

BOARD WORK SESSION

A Work Session of the Springfield School District No. 19 Board of Education was held on August 30, 2021.

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Board Chair Naomi Raven called the Springfield Board of Education virtual meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Attendance

Board Members attending the meeting included Board Chair Naomi Raven, Kelly Mason, Jonathan Light, Dr. Emilio Hernandez, and Todd Mann.

District staff and community members identified included Superintendent Todd Hamilton, Brett Yancey, David Collins, Dustin Reese, Matthew Oddo, Taylor Madden, Colleen Hunter, Steve, Blaines, Anthony Reed, Jeff Michna, Britney Standeford, Rose Ann Coe, Jonathan Gault, Andy Smith, Jennifer, Acacia Adair, Tonya Reichenberger, Brian Megert, Joyce Johnson, Moriah Shanahan, Whitney McKinley, Mindy LeRoux, Judy Bowden and Jayson Hayden, minutes recorder.

Guest speaker Vince Adams from the Oregon School Board Association was also present.

2. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

There were no changes to the agenda.

MOTION: Dr. Hernandez moved, seconded by Mr. Mann to approve the August 30, 2021 agenda as presented.

Chair Raven called for a roll call vote in favor of approving the August 9, 2021 agenda as presented: Dr. Hernandez – yes, Mr. Light – yes, Mr. Mann – yes, Kelly Mason – yes and Ms. Raven – yes.

Motion passed, 5:0.

3. THE BOARD'S ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Mr. Adams began by refreshing the fundamentals of boardsmanship by going over the board operating agreement.

He asked the Board to share their names, why they ran for board, what they were doing outside of Board work, and what they did over the summer.

Ms. Mason shared that she ran for the board in part to give back to the community that raised her. She said she had went to Springfield public schools and also that she served as academic advisor at University of Oregon for the Pathway Oregon program serving low income and under-represented Oregonians with tuition and advising. Ms. Mason also shared that she had visited Puerto Vallarta, Mexico over the summer.

Mr. Light said that he had been involved with the School District since 1995 first as a volunteer through the Chamber of Commerce and other committees, and then was on the Board from 2001 to 2016 and Springfield had hired him as a teacher on special assignment. He then stepped off the board and had

retired last year but thought that there was still a lot of work to be done in education and wanted to see more students be successful parts of the district. Mr. Light said he had visited the east coast for a graduation ceremony in May and had recently taken his daughter to grad school at UC Berkeley.

Dr. Hernandez shared that after some deliberation he ran for the Board and won without competition. He said he had been in education his entire career at both the state and regional levels, and in D.C. Dr. Hernandez explained that he was then at the University of Oregon for about 15 years and finished his doctorate. He added that he was inspired to return to education by all of the equity and diversity work being done. He shared that he had visited the coast of the summer but was limited by pandemic closures and the recent smoke problems.

Mr. Mann shared that he was on the board because school had always been a sanctuary for him and wanted that support to be available for all students and that he believed in the possibilities of quality education for the community. He said that it had been fun walking his daughter back and forth to the summer enrichment program and stopping by the park every day.

Chair Raven explained that this was her 4th year serving on the Board and shared that her love of children and desire to be sure they were well taken care of was her inspiration for serving. She said she loved the conversations taking place in the field of education and the challenges given. She said that she had taught everything from pre-K to college level and most recently at Lane Community College for the last two years. This summer she had climbed two mountains in Washington and enjoyed the challenge.

Mr. Hamilton shared that he had visited Yellowstone over the summer. He noted that it had been a very difficult time in the district but was proud of the work happening to get children back into school and supporting students and families.

Mr. Adams shared an overview of the agenda including reviewing collaborative governance, reviewing the Board's operating agreement, meetings and procedures, public comment, and incorporating student voices into the work of the Board.

Mr. Adams shared a slide outlining balanced governance. He explained that there was a growing body of research around the connection between school boards and student outcomes. He said prior to that there had been a strong movement to get rid of school boards as they caused problems and had a negative association. Mr. Adams shared some practices which showed a positive impact on student outcomes including the Board setting the vision and goals for the district, the expectation that all students can achieve at high levels, creating the climate and culture for success, and that successful boards were data savvy. He noted that the Board included the Superintendent as part of the team. Mr. Adams explained that accountability and policy was how they set expectations for how the District was operated.

Mr. Adams shared some research on the behaviors of less effective boards including less efficient use of meeting time, less focus on students, members not being respectful or attentive and coming with their own agendas instead of focusing on the needs of children, weakened relationships between the Board, the community, and not relying on the Superintendent and staff for advice, and the focus on operations at the expense of policy. He warned about making excuses about low student performance, spending less time focusing on student need, and relying on anecdote and agendas instead of solid data to make decisions.

Dr. Hernandez asked to clarify about poor relationships and Mr. Adams explained that it referenced relationships within the board, between the board and Superintendent, and between the Board and community, and they should all be avoided. He noted that time spent focusing on students was measured by timing Board meetings with a stopwatch to gauge how much time was being spent on student issues.

