to ask questions, many of which had already been posed but only answered "minimally." They wondered whether the district perceived the
immersion program to be Kindergarten through 12th, meaning a continuation into the International High School at Sheldon. She related that they wondered if this would deprive their kids of the elective courses, diverse curriculum, socialization, and more mature faculties currently at Monroe.

PUBLIC HEARING ON THE SUPERINTENDENT’S PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACHIEVING A SUSTAINABLE BUDGET

Mr. Smith stated that the next revenue forecast would be available on November 19. He underscored the board's need for help in formulating how to undertake a $30 million budget reduction.

Norma Martinez was very concerned about the reconfiguration. She was a parent of a student at Cesar Chavez Elementary School who had special needs. She felt Chavez had given him a good place to be and was concerned about his ability to make a transition to somewhere else. She shared that he had just started to enjoy going to school.

Celina Navarette was concerned about the changes that were happening in the future. She thought it would be difficult for children to get used to another school that they did not know and one that potentially had older children in it. She believed that kids that were already behind would learn even less.

Harry Thornton said he was an 8th grader at Roosevelt Middle School and not the French Immersion program. He strongly disagreed with the proposal to take the French Immersion program out of Roosevelt because having both share the school provided them with a lot of advanced classes and an array of electives including theater and music. He said Roosevelt had multiple bands and an orchestra. He felt that one of the most important things was the ability to choose electives because in choosing what to study, students were more present and engaged. He predicted that no electives would be available if the school population was reduced by removing the French Immersion and that the immersion program would suffer, too. He asserted that the collocation also created a social climate, putting kids from different backgrounds together and this made it more interesting. He did not believe the change would save much money anyway.

Justice McNeely, Family School student, had his mother speak on his behalf. She stated that he loved Family School and did not want to lose his friends and teachers. She said Family School was unique in that it welcomed everyone. She shared that her son had excelled there. She was concerned that the closure would let some kids fall through the cracks. She noted that they did not attend the school because it was close; rather they took public transportation to get there every day.

Michele Coluzzi said she had a 3rd grader at Family School. Her daughter Julie read a letter that she had written expressing her love for Family School. She did not want to be in a 4th through 8th grade school. She suggested that they shorten the school year instead of closing her school.

Alexis Rose Andersen, student at Roosevelt Middle School, shared that she struggled in larger classes. She thought it would be best if they lost as few teachers as possible. She opposed reducing the extracurricular activities. She understood that programs like volleyball, football, or drama productions would be reduced. She said she was not one of those kids who would be
able to go to a fancy college, but programs such as the volleyball program could allow her to compete for scholarships for a good school.

**Sandra Mann**, substitute teacher for the district, shared that she had the opportunity to sub at almost every school at the district. She thanked Superintendent Russell for researching work in different areas of the country on school configurations. She discussed her teaching credentials, which included being able to teach to the English Language Learners (ELL) students. She wished to share her suggestions for budget cuts, which included cuts to those who were earning at the highest levels, work with the state government to improve funding, and to use schools for community centers and to charge fees for doing so. She recommended that the district be run "more like a business."

**Marshall Peter** submitted his testimony in writing. He urged the board to maintain current efforts in monitoring accountability at the individual student level and to continue to differentially allocate resources in ways that expand and balance opportunities for struggling students. He stressed the importance of continuing the anti-bullying efforts and of making equity the "primary lens" through which all of the budget decisions were viewed.

**Julie Rice**, Parker Elementary School parent, had read about Grant Elementary School in Redding, California, which had begun the school year with a completed photovoltaic energy generation project. She said the school was projected to see a forecasted total of $600,000 in savings over the 20-year life of the agreement it had with its partner in the energy generation. She felt this was definitely a revenue source that should be looked at with seriousness.

**Tiffany Hutchins**, parent of Family School students and a teacher at the school, had not been certain where to put her efforts. She had taught in schools in all four regions in the district, but she had made the "big choice," to leave Spencer Butte Middle School to teach at Family School. She recalled that the school had been moved to the ATA. It had made sense for the school to be there. She felt the transitions would impact their students tremendously. She related that she had two children with Type 1 diabetes in her Kindergarten class of 26 children, with no aides. She could not imagine increasing the class size larger than that.

