

EEA Statement to 4J Board  
10-6-21

Good evening members of the board and Superintendent Vandercar. My name is Sabrina Gordon and I am president of Eugene Education Association. I know it's only the first week of October, but unfortunately it's not too early to say, "Wow - what a school year this has been!"

Every day our schools are dealing with staffing shortages, substitute shortages, nursing shortages, not enough space, not enough time, and legal expectations to provide services that frankly we don't have the resources to provide. We cannot and should not pretend that all is well. School systems across the state and across the nation are struggling in the wake of COVID, and so is 4J.

As is to be expected in a crisis, people are stepping in wherever they're needed. Teachers on Special Assignment who serve in critical support roles downtown are stepping back into classrooms to sub or providing virtual support for students in quarantine. Teachers in buildings are subbing for colleagues instead of planning during their prep period, Special Education staff are supporting students during their case management time and their lunch time. Nurses are taking on entire extra schools (hundreds of additional students) when there aren't enough nurses to go around. And building principals are stepping into all of these roles and more, right alongside their staffs.

Everyone working with students knows that there is no pause button when it comes to the needs of our kids. We must be fully present for them at all times and responsive to what they show us they need. This is challenging even during normal times, given the large class sizes and high caseloads that have become our "normal." And with the stresses that people are currently under, the challenge is even greater. The educators on the ground, in classrooms and health rooms working with students are best equipped to know what will help and what they need in order to continue being fully present.

Thankfully, 4J administration sees this reality. I have witnessed the superintendent, members of her team, including the directors of Elementary, Secondary, and Student Support Services, and school board members taking stock of how things are going, asking "How can I help?" and most importantly, listening to the answers and acting on them. Evidence of this was mentioned by Superintendent Vandercar during her report a few minutes ago. On behalf of the members of EEA I thank 4J for that.

I want to encourage the board and 4J administration to continue this practice throughout the school year. Keep asking, "How can I help?" Ask more often. Keep listening to the answers. And commit to staying in this together.

There are opportunities in every crisis, if only we look for the lessons and resist the easy path of returning to "normal" when the crisis seems to have passed. Our "normal" was not as good as it could be. Our students deserve smaller class sizes, smaller case loads for Special Education

services, a stronger focus on relationships and on a sense of community and belonging. They deserve these things now, during this crisis, and forever.

People can do amazing things when they feel valued and supported. Our educators and specialists deserve to be decision makers and co-creators of the school experience we build for our students. Keep listening to them and thank you for doing so.