Mr. Adams explained that balanced governance involved the balance between being overreached vs disengaged. He said they did not want to only be focused on outcomes while not tracking indicators and also did not want to micro-manage by contacting staff directly or showing up to schools unannounced. He shared that they were in the end phase of developing a new board assessment based on the idea of balanced governance based on national norm research.

Mr. Adams explained that research showed Boards with high turnover tended to have more Superintendent turnover and was associated with lower student outcome and that continuity was important.

Chair Raven asked for more focus on the goals for boards to monitor. Mr. Adams explained the two types of goals boards dealt with; how they would change their own practices or professional development they needed, and district goals which were larger goals focused on changing student outcome. Chair Raven wished to bring the Board's attention to the member handbook which included a state report card and stressed that would be a good document to review. She added that last year the Board had participated in a scholarship program and book study which facilitated fantastic conversation and brought the Board together on difficult topics. She encouraged the Board to focus on development goals going into the new year.

Mr. Light asked if they would revisit the last session for the new members to review and discuss strategic goals and Chair Raven responded that was a good idea.

Mr. Light asked about balanced governance and how the Board managed the community relationship and Mr. Adams answered that community engagement was one of the twelve standards and suggested that the Board could do another self-assessment to leverage their strengths and areas for growth. Mr. Light noted that his experience with input from the community involved not only student outcome discussion but also how the district was run.

Mr. Adams explained that collaborative governance was based in culture, the things done in Board meetings would not be successful if they were undercut by the behaviors, biases, and beliefs of the members. He said that collaborative governance was defined as an approach that utilized effective partnerships to learn and lead together in an environment of trust and respect with the shared focus on student learning through collective responsibility, accountability and support. He explained that effective partnerships meant the board needed to work together as a cohesive unit, but that it was stronger with some constructive disagreement.

Dr. Hernandez asked about effective partnerships during the times of the pandemic, that some of the community was not involved due to concerns about being forced to wear masks and that they couldn't move forward without everyone being on board. Mr. Adams responded that the district was constrained by a legal mandate and that they could not have a partnership if both parties weren't willing to reach out. Dr. Hernandez noted that education would be pushed aside if the community could not come together on issues of masks and vaccines. Chair Raven thought that there were ways to address these issues without negatively impacting their work with students and that they needed to be clear on what their role was on each of these issues.

Mr. Adams asked the board why it would be important for them to work as a team with the Superintendent? Chair Raven answered that it was important for people to know their roles and positions on the team to work together to produce camaraderie, respect and efficiency. Dr. Hernandez added that if you did not have a goal you were training for then you would not know what you were there for and that the coach and trainers should be able to compliment and emphasize your skill sets. Mr. Mann gave a cooking analogy and explained that the team had to all be on the same page to produce good results. Mr.

Adams said that without a good relationship with your Superintendent you could probably get by, but the students would not flourish and when times became difficult, the Board would not have the resiliency needed to move forward. Mr. Light noted that the Board's only avenue to effect the organization was through the Superintendent and that relationship had to be respected and said that other perspectives could help the organization be more adaptive.

Mr. Adams asked what effective two-way communication looked like and noted that the Board had cited community engagement as an area for growth in their self-assessment. Dr. Hernandez responded that COVID had made it difficult to keep in touch with the community and was not sure how to overcome these barriers. Chair Raven said that it was important to define clear channels of communication and rise above the barriers with creative methods. She stressed the need for the community to understand what the Board's role was in all of this. Mr. Mann thought that the pandemic reinforced a reactive approach to communication and wished to go back to a more proactive one. Mr. Light thought that the district had done a good job aligning their protocols with guidance received from the state but said the community didn't always understand these policies and often blamed the Board.

Mr. Adams noted that the Board was a deliberative decision-making body and asked when the Board can deliberate and take action. Chair Raven explained that they had a two meeting process where information was presented at one meeting and then a decision was made at the next one which gave them time to understand and ask questions. Mr. Adams added that this also gave the public time to engage with the process.

Mr. Adams asked why it was important to encourage debate and different points of view? Mr. Light said that they represented their community and it was important to make sure it did not seem like they were simply rubber stamping decisions. Dr. Hernandez noted that if the community did not agree with the decisions made, then they would not support the Board. He added that the Board needed to find a creative ways to communicate all information to the community.

Mr. Adams asked what it meant to adhere to standards of ethical conduct and professionalism. Chair Raven said it was important to stick to basic procedures and protocols including listening and redirecting to the proper channels, as well as being positive and honest. She added that a Board member's individual role was much different than the Board as a whole. Ms. Mason thought that professionalism meant how they speak to each other and conduct themselves during meetings and in the community and noted that this wasn't always easy. Mr. Adams added that ethical conduct also meant not using their positions of power for personal gain and also respecting confidentiality.

