

SOUTH LANE

- B O A R D N E W S -



Regular Session February 5, 2024

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

The South Lane School Board began its Monday, Feb. 5 meeting one member shy of its full capacity, a shortage that would be remedied by the end of the evening.

In a 4-2 vote following interviews of five applicants for the Board's open seat, Jeff Gowing was appointed to fill the vacancy at Position 7. The position had been vacated with the resignation of Tina Murphy on Jan. 8.

Murphy, who was elected last May and has held office since July, cited the purchase of a home outside the District as the reason for her resignation.

Gowing, who most recently served as Cottage Grove's mayor and offered a long list of community involvements during his interview, was chosen from a group that also included Susan Lawn, Joseph Lengele, Angel Reeves, and Brittney Stewart.

Each candidate was asked the same seven questions, one by each sitting board member and two from Board Chair Taylor Wilhour. Wilhour explained that the Board would choose its new colleague using a process that had recently been utilized by Eugene's 4J District to select a new member from a similarly large group of candidates.

The candidates were given five minutes to make an opening statement. They were then asked about their involvement in other community organizations and the school system; their biggest strengths and weaknesses; about any scheduling conflicts with school board meetings and preparedness; about the biggest challenges facing the District, and about school-related issues of particular importance to them. They were then given time to make closing comments.

Lawn, a mother of four and past member of boards for the Church of the Nazarene and Oak Park School, said she filed because she was concerned about the community. She said that the respect and inclusion of all students was one of her big concerns and that curriculum at the elementary level was an area of particular interest.

Lengele spoke of a 13-year teaching career and 10 years in the Army including a tour of Iraq in which he was seriously wounded (and would later have to "teach myself everything over again"). He cited graduation rates as a big challenge and vaping and drug use on campus as a major issue. He cited student achievement as a concern.

“We’re putting kids out there and expecting them to get jobs, but we’re not setting them up for success,” he said.

Gowing, a fourth-generation Cottage Grove graduate and retired millwright, listed his time as mayor and city councilor, representing the CG Community Foundation, American Legion and Veterans Legacy as involvements. Community connections were cited as one of his strengths.

“I know a lot of people, and I can interact with lots of different kinds of people,” he said. “And even if we don’t agree, we can still have a respectful conversation.”

Gowing listed building maintenance as an area of interest and the District’s budget as a concern.

Angel Reeves has served as secretary for London School’s Parent Club. She also listed efforts to create a mental health collaboration to work with Cottage Grove’s interim Police Chief to support to ensure that officers have the mental health support they need as an accomplishment. Reeves listed collaborative problem solving, which “supports folks in developing skills to identify your own concern and of the other down to its core,” as an area of interest.

Brittney Stewart said South Lane was the first board she’s applied to be part of, that she’s interested in all aspects of the District and wants to work to correct a perceived disconnect between the Board and the community.

After the interviews, Board Chair Wilhour said that each Board member would vote by paper ballot for their preferred candidate. If one candidate got four votes, Wilhour said, a motion to appoint them would be voted upon by the Board. If not, a second ballot would include two choices from each sitting board member.

The second circumstance eventually happened, with one candidate getting three votes in the first round. The second round found Gowing with the required four votes, leading to his appointment.

Board Member Duane Taddei lamented that the process would not involve the nomination and second of a candidate, then a vote. Wilhour reiterated that he’d modeled the process after a recent effort at 4J, which included even more candidates and an “even more contentious” Board than South Lane’s. Taddei made a motion to discuss the appointment at a future meeting, a motion that was voted down by the Board and followed by Gowing’s appointment.

Gowing was sworn in toward the end of a meeting that also included a report from Lane ESD Superintendent Tony Scurto, an update from Superintendent Yvonne Curtis, and a report about graduation rates and other data from Assistant Superintendent Brian McCasline.

Curtis detailed that Scurto convenes area superintendents monthly in the spirit of collaboration. He came to the Board to seek its authorization of the second year of a two-year service plan.

The ESD, or Education Service District, offers services such as special education, technology and administrative services supports in addition to its operation of Lane School, which works with students that each have an Individualized Education Plan, or IEP.

Scurto detailed an emphasis on social emotional learning as one of Lane ESD’s key initiatives recently. South Lane partners in a consortium with 4J and Springfield School District, he said, and has shown great involvement in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

Lane ESD’s one-year service plan was supported unanimously by the Board.

During her report, Curtis stated that the progress report regarding District goals – which would begin the Board’s evaluation of her own performance – had been scheduled on Jan. 22 but was cancelled due to the recent ice storm. She stated that the Board would likely need to extend her evaluation process past its March 1 deadline, which was acceptable to Board Leadership.

An executive session was added to the Board’s schedule on March 18 to discuss the progress report, after which a board discussion will be held. Wilhour will ultimately draft a summary report for Curtis’ evaluation, which the Board will vote on at its March 22 meeting.

Curtis also reported that the District is up and running after the ice storm and all its challenges,

lauding district staff for its tireless efforts during a trying time. She said the District will not be required to make up the instruction time lost to the storm.

During his report, McCasline talked about the milestones for data gathering undertaken by the District. This data, he pointed out, is increasingly used to identify students “that historically don’t perform well.”

The District regularly monitors attendance, its graduation rate, and the rate of ninth-grade students on track to graduate in four years, McCasline said. The current four-year graduation rate remained unchanged at 72 percent.

“The reason our goals matter is that we strive to create a culture and climate of care and belonging, and of raising academic achievement,” he said, “working to bridge students’ strengths, passions and interests.”

“We believe that continuing focus on these areas will see more students graduate,” he said.

The next Regular Session meeting will be on March 4, 2024.

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