

FOR INFORMATION ONLY.

MINUTES

District Information Overview for School Board Candidates
Corvallis School District 509J
1555 SW 35th Street
Corvallis, OR 97333

I. CALL TO ORDER

Superintendent Jim Ford called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. in the Central Office Board Room, 1555 SW 35th Street, Corvallis. The secretary recorded those present as listed below.

STAFF PRESENT

Jim Ford, Superintendent
Dawn Tarzian, Assistant Superintendent
Jeanne Holmes, Human Resources Director
Kathy Rodeman, Business Services Director
Debbie Bell, Accounting Supervisor
Duane Jager, Technology Services Manager
Fred Wright, Auxiliary Services Manager
Sharon Thornagle, Student Services Director
Laverne Pitts, Public Schools Foundation Director

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Cyrel Gable, Chair
Helen Higgins (also a candidate)

SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES PRESENT

Matthew Donohue
Donna Keim
Arnold Larson
Blake Rodman
John Turman

Due notice had been published.

II. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Ford welcomed everyone in attendance and led introductions of those present.

III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Dr. Ford provided a historical perspective of the work that has gone on in the District since he first joined it in 1999. He referenced a document, *District Speaks*, that was created after meetings with 67 focus groups; he read some highlights from the report.

Matthew Donohue joined the meeting at 6:39 p.m.

Dr. Ford said that since his arrival, the District has moved from a preoccupation with standards and testing to culture building.

Dr. Ford provided highlights of some of the work, accomplishments and changes of the District over the past six years:

- Passed the state's first local option levy.
- Expanded Inavale to K-8.
- Increased customer service efforts with the assistance of Umpqua Bank.
- Simplified the myriad goals of the board, superintendent and district to just four for everyone: learning for all; listening to all clients to find solutions (customer service); collaborative and innovative environment; alignment.
- Expanded the role of the Corvallis Public Schools Foundation.
- Consolidation and Closure Committee recommended the closure of three schools.
- Redrew school boundaries.
- Developed the Long Range Facilities Master Plan.
- Launched the Dual Immersion Program at Garfield Elementary School.
- Reduced the four goals to three with the extended learning plan.
- Developed the District Improvement Multi-Year Plan.
- Passed an \$86.4 million bond levy.
- Secured Tier Two funding from the Linn Benton Lincoln Education Services District (LBL ESD), resulting in more services and relief to the General Fund.
- Opened Linus Pauling Middle School.
- Settled the teachers' contract.
- Hired a new superintendent.

Dr. Ford offered the following themes for his tenure:

Leadership stability

- Two board chairs in six years.
- Succession leadership – Dawn Tarzian selected as new superintendent.
- Added assistant principal positions at the high school and middle school levels as a way for the District to develop its own leaders.

Listening to the community

- Focus groups.
- Forums.
- Key Communicators.
- Updating the District's web site.
- Three community surveys.

Dr. Ford said communication is still a vulnerable spot for the District because there is so much going on and the District has no communication department.

Made the tough calls

- Tried to do what was right for the District, not what was easy or popular.

Financial stewardship

Moved beyond the general fund for financial/resource support

- Partnerships.
- LBL ESD Tier Two
- Regional Board Chairs and Superintendents meetings (REBOCS).
- Leaders from Oregon State University, Linn Benton Community College, and Corvallis, Philomath and Albany School Districts meet every other month to develop partnership opportunities.
- Monthly meetings with the dean of the Oregon State University School of Education.

Learning for all and instructional leadership

Choices

- School of choice – Franklin.
- K-8 – Inavale.
- Dual Immersion – Garfield.
- Every iteration of kindergarten imaginable.
- Core Knowledge – Wilson.
- Extended learning – students.

Dr. Ford said there are no simple solutions; the problems here are complex. We have tried to not introduce more complexity.

IV. DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

A. Overview and future vision

Assistant Superintendent Dawn Tarzian distributed information regarding student achievement data and led review of the information. She pointed out how closely our numbers on the Oregon Statewide Assessment align with the state's numbers, but we have higher scores for 8th and 10th grades.

Ms. Tarzian drew the group's attention to school report card data and pointed out that every school in our District has an exceptional rating in one or more areas, which is unusual. Four of our schools have an overall rating of exceptional, which is also rare in the state. She led review

of Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores and said Corvallis students in high school have fared quite well.

