

MEETING MINUTES

VERNONIA SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD of DIRECTORS Workshop Meeting – October 16, 2021

CALL TO ORDER: A Workshop of the Board of Directors of Vernonia School District 47J, Columbia County, Oregon was called to order at 9:04 a.m. virtually. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

Board Present: Stacey Pelster, Javoss McGuire, Amy Cieloha, Joanie Jones, Susan Wagner, Scott Rickard and Greg Kintz. BOARD PRESENT

Board Absent: None. BOARD ABSENT

Staff Present: Aaron Miller, Superintendent and Barb Carr, Administrative Assistant STAFF PRESENT

Visitors Present: Steve Kelley, OSBA. VISITORS

Steve Kelley revisited the definition of collaborative governance. *“Collaborative Governance utilizes effective partnerships to learn and lead together in an environment of trust and respect with a shared focus on equitable student outcomes through collective responsibility, accountability, and support.”* DEMSP TRAINING SESSION #2 – SHORT PROGRAM

This key phrase which focuses on learning and leading together is the focus for this 2nd training session of the short DEMSP Scholarship program. The Board will be looking at strengths and areas of growth within the environment of trust and respect.

A quick check in on the Superintendent evaluation process was held. Stacey Pelster shared:

- Evaluation was held last June
- Superintendent has created and the Board approved two goals for 2021-22
- Work will take place on the creation of a third goal.

Steve Kelley reminded the Board that setting Superintendent goals must take place in public session. The goals can come from previous evaluations in the areas of emphasis or from the District goals and Superintendent work to support the District goal. Check-ins with the Superintendent are the most important aspect of the evaluation process. Get these on the calendar every other or every third month. This can be done in executive session and is very informal and should take no more than 30 minutes.

Board Self-Assessment (BSAS) Results: Steve Kelley shared that OSBA partnered with a top researcher in monitoring board governance and created the new survey tool. The research basically comes out in the 12 standards included in the assessment tool. Some of the standards are advanced and some are foundational which are referred to as “power standards”.

The summary page was shared showing the colored categories referenced on the graphs. Green – accomplished, Blue – effective, Yellow – developing, and Red – ineffective.

Vernonia’s assessment results were reviewed. The top three Strongest Standards were:

- #9 - Systems Training
- #11 - Board Member Conduct Ethics and Relationship with Superintendent
- #12 - Budgeting and Financial Accountability.

The top three Areas of Growth standards were:

- #2 – Community Engagement
- #4 – Accountability
- #1 - Vision Directed Planning

Greg Kintz asked for Steve Kelley’s opinion in comparing this BSAS with previous BSAS done by our Board. According to Steve it is hard to compare the two as the assessment tool has changed.

Scott Rickard shared it was difficult to complete some of the assessment questions due to the fact that he didn't feel like he had significant information having only attended a few meetings. He didn't want to arbitrarily select without adequate knowledge. Steve Kelley agreed that it can be difficult for new board members to respond.

Review of Individual Standards:

Standard #11 – Board Member Conduct, Ethics and Relationship with Superintendent. *The Board recognizes that it is essential to have a clear, mutual understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of the Board and the Superintendent. The Board supports and practices team building as an essential part of this relationship.*

This is the foundation, if a Board can't do this well, it's hard to do other standards well. This is a power standard. Discussion was held on various statements within this standard.

Q71: Each member of the board understands and respects the distinction between the board's responsibilities and the superintendent's duties.

Q72: The board and superintendent trust and respect one another.

Stacey Pelster felt this is developing due to newer board members. Individual board members are meeting monthly with the Superintendent and this is helpful in building trust. It is important to have the communication so that there can be trust. She appreciates the Superintendent reaching out to the community.

Aaron Miller shared that the interaction with the community is not necessarily new but is being addressed in different ways. Unfortunately none have proven to be very effective. He stated that he doesn't feel trust and does not believe this is due to the newness of board members. He stated it is important to address the realities of the responses given to be able to move forward.

