

Board of Directors Meeting
School District 4J, Lane County
District Office
200 North Monroe Street
Eugene, Oregon 97402
Monday, April 25, 2022

NOTICE: The meeting will be open to the public via live broadcast on KRVM 1280-AM and 98.7 FM, the internet at www.4j.lane.edu/stream, or via Zoom Webinar at <https://zoom.us/j/97396578668?pwd=LzBRReEpqZ0JxRzVpaVdlQ3h5UFVzd09>

4:00 PM
4:00–5:45 p.m. Board Work Session (recess for Budget Meeting) 7:45–10:00 p.m. Board Work Session

- I. **4:00–5:45 p.m. Board Work Session:** Interview Finalists for Board Vacancies **2**
Recess for Budget Committee Meeting from 6:00-7:30 p.m.
7:45–10:00 p.m. Board Work Session: Interview Finalists for Board Vacancies
- II. Call to Order, Roll Call
- III. Adjourn

THIS MEETING WILL BE BROADCAST OVER KRVM-AM (1280)

INFORMATION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING:
Closed Captioning is available during Board meetings through a zoom live feed which is also displayed at in-person meetings.



ITEM FOR INFORMATION – WORK SESSION

Date of Meeting

April 25, 2022

Title

Interview Finalists for Board Vacancies

Presenter

Kerry Delf, Chief of Staff

Description

The Eugene School Board has identified finalist candidates for appointment to the board, and is slated to select two to appoint next week.

The board is seeking to fill two vacancies on the board. Following the resignation of two elected directors, the remaining board members must appoint two district residents to complete their terms, serving through [June 2023](#). The positions will be up for election in [May 2023](#). School board positions are non-partisan and are not connected to any specific region.

A total of 38 community members applied for appointment to the board and four later withdrew from consideration. Applicants were invited to speak briefly to the board on [April 20](#) about their interest in being appointed.

After considering candidates' applications and statements, board members conducted several rounds of balloting to identify their preferred candidates to move forward for further interviews and consideration for appointment.

The finalist candidates are:

Andrew Ross
Carlos Sequeira
Daniel Patrick Isaacson
Jennifer Jonak
Keerti Hasija Kauffman
Michelle Hsu
Thomas Hiura
Tom Di Liberto

A ninth finalist candidate the board selected to move forward, Deborah Dailey, withdrew from consideration following the [April 20](#) board meeting.

The board plans to interview the finalists in a work session on [Monday, April 25](#). On [Wednesday, April 27](#), the board is scheduled to hold a special meeting to ballot to select two candidates to appoint to the vacancies.

More information & meeting videos: <https://www.4j.lane.edu/2022/04/school-board-finalists-2022/>



**EUGENE SCHOOL BOARD WORK SESSION
APRIL 25, 2022**

School Board Finalist Interviews

There are two open positions on the Eugene School District 4J Board of Directors. In accordance with state law, the board will appoint two district residents to serve through June 30, 2023.

The application for appointment was open from Thursday, March 31, to Monday, April 18 at 8 a.m. A total of 38 community members submitted applications and four later withdrew from consideration.

The board selected nine finalists to move forward for interviews and consideration for appointment, and one withdrew following the board’s selection.

Each of the eight finalist candidates has been scheduled for an interview on Monday, April 25. Applicants are scheduled in the following order.

4:00–6:00 p.m.

Keerti Hasija Kauffman p. 3
Tom Di Liberto p. 8
Carlos Sequeira p.13
Andrew Ross p.16

7:45–10:00 p.m.

Michelle Hsu p.17
Jenny Jonak p.18
Thomas Hiura p.20
Daniel Patrick Isaacson p.25

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for two-sided printing*

Name: Keerti Hasija Kauffman**Occupation:**

Director, International Partnerships, Teaching Strategies

How long have you lived in the school district?

10 years

Why are you applying to be a 4J school board member?

I am applying to be a 4J board member because I have been working in educational development in international communities for so many years, that I feel that it's time I bring some of that same passion and commitment, and hopefully lessons and understandings, to impacting and shaping the community in which I live. Plus, I'm raising two Eugenic children, and I want to give them as much of myself in terms of my strengths, and passions, and abilities to contribute to their learning and educational journey. In doing so I hope to contribute to making their schools experience as joyful, nurturing, accepting, pluralistic, and exploratory as it could be—for their well-being, and for the well-being of this growing community.

What strengths do you think you will bring to the school board?

I believe that I will contribute several strengths to the board including my professional work experience, my strengths in relationship and consensus-building, and experience from my actual education programs.

Professionally, I've worked twenty years as international education programs and markets specialists—meaning that most of my career has been spent connecting or designing education programs to meet the contextualized learning and teaching needs, environments, and cultures of local populations and communities. I've worked professionally in more than thirty countries, and my work experience has ranged from early childhood education to adult and continuing education, and covered areas as broad as career and technical education, arts education, engineering, assessment, business education, non-formal education programming to post-war democracy and peace-building programming. I have conducted teacher training in social studies education; created content and written curricula; conducted standards alignments; developed dozens of projects plans and proposals; and written extensively on education development, best practices, and socio-economics within the United States and internationally. I believe, having a (literal) global outlook and perspective from which to share and frame recommendations will be a significant strength.

I have a proven track record of developing strategic partnerships to support education activities domestically and internationally, including working with schools, governmental agencies, assessment organizations, corporate businesses, development funding institutions, and non-governmental organizations. The personal connections I have made across several countries have fueled my commitment towards supporting improvements in education programming and continue to give meaning to the work that I do. I believe my success is built on my ability to engage with partners in a culturally nuanced and informed manner and to advocate for local education outcomes. I believe these abilities to make and sustain relationships and build programs based on consensus are two big strengths I can contribute to the board.

I have a masters degree in International Education and Training from American University in Washington DC where I focused on looking at how systems of education can be constructed in a culturally nuanced manner and how development planning is undertaken for large-scale project

implementations; a secondary focus of my graduate education was on organizational behavior and development which overlaps with DEIA programs and psychology. I believe that having a strong educational foundation from which to look at and frame education policy, programs, and behaviors, will be an additional strength I hope to contribute to the board.

What are some of your particular interests or concerns?

I have been involved in education development for so many years, and am interested or concerned about so many areas, but a few in particular that stand out include the following:

- Driving real inquiry-based education programming and learning culture within the schools community. I was raised in a very diverse city—racially, ethnically, economically, religiously—and come from a public schools culture that was rooted in connected-mindsets and curiosity culture. My first-generation, immigrant family became an integral part of this schools community, and it was through my teachers and administration, that I developed a love for the world and our local connections as a community to this world. Eugene is growing in terms of diversity and socio-economic status—I would love it if the schools community would grow in sync in terms of developing and/or setting an inquiry-based culture that can lead students to greater exploration of themselves and the world, and in doing so, possibly to greater acceptance mentality. This can be done through active programming, training, and even through leading by example, and policy shifts.

- Ensuring an equitable allocation of resources.

I have worked in many communities where resources often go to the most vocal or involved constituents; in my experience, it's rarely the most vulnerable communities that have the time or know-how to advocate for themselves, and therefore, are not always given their fair share of resources. I've been in Eugene for a decade and some of these divisions are so clearly visible. I'm a firm believer in driving educational and societal growth through an equity and justice framework that takes into account what individual communities need to succeed and would really like to address some of these concerns around increasing disparities through budget reviews or policy changes.

- Exploration-based instruction and programming.