Ms. Tarzian distributed a document entitled “TAG-ESL-IEP Population By School” and led review of it.

She ended her comments by saying that the District Improvement Plan is the richest work the Board does with the District. She led review of each of the three goals and touched on the school action plans as well as the work that has been done this year on extended learning with the fully-grant-funded staff member: the extended learning coordinator.

B. Student Services

Student Services Director Sharon Thornagle provided a chart of the responsibilities of the student services department, which supports students in schools and is very closely connected with the goal of learning for all.

She said that most of her department’s work is in support of special needs students, including students who are at risk; specially trained staff help those students succeed. She pointed out that special education students are included in the testing.

Ms. Thornagle commented briefly on:

- The funding that is dedicated for specific things.
- Positive Behavioral and Instructional Supports (PBIS).
- The partnership with Oregon State University for elementary counseling.
- General administrator duties.

C. Technology

Technology Services Manager Duane Jager said his department facilitates student learning and supports staff. Technology has been a District priority since 1995 when the community passed a technology bond levy. The District has fiber cabling between all schools except Inavale.

He provided the following data about the Technology Department:

- Supports over 2,500 computers and 500 other networkable-type devices, like printers.
- There are wireless labs in a number of District facilities.
- The District formed a technology advisory committee this year, made up of staff and community members, to make recommendations for guiding the District’s technology plan.
- Offers technology classes for staff and volunteers.
- Has workshops throughout the school year and into the summer to teach how to integrate technology with students.

- Offers over 30 online courses for high school students. Approximately 100 students are enrolled in online courses at any given time throughout the year. A set of criteria is used to determine who gets to take online courses. Each school decides which students get each of the allotted slots. The District gets state money for home school students who take online courses.

D. Facilities

Auxiliary Services Director Fred Wright touched briefly on the staffing for the department and said that funding used to be mostly at the school level. He provided the following information:

- In 1999, the District started its energy management program, resulting in \$1.829 million saved in energy cost “avoidance”.
- In 2002, the District closed its in-house print shop and contracted out for the service.
- In 2003, the custodial operations assessment committee recommended staying with in-house custodial services but recommended a cut in staffing by over eight staff members.
- Seismic evaluations of all buildings were conducted.

Mr. Wright said phases two and three of the long range facilities master plan have yet to be started; each is scheduled to be implemented five years after the completion of the prior phase.

He provided information about the District’s Food Services Department.

E. Human Resources

Human Resources Director Jeanne Holmes reported that a couple of years ago, the District looked at the Human Resources Department and what its work is. The department reorganized and formed a human resources leadership team that delves into what the work of the human resources department should be. Ms. Holmes provided a document entitled “Our People & Culture/HRM Plan”.

Ms. Holmes said that several years ago, research was done on current staff and we realized that 30% of District staff would be retiring in the next several years; developing the workforce would be vital for the department. Recruiting and planning for workforce development has been key for the department.

Priorities this year:

- Technology – on line applications; web based substitute system, web site, on-line orientation, ADP (interactive HR and payroll systems).
- Retention – better welcome for new employees, assign new employees a human resources person, mentoring, exit interviews, more research on what other organizations do for retention.

- Recruiting – job fairs, bilingual conference, university partnerships, “grow our own”, research, diversity issues re: recruiting.
- Evaluations – more focus on non-represented and classified, accountability for principals, provide names and deadlines up front for principals, support administrators in any aspect of process, i.e. writing plans of assistance.
- Classified staff development.

F. Corvallis Public Schools Foundation

Foundation Director Laverne Pitts said she started with the Foundation in 2001 and one key thing she addressed was making it easier for people to donate to the District, including implementing online donations and the use of credit cards.

Other changes:

- Processing deposits every week.
- All checks deposited by the Foundation, not the schools.
- Started accountability using disbursement certificates, so that we knew exactly what the money was spent on, all the way back to invoice.
- Working with all the fundraising groups in the District to make sure the operations are consistent and to prevent “reinvention of the wheel.”
- Annual fundraiser “Spring for Kids Run”.
- New fundraiser “Adult Spelling Bee”.
- Grants are given out every spring and fall, to get the money to the schools.

