

EEA Statement to 4J School Board  
10/20/21

Good evening, members of the Board and Superintendent Vandercar. My name is Sabrina Gordon and I am president of Eugene Education Association.

It's hard to know where to begin, given all of the stress our system is under right now as we try to provide the "return to normal" that everyone hoped was coming this year. We are experiencing the most stressful time any of us have ever encountered in education. As a teacher, when things get overwhelmingly difficult it helps to focus on the most important lessons we want our students to learn. Lessons such as:

- Critical thinking, including asking questions
- Perseverance in problem solving, even when it's difficult or uncomfortable AND
- Self-advocacy, including asking for help when they need it

We teach these skills because they are necessary in order to create a thriving community. As the adults in the 4J community, we need to ask ourselves whether we're practicing these fundamental skills that we teach our students, especially during this stressful time. Let's check ourselves.

#### **Are we thinking critically about the situation?**

Our superintendent did when she found ways to relieve pressure in the short term by giving educators more planning time. And now let's continue to think - what would relief look like for educators providing special education services? How can 4J support them through this stressful time, and allow them to better focus on students?

#### **Are we asking questions?**

Educators appreciate district staff who are asking questions about how to help. Educators also appreciate members of this board who ask questions. Questions lead to better understanding. This practice is the job of community leaders; and should be encouraged rather than discouraged.

#### **Are we staying engaged in problem-solving, even when it's difficult or uncomfortable?**

In our schools I see educators and building principals continuing to show up for students every day, even when it's difficult.

I've seen this board staying engaged in difficult issues and working through them, even when it's uncomfortable. It is not your job to say yes all the time or to make the work look easy.

I believe it is important for district staff to be present and engaged at the board level, too. Teachers and principals don't get to stay home when faced with questions or disagreements. District admin need to be present here to answer questions and engage with the officials elected by our community.

And the final system self-check: **Are we asking for help when we need it?**

We never want our students to pretend they're OK when they're not. If something isn't working we want them to advocate for themselves and ask for help solving the problem.

As a school system, are we being transparent enough with parents and the community about the difficulties we're experiencing this year, so that if and when we ask for help, they will be supportive and not surprised?

I've seen communication about bus driver shortages. And tonight I heard the superintendent talk about other needs as well. That's a good start. But does our community have a clear picture of how staffing shortages are impacting our ability to support student behavior needs? Our ability to provide quality instruction? Our ability to ensure COVID safety protocols and mental health supports?

Educators are past pretending that all is well. Staffing shortages have increased the burden on everyone who remains, and people are spread too thin. Our community needs to know this reality so they'll be ready to stand together with us when we ask for help.