**Kate Hall** stated that she had two children at Meadowlark Elementary as well as a Sheldon graduate and a daughter at Willamette High School. She averred that money was tight and school choice was expensive. She stated that her son's blended 4th/5th grade class had 31 students. The Buena Vista 4th and 5th grade classes only had 25 students. She did not consider this to be equitable. She declared that they needed to focus on funding the basics and not the luxuries; they needed a uniform and traditional school make-up that served all of the children equally and with excellence.

**Sjana Barcroft-Hundt**, teacher at Monroe Middle School, was "vastly impacted" by some of the proposals. She said Monroe housed the Spanish Immersion program, 6th through 8th grade, and though there was a lottery, the reality was that to consider any immersion school parents had to be willing to transport their kids to school daily. She said Monroe had a higher socio-economic status because of the Spanish Immersion program and if one took the immersion program from the equation, Monroe had one of the lowest socio-economic statuses in the district. She stated that stripping the immersion program away from Monroe would take away some of the most involved parents. She also had noticed that it had been healthy for immersion students to mix with others at Monroe. She feared that a Kindergarten through 8th grade configuration would strip them of opportunities for greater choices. She wanted to speak from the parent's perspective; one fear she had heard a lot of was that parents were worried about
the "hyper-sexualization" of kids in middle school and what exposure to that would do to 4th and 5th graders. She said parents were considering leaving 4J for other schools because of this.

Jennifer Phillips asked that the district take school closures off the table. She said until the district took the item off the table, they would continue to hear the voices of opposition in the community. She had not heard any of the board members discuss the consistently high academic performances at many of the schools targeted for closure. She considered them to be some of the stars of the district. It was hard for her to hear of potential academic improvement resulting from closures and reconfiguration when she believed the schools that were being considered for closure were already achieving these aims. She averred that they were proposing to dismantle proven teams of teachers and administrators for hypothetical academic gains and that they were ignoring qualitative factors, reducing the equation to one of "pure quantity." She found this unacceptable; this was not an abstract logic problem. While she did not doubt that Superintendent Russell had good intentions, but advocating for these solutions to the budget problems "and then walking away" was "irresponsible." She beseeched the board to listen to the community when they said they did not want this change at this pace. She asked them to trust the parents and teachers to find innovative and proactive solutions to the FTE reductions.

Sandy Graham said she was a mother of a student at Meadowlark and an 8th grader at Prairie Mountain in Bethel School District. She averred that the district was excellent because of the board, the staff, and the parents. She did not think the proposal to close some schools and reconfigure was equitable; it was especially not fair to Meadowlark. She asked that the board please do what is best for all 4J students and to have that be in line with the district's goals.

Jenifer McAllister, mother of a daughter at Chavez and son at Family School, submitted a research study on grade configurations and their effects on children who qualified for free and reduced lunches. She noted that 80 percent of Chavez students qualified for free or reduced lunch, at ATA that figure was 59 percent, at Family School it was 52 percent. She pointed out that 35 percent of Chavez students were English Language Learners (ELL). She asked that when they looked at academic students they consider the population at schools that qualified for free and reduced school lunches. She understood that they needed to consider population when reconfiguring, but she felt they also needed to consider the high number of kids in Chavez who were ELL, qualified for free and reduced lunches, and that the school also had a high number of autistic students. She stated that a critical window of cognitive development occurred in 4th and 5th grade; the student shifted from an "emergent reader to master learner." She felt that transitioning in the middle of a critical window of development would be unpredictable for children with autism spectrum disorder. She applauded the special education teachers at Chavez, who she credited with creating a program to include the children in the general education setting. She understood that budget issues demanded changes and some closures. On behalf of her daughter who was in the cognitive learning center at Chavez and her son, she asked that they please looked carefully at the issues; please consider the effects of these transitions on students in adverse populations.

Blaine Hlebechuk declared that neighborhood schools were jewels of the community. He felt that elementary schools were what people remembered from their childhoods. He thought it was disingenuous for the district to propose to close down Meadowlark because it only had 200 students, given that the population was the direct result of the district's policy restricting the population because of the collocation of Buena Vista. He suggested the district move Buena Vista to Monroe Middle School and allow the boundaries to be changed. He asked that they consider the Kindergarten through 8th grade model. He would not send his son to Monroe as a
4th grader. He also asked that the district eliminate all non-essential staff, such as the grounds maintenance personnel.