Ms. Pitts talked about endowments and other funding mechanisms and provided a brief synopsis of the Foundation, as well as a chart of donations and some expenditures since 1996.

G. Budget

Business Director Kathy Rodeman explained that the Business Department’s work is to ensure that all the District’s financial matters are handled and reported to meet all state and national guidelines. She introduced accounting supervisor Debbie Bell, who is responsible for that aspect of the department’s work.

Ms. Rodeman’s comments:

- The District is audited annually under very strict state guidelines.
- We have been award winning for our reporting for at least the last 15 years.
- The Business Department provides the Board support to make decisions about financial matters of the District.

- The Business Department's mission is to support the Board and the superintendent in making the best possible decisions for using the funds that the District receives for the benefit of students. Sometimes that means recommendations that are not very popular, such as the Administrative Review Task Force recommendation to end the teachers' early retirement incentive. Because of the recommendations by that task force, and the Board's action on them, the financial future of the District is brighter.
- Comparisons
 - ◆ At the start of Measure 5, the District had 465 teachers for 7,200 students.
 - ◆ When Dr. Ford joined the District in 1999 we had 7,261 students but 102 fewer teachers (362).
 - ◆ This year we're at 6,844 students, not counting the Farm Home but we have only 273 teachers.
- Declining enrollment is the toughest issue the District faces. Our funding comes in from the state based on enrollment. Our community is "graying" and families in their 30s who are having kids are moving out of Corvallis. We had a study done by a population group that said that for the next 8-10 years we forecast a gradual decline in enrollment. In addition, the funding from the state declines. Last year we received \$5,100 per student; this year we received \$4,836 per student. That meant that we had to set aside some of last year's money to pay for this year's costs. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Susan Castillo sent out a questionnaire last week asking if school districts should continue to lobby the legislature for more money if we're building all these reserves.
- If someone looks at this year's budget alone, they'd get a skewed perspective. Board candidates should look at several years' worth of data. (Ms. Rodeman offered assistance in this regard.)
- The Board's financial policies, one of which specifies a 2.5% contingency, are in the back of the budget book. When Dr. Ford came, the District had a \$15,000 ending cash balance. What came out of that was to increase our contingency and increase our ending fund balance.
- The District has been taking a longer-term perspective, thanks to a suggestion by Board member Bob Johnson. We've landed on a 15-year plan; doing so allows us to hold some things constant and see what happens if other things change over time. During bargaining, we had to control insurance costs, which had been growing 15-20% a year. Over time our benefits would outpace our salaries. It's one of the issues that Board members will be involved in over the next 3-5 years.
- The District's 15-year plan also helped identify other revenue sources. One was the local option levy, which expires this year and means a \$1.4 million reduction in revenue. Kindergarten programs are self-sustaining and the Board has supported them.

- Non-represented and classified employees have not had a pay increase in two years, but the District must hold the same core foundation as it did with the teachers. Our people are our biggest cost. We're funded at the average level from the state and we have to keep our salaries in the average level. We're going to have trouble with the strangle-hold on the money supply by the legislature. We used to have almost \$40 million coming in; this year it's \$38 million. All projections are that for a long, long time, funding won't change. At the same time the legislature is trying to control how the money is spent.
- The Board will be facing the school closure issue.
- District efforts to take reductions in places away from the classroom
 - ◆ In 1990-91 we had 36 administrators; this year we have 23.
 - ◆ Our administrators have been reduced at the same level as teachers. More have come from central office than from schools.
- We've closed and consolidated schools; we've downsized our central operations, such as custodians and maintenance staff.
- Every year we go through budget reductions and Board members are going to spend way more time than they want on it and will be frustrated that they won't be able to talk about wonderful things like the work of the District improvement plan.
- Every year we look centrally for reductions first. But central expenses are only 4% of the budget.

Ms. Holmes mentioned the District's informational and recruiting brochures, which had been provided to the candidates.

V. FUTURE CHALLENGES

Ms. Tarzian referenced the huge leadership transition: four new board members and a new board chair. It will really require a careful balance between knowing where we've come from and where we're going.

She reiterated the challenge caused by declining resources and said legislation has changed what schools are required to address for students; litigation has impacted public schools as well.