Having worked in education development in more than 30 countries, I personally believe one of the greatest advantages of the US education system is the idea of "choice" we (are supposed) to instill in our students. Countries all over the world track students into particularly narrow subject streams and career paths at a young age, sometimes alleviating time for exploration of other skills sets. The US allows for greater skills and subject exploration at the higher education level, but I would be so interested to see if there were possibilities of exposing students as young as elementary and middle school levels to as many subjects and career paths and options as a means of self-exploration, yes, but also set up the possibility of a future career path. I think innovation comes from passion or necessity, and the more exposure we allow students to options for explorations, the more we set ourselves up as a society for future innovative growth and research.

- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access.

I believe that Eugene is on a precipice of growth with newer communities of immigrants coming in, and am concerned that these new groups along with other vulnerable communities will continue to face a host of disparities caused by the current socio-economic and political factors. DEIA is a passion of mine, but more importantly, I believe a focus on DEIA is going to be a necessity within our education system in ensuring the health of ALL of our local communities and groups.

What do you think are the two most important issues confronting the board in the next two years?

I imagine that the 4J board is going to be dealing with a host of extremely important issues from setting policy and budgets, to hiring of 4J administrative staff, and Eugene is certainly not isolated from national and global events that are affecting all communities. In my opinion, two of the most important issues I believe are going to be facing the board include the following:

A continuation or increase of trauma-informed classrooms and schools.

Due to the continuation and uncertainty caused by the pandemic, economic turmoil that has affected local families, increased social and emotional isolation, displacement and precarity caused by environmental factors like fires or food scarcities, funding and budgeting constraints often affecting already impoverished or under-resourced communities, and the turning of local education communities into the frontlines for the current culture wars, I think it is likely that 4J will continue to see the influx of students and educators that are dealing with increased trauma and stressors. These traumas and stressors are going to greatly influence the children's ability to learn in traditional environments unless adequate supports are in place to address the emotional and health needs required before real learning can take place. Teachers—who are already tasked with providing emotional and social supports beyond their teaching and administrative responsibilities—will be dealing with their own trauma and stressors compounded with addressing learning needs for classrooms with students who are, in turn, experiencing their own array of stressors. I think the 4J board will (and should be) tasked with addressing how best we could alleviate some of the stressors on the school system, and also focus on how classrooms and schools can be reclaimed as secure, supportive spaces for all students.

Access to quality post-secondary career programming and options.

I believe that with the current state of inflation, the increased global economic uncertainty, and the state and costs of higher education, that one of the most important issues facing the board in the next two years will be to make sure that students have options and connections for post-secondary careers and occupations. I believe that students should have credible “hope” for their futures—that they can gain sense of economic security, and even pursue a passion—and that “school” isn't just a meaningless path to nowhere, and I believe as influencers in policy and education, we owe it to our children to make them feel as they will always have a place as contributing members of a society. I believe the 4J board will be dealing with budgetary constraints, the dire state of unemployment, misinformation that will target ‘scapegoat’ communities for the state of such economic distress, and will have to work hard to continue to drive programming that ties schooling to post-schooling options, and to prioritize connections and policies that can demonstrate real, tangible options for our students.

Please describe your connection to Eugene School District 4J.

I am a resident of Eugene 4J and a mother to two students—a rising first grader and rising fourth-grader at Adams Elementary. My husband is professor at University of Oregon, and I work remotely for an early childhood education company based out of the state.

What does equity mean to you, as it relates to K–12 education?

Equity has always meant to me, that we need to provide children with the supports that they need, individually—and as part of a system—to succeed and achieve the best outcomes for themselves.

First, I believe that these “outcomes” can be achieved by all students provided the right supports and measures, and second, I believe we have a compelling duty as a society to understand what these differentiated supports and measures are, and to provide them to our children. Within the K-12 system, I believe equity to mean taking a deep, meaningful look at the individualized contexts in

which students are developing—their communities, their support structures, their home responsibilities, their access to resources, their individual learning styles, among other indicators—and to develop tailored programs that are going to provide the scaffolds and supports that these children require to address their unique needs.

Equity within the K-12 system, or “inequity,” rather—from beliefs and thought patterns both at the systemic and individual levels. I believe that for many years, school systems, and thought leaders have been stuck in a largely deficit-thinking mentality when it comes to addressing equity especially within the K-12 system—as if in some cases, that what is considered “low performing,” or ‘low achieving’ arbitrary measures are indicative of a larger community culture or worse, intellectual acumen, rather than results of a system that has failed to address overall economic, social, or cultural stressors that have been in play for decades. This deficit-thinking mentality, I believe, has led to a shifting—or shirking—of responsibility from administrators and policy makers to address such needs and in turn, increased these gaps and made “the systems” actually more inequitable in the process. I also have found this “deficit-thinking” mentality when it comes to performance indicators as they relate sometimes to some of our most vulnerable communities, including, for example, immigrants, or English-language-learners. I think the disproportionality of these communities along with others within the framework of ‘equity’ is problematic and believe that this “deficit-thinking” needs to be replaced with an ‘asset-based’ or strength-focused re-contextualizing of students’ abilities. For example, students who come from a dual-language, or non-English language household should not be penalized for lower scores on language tests, but rather rewarded and/or supported for achieving alternate outcomes that rightfully recognize the capacity it takes to master skills without the similar supports and advantages that are available to native English speakers. I think by re-framing equity in a lens that is supportive rather than reductive will go a long way in gaining buy-in or allies—both from community members who sometimes can view the system as a competition for resources, and from students who are often in need of the equity programming, but experience shame or fear repercussions for requiring additional support.

The final thing I want to say here on equity—as I could speak on this for days—is that I know that the main thing is that equity programming and systemic change is going to look different for every child and every community. Having said that, I have seen some communities in this world that are working to address societal inequities in a systemic manner with interesting results. For example, there are secondary schools in Singapore that are designed to accept only the low-scorers on standardized tests. To alleviate any shame associated with “a number,” these schools are equipped with the best equipment, the best counseling, the best resources, and are set up to ensure that students feel that they are valued as a member of society and can still have a strong career path ahead of them. How and whether these schools are succeeding are up for debate, but it is worthwhile examining ways in which other parts of the world are addressing plural societies and inequities to see if there are lessons to be learned.

If you were on the board, how would you see yourself contributing to the goals of diversity, equity and access in education?

If I were to be appointed to this board, I sincerely hope to have an opportunity to affect change or make inroads into the real, meaningful impact diversity, equity, and access programs and policies can have on the learning community and the larger Eugene community as well. Beyond sharing from personal my experiences as a bilingual, woman of color, child-of-immigrants, who is raising two biracial daughters, I see myself contributing to these goals in a number of ways including the couple I have listed below as examples.

Utilizing training tools and methodologies to review and provide oversight and recommendations to proposed programming.

I have a graduate degree in international education and training, and more than twenty years of experience designing educational programming that has to produce measurable indicators and metrics for change. While these metrics are different and aren't always in an enumerated matrix, all training programs should have some key Knowledge, Skills, and Attributes/Attitudes (KSAs) they are trying to achieve. Specifically around DEIA, my experience has shown that many programs put in place at an institutional/organizational and policy levels often amount to a checklist indicating a completion of a set of objectives or tasks rather than implying any meaningful change in behaviors, understanding, or impact on stakeholders. With the high stakes associated with DEIA—when if done ineffectively—can further disparities, cause additional stressors on already vulnerable children, and more importantly lead to health risks both for individuals and for the socio-economic health of communities—development of meaningful programming that truly takes into account the “inclusivity” portion of the diverse, equity-challenged, and differently-abled populations will be a key driver of success in education. I hope to be able to make recommendations to support these programs.

Applying a lens of new DEIA learning and teaching to new programs development.