Javoss McGuire shared that in a small community, there are responsibilities in more areas, and lines are easily crossed.

Greg Kintz suggested perhaps another training in Roles and Responsibilities is needed. Through recent trainings quite a bit of information has been provided on crossing lines, he was surprised at the responses. The superintendent has done a lot of community outreach but feels the Board could do more of this outside the regular meetings.

Amy Cieloha shared that she would like to see less resistance when the board and the superintendent have different ideas. She would like to see an area of trust and respect and not the barriers that go up between the board and the superintendent. Steve Kelley shared that when you get into this situation, always ask yourself if this is "board work" or "superintendent work". Once the decision is made as to whose work it is then respect the decision. If it falls into a grey area, it is important to state that it is in a grey area, and determine who will address it.

Joanie Jones shared that this is the 2nd survey she has done and she answered questions differently this time. There are more issues and controversy on the board at this time than she's ever seen before. She also feels the chats and meetings offered to the community, although not attended well, are effective and important to continue.

Wrapping up the discussion on this area, Steve Kelley suggested creating a Board/Superintendent operating agreement.

Q73 – Board members represent the interests of the entire district.

Stacey Pelster feels that through the varying opinions of board members they are representing the interests of the entire district.

Susan Wagner shared that it is important for the board to not just listen to what we are hearing from a small circle of friends. Our community is big and it is important when thinking about how to respond that the board thinks of the entire group.

Aaron Miller shared that the number one reason for all decisions he makes is the impact it will have on students. Secondly, how it impacts the staff. Staff consistently are the highest number of participants at board meetings and community chats. They are there because they care about our students. It is critical that all concerns be conveyed to the superintendent when board members have these conversations with community members. He reminded board members that this is work that he does in his office not in board meetings. If something is large enough, it will come to a board meeting.

Standard #2 – Community Engagement - The Board recognizes that all members of the community are stakeholders in the success of their schools. The Board engages the community using a reciprocal advocacy process that creates and sustains meaningful conversations, system connections, and feedback loops across the breadth of their community. The Board supports collaborative partnerships and new types and levels of community participation in schools.

Q12 – The board ensures that vision and goals are collaboratively developed with input from staff, parents, students, and the broader community.

Amy Cieloha questioned how the board builds relationships to collaboratively work together with staff? Stacey Pelster noted that some first steps were taken when Board members attended the back to school in-service with staff during the Breaking Down the Walls training.

Greg Kintz asked what can be done in the future to get to know staff better?

Steve Kelley reminded all that this is not individual board members interacting with staff it is an exercise in how the entire board interacts with staff. Individual interactions, by policy and best practices, should run through the superintendent. Individually, board members have no power, collectively as a board they do.

The work completed last Spring with the District Learning Team (DLT) to develop and create the District Priorities is a great example of this. To make this systemic, regardless of change in board or superintendent, the expectation is to sit down periodically three times a year with district leaders to look at data and review priorities. It is important that the board identify what data they want to monitor.

Aaron Miller shared the DLT is a well-rounded group and the discussions held were helpful in moving the District forward. Continuing these types of conversations around reviewing data is a great opportunity to have meaningful interaction with staff. Also the Strategic Planning meetings are coming up. This is another way to get to know staff and community.

Q13 – The board recognizes and celebrates the contributions of school and community members to school improvement efforts.

It was noted that having the Stadium Campaign report at the board meeting was important but comments were made about bringing in more to celebrate what is happening in the schools.

Q14 – The board is responsive and respectful to community inquiry and feedback.

Amy Cieloha shared that discussions around public comment and how the board can respond has been discussed.

Steve Kelley responded that they talk, you listen, which is what you are coached to do. The board does not engage. He offered a suggestion of building into the agenda a Board Reflection on Public Comment time. There is no engagement with the individual that spoke. It's a time that the board could verify who will address the individual, likely the superintendent but the conversation would bring closure to their comment. The best placement for a reflection would be at the end of the meeting. This way it doesn't bring the commenter back into the conversation.

