

# SOUTH LANE

- BOARD NEWS -



Regular Session November 6, 2023

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

The Board and Superintendent set a goal to provide a summary of each regular Board meeting for staff, students, parents and community. We hope this article written by Jon Stinnett, a professional journalist and parent in our district, provides a quick look into our recent Board meeting. Watch for a summary following each regular Board session for the remainder of the year. ~ Superintendent Curtis

Following a worksession dedicated to board professional development, the South Lane School Board met in regular session on Monday, Nov. 6, and one little word dominated much of the conversation.

A previous worksession found the Board discussing the School Board and Superintendent Operating Agreement for this school year, and a memo from Superintendent Yvonne Curtis to board members on Monday afternoon attempted to frame the decision the Board would face that evening.

Two documents address the need for all board members to support a decision after it's made by the entire board, Curtis wrote – the Board Standards of Conduct Policy and the School Board and Superintendent Operating Agreements. The Oct. 16 worksession included an in-depth discussion of both documents.

The discussion included a comment by one board member that they might still want to discuss a decision after the Board had voted on it, Curtis reminded the Board in her memo. She reiterated that once the Board makes a decision, she is tasked with supervising implementation of that decision through the proper channels. Curtis said that further board discussion after a decision has been made can cause difficulty in implementing the decision.

“It creates confusion and chaos if staff or community members think there is a chance that the School Board could reverse their decision,” she wrote.

Tasked with considering the adoption of the School Board and Superintendent Operating Agreement, that one little word – whether once a decision is made by the Board, its members “will” or “should” support the decision of the majority -- comprised about an hourlong discussion led largely by the Board’s Duane Taddei.

Taddei 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.

“We should all be able to support the decision,” he said. “I just know that there are times there will be something we can’t support, and I want to be able to talk about it. But in signing this agreement, I won’t be able to.”

Board Chairman Taylor Wilhour pointed out that the agreement doesn’t obligate a member to vote for or agree with any decision, attempting to clarify that board members support decisions made by the Board of which they are one voting member. He said that this agreement helps to reassure the public that once a decision is made by the Board, it won’t be undone at the next meeting.

“But that’s what we can do – we can undo the decision,” Taddei countered.

“What about giving staff that doesn’t support the decision the trust that we might change it?” Taddei asked.

Taddei said that the Board’s operating agreement and policy should both read that board members “should” support decisions made by the entire Board. He said that he did not sign the agreement at the worksession and would again refuse to do so at Monday’s meeting if the language wasn’t changed.

Board member Sherry Duerst-Higgins stated that she ran for School Board to support the kids, saying that she assumed that’s why Taddei ran as well.

“We’re spending time talking about this, and we’re not talking about our kids,” she said.

“I ran because I heard concerns from the community,” Taddei responded. “Not every decision is about the kids.”

Taddei said he believed that signing the agreement meant board members “basically signed that we won’t talk about it anymore,” something he refused to do.

Wilhour countered that “everything the District does takes time to implement.”

“Very few things are going to take place in a month,” Wilhour said. “This could likely lead to a situation where the implementation process has started, and they have to stop implementation, and that work was wasted. This is reassuring them that’s not what we’re going to do.”

Wilhour later said that the Board has always signed the operating agreement unanimously, and it would be a shame if the Board didn’t do so this time around. When the time came to call the question, however, that’s exactly what happened, with Taddei refusing to sign.

“They’ll have to watch and see how I operate,” Taddei said of the community and district staffers’ perception of his intentions if he didn’t sign the agreement. “They’ll be content with it. My intent is not to come here and disagree just to disagree.”

Prior to the discussion of the operating agreement, Curtis gave her Superintendent’s Report, which touched on local events she’d attended including fall festivals at London and Dorena schools. She reported that Al Kennedy High School has been selected for an audit by the Oregon Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights.

“When they look at alternative schools, they want to know, ‘are all kids getting access to rigor, and to CTE (career and technical education) opportunities,’” she said. Curtis said she’s not participated in this type of audit before, which includes a worksheet that must be filled out and an upcoming school visit.

Reports from Al Kennedy and Cottage Grove High School students were also entered into the record. The Al Kennedy report detailed the school’s Fall Festival held on Oct. 18, pointed out that it graduated one student early already this year and, as the school had experienced a significant loss last year, the BIPOC Student Union had constructed an “ofrenda,” an altar honoring that student, to commemorate Dia de los Muertos.

The CGHS summary included news that a grant from the Yarg Foundation would be used to finance a clothing closet for those in need; senior representatives are working on graduation letters, shirts, and a time capsule; junior representatives are working toward choosing a prom theme for the dance, which will be held at the CG Armory; and the Electronic Media class is currently getting ready to livestream games during the upcoming basketball season. The fall play, “8 Minutes Left,” will run Fridays and Saturdays, Nov. 10-11 and Nov. 17-18.

The OSEA (Oregon School Employees Association) Report submitted by Vice President Sheila Heley indicated that the OSEA had set dates in January and February to begin bargaining for a new contract with the District.

“Classified (employees) as a whole would like for the Board and the District to keep in mind that without classified employees, the District would cease to function,” she wrote. “So many times we hear that we are valued and that it is important to have long-term employees for consistency for students. We will be looking for you to show us that these are not just words, but truly how you feel, as we head into bargaining.”

SLEA President Emily Quindry’s report stated that “the impact of online students returning to school buildings has been more significant than originally anticipated,” adding that “some of these students need more time to adjust and learn school readiness behaviors.”

Quindry mentioned several payroll issues that have begun to feel like lots of extra work for employees trying to get paid. She added that she wanted to “make (sure) the Board is aware that certified staff have not regained all of the Trust that was lost between SLEA members and District Administrators during the past year or two. We need to continue to work together and keep building that trust.”

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