While I've been working in education systems for the past decades, I've also remained a dedicated student of subjects that I am passionate about: DEIA being one of the top. I am an avid reader of thought leadership on DEIA, especially as it relates to education; the most recent book I have read is “Don't Look Away: Embracing Anti-Bias Classrooms,” by Dr. Iheoma Iruka. I have also worked towards certification in DEIA courses including an “Appreciating Differences” course for organizations through Korn-Ferry, and hope to be able to apply for a certification course on Diversity Management through Cornell University. I have also participated and held leadership positions on DEIA councils in several of the education companies where I have worked, (I am currently on the mentorship committee on the IDEA council at my job). Each of these positions has given me an opportunity to improve the paradigms in which I view the structures of education, the delivery of education programming, and often the institutional and organizational behaviors that can support or hinder the growth of DEIA initiatives and outcomes. I hope to be able to apply these different mechanisms and lenses to how DEIA is delivered in 4J and to contribute a healthy discussion on how best to achieve the outcomes outlined for our community by providing real examples and through the sharing of best practices.

Name: Tom Di Liberto**Occupation:**

Retired

How long have you lived in the school district?

34 years

Why are you applying to be a 4J school board member?

There are several key reasons. To mention a few of the most important, for the first time in many years we are starting to see perhaps a return to better, more stable state funding. We are beginning to emerge from a pandemic that has tested us all. 4J has made important steps in identifying educational inequity in our schools and how to rectify this problem. Our state and district are finally discovering that we have overused standardized testing to the detriment of our students. And we are also about to choose a superintendent that could help lead 4J back to national prominence. We are at an unprecedented, consequential mark in our district's history, and I believe I have the skills and background to contribute significantly to this transition. I want to be part of it.

What strengths do you think you will bring to the school board?

Above all, I believe my long experience in education would be a unique and significant benefit to the school board. My life's work has been in education, three years as an instructional aide, five years as a high school teacher in Los Angeles and San Francisco, and 31 years as a teacher in Eugene.

I realize the board's responsibilities do not include the day-to-day operations of the district. But so many of its decisions have immediate impact on the everyday experience of 4J's students and staff. Having someone on the board who has, in addition to being a 4J parent, had long, experiential contact with our schools, has worked with its students, families, and staff, and who has a practical understanding of how board decisions take shape in our schools would be informative and uniquely valuable.

In addition to my strength of experience, I've developed excellent listening and advocacy skills in my career, and I speak Spanish fluently. I've spent incalculable hours with students, parents, and staff to find solutions to sometimes vexing problems. I believe these communication skills and the inside view of 4J I've acquired over my career align well with board members' responsibilities.

What are some of your particular interests or concerns?

1. Community engagement: In order to truly meet the board's goals and provide an equitable education for all our students, we need to hear from all our communities. In doing so, we have to acknowledge that we don't all speak English, we don't have the same access to technology, our work hours are different, and we often communicate via diverse conduits. We have made progress in this area (elements of 4J's community input for SIA funds are an example), but we have to redouble and sustain our efforts in getting feedback and input from all our communities.

2. Teacher retention: Good teachers of course are the bedrock of our mission. Sadly now, too many teachers leave the profession frustrated and defeated. It's clear we need to reverse the national and local trend and find out why educators—especially people of color—leave, and how our district can retain them. Too often teachers who consider quitting cite the national and local

direction of the top-down, overly centralized decision making approach that robs educators of their creativity to truly meet their kids where they are, challenge them, and help them achieve their goals. Another piece that's missing is meaningful mentoring. The District used to provide a robust mentoring program in collaboration with the teachers' union, but this has been scaled way back. We need to prioritize teacher mentoring if we truly want to attract and retain talented, inspiring teachers.

3. Teaching the whole child: For some time now, music, art, world language, drama, and other enriching classes are often the first to go if a child's reading, math, or science score dips. Also, by focusing on only tested subjects—often double dosing them—we have increasingly marginalized the former core academic subject of social studies. At a time when we are concerned with students not graduating, we need to revisit elective offerings that can attract and keep many students in school and ensure they leave our District informed of the world around us.

4. Emerging from the pandemic: Many are concerned about student achievement expectations now that students have returned to the classroom. But it would be a mistake to look at benchmarks, realize our kids have lost ground, and then expect students to make up that ground by ramping up remediation too quickly. We need to allow our teachers to plan lessons that will help guide kids through this transition, reacquire their skills, and to reexperience the joy of learning.

I'm happy that the District has chosen to concentrate on the social-emotional piece of returning right now. But we should also resist federal pressure to use valuable instructional time for standardized tests. At the very least we should do as some districts have done and encourage opting out clearly and publicly by placing opt-out buttons on our main webpage.

5. Rebalancing our testing model: In my final year of teaching, I lost at least two full weeks training for, preparing for, and proctoring mandated standardized tests instead of teaching my students. Organizing this endeavor (scheduling, sharing computers, providing snacks, altering routines, etc.) also required countless staff hours. In addition, experts are finding more and more that the overuse of these tests negatively affects economically disadvantaged students and students of color disproportionately. This trend has robbed educators of valuable time they could use to craft more useful assessments whose results they'd have back promptly and could more practically guide instruction.

I am not anti-assessment. Ask any of the thousands of students I've taught in my career. Not one will tell you I did not assess their progress often and in various ways. We need a more balanced assessment system, one that doesn't rely so heavily on standardized exams, but invests in using teacher-crafted and building-based formative assessments that provide teachers, students, and parents with truly useful, much more timely data. This is the piece that has been sorely missing in the recent wave of assessment. District 4J has the staff expertise to be a leader in this area, but we must have the courage to take a smarter path.

What do you think are the two most important issues confronting the board in the next two years?

1. Mental health: The statistics on mental health in Lane County are dire, and recent rates of student depression, anxiety, unsafe behaviors, self-harm, and suicide in 4J have sent shocks through our community. I don't believe we were prepared for this as a district, and the news has compelled us to look closely at some of the decisions we've made regarding mental health in 4J.

I'm very pleased we are beginning to reexamine the way we support kids. A couple of examples: We need to hear directly from school counselors, school psychologists, and other specialists to make sure we are deploying their expertise wisely. We've discovered elements of their jobs could be redistributed to other licensed or classified staff so they can focus on this troubling emergency and to put in place procedures that will truly support our students. I also see that better, more intentional partnering with community organizations should bear fruit (something that didn't materialize after removing district mental health specialists eight years ago).

Until we meet this life or death crisis head-on and explore every avenue to solve it, this issue will be at the top of my list.

2. Achieving educational equity: The District's awareness of systemic inequalities and our commitment to eradicate them is a very positive, long overdue step. What needs to happen as a prerequisite is a more in-depth community conversation about how the Equity Tool impacts specific District policies and practices. I discuss this in later questions. But providing equitable educational opportunities to only some of our stakeholders is to fail as a district.

Please describe your connection to Eugene School District 4J.

My connections with the Eugene School District are broad and deep. My wife and I arrived in Eugene in 1987 and were both hired by School District 4J that fall to teach in the Spanish immersion program, my wife replacing the first grade teacher and I taking on the first class that was entering Monroe MS. I had to create a curriculum from scratch because there were very few secondary immersion programs in the country. There were huge challenges in finding and obtaining materials, some of which only existed outside the US (no internet then), but there was adequate funding and other supports at Monroe and District levels.

There was a lot in this district that impressed me when I arrived. 4J was nationally renowned as an innovator, and the district cultivated a vibrant culture that allowed schools and regions to create programs that offered diverse learning experiences for students. Students, families, and staff wanted to be a part of 4J to the point that I was one of only five licensed teachers hired by the district that year.

In my time at Monroe I served as a cooperating teacher for many student teachers, as a team and building leader on grade level operational teams, curriculum teams, and parent-teacher site-based management committees and fundraising/event planning groups. To this day I remain in touch with scores of former students and their families.