Mr. Adams asked what the process was for developing the Board agenda? Chair Raven explained that they sent out a draft agenda and then the Chair, Vice Chair, and Superintendent met on the Wednesday before a meeting to discuss the agenda. Ms. Bowden added that the agenda was usually finalized at this meeting and then posted online the following day by noon. Mr. Adams said he liked the predictable structure of this process.

Mr. Adams asked what should not be on the agenda? Dr. Emilio suggested issues pertaining to personnel or issues with specific schools as it was between the Superintendent and the effected party. Chair Raven noted that agenda items led to decisions and it was important to understand that as a Board. Mr. Light asked if it was okay to discuss Board items over email if it was something that didn't lead to a decision. Mr. Adams said this was not a violation of public meetings and that they could have procedural communications this way.

Dr. Hernandez asked how the Chair and Vice Chair should facilitate the orientation of new members? Mr. Adams said this was done by answering any questions to bring them up to speed, and providing a

mentorship role. Dr. Hernandez asked how the Chair and Vice Chair could provide information to the Board from the Superintendent. Mr. Adams explained that the Chair had a much closer understanding of the daily operations of the district and often had more access to information. He added that they wanted to avoid any asymmetry or unevenness of information across the Board. Chair Raven asked if other districts had something in place for the Superintendent to provide regular information to the Board. Mr. Adams said he was not aware of similar policies in other districts.

Mr. Adams outlined some roles of the Superintendent including managing the daily operations of the district, working as a team with the Board members to establish a clear vision for the district and collaborate to set goals, checking in annually. He asked about facilitating direct communication between central staff and the Board that would require more than 20 minutes of staff time. Mr. Light explained that in the past they had members who went directly to staff to get information and that staff felt compelled to respond and often took too much staff time. Mr. Adams said that this violated their policy and that all formal communication was to go through the Superintendent. Chair Raven asked Mr. Hamilton what value he saw in this protocol. Mr. Hamilton responded that everyone had done a fantastic job working with them and this was one of his most important policies.

Mr. Adams asked how the Board handled business that exceeded the meeting time limit. He also noted that side-bar conversations lead to divided attention and suggested stiffening up the language regarding these.

Mr. Adams asked about the process of preparing for a meeting. Dr. Hernandez said he reviewed the packet and noted any questions that came up to ask Ms. Bowden. Chair Raven shared that she really enjoyed reviewing the packet beforehand and taking notes. Mr. Mann thought that this was an area that the Board could improve upon. Dr. Hernandez noted that not reviewing the packet and information provided was a disservice to the staff who worked hard on it. Mr. Light thought that their greatest responsibility was the expectation of the community that they had a thorough understanding of anything they made decisions on. Mr. Light asked if more time would be needed to review the packets and Mr. Mann said it was important to be as efficient as possible and make sure everyone had time to review the packets.

Mr. Adams asked why it was important not to make new proposals or change the agenda the night of meetings? Chair Raven said it did not give enough time to ask questions and Mr. Mann said it was hard to get input from other stakeholders.

Mr. Adams asked when the Board was obligated to hear complaints? Dr. Hernandez answered that he had not heard any formal complaints and Mr. Light shared that he very rarely heard any and that they were answered in executive session. Mr. Adams noted that the Board was the last resort to hear appeals, that they heard complaints against the Superintendent and against the Board itself. Mr. Adams added that it was important for individual Board members to not address complaints, but to direct them to formal policy or staff.

Mr. Adams asked if it was okay for a Board member to respond individually to emails sent to the Board after the Chair has responded. Chair Raven thought that this was not allowed and thought that maybe this could be clarified more in policy. Dr. Hernandez thought that members should not respond to the patron but to the Chair directly. Mr. Light noted that there may be an expectation by the community to respond and said it was important not to damage relationships with the community. Dr. Hernandez noted that sometimes concerns had to be translated into English and wondered about being the only member on the Board who was able to understand correspondence in Spanish. Chair Raven thought it would be a good idea to expand the process for overcoming the language barrier.

Mr. Adams asked who the key stakeholders were and how the Superintendent interacted with them. Mr. Hamilton explained that this item was a carryover from prior operations and that there were members in the past who had met with stakeholders without keeping the other members involved which lead to surprises. Mr. Light added that they had members who would show up to schools unexpected which would impact operations and the learning environment. Mr. Adams noted that it was be a breach of trust and disruptive to show up to schools unannounced. Chair Raven suggested adding language to procedure around attending school events and asked if this would be appropriate. Mr. Adams answered yes and offered to provide some examples of this language.

Mr. Adams noted that they would discuss meeting procedure, public participation and student representatives in the next Work Session.

4. NEXT MEETING

The next Board meeting will be held on September 13, 2021 beginning at 7:00pm in the Board Room at the Administrative Building located at 640 A Street in Springfield.

7. ADJOURNMENT

With no other business, Chair Raven adjourned the meeting at 8:04 p.m.

(Minutes recorded by Jayson Hayden)