James C. Manning III said he was a student at LCC, and had served one year on the Oregon Community College Association and one year as student body president of the Oregon Student Association. While he had been an advocate for secondary education, he wanted to talk about the public schools. He had attended Kennedy Middle School and Churchill High School and had been a student with an Independent Education Plan (IEP). Getting through middle school for him had been very difficult. He thought that if he had been in a class with 40 children he would not have made it. He advised the board and administrators to be careful with restructuring schools because it could have unforeseen consequences.

Joshua Burstein asked that the board postpone any reconfiguration, closures, or mergers for this year. He lived in the Churchill region, which the superintendent had indicated the issue had begun. He said neighborhood schools included Crest Drive Elementary, ATA, and Churchill. He noted that his oldest daughter was a 3rd grader at Crest. He had heard people talk about the plan being too rushed and fears of mixing the grades. He thought that if they did the research on the 4 to 8 configuration they also needed to look at districts that had tried it and then decided against it. He found it confusing that the superintendent had referred to pre-Kindergarten through 3rd grade at the previous week’s work session. He wondered where the money would come from for pre-K if there was not enough money for full day Kindergarten at present. He averred that they needed more time for this discussion and boundaries, bus routes, and achievement gaps needed to be included in the conversation.

Monica Adkins, Family School parent, said they loved K through 8 schooling. She felt that it encouraged children to nurture children. She wondered where the private sector was; the private sector should help fund education. She declared that if the community lost good education, it would lose businesses, and businesses could help provide sustainable revenue.

Annette Liebhardt agreed with Ms. Adkins. She was willing to give up more days of schooling. She preferred quality over quantity; she did not want to overload classrooms. She also thought that if they were going to cut days, it would be beneficial to have regular days off so working parents could plan better.

Cindy Danforth, Parker parent, hoped they were not acting out of fear. She thought they should work on increasing revenue by undertaking green activities in collaboration with LCC. She also suggested they pursue a citywide tax or a sales tax and bond measures. She was willing to help with any fundraising efforts. She thought they could try corporate sponsorships. She said there were people in the community who knew how to raise money and the district should tap into them. She recommended they research the declining enrollment and find out the reason for it. She related that they lived two blocks from Parker and walked there. She understood that the plan would be for an immersion school to move into Parker and she would have to drive her kids to another school. She felt something was illogical in this. She thought Parker should be a model for every school in the district.

Laural Miller said she had five children in the 4J School District. She averred that the district did not offer a sufficient number of school days. Students could not compete in the modern world without additional learning opportunities. She asked that if the district needed to shorten the school week that it be done in a manner that was predictable and fixed. She stated that working parents could not handle the lack of rhythm and children needed consistency. She
added that a quorum from each school should be brought together to help with the budget reductions.

Dev Sinha, Edison parent and U of O faculty person, observed that the district was facing a situation in which it seemed a lot of parents were thinking about leaving the system. He proposed that the district develop partnerships with local businesses that had a stake in the success of the district. He underscored that the hospitals and university could not recruit as well if the school district deteriorated. He thought the district could use the United Way model, where employees could go and help at other places; this could help at times of year where they needed more staffing. He also suggested that Symantec could help with information technology and other local companies could help in their areas of expertise.

Susan Huellow related that she had chosen to move to Eugene, though she could have chosen to move anywhere, in part because of the school system. She said her son attended an alternative school and her daughter attended Parker. She commented that the alternative school had not worked well for her son; he had become behind in reading and math. She had moved him to Parker and he had improved substantially there. She declared that closing Parker would be a "really big mistake." She felt that school choice was only right if there was a good foundation of neighborhood schools.

Julia Lindberg, mother of a 1st grader at Parker wished to stress that children were not "cattle" and should not be moved around as if they were. She understood the need for a sustainable budget and education model that acknowledged the strong foundation of the K through 6th graders and the need for stability at those ages. She believed that they needed parent participation and fund-raising and people with means going to public schools and the district would not get that if it established different grade configurations for different areas. She averred that Parker was a model of parents bringing in resources.