At the district level I participated on task forces for adopting curriculum in the three areas in which I am licensed (social studies, English language arts, and Spanish) as well as textbook adoption committees.

Since the early days of my experience with 4J, the district has experienced massive changes in the way schools are funded and overseen by the state and federal governments. I experienced this as the parent of a 4J student as well as an employee who tried to keep up with the funding reductions. In response to these shifts, I decided to also become active as an advocate for students and staff in the Eugene Education Association. I served as a building rep, a member of the Human and Civil Rights committee (instrumental in placing the first sexual orientation protections in the 4J-EEA contract), and as a member of the bargaining team, on which I served as chair for eight years. For seven years I also was the liaison between 4J and university teacher preparation programs, a unique and successful collaboration with 4J, EEA, and universities.

My work with EEA allowed me to learn about what was working and not working in 4J and to try to solve problems in many areas. This position involved countless discussions with teachers and building- and Ed Center-based staff on how to maximize staff efforts to educate students. Learning and working conditions were improved and stubborn obstacles were overcome in our discussions, in spite of the erosion of state financial support and misguided legislative attempts to reform education.

After 31 years of service to 4J, I retired in 2018. Since retiring and up until the time of the pandemic, I worked as a volunteer in the music department at Monroe MS and as a substitute teacher. I currently serve as a university supervisor of student teachers in 4J for the University of Oregon and am a member of the 4J Budget Committee.

What does equity mean to you, as it relates to K–12 education?

For me the ultimate goal in education is ensuring all students achieve their potential by providing what is necessary for each student to get there. As a teacher this has always been my goal. And when I was in the classroom, I learned quickly that determining what a student needed couldn't be derived from a single test score and that achieving that goal entailed much more than equal materials or technology, equal time, equal attention, or even equal feedback from me. A deeper, more differentiated approach is necessary in the classroom and goes far beyond what happens in that classroom.

I'm pleased that District 4J has recognized this formally and is beginning to put into place its Equity Tool to ensure all systems, procedures, and practices are reviewed using this lens. This cannot be seen as a short-term goal that can be checked off at some point in time. It will take anti-bias and other training for all staff and sustained, systematic engagement with our stakeholder groups to truly know how to reach students successfully.

A persistent examination of everything we do is absolutely necessary to make sure all students receive what they need to reach their potential.

If you were on the board, how would you see yourself contributing to the goals of diversity, equity and access in education?

Throughout my career in this district, I have witnessed and experienced the roadblocks that have kept us from achieving 4J's goals. I've seen first-hand how difficult it is for a district, a school, a department, or staff member to change perspective and behavior in the areas of diversity, equity, and access. Educating children has always been extremely challenging work, and the task has only become more complicated by many factors (a pandemic and its aftereffects being one of the most exasperating). I offer this as a partial explanation of why we aren't where we need to be in this realm—not as an excuse. I believe everyone, from every employee to every board member, we all have to change our views and practices regarding how we provide an equitable education for our students.

In the area of staff diversity, I would start with examining some of the factors teachers of color point to as stressors or reasons to quit (centralized decision-making, the obstacles to creativity in the classroom, and the lack of a robust mentoring program). Exit surveys and interviews would also be helpful in this area.

Regarding access, I'm delighted to see the board begin to ask the important questions about both student access to education and family access to schools and district systems. I believe part of this

change has been because the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to look more closely at this and revealed that when we do the hard work of assessing equitable access for students and families (asking the right questions in an effective manner), we do a better job of meeting those goals.

In addition to my views on how to achieve our equity goals in the preceding question, I'd add that my experience as an educator, a parent, and advocate in this district gives me a unique perspective that will help inform our discussion on diversity, equity, and access in education. I've seen what's been tried, what's been successful, and what has missed the mark.

Name: Carlos Sequeira**Occupation:**

Educator, School Administration

How long have you lived in the school district?

9 years

Why are you applying to be a 4J school board member?

I would be delighted to serve our community and join the current Board of Directors in their collaborative efforts to strive for improvement and achieve educational equity for all our students. I wholeheartedly believe in the core principles and the moral imperative to build educational systems that support our students to develop highly cognitive critical thinking skills, acquire mastery of content and build character qualities such as courage, integrity, concern, curiosity, and leadership. I am compelled to want to make a difference in our community for our students, for their future, for our future. So I want to invite our board to ask ourselves what are the dreams and beliefs that we have for our community, about our students, about our teachers, support staff, administrators, and elected leaders in our board rooms? Will our behavior and beliefs shape the kind of future we dream for our students? You see, I have the desire to make something happen, to change how things are, to create something that no one else has ever created before. I believe I can help make a difference.

What strengths do you think you will bring to the school board?

First and foremost my dedication and commitment to want to see our schools be the best they can be, and I want to give back to a community that has given me so much. The multifaceted nature of my experiences as an educator has helped me gain a deep sense of respect for all individuals, the willingness to collaborate with others, and the commitment to life-long learning. For almost three decades, I have been privileged to be part of diverse communities in both urban and rural settings. Every one of these communities has given me great appreciation and practical understanding of the complexities of our educational system and the urgency to meet the needs of all our students. And in my role as a board member, I want to continue to grow in my awareness, respect and appreciation for the richness that diversity of culture, beliefs, ideas, and experience offer an interdependent community such as the city of Eugene, where I have made my home for almost ten years now.

What are some of your particular interests or concerns?

I want to be part of a board that (1) Leads by Example and (2) Inspires a Shared Vision for our Community.

(1) I would love for our Board to begin by clarifying and affirming our core values, what we are about and then expressing them in a way that is authentically our own. Then let's align our shared values with our actions. Let's demonstrate through deeds and words how deeply committed we are to our beliefs, in what we say and we do, and how we behave, on and off our places of work. Let's take the necessary actions necessary to build consensus around our shared values. We cannot impose our values, policies or practices on others no matter how hard we try or how much power we have. Unless values are shared among all those who we work with or for, intense commitment is impossible. Leading by example is essentially about earning the right and the respect to lead through direct individual involvement and action.

(2) When we think about our community, what are the visions and dreams that come to our minds? As a school board, we must be confident in our abilities to make extraordinary things happen. Let's envision the future by imagining exciting and innovative possibilities. Let's gaze for a moment across the horizon of time. We are exactly where we are supposed to be. We created this reality. The reality that we are in. I am exactly where I thought I would be today, in front of you, both in my personal and professional life. The actions of my past have brought me here, I am not here by coincidence. The beliefs and actions of my past have brought me exactly where I am today. And today I get to dream with you, where do we want to be in three years, in five years, in ten years?

What do you think are the two most important issues confronting the board in the next two years?

1) Setting a vision where all students, staff and the parent community belong and (2) Addressing Mental/Emotional health for the adults and the students in our schools.

(1) I believe that together we can make this community a better place than how we found it. Let's pretend for a moment that we had nothing to do with the complexities of our current educational system that our students and our families have to navigate, the polarization, the finger pointing, the name calling, the anger, frustration, and disappointment that you and I are experiencing in our community. Let's pause and look around, and ask ourselves, what can I do, what will I do, to make this a better place? Let's gaze across the horizon of time and imagine the incredible, life and joy giving opportunities that are in store once we as a community arrive at our final destination, that place we dream of for ourselves and our children.

(2) Addressing the Social-Emotional and Mental Health of both adults and students in our schools. Now more than ever, building connections and relationships with all students should be a critical priority. This is informed by systems level commitments to social-emotional standards and ethnic studies standards which can serve as a road map for our district. But it is also something more basic and human: everyone needs to feel valued and have a sense of belonging. We need to acknowledge that these last two years many of our students experienced the traumatic experience of feeling disconnected to their schools and have experienced learning loss, many of them due to lack of access to good instructional experiences in their homes. They are coming to our schools oftentimes ill-equipped to handle stressful situations. Our teachers need our support and our students and their families need our guidance and understanding to ensure them we will do whatever is possible within our means to ensure the success of their children's education.