It was confirmed that the reflection time would not offer any solutions or responses, but merely acknowledge who spoke and identify who is going to review the topic presented in public comment. Scott Rickard stated that it essentially comes down to board discipline to keep it from dissolving.

Stacey Pelster suggested making a change to her public comment verbiage which is read at the beginning of the public comment section.

Standard #4 Accountability - The Board holds high expectations for the learning of each and every student and holds themselves and the District accountable for reaching those results. The board provides strategic direction in the development of the District's mission, vision, and goals. The Board adopts policy and resources that align with District's strategic vision and goals. The Board monitors and holds accountable the superintendent to implement the District's strategic vision and goals.

Steve Kelley shared that through the training last spring the board will be developing a monitoring program. This allows the board to sit down with staff and look at the big picture data.

Q27 – The board models a culture of high expectations throughout the district.

Scott Rickard asked for an example, in what other boards have done to model such a culture. Steve Kelley passed this question first to fellow board members for comment.

Joanie Jones shared she feels by looking at data the board is conveying their expectations. Greg Kintz shared that going through the process of developing District priorities and goals.

Steve Kelley indicated that by working with staff, talking about student achievement, the board is conveying their priorities. In his prior district they scheduled walkthroughs for the board to see what was happening in the classroom. At first it scared the teachers and they were reminded that the board was not there to evaluate.

It can be the board's expectation to have all students reading a grade level. The board does the work to set the expectation but it would not be the board's work to determine how to get there. Aaron Miller stated that when data is shared at board meetings it is very appropriate for the board to ask questions. Steve Kelley echoed this by saying that board members should be encouraged to ask questions. This models high expectations by showing interest. It would be best however, to get into the details with staff at a monitoring meeting.

Steve shared the District Priorities monitoring plan around the three focus areas.

1. Focus Area: improve academic proficiency levels for all students. Getting together to have powerful conversations around data.
2. Focus Area: Career Pathways
3. Focus Area: Inclusive/Equitable Programs and Opportunities

Aaron Miller stated that these three priorities are the anchor for his strategic planning meetings. They have been shared with staff three times during professional development this year, and the administration is embedding them into professional learning community work with teachers.

Once the strategic plan is done, it belongs to the superintendent but is shared with the board. The board looks for alignment and if not they give feedback to the superintendent to align with district priorities and expectations. The board gets periodic updates which is one way to show accountability. The board can also give feedback during the superintendent's evaluation. A third way to have accountability is through monitoring meetings with staff.

Steve Kelley offered suggestions for concepts for developing board goals.

1. Develop a monitoring program
 - Collaborative staff work sessions (DEMSP) - public meetings
 - Community engagement plan
 - Periodical Strategic Plan update (old vs new)
 - Superintendent evaluation system – (check ins especially)
2. Develop Board Operating Agreement with the Superintendent – officially adopted, reviewing every July and adopting again if changes are necessary.
 - Emphasis on the positive achievements
 - Reflection on public comments

3. Leadership Transition - The board will spend a lot of time with this process. There is a lot of work to be done over next 4 or 5 months. The DEMSP work can wait until later in the year after the superintendent transition work is done or the board can try to both at the same time. Recommendation is to focus on leadership transition and finish the DEMSP work in April and May which could possibly involve new leadership. There are two more sessions in the DEMSP program training.

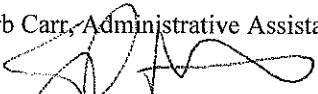
The board was in consensus of having a full plate and deferring the remaining DEMSP meetings until after the bulk of the leadership transition is complete.

Aaron Miller suggest getting the dates on the calendar regardless of when.

ADJOURNED: Workshop adjourned at 11:53 p.m.

ADJOURNED

Submitted by Barb Carr, Administrative Assistant



Board Chair



District Clerk