Sonja Burrows, Crest Drive Elementary School parent, felt strongly about reframing the discussion so that they were not lumping together the proposal to shut down and reconfigure schools with the discussion about the budget shortfall. She felt the savings would be surpassed by the cost of restructuring of this magnitude. She questioned the motives behind introducing the reconfiguration as a "package deal" with other recommended cuts. She said the debate had been framed around saving money and not closing the achievement gap. She asked that the reconfiguration proposal be considered separately as there was no compelling reason to consider this at this time. She wanted to see a variety of alternatives to reconfiguration, backed by clear data.

Myriah Davie read letters from her children who attended Family School. The children expressed their love for their teachers and how important the school was to them.

Claire Dannebaum, parent of a South Eugene High School student, did not feel any of the proposals were in the interest of learning. She recommended that the district and the Eugene Education Fund (EEF) support passage of a 1 percent city tax to support education. She noted that Berkeley, California, exacted a 7 percent tax, and Vancouver, British Columbia, exacted a 12 percent city tax. She believed such a tax could generate between $8 and $12 million annually. She said Ashland was the only other city that charged a city tax and it was a restaurant tax used to maintain parkland and recreational facilities.

Jennifer Harper said she was an educator and a parent of a Family School student and an ATA student. She lived in the South Eugene High region but sent her children to the Churchill region
because of the schools there. It was disheartening to hear that the schools would not be available. She had been trained, as a teacher, to design lessons to be student-centered. She did not believe the decisions that were being made were student-centered. She stated that larger classrooms were bad and too many transitions negatively affect learning. She thought they should consider having more K through 8th grade schools.

John Bauman did not believe they were hearing good justification for reconfiguring schools to K through 3rd grade and 4th through 8th grade. He had heard Oshkosh, Wisconsin cited as an example of a place that had reconfigured schools this way and wanted to share his experience of living there. He stated that out of 16 elementary schools, three were K through 3rd grade and he considered them to be the "bottom dwellers." He averred that the Oshkosh school district was in disarray; a friend of his had joined the school board because of this. He urged the district to find better proof to support this reconfiguration.

Joan Obie said it seemed that a lot of people thought the recommendation for closing schools and for reconfiguration had been based on saving $1.2 million. She understood that the recommendations had been made to save enhancing programs such as music and physical education and to hopefully minimize the impact to the student/staff ratio. She underscored that most things were beyond the control of the school board, such as negotiations with staff and the passing of bonds and levies. She had heard concerns about making the changes in the present year but she was more concerned about deferring the changes to the next year, when the budget had already had to be "catastrophically" cut and there was not enough staff to help facilitate the changes. She said while it was important for the board to listen to the community input it was also important for them to remember that they were hearing from a small portion of the people who had elected them to do the best for the students with the resources they had. She added that the principal of South Eugene High School had made good suggestions. She also found it notable that there seemed to be strong support for a K through 8th grade configuration but a lack of support for the 4th through 8th grade configuration.

Beth Stein, parent of a 6th grader at Roosevelt and educator for a non-profit entity in Eugene, recalled the testimony earlier in the evening by a parent regarding how long it had taken to make Camas Ridge Elementary School work. She could not imagine how long it would take the number of schools currently proposed to be closed or reconfigured to get to that point. She said with all that "disruption" the district would need the support of parents. She also advocated for the school board to use its "clout" to promote a local tax, perhaps an income tax, so that people who did not have children could understand the importance of a good local school district as well as families with children did. She said parents like her were willing to help make that happen. She thought parents could do other things as well, such as helping in class. She added that she planned to work within her non-profit group to come up with ways to fill in the gaps in the school year.

Ron Teninty averred that an ideological debate had been going on over the past 50 years regarding what government should provide and who should pay for it. He understood that those who supported limited government had been focusing on that debate and had been "winning." He said they thought government should only exist for three reasons and public education was not one of them. He opined that Measures 47 and 50 were not accidents and neither were the Reagan/Bush tax cuts. He advocated for moving the debate into a public debate regarding what government should provide and who should pay for it. He said a person could go to the IRS web site and see who used to pay and who was paying now. He advised everyone to look at who was funding the opposition to government.
Kris Moe, parent of two children at Meadowlark, felt that the current proposal impacted some segments of the 4J student population more than others. He thought they should expect more from a district that claimed equity as one of its core values. He reiterated that it had been the district's own policies that had caused enrollment at Meadowlark to become reduced. He opined that Meadowlark was "being squeezed out." He said they needed to fairly balance the needs of all 4J students.

Anita Perkins said she had a son with autism who was about to graduate and a daughter at Parker. She thought that if the board wanted a quieter meeting they should not have such a controversial proposal. She echoed concerns about closures and reconfiguration. She did not want the teacher/student ratio to change and, especially, did not want special education students to be subjected to large class sizes. She wanted to see more energy focused on creativity toward the goal of increasing revenue. She understood that no one wanted to make the cuts that were in the proposal. She declared that education was essential for community and country and they could not afford to bankrupt children's educations to save money.

Sarada Thomas, 4J parent of a Howard student, believed that it was a foregone conclusion that there must be change in the school district. She was very concerned about the proposed grade reconfiguration. She likened sending 4th graders to school with 8th graders to sending 8th graders to school with college students. She said 8th graders were dealing with issues that were far from appropriate for 4th and 5th graders. She recalled that the reconfiguration had been touted at the November 10 meeting as being a wonderful solution to the budget situation. She pointed out that no cons to the situation had been presented. She attributed this to either a lack of research or dishonesty. She declared that the change would need to be researched properly and well and asked the board to reconsider the proposal to reconfiguring grades to a K through 3rd grade/4th through 8th grade model. She believed that a K through 6th grade/7th through 12th grade model would be more appropriate and would allow the district to close two older buildings and keep communities together.

Vicki Koeppel spoke on behalf of Twin Oaks Elementary School. She said her son had transferred from Willamette Christian School to Twin Oaks and it had "saved him." Now her grandson was attending Twin Oaks. She did not want him to be moved around. She appealed to the board on behalf of her "little country school" that she did not want to lose.

Dennis Gerot, parent of Parker and Spencer Butte Middle School students, asked that the board take a look at ratios at the lower grades and maintain them based on research. He thought the board was being visionary to try to develop a system that, once in place, would likely last for many years. He encouraged them not to shy away from the hard calls. He said one of those calls was whether the district should continue to allow languages in elementary schools by lottery. He had heard that some neighborhood schools were considering cutting out language programs. He felt that by allowing choice to continue they should ask themselves if they were allowing everyone equal access to education. He asked the district to consider what would happen to demographics if the immersion schools were discontinued as a choice. He also asked that the district not give up on spending money on technology. He suggested that if the district would go to a four-day school week, there might be a way to utilize technology to make up the gap.

Ryan Radloff, parent of middle and high school students and a taxpayer, said based on all of the discussion and the small amount of money it would save, reconfiguration should be part of the long-term solution. He thought they should focus immediately on getting the budget balanced for the coming two school years with as little impact to the kids as possible. He was
chiefly concerned with impacting the teacher/student ratio as little as possible and with putting as many school days back on the calendar as possible. He said teachers were the biggest asset the district had, but there were only two things to look at when balancing the budget: revenue and compensation. He averred that given that salaries were a "huge part" of the budget, it was time for everyone to make sacrifices. He underscored that many in the private sector were doing the same job for less and it was time for the public sector to do the same.

COMMENTS AND COMMITTEE REPORTS BY INDIVIDUAL BOARD MEMBERS

Ms. Walston found the testimony to be thought provoking. She had additional questions she would bring forward at the next week's meeting.

Ms. Geller appreciated the comments everyone provided and found it especially helpful when people gave recommendations instead of just saying what they did not like. She said even if the board put the reconfiguration issue aside, they needed to do a better job of talking about the excess capacity in the district and they had to look at things that would save money. She felt they needed to reiterate that though the closures would only net an immediate savings of $1.2 million but there would be ongoing costs that would be saved as well. She stressed that when they were talking about closing schools, ultimately they were trying to what was best for kids, to preserve programs and minimize changes in the staffing ratio. She stated that they understood very well that the ratio had a huge impact on learning. She recalled that she had decided to serve on the board because she was one of the parents who spent a lot of time at Parker Elementary School and she had realized that volunteering for one more enrichment program or one more fundraiser would not be enough to do what was right for the kids. She appreciated people talking about broader solutions. She underscored that they had a series of fiscal and policy governance issues at the state level that had put the district at the point where such deep cuts were needed.