Please describe your connection to Eugene School District 4J.

I can relate at a personal level with this community. I have made Eugene my home for almost ten years now. I love the diversity of culture, beliefs, ideas, and experiences. I attended a K-12 school very similar to the immersion schools we have in this district. I was a language learner similarly to hundreds of students that attend our schools in Eugene. So I can relate with the parents and the student's experiences navigating the school system. I also attended a community college in Vancouver WA, a similar institution to Lane Community College, so I understand the need to provide our high school students with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in a post secondary career and education. I also attended a private university for my undergrad studies, George Fox University. I can relate with the families who are investing heavily in their efforts to ensure that our students come out prepared to navigate the education systems and rigor of highly competitive private institutions. And I can also relate with families and students who choose to send their high school graduates to state universities as I got my higher education degrees from two state institutions, Portland State University and the University of Oregon. And I am the proud

dad of two amazing young women who are graduating this year, one with a humanities degree in anthropology from the University of Oregon, and my youngest one with an engineering degree from Oregon State University. I can also relate very closely with our families and their children with exceptional needs. These last 6 years at Lane Education Service district I have been working closely with amazing colleagues serving our children in life skills classrooms at our Westmoreland campus, as well as similar teachers in classrooms both in Eugene in many other districts in our county. I know this does not in any way make me an expert in Special Education, but I am keenly aware of their needs and I can work well and closely with folks who know their craft and have a passion for some of our most vulnerable students. The time is now.

What does equity mean to you, as it relates to K–12 education?

Educational equity to me means that each and every student has access to the right resources they need to succeed at the right moment in their education, and removing any barriers that have historically and currently gotten in the way because of their group affiliation such as their race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, language, religion, family background, or family income or zip code. Many policymakers, researchers, district administrators, and teachers have taken up the cause of bringing “equity” among different groups of students—by race, income level, and disability status. I also see educational equity as the eradication of disparities or achieving “equal” academic outcomes among all student groups. It has also come to mean equal access to gifted programming, high-quality teachers, and high-quality curriculum.

If you were on the board, how would you see yourself contributing to the goals of diversity, equity and access in education?

In order for schools to break down barriers that block access to opportunity, as a board member I can model and help foster in our board room a learning environment that ensures that educators believe that all students can achieve at high levels. This often includes challenging people’s mindsets about race and bias and talking bluntly about longstanding practices that have kept students of color and students in poverty from accessing the same learning opportunities as their white and more affluent peers. I want to be a part of a Board of Directors who intentionally and explicitly foster community conversations about equity, and adopt policies and practices that aim to eliminate long standing gaps in access to high quality educational opportunities for students of color, students with disabilities, and low-income children.

Name: Andrew Ross**Occupation:**

Retired attorney

How long have you lived in the school district?

1991-present. In Harlow/Bertha Holt neighborhood since 2007.

Why are you applying to be a 4J school board member?

I have a son at Bertha Holt school and want to be involved in local education.

I am concerned about recent events at other school boards, in which people, often from outside the district and without children enrolled in the schools, have disrupted meetings and caused problems because of their political, anti-learning agenda.

I have recently retired from my profession and am interested in continuing to contribute to the community.

What strengths do you think you will bring to the school board?

I have a legal background and have broad experience in conflict resolution.

I read banned books.

What are some of your particular interests or concerns?

American history, government, law, literature

What do you think are the two most important issues confronting the board in the next two years?

Enabling the school system to thrive on a limited budget

Enabling traditionally marginalized populations to experience their school as a place where they are safe, heard and belong, while resisting the attempts of people with a political agenda to erase them and their histories from the curriculum.

Please describe your connection to Eugene School District 4J.

I have a son at Bertha Holt elementary. My eldest went to South Eugene High via International school. I also had a special needs daughter with an extreme IEP.

What does equity mean to you, as it relates to K-12 education?

Equity means that every student counts and is encouraged to thrive. The rights and needs of all, not just the privileged few or the homogenous majority, are respected and met.

If you were on the board, how would you see yourself contributing to the goals of diversity, equity and access in education?

By ensuring that these things are indeed a priority, by looking to see that all are included, and being prepared to answer the false claims that, for example, race-inclusive educational materials are "indoctrination" or that materials that support LGBT students are somehow not age-appropriate.

Name: Michelle Hsu

Occupation:

Librarian

How long have you lived in the school district?

6 years, 9 months

Why are you applying to be a 4J school board member?

I am interested in serving on the 4J school board as a parent and professional who has worked in educational environments. I'm a product of public education and am willing to dedicate my time, experience and willingness to learn to our schools. I feel I can contribute to and collaborate with the current members of the board as well as with our wider community.

What strengths do you think you will bring to the school board?

I am a trained librarian who has lived and worked in many places, both domestic and international. I am invested in education equity and will bring a diverse viewpoint to the district. I work with organizations serving the most vulnerable in our community with patience and compassion. I am adept at deescalation. I value deep listening, analysis and take the responsibility of making decisions to heart.

What are some of your particular interests or concerns?

I am interested in reading, digital literacy and feeding people. I am concerned that there are students and families who do not have their basic needs met. I would like to see librarians managing school libraries and to not consider libraries simply as repositories. Libraries are a place for community.

What do you think are the two most important issues confronting the board in the next two years?

The most important issue is ensuring that schools are safe spaces for everyone as defined by the collective school community. An equally important issue is teacher retention and engagement.

Please describe your connection to Eugene School District 4J.

I am a parent of two 4J students; one who attended briefly and one who has been enrolled for the last 6 years. I have volunteered in school libraries and for various 4J events. I was invited to catalog the print collection for the Chinese Immersion School library when they moved to their current location at Kennedy Middle School.

What does equity mean to you, as it relates to K–12 education?

Equity recognizes that opportunities are not the same for everyone. Equity in education means that the district provides flexibility and resources to eliminate barriers in order to accommodate individual needs and preferences. Where there is equity, underrepresented or marginalized groups are valued, welcomed and included in all spaces.

If you were on the board, how would you see yourself contributing to the goals of diversity, equity and access in education?

I think about diversity, equity and access in education as well as in relationship and community all the time. I practice dismantling stereotypes and beliefs that I was conditioned to accept both socially and culturally. My range of perspectives would be a contribution in supporting diversity, equity and access. Diverse and equitable schools will build a culture of access.

Name: Jennifer Jonak**Occupation:**

Attorney

How long have you lived in the school district?

4 years

Why are you applying to be a 4J school board member?

I'm a parent of three children in the 4J school system. I have volunteered with several schools that my children have attended in 4J, and for two years, I served as Co-Chair of the PTO for Charlemagne Elementary School. I am a class representative for the Parent Council with Village School and volunteer in the classroom. I am passionate about education and trying to make it more equitable and accessible, including for students with special needs. I have first hand experience parenting a child with a rare medical condition, as well as autism and learning disabilities, and going through the IEP and 504 processes. I'd like to further the district's goals of diversity, equity and inclusion, and I'd also like to be an additional voice and perspective for families of children with special needs.

What strengths do you think you will bring to the school board?

I have practiced law for 25 years. One of the most important jobs of an attorney is understanding different points of view and trying to navigate those disparate perspectives. In both my professional and personal life, I am versed in finding common ground, while not losing sight of the end goal: advancing objectives of real change and forward momentum.