She touched on changing demographics: 20-25% of our students are talented and gifted (TAG), whereas 8% and 11% are the national and state levels, respectively. Ten percent of our students have learning disabilities and need individual approaches to their educational program. Seven percent of our students do not speak English.

Ms. Tarzian said Oregon's 24th poorest school is in Corvallis: Lincoln Elementary School. Garfield is the 64th poorest; Franklin is 761st. So the Board is challenged to take a big picture look at the District. She said our teachers range from eight to ten years older than the average teacher, which means more new hires. Regarding fair and affordable compensation, Ms. Tarzian said that when you cut salaries, you find that people won't apply. She said that overlying all of that is an ongoing, alive-and-well lack of trust in public education's ability to manage its resources and serve kids.

She said Board members are challenged regularly with finding the balance between building relationships and holding staff to high outcomes. Rights of the employees and rights of students must be balanced, as well as individual needs of students vs. the needs of all kids.

She said that what staff counts on from Board members is a lot of understanding, trust, guidance, permission and active support of our community. It's a bittersweet time for us, saying goodbye to leaders in the District and on the Board; yet it's an exciting time.

Dr. Ford recessed the meeting at 8:03 p.m. and reconvened it at 8:08 p.m.

VI. QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Questions/Comments:

- *Regarding line items following through the entire budget – schools don't use the same language. Is it ever addressed for the public to get more than a cut and dried summary sheet?*

Ms. Rodeman explained that the District has been criticized for having a budget document that's too difficult to read. She said to look at the school information pages that tie to the budget numbers. Detail is kept at the business office and can be provided to board candidates.

She said the state sets a chart of accounts for all school districts and supposedly everyone's using the same information.

Chair Gable pointed out that not every district is putting the same things in the same categories.

- *Regarding the District Improvement Plan –I've noticed that in bureaucracies I've worked with, there've been big plans at the top but the information doesn't get down to the line staff. How well are the goals for the District known?*

Dr. Ford said he meets with classified and certified staff advisory groups, which are opportunities for him to get out the word. This year he didn't hold the certified staff meetings because of negotiations. So that tool for sharing information was not available. Board members

helped this year with visits to schools for extended learning. At Board meetings there is a regular agenda item on the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and we have added reports for the student representatives to the Board. Getting information to teachers is a challenge and we're working on that.

- *There are two levels of success: how effectively the plan goes down and how effectively the problems come back up. What does the District have in place to make sure that happens – formal or informal structures?*

Dr. Ford said the structures are more informal than formal. When we developed the DIP we did a massive "what do you want to do?" and tried to build the plan at the grassroots level. But 40% of the people have left since then. Visions don't last forever and need to be modified as new people come on board. We're trying to work smart and get the right kind of people to work here. The more aligned we become the more creative people become.

Ms. Tarzian said she has heard much more in the conversations when employees are being hired that classified and certified staff use the DIP when evaluating candidates.

Chair Gable said there's longevity to the DIP; it hasn't changed much in the last few years.

- *Regarding the Harding facility – I thought it was at risk for earthquakes and that one of the reasons we gave it up was because it wasn't terribly safe. Was that building part of the bond initiative and has it been updated to make it more safe?*

Mr. Wright explained that Harding was not included on the bond issue for facility improvement. The part of the building most at risk is the 1927 portion, which is being used for storage; no instruction is being done in that section. Dr. Ford added that Harding was to be held for a future school site, as part of the long range facilities master plan.

- *What's being done with Westland Middle School?*

Mr. Wright said he would come to the Board this spring with a conceptual site plan for that facility. Right now in the bond, the majority of the building is earmarked for demolition. We are currently leasing the biggest part of the building to a church. Next year we'll move out our food service operation and the church won't be able to cover the utilities on its own. If the Board continues to support the master plan, Westland is scheduled for demolition in the summer of 2006, with the exception of the library and modular buildings. We might be able to save the gymnasium portion.

- *Regarding the communication office being abolished – the trust of the community is a concern. What did that office do?*

Ms. Tarzian said the Board has looked at the District's inability to implement a communication plan and discussed moving funds from their budget to cover that function. The Board wants to do a more comprehensive and planful job of communicating.

Dr. Ford added that the criticism was worse from the internal clients of the District because it's a big target.

