

SOUTH LANE

- B O A R D N E W S -



Regular Session January 8, 2024

M E E T I N G S U M M A R Y

The South Lane School District Board of Directors ended its January 8 meeting with a reduction in its ranks.

During the portion of the meeting dedicated to board member comments, the Board's Tina Murphy announced her resignation, effective after the meeting. Murphy, who was elected in May and has held office since July, indicated that she'd purchased a new home outside the District.

"It's best for me to live close to the activities and doctors that I frequent," she said. Murphy thanked the voters for supporting her and recommended that the Board appoint a successor who shared her beliefs, indicating that it would show a respect for the wishes of those who elected her. She thanked the Board for showing her the inner workings of its processes.

Board President Taylor Wilhour later said that the Board will begin discussing the process for filling Murphy's seat at its next meeting.

Prior to her resignation, Murphy was part of a meeting that included several notable developments. The public comment period, which had drawn a room full of people, began with testimony from Susan Lawn, who expressed disappointment with the "things that are going on" in the District, adding that she believed a majority of people shared her sentiments.

"We're disappointed in the way things have been handled lately with certain things that have passed that shouldn't have," Lawn said. She said a group has gathered 262 signatures on a petition, with more signatures on their way.

"I'm not happy with the curriculum I've seen online," Lawn added. "And I will be speaking strongly with my opinions on that."

Jennifer Powell began her comments by reciting the definitions of bullying and bigotry, later adding that within the District, a "culture of bullying and bigotry has caused deep fractures, mental distress, low performance, lower attendance and frustration and hopelessness."

Powell said she believed there to be good news with regard to a cultural change under current district leadership.

"The need to transform our schools' culture has finally been recognized," she said.

Not everyone who spoke Monday evening seemed happy with district leadership, however. Sherry Yoss indicated that the inability of the entirety of the gathered crowd to occupy the same room as the Board was a “form of prejudice against us.” Yoss said she started a petition last Wednesday night that had already garnered over 260 votes.

“There are two churches filling pages full, and they’re gonna hit 2000 easy,” she said. “They all feel the same thing and are telling me the same story. They don’t feel they’re being represented. You guys need to listen.”

During her report, Superintendent Yvonne Curtis said that the District is in the process of changing its calendar from one that splits the year into trimesters to one that uses a semester system, citing several reasons for the change.

“We want to make sure that kids can get their full credits,” she said. “Trimesters don’t quite work with CTE (Career Technical Education) and other courses. Most staff members are saying it’s a no-brainer, but we’re putting together a committee of staff at all levels. We want to let you know it’s happening, and that there will probably be adjustments to the calendar.”

Assistant Superintendent Brian McCasline reported the status of a community group’s efforts to form a Parks and Recreation District in Cottage Grove.

“We’re always in need of more recreation and education opportunities for students and families,” McCasline said. “That’s one of the reasons we wanted to make sure we are part of this process, to see if this is viable for our community.”

McCasline said the District constantly works with the City of Cottage Grove and South Valley Athletics to coordinate gym space, field space, and other resources that each organization is involved with.

“A concerted, consolidated effort to serve the community is exciting, but the devil is in the details,” McCasline said.

Also on Monday night, the Cottage Grove City Council voted its support for putting the formation of a Parks and Recreation District on the ballot to let local voters decide its fate.

The Board also unanimously approved the adoption of new English Language Development (ELD) curriculum for students at all levels.

“There are changing populations in our District that come with significant challenges,” said Director Jeremy Smith. “We’ve done a lot of work over the last couple years to change our approaches, to add more resources and support.

Director Smith indicated that the District had chosen curriculum for English Learner (EL) students at each educational level. Board President Wilhour asked how the curriculum could be utilized for students that are integrated into a typical classroom.

Director Smith responded that a small number of students that primarily speak a language other than English, often new arrivals to the District, are still educated separately for English instruction, and for them, the curriculum is quite useful. Students learning English as a second language at higher levels often receive that instruction during a separate class period, he said.

The Board also voted unanimously to approve its own operating agreement. The agreement had previously been discussed back in November, with the Board’s Duane Taddei expressing his dismay that the policy stipulated that, once a decision is made by the Board, its members “will” support the decision of the majority, rather than “should” support it. Taddei had previously stated a concern that, should he sign the agreement and later speak in public about a decision the Board has made, his conduct could be considered unethical. He stated that the agreement needed to say that board members “should” support the Board’s decisions, not that board members “will” support them.

The discussion of that particular word choice comprised about an hour of the Board’s Nov. 6 meeting. On Monday, though, the decision to change “will” to “should” prompted a unanimous vote in favor of the new operating agreement.

The South Lane School Board meets again for a Regular Session on Monday, Feb. 5.

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