I have served with several non-profits, including: Square One Village's Board of Directors, which focuses on expanding affordable housing options; member of the Council of Korean Americans; Steering Committee for Lane County's Campaign for Equal Justice, which fund raises for Legal Aid and tries to ensure equal access in the court system; Lane County Bar Association's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee; Chair of the Lane County Law Library Advisory Committee; President of Eugene Round Table Club; Co-Chair of Charlemagne Elementary School PTO from 2019-2021; President of the Friends of Eugene Public Library from 2010-2014; Director of Eugene Public Library Foundation from 2010-2015; West Cascades Fiddle Camp & Workshops Committee member to fundraise and put on a free/heavily discounted music camp in summer for children; Director of Oregon Bach Festival from 2013-2014; Chair of Events Committee for Eugene Symphony's 50th Anniversary from 2013-2014.

I also serve as a volunteer attorney for the Lane County Public Defender's office and have done pro bono work assigned by the Oregon federal court.

In 2019, I graduated from Emerge Oregon's seven-month program, which trains women to run for political office. The goal is to increase the number of women leaders from diverse backgrounds and change the face of leadership to have policies that are responsive to all.

What are some of your particular interests or concerns?

As the mother of a child with special needs, and someone who is neuro-diverse myself, I am interested in the Special Education programs/processes in the school district and how we best serve students with special needs. This includes Special Ed support that will provide long-term benefits to the students, not just ones that may create short-term solutions to the detriment of a

student's long term health or well being. I'm also concerned by the rates of dropouts and failures to graduate among these students and how we can reverse this.

As a Korean-American, and the daughter of an immigrant, I am interested in seeing education embrace greater diversity and inclusion. Even to this day, the role of Asian-Americans in our country's and state's history is something that has been largely ignored or glossed over. I would like to see the district embrace policies that do more than talk about our goals of diversity, equity and inclusion, and find ways to increase access for families of color, low income and/or special needs to the same opportunities and support that other students receive.

I'm also interested in how we support the mental health of our teachers and our students. The pandemic has made this problem particularly timely, but even without the pandemic, we have to take steps to address suicide, bullying, burnout, school violence, and other issues that affect our students and teachers.

We have a limited budget, so we also need to find other ways to increase teacher retention and deal with burgeoning classroom sizes.

What do you think are the two most important issues confronting the board in the next two years?

1. Mental health of students
2. Increasing access to education/support for students of color, special needs and/or who do not come from advantaged backgrounds.

Please describe your connection to Eugene School District 4J.

I have three children in the 4J schools. I have volunteered with several schools that my children have attended in 4J, and for two years, I served as Co-Chair of the PTO for Charlemagne Elementary School. I am a class representative for the Parent Council with Village School and volunteer in the classroom.

What does equity mean to you, as it relates to K–12 education?

It means not only that all children (and families) get the same educational opportunities and support, but that we provide support to children who have special learning needs or haven't had the same advantages so that they can all be successful. It would be wonderful for all children to feel that they have the same educational potential as any other student and to feel equally embraced and valued. Social thinking and emotional support are an important part of the educational process and should also be prioritized.

If you were on the board, how would you see yourself contributing to the goals of diversity, equity and access in education?

I would like to work with fellow board members to further the objectives outlined above, including making sure that children of diversity and special needs receive not just educational support, but also feel fully included and valued in our school system. We need to have that culture of equity and inclusion to increase student engagement and success.

Name: Thomas Hiura**Occupation:**

Online English Teacher, VIPKid

How long have you lived in the school district?

21 years total

Why are you applying to be a 4J school board member?

Since my mother enrolled me in North Eugene's preschool, I have been proud to live a life inextricably linked to this district. Earlier this year, I convened a team of lifelong friends to coordinate the most inclusive possible 10-year reunion for our North Eugene Class of 2012. While the 26 years between these events has mostly been characterized by steadiness and continuity within 4J decision-making, there is always room for improvement, especially when overlooked communities throughout the city have yet to feel their voice is represented and heard.

I remember sitting in the room when the previous vacancy was voted on in 2019. While the candidate I supported did not prevail, Mary Walston articulated that her vote would be based on "balance": a virtue I value both personally and professionally. Today, I do not think I would be the most traditionalist nor the most idealist member of the board, were I to gain the privilege of serving. But I would embrace the role as just that: a privilege to listen hard, seek to understand differing perspectives, and serve the entire public.

I would not add to the lengthy list of applicants for your review if I did not believe our students need an advocate who intimately understands their modern lives. I am a teacher of English to students in China. My partner of 1.5 years is in our local schools every week day as a substitute teacher, so if I am the decent partner I hope to be, I am listening intently about her students' triumphs, anxieties and challenges every single evening. While the 4J board is now without its youngest member and its long-standing River Road connection, I believe I can assume these components of the role with the aplomb and resilience of a proud 4J graduate.

What strengths do you think you will bring to the school board?

Every candidate has unique skills that would prove invaluable on the board.

I think the top asset I would bring is a perspective informed by powerful lived experiences, many of which would be represented for the first time on the board. I admire my friend Doyle Canning because in her own efforts toward public service, she has unapologetically shared relevant stories of trauma endured in her personal life. I will follow her example to share how my own 4J story made me more resilient than I ever imagined I could become. I will share that lengthy story at the end of this application.

Another unique strength is my proven dedication to public engagement and outreach. Since 2015 I have interviewed over 400 individuals, either as an independent media host or an admissions interviewer for Carleton College. When I returned to Eugene in 2019 from a year at Columbia University's Teachers College, I grew disappointed in the dearth of local investigative journalism. I could only grow so weepy about this dying art before opting to do something about our democracy is (or is not) covered.

For four consecutive Lane County election cycles (May '20, Nov '20, May '21 and May '22), I have sought to democratize information by conducting in-depth, long-form interviews with every

candidate I could. These 17 interviews* have led to my education-themed podcast, Broken Class, playing a small but sturdy role in our local democracy. I am proud to engage audiences that are younger and less traditionally welcomed by most legacy institutions and their candidate forums.

As a scholar of education, I know the importance of differentiated instruction; the concept is why I make each broadcast free to play on any device in either audio or video. I've sometimes spent 18-hour days typing and synchronizing over 1600 captions per episode, in case a single human being might benefit from the increased accessibility to the content.

I am autistic, and proudly so, but sometimes I come off as hypervocal or shamelessly vain. In taking so much space to explain my qualifications as a young second-time candidate, I seek this position so that other oddballs on the margins can hold a director's seat alongside and well after me.

What are some of your particular interests or concerns?

The neat thing about a policymaking position is that it necessarily impacts a wide range of issues. My friend Jennifer Yeh recently told me, "I think people that have, like, one issue that's their main focus can be difficult for them [to serve]." I think it is self-evident that equitable inclusion of overlooked voices is crucial to me, but this diversity intersects with every other crucial issue of our district as well. Issues like:

Teacher pay – so we can retain and attract the best talent, particularly in a dismal local housing market for working people. We should also fight for a living wage for all 4J staff.

Disability justice – we are part of a larger educational system that paid no attention to these issues when it was designed.

Retrofitting both buildings and cultural norms to meet everyone's needs is a necessary challenge, along with ensuring the utmost access within all future projects. Accommodations must be delivered free of stigma.

The arts – these cognitively essential spaces are imperative to fund and strengthen, not just because they enrich lives, but because they save them. I have seen the power of the arts in our schools to be the very reason for an at-risk learner or a bullied queer student to get out of bed on any given day.

