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4J LABOR NEGOTIATIONS

Statement of Eugene School Board Chair Mary Walston

Thanks for the opportunity to give a brief update before we begin our session this evening.

Everyone in this room has a shared interest in coming to resolution and finalizing a contract and budget as quickly as possible to provide the certainty our schools need to plan for the next school year. I am confident we can get it done.

The opportunity is that for the first time in years, we are in a position to be reinvesting in our classrooms, in our students, in our teachers and in improved outcomes. We do not face the deficits, the cutbacks or the pain of layoffs of years past.

But make no mistake. We still face a constrained budget that requires tough choices. And the school board has been clear from day one about its priorities for investing limited resources. The district's financial offer follows through on our promises to:

- Restore a full academic school year for the first time since 2008–09,
- Reduce class size and provide workload relief, and
- Support teachers by providing a full salary step increase while building a sustainable budget for long-term success.

We can make a real dent in class size with our offer. It adds more than 20 new positions with the opportunity to target our most overcrowded classrooms. If we could have added 12 teachers at the elementary level this year it would have reduced the number of classes larger than 30 students to just 12 classes instead of the 45 classes we have now. We could have dropped the number of blended grade classes from 26 to 17. And we could have increased the number of elementary classes with 25 students or fewer by 38, to almost half the elementary classrooms in the district.

We have listened to teacher concerns throughout the collective bargaining process and responded. We revised our financial offer to address compensation and workload issues and significantly scaled back contract language changes.

Tonight, we will offer additional proposals including a step modification for our most experienced teachers who would not otherwise benefit from our proposed step increase, as well as providing additional support for special education case management and the need to reduce workloads.

I want to emphasize how little financial flexibility remains. The board will **not** be moved off its commitment to restoring a full school year, reducing class size, and maintaining elementary prep time. That means other worthwhile investments will have to wait. We simply cannot do it all.

We understand staff have sacrificed time and again to support the children and families we serve, and the district is committed to working hard to continue to get teachers the resources they need to be successful in the classroom. The proposal before you is a serious, thoughtful effort to build a brighter future for our school and community together.

I am committed to continuing our strong collaboration and cooperation with the district's teachers and employees, and again, I look forward to finalizing a contract and budget as quickly as possible.

With that, I'll turn it over to Kelly and the team.