Additionally, Ms. Geller wanted to recognize Ms. Gerot for her work on the Oregon School Board Association (OSBA). She and Ms. Walston had spent two days at the OSBA meeting in Portland. She said Ms. Gerot was the outgoing president of OSBA and she wanted to call out Ms. Gerot's huge contribution to the state and to the district’s students and how much time she had spent lobbying on behalf of kids in public schools at the state.

Ms. Gerot received a round of applause.

Mr. Torrey thanked those who had stayed until the end of the testimony. He said the tenacity of the people who had attended the meeting and the meeting held on the previous evening had the ability to help the board and the district to get through this time. He stated that whatever they found, whether it was new sources of revenue or more appropriate ways of approaching the reconfiguration, the board would depend on the people present to remain as strong in their convictions through the coming year as they were at the present meeting. He stressed that this was not a one night event. He said there were more people speaking in the last 20 minutes of the present meeting than had attended any Budget Committee meeting in the entire four years he had served on the board. He emphasized that this issue did not "just come up." He urged those present to get their friends and "demand" to do the right thing. He stated that while it was not possible for everyone to agree, they did hear the testimony and they did read the emails. He thanked the chair for writing a response to everyone on behalf of the board. He advised them that they should remember that this was not a one-day event; this was a marathon and not a sprint.
Ms. Levis thanked everyone for their testimony, adding that she had taken "copious notes." She stressed that they were paying attention to all of the input. She had run for the school board to work with the community on this issue. She appreciated the civility with which everyone had provided their testimony. She noted that some had expressed concern about transparency and she wished to clarify that the board conducted no budget-related business anywhere but in public meetings. She related that the proposals that had been put forward had been researched and expressed appreciation for the staff work that had gone into them. She lauded the staff and teachers that worked for the district. She also appreciated the number of people who talked about excellence, equity, and choice; it showed that they had read the board's goals. She stated that the board took the goals very seriously. She concluded her remarks with an expression of appreciation for Superintendent Russell. She observed that many people with less courage could have walked away from the problem that a $30 million budget cut presented, but Superintendent Russell did not. She felt lucky that he was helping with the process and lucky to be undertaking it in a community that was as involved and as tuned in as this one.

Ms. Gerot cited the funding statistic from the past few years for General Fund money, which had gone from 44 percent to 37 percent. She encouraged everyone to get to know their local legislator and have a conversation with them as soon as possible. She reiterated that another revenue forecast was coming out on November 19 and another one in March; there was a good possibility that the district would see its funding drop for the present year and not even the next year. She said they needed to point out to people that it was often said during the election season that they valued education and they needed to be asked then why the percentage of General Fund dollars continued to drop for K through 12th grade public education. She stressed that this was not in the best interest of the economy, the citizens of Oregon, and the children who are the future. She stated that there had been "a tremendous disinvestment" and this had to change.

Ms. Hays had been at a meeting at River Road Elementary School prior to the present meeting. She had come to the Wheeler Pavilion to find a large crowd and had been impressed by how many people cared about the community. She had been overwhelmed and thanked everyone who had come to share their ideas. She said she had taken a lot of new information and new thinking away from the comments offered. She underscored the need to take this forward.

Mr. Smith thanked everyone for staying. He said wesupporteugenestheschools.blogspot.com was a web site for people interested in getting involved in activities to support schools. He clarified that they were working on the budget for the current year as well as the next year. He stated that they needed to think broadly. He noted that only 21 percent of people in the district had children in school. He said generally most people supported public education statewide. He had attended a meeting at which employers had expressed concern about the impacts on public education and the effects it was having on the workforce. He asked that people think beyond restructuring schools and to think globally for the district, the state, and the nation. He underscored that these were critical times in terms of the disinvestment in kids. He said they would reap the rewards in the next 15 years if they did not make positive changes now.
ADJOURN

Mr. Smith adjourned the meeting of the School District 4J School Board at 10:35 p.m.

_________________________   ________________________
George Russell     Craig Smith
District Clerk      Board Chair

(Recorded by Ruth Atcherson)