And to save my top issue for last: Wellness and mental health. Sure, some students do not experience challenges here, but studies show that percentage is shrinking at an alarming rate. Everyone is affected in some way, and it is far from abstract for me. My father struggled psychiatrically and emotionally. Although Covid is what ultimately took his life last August, make no mistake, depression, heartbreak and abandonment are what slowly killed him as I watched in horror. He was only 69. This issue is stigmatized within so many Asian-American families, and I know that if I had attended school in a climate more open to it, I would have been diagnosed with my own psychiatric conditions at a much earlier date that could have saved me much trouble, later on. I am proud that my father – a healthcare and union activist – got to see me run for Mayor with youth mental health as my #1 issue. Though I was unhoused and spent no money on the campaign, the fact that I came in 2nd among 7 wiser and more experienced candidates must have had something to do with my forthrightness on this topic. I want to build on the district's efforts to do more.

What do you think are the two most important issues confronting the board in the next two years?

Leadership matters, and choosing the right superintendent for this unprecedented moment is the top issue. We need someone who has a track record of putting dollars toward the areas of greatest need in our district, and we frankly need someone trustworthy who can unite our community. Some of us have felt that the Eugene School District was a stepping stone toward more lucrative prestige elsewhere. Our kids should never feel that way!

It is difficult to highlight one issue of secondary importance, but we do have a sacred responsibility to earn as much public trust as possible as we enter the fourth academic year affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. Fracturing, mistrust, and misinformation coupled with scarce resources and plain old hatred have been normalized during this pandemic. This is a global problem that requires local solutions, built from the ground up. Policy disagreements regarding safety and science have led to violent conflict. I believe that when wrongdoing has occurred, accountability without shaming and blame gaming is possible. Our young learners are watching, and if we model ethical adult behavior for them, we can rebuild public trust across every generation. We must embody those characteristics of a great teacher: fair and loving, but tough and committed to truth.

Please describe your connection to Eugene School District 4J.

- I graduated from North Eugene Preschool, Yujin Gakuen Elementary, Kelly Middle and North Eugene (International) High School.
- First paychecks in life were from 4J; I worked as North's head A/V and theater technician from 2010 to 2012. I worshiped in two churches in two 4J buildings for years.
- Volunteered for Measure 20-182 in 2011 (a proposed income tax for 4J and Bethel). I was sad that this failed in an off-year special election, because our community has a decades-long record of showing up for school-funding bond measures at the ballot box.
- I have always fought for equity in 4J: I co-founded PASS (People Against Stupid Sexism) in 5th grade, co-founded North's Social Justice Club in 9th grade, led an anti-bullying campaign in 11th and 12th grade called "Words Can Hurt," founded North's Random Acts of Kindness Club, and got in hot water once for allowing a pro-union student walk-out to rally using a 4J PA system without approval. We made good trouble that day.
- Produced and published countless videos and short films in support of 4J. A year after my graduation, I created an NEHS Small Schools documentary at the request of [staff].
- I continue to practice and pursue a career in education, and I am less than a year away from receiving my Master's in educational leadership from Southern Oregon University (online). My dream job has been NEHS principal for 11 straight years.
- I am always thrilled to visit 4J classrooms. During distance learning, [staff] invited me to guest lecture for her 7th and 8th grade leadership classes on three occasions.

What does equity mean to you, as it relates to K–12 education?

I think it is unfortunate that in this trendy climate, there really is no way to be confident that a person will fight for equity unless they have a long-standing track record of already doing it. Thanks to the outstanding 4J teachers who did not shy away from these issues, I have never stayed quiet.

During weekly meetings with [staff] in 2009, I learned about the powerful concept of equity (as opposed to equality, which was spoken of much more often at the time).

I will exercise brevity here and simply say that equity is not a simple jar in which to insert money, nor is it a cause to champion during a given day or month. It is a framework I would consider in every decision as a 4J school board member, while striving to maintain humility about my own expertise. We all have so much to learn, and I am always ready to dig in.

If you were on the board, how would you see yourself contributing to the goals of diversity, equity and access in education?

Thank you so much for your consideration of my lengthy application. Here is my story (TW: abuse, mental health, suicide, bigotry):

When my senior year at North began in 2011, I had just returned from the LEDA Scholars summer program at Princeton. LEDA (Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America) had previously changed my sister's life after the ever-compassionate [staff] brought it to her attention; the org would now be helping in every step of my college application process, at no charge.

Back on Silver Lane as ASB President, I hosted the "Hello Assembly" and Back to School BBQ, before proceeding to experience the most tumultuous year of my life. When I welcomed the incoming class of 2015 through those tinny gymnasium speakers, I had no idea that this North main gym would soon be one of the key safe havens where I would stay as long as I possibly could that Winter, fleeing from domestic violence. I would thank God for nights with home basketball, because I could stay on campus for either newspaper or debate, then cheer on the JV squad before hammering on the drums at the varsity game. There was bliss in this reprieve.

I would receive two massive blessings in the spring semester, even though I had begun to fail coursework for the first time. The first was that the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce – who had previously honored my sister as North's candidate for the Future First Citizen Award – would choose me to receive that titular prize. I remember growing up feeling that Dennis Nakata was the only person of my race on local TV, and then all of a sudden there he was in a Hilton ballroom, announcing (and correctly pronouncing) my name as the recipient.

There was a lot of putting on a happy face, that year. A matter of weeks before I had flown to Princeton for the summer program, my father was incarcerated for the first time at the Lane County Jail. There was a certain resilience I had developed in a household full of violence. In many cases, I physically stood between members of my family to calm them down as they shouted threats and vitriol at one another. Both of my parents threatened suicide at various points. I was too young to understand that the resilience I'd developed would be best unpacked through therapy.

I attended Carleton College with the giddy feeling of a fresh start. My assessment of the experience remains positive, although I would later relate to Director Rabasa's sharing of her experience at a similarly "elite" private liberal arts college in the Midwest. I was visibly one of the poorest students on campus; 50% of the student body received no financial aid (meaning their parents paid the full \$64K per year for just one of their offspring to learn the liberal arts). I experienced physical violence based on my race and non-binary gender identity for the first time. And there is really no elegant, application-friendly way to describe that feeling; it's just trash! When I stood up for myself in person, my bullies would intensify their mud-slinging in cyberspace. I am grateful that the administration approved at least some measures to protect me – an experience that I think of in my student affairs graduate coursework constantly. Through a good deal of therapy and some heartening summers away from Carleton, I graduated within 4 years, all the while receiving intermittent phone calls of desperation from my unhoused father.

Once again, I do not have an impressive strategy for tying this all back to the question. I simply feel that in previous attempts to lead, sometimes people do not take you seriously unless you give them an abundance of provable enough examples of competence. There is no way to be assessed on the merits of experiences I do not articulate. I can think of three actions I feel blessed to have been able to take, which helped transform this up-and-down life experience into a more diverse and equitable world. First, I returned to the LEDA Scholars summer program as a College Guidance Coordinator. Within this role, I mentored a caseload of 50 rising high school seniors from around the country, 49 of which were students of color. This intensive 1:1 mentoring paid off; for the first time in LEDA Scholars history, all 50 scholars were admitted to one of Barron's most competitive colleges and universities. I swell with pride when I see what they are accomplishing now – it dwarfs my own successes.

Secondly, I was able to save up funds to get my father into a 2007 Toyota Prius, which was the most reliable vehicle he had owned in decades. It would be his home in the years leading up to his death, and it both made me happy for him and relieved some of my anxieties about having some form of shelter from the cold and rain.

And thirdly, during my previous attempt to be appointed to the 4J board, I was the only candidate who used their full 10 minutes and ran out of speaking time. I had misunderstood Chair Levis' statement about the rigidity of the time constraint, and I was heartbroken that my disability may have played a role in my speaking too verbosely before reaching the only question about equity. I have no indication that this directly affected the current (and likely more equitable) vacancy appointment process, but when I met with Superintendent Balderas, I advocated for a disability accommodation to be explicitly offered in any future iteration of this process. He promised me this would be the case, a few weeks before announcing his departure. I hope you will trust that my personal and professional passion for inclusion and access would only increase – alongside my effectiveness – if I were to be appointed to serve. I feel proud that I may have had some impact on 4J in the past, and I believe our community is waiting for the ideal team to come together and do so much more.

Endnote:

*In reverse chronological order, I was honored to interview these candidates in their races: Jennifer Yeh (Eugene City Council), Harry Sanger (4J board), Rose Wilde (Lane ESD Board), Laural O'Rourke, Tom Di Liberto (4J board), Maya Rabasa, Isiah Wagoner (Eugene Mayor), Eliza Kashinsky (Eugene City Council), Candice King (Eugene City Council), Zondie Zinke (Eugene Mayor), Kitty Piercy (former officeholder: Eugene Mayor Emeritus), Doyle Canning (U.S. Representative), Kate Davidson (Eugene City Council), Matthew Yook (Eugene Mayor), Robert Patterson (Eugene Mayor), Mandey Chappell (Eugene Mayor).

Name: Daniel Patrick Isaacson**Occupation:**

Small Business Owner

How long have you lived in the school district?

9 years (1998-2005, 2020-present)

Why are you applying to be a 4J school board member?

I am asking for your appointment because I believe in the absolute power public education has to change a child's life for the better and because so much rests on every child having the same access to education, with the same resources, and the same support, in and out of the classroom. Our fidelity to them must be made known in every policy we take up; it must be the very ethos we create.

Education is the great equalizer; it is the path that, if taken, affords its user universal access to the blessings of our community. However, if denied, it all but ensures an insurmountable climb throughout life. I was blessed by healthy doses of luck, privilege, hard work and an accident of birth. Many of my childhood friends fight right now against the rip current of poverty, institutionalized racism, mental health concerns and substance abuse. As an adult, I can picture them as classmates and through the lens I have now, identify and remember key moments when a change could have been made to give them a better chance, but it was absent. I want to work to ensure every child under our care is empowered and shown their inalienable value.

Our shared future requires continued commitment from the public and if we want the changes we know need to happen, we need to strengthen our argument for their investment. This synergy happens when talk stops and action starts. Acting as the sea wall for our children and their teachers and assistants, I believe we can give them the room they require to grow. Ultimately, it is our children, our teachers and our staff that serve as the best ambassadors for the district and our work.

What strengths do you think you will bring to the school board?

A strong and effective board brings diverse backgrounds and experiences together to meet the challenges, known and unknown, facing it. The difficulty then is how to select which backgrounds and which experiences are needed most. For me, the choice is clear and ever present: we need a voice from our mental health community. We need someone who has established themselves as a leader in its advocacy, who understands both its needs and opportunities, and brings the notion of applying its lens toward the policies, staff and children of the Eugene School District 4J.

I serve as both the President of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Lane County and the Co-Chair of the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Lane County. During my tenure, we have expanded our programs, opened a permanent office in Springfield, and focused on becoming more public facing.

During the pandemic, we trained over 900 community members to act as a mental health community watch looking for signs of distress and concern to step in and prevent tragedy. We chose previously overlooked professions in our community, like cab drivers and baristas. We trained bank tellers to watch for their small business clients. We reached out to our schools, our first responders and our BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities. As a result, despite Lane County historically having a suicide rate four times greater than 84% of the counties in the nation, we saw a reduction in suicide both in 2020 and 2021, something never before seen in our records. We now have a pathway to make this a trend.

Outside of my mental health background, my portfolio of experiences I draw from and highlight for you include being a small business owner and knowing the constraints placed on it and the late nights worrying about making payroll, teaching undergraduate and graduate college students as an adjunct professor in Chicago, and serving as one of your Eugene Planning Commissioners, which has given me the experience of being a steward of our voter's trust.

Through it all, one word correctly captures the philosophy I bring to every room I enter: curiosity. Our children come into our classrooms curious about the world around them, looking for an elder to impart the wisdom and wonder of that world upon them. It would be a mistake if we, ourselves, didn't show them that their school board is just as curious in all of the ways to make their education more meaningful and their experience here more memorable.

What are some of your particular interests or concerns?

My worry is that we hold for a very short time a tremendous opportunity to take what we have learned from the last two years and make permanent that which has been useful and to galvanize support for the idea of public education in ways that challenge outdated thought and usher in needed change to stagnant ideas. I would welcome being a part of any discussion centered around how to add these best practices to our toolbelt.

We cannot, however, overlook the ways the events of the last two years have negatively challenged our systems, our staff and teachers, and our students. Many students, especially those impacted by an inequitable system, fell further behind. I want to be a part of a board that not only looks for innovative solutions to bring them current, but identifies the pathways that better prepare our district for the next challenge we face.

The more we tether ourselves to curiosity, remove our biases and tendency to worship power over purpose and accept our role in this broader conversation, the better prepared we are, the more informed our community is, and the more our children will thrive.

What do you think are the two most important issues confronting the board in the next two years?

I believe that the uncertainty for everyone on what the 'new normal' will look like will occupy a great deal of our time and attention. From internal issues such as our budget and resources, to hybrid ones like student and staff mental health and access to education, the dampening of COVID was simply the first salvo in a very long struggle to recuperate from, at the very time we push to expand the conversation finally around issues of equity and equality.

But I am cautioned in that rarely are we given notice of our impending problems; I doubt that the board that sat in session a couple years ago would have placed a worldwide pandemic in the list of answers to this question. As a result, I am more focused on the team and the process rather than the specific issue. If we strengthen our team, stress test our vulnerabilities, support our teachers and empower our children, then whatever we face we are better prepared for.

Please describe your connection to Eugene School District 4J.

My partner and I's son is almost 5 and will be attending Howard Elementary this fall, and with it, the three of us will begin a twelve-year relationship with 4J. My hope is that he is enriched by a fabric of culture, diversity, tradition and excellence. And along the way, that I am able to help, not just my own son, but all our community's children, in making each institution better than when we found it.

What does equity mean to you, as it relates to K–12 education?

This is one of the largest questions of our work. Too often equity and horizontal equality are intertwined when there are stark differences between them.

Equity is not simply, for example, ensuring every student has a laptop. That's equality. It's ensuring that child has internet access at home to use it. The Race Matters Institute said, "The route to achieving equity will not be accomplished through treating everyone equally." And without an understanding of the differences between the two terms, this might sound surprising, but it shouldn't.

We cannot overlook the reality that while we may arguably provide an education equally to every child who walks through our doors, many students must overcome several hurdles just to be at where other children start from. At-home family issues or abuse, mental health concerns, lack of access to healthcare, food insecurity, houselessness, and language barriers remain the challenges we must address if we want to start all our children from the same position.

At the same time, however, we must resist the inclination to allow the performance of equity to take the place of actual achievement in the area. Too often, equity work has become procedural and standardized. Our schools should be a house of learning, not a monument to bureaucracy, especially given the purpose of this endeavor is to redistribute power and assets in a decentralized way.

Ultimately, equity work is centered around the goal of making the outcomes more equal. To do this requires us to ask, to learn, to be curious and humble, to have compassion, but also the resolve to act when needed change is identified.

If you were on the board, how would you see yourself contributing to the goals of diversity, equity and access in education?

First, I would do this by listening and seeing. I fear many in my position of seeking a new seat within bodies like this come with great ideas and passion, but forget that we need to pause for a moment and learn from the system we seek to change. Talk with the students and the teachers, listen to the parents and the advocates, see the gaps between our stated goals and the realities within our halls. Only then can a contribution be made that will have a meaningful impact on the world around us.