Chair Gable said it's a balancing act. The Board feels even more strongly than staff about the need for a communications person. We want that person to do internal and external communications and it would help everyone know what everyone else is doing. Most districts our size have a communication person designated on staff. There are only 20-25% of the community who have children in schools nowadays. When our country's demographics were different, we had many more people with kids in school and they felt more connected to schools. Also, when schools used to be funded locally, we would decide what our budget would be and it would drive the tax levy and created a constant dialogue with the taxpayers. Now when we go out for a tax levy it's an anomaly. That means there are more reasons to reach out to the community and communicate in more formal ways. It hasn't been traditional for Board members to do more formal communications, like writing their own pieces; they've always done informal communication like talking with people. We're developing a communication plan for Board communications.

- *Regarding the web site being upgraded and revamped – I've been talking with folks in the community and School Board members. There are a lot of people with ideas for Inavale and Garfield but they're coming up with these good ideas in a vacuum about information that they could get from our web site. Will the web site be an improved information source for parents to use as tools when they're developing new ideas? To give them a leg up so that by the time they get to the District level they'll already have incorporated all the challenges they'll encounter at the District level.*

Chair Gable said the main thing is that if people have an idea (programmatic change or new program, etc.), the most effective way for that to move forward in the District is that they have to be talking to people face to face.

- *Parents are talking amongst themselves and developing plans before they come to the District with ideas. It seems like those would be the folks we'd want to reach; they'll not come to the District until they have an idea developed. People have to run their ideas through all the requirements the District has. Like what building funds can be spent on, what title funds can be spent on. That's one of the concerns that people I'm hearing from are talking about. If we're talking about closures, we should expect a lot of proposals from each parent group.*

Chair Gable said the Program and Resources Review Committee meetings will be open to the public and the information will be available to the public. Developers of the "Dan Brown proposal" have been working with us and the plan has been tweaked and refined. It works better when direct discussions are held.

- *Regarding the unspent portion of the bond measure – has the Board entered into any discussion about what we can do with the money?*

Chair Gable said the Board will be having a discussion about this issue at its April 18 work session.

- *Are there any restrictions? Does that money have to be spent on the projects outlined in the bond or is there flexibility?*

Ms. Rodeman said there is some flexibility, but it must be spent on things that match with the ballot title and are eligible under state law.

- *Have any proposals been floated?*

Chair Gable said that Mr. Wright will bring a list to the Board for discussion on April 18 which will include what things are on the list for phase two already. There may be some things about deferred maintenance needs that have moved up on the list since we made the list. There are also a few things that have come from individual schools/parents – special interest groups. The Board will be looking at those three possible categories. In addition to legal restrictions to spending the money, Board members feel a real dedication to wanting to spend the money the way we said we would spend it; that it's important to keep faith with the voters. Some Board members want to give back the money.

Dr. Ford pointed out that the meeting on April 18 is just a discussion; the decision will be made next year.

VII. CLOSING

Chair Gable said that, from the perspective of a Board member, candidates saw a small smattering of what these highly trained staff have to offer. It's important for the Board to remember that we have these professionals in our midst who know the best practices about education, building maintenance, how to raise funds, etc. The Board sets the overall direction for the District but always in collaboration with staff.

Ms. Tarzian referred to an information sheet on the Oregon School Boards Association Summer Board Conference. Chair Gable distributed the schedule of Board meetings for 2005-06.

Dr. Ford offered some concluding remarks:

This is the best district office staff you'll find in the state of Oregon. There's not a district in the state that wouldn't want to get Fred Wright or Kathy Rodeman. Calls come in from around the state to Kathy Rodeman, Debbie Bell and Linda Martin in Business Services.

Dr. Ford mentioned the high caliber of Duane Jager, Sharon Thornagle, Dawn Tarzian and Laverne Pitts. He said all of the staff is really fun to work with. He said this District had a reputation as having a contentious Board; that kept him from applying the first three times the superintendent position was vacant. He said this Board is wonderful and he applauds the candidates for wanting to sign on for it. He said it's been a nice merging of Board and staff.

III. ADJOURNMENT

Dr. Ford adjourned the meeting at 8:50 p.m.

Prepared by: Julie Catala

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