

**Shaping 4J's Future:  
Report and Recommendations  
of the 4J Think Tank**

Final Report

August 2007



# Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the members of the Think Tank for the considerable time and effort on this project.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Fall 2006, the Eugene 4J School District embarked on a strategic planning process called “*Shaping 4J’s Future*.” The process is focusing on several unanswered questions about how to best serve students over the next five to seven years in light of declining enrollment and changing student demographics and needs. This process builds upon ongoing instructional planning and previous District plans. The primary guiding question this process is designed to answer is:

“What services and facilities will be needed to support the District’s future instructional programs in order to increase the achievement for all students and close the achievement gap?” — *Shaping 4J’s Future Focus Group Resource Guide*

## SHAPING 4J’S FUTURE PROCESS

The *Shaping 4J’s Future* process involves three phases: (1) Focus Groups with 4J District staff; (2) a “Think Tank” composed of community members; and (3) a public engagement process. The 4J District contracted with the Institute for Policy Research and Innovation and the Community Planning Workshop at the University of Oregon to facilitate the Think Tank and public engagement phases. This report summarizes recommendations developed by the *Shaping 4J’s Future* Think Tank.

**Focus Groups:** In Fall 2006, eight focus groups comprised of 4J staff were convened around the following topics: (1) special education; (2) grade configuration; (3) high school size; (4) elementary and middle school size; (5) Title I (federal assistance for low-income students); (6) English Language Learners; (7) technology; and (8) pre- and full-day kindergarten. To assist the Focus Groups, 4J staff prepared a resource document that summarized current District trends and reviewed current best practice research. Each focus group reviewed the data and developed options based on three budget scenarios: no additional funds, some additional funds, or full funding of the state’s Quality Education Model (QEM).

**Think Tank:** In January 2007, the University of Oregon’s Community Planning Workshop (CPW) convened a “Think Tank.” The Think Tank’s charge was to explore the focus group and best practices information, and recommend options to the School Board for a more extensive public involvement process. In making their recommendations, the group was asked to consider administrative, financial, legal and political feasibility of the options, and narrow and package the options to the extent possible. The group was also asked by Superintendent Russell to address several additional questions facing the District.

The Think Tank consisted of 12 local residents selected to provide a range of community perspectives. Between January and August 2007, the group met 12 times, participated in on-line feedback forums, and provided individual comments on the final report. The UO team worked with 4J staff to provide Think Tank members with a detailed overview of the key issues facing the District, information about educational best practices, options from the Focus Groups, and other information requested during meetings.

**Deliberative Public Process:** The final phase of “Shaping 4J’s Future” is a public involvement process, where residents will have the opportunity to study the material, review options forwarded by the Board, and voice their preferences. The School Board will use the information from all phases of this process to make decisions about District policies, facilities and services.



## **THINK TANK PROCESS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

Between January and August 2007, the Think Tank met to review the information and develop their recommendations. During this process, some guiding principles emerged that influenced Think Tank recommendations:

### **1) Increase overall achievement**

- Overall achievement refers to the educational performance of all students
- Education is important to Eugene residents
- Concerns about District achievement trend data
- Need to comply with federal and state laws
- Need to ensure that current research findings demonstrate that proposed changes will increase overall achievement

### **2) Close the Achievement Gap**

- Achievement gap refers to the difference in achievement among groups of students with common characteristics, which increases at higher grades
- Ability of schools to address student performance varies, contributing to achievement gap
- Increasing overall student performance should coincide with closing the achievement gap

### **3) Address Equity**

- Inequalities exist among schools in terms of their ability to address students' educational needs, particularly for schools serving low income and/or low achieving students
- Student transfers can lead to concentrations of higher and lower achieving students
- Support idea that education and services can be placed to ensure they are accessible for all students
- All schools should equally share services for students with high needs

### **4) Consider Feasibility:**

- State funding for operations is limited, and this funding is linked to enrollment
- Greater flexibility of capital funding may be available if there is public acceptance
- Operational and capital costs need to be weighed against educational benefits

### **5) Minimize Community and District Transitions:**

- Some options could involve significant transitions
- Transitions involve human and financial costs
- Changes must result in clear educational and financial benefits

### **6) Honor Community Traditions:**

- The Eugene community has a deep sense of pride in the 4J District
- Traditions such as valuing children, community based decision making, parental involvement and school choice have long been honored by the District
- All schools provide unique and distinctive learning environments
- Benefits of changes must be weighed against the number of students served and the ability of these programs to efficiently and equitably serve all students and close the achievement gap

## THINK TANK DELIBERATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During their deliberations, the Think Tank relied heavily on the best practices research and options developed by the Focus Groups. They requested supplementary information on a number of topics, and reviewed reports and studies from several sources. In weighing the options to recommend for a public process, the Think Tank considered several different approaches to packaging and presenting the alternatives. During these discussions, it was determined that several options from the Focus Group process related to ongoing instructional planning, and were better addressed through internal District processes. The Think Tank also recommended that several options not be forwarded for consideration for one or more of the following reasons: (1) they believed the change would create too much disruption; (2) there was not compelling educational evidence that the change was warranted; and/or (3) because it involved costs that the group believed would not be supported by the community.

The main body of this report describes the issues considered by the Think Tank, and the options they recommend the School Board put forward for public deliberation (summarized in Table S-1). The Think Tank recommended that these options be grouped around: school types (elementary, middle, high school); future expansion; and other potential facility and infrastructure needs.

### Summary of Recommendations for Public Deliberation

**Elementary Schools:** The Board should seek public input on new site enrollment guidelines. A minimum enrollment was selected to ensure that all school sites have a full complement of programs and services, including a full array of programs that will support all students (e.g., music, art, physical education) and services to support students with high needs (e.g., Special Education, Title 1 and English Language Learner students). These programs and services will help increase overall achievement, close the achievement gap, address equity, and reduce operational costs. This change would involve consolidating, co-locating or closing small schools, and place more restrictions on transfers. For alternative schools, this would require co-location of some schools, and an equitable distribution of students with high needs.

**Middle Schools:** The Board should seek public input on new site enrollment guidelines. A minimum and maximum enrollment was selected to ensure that all school sites have a full complement of programs and services, including services to support students with high needs (e.g., Special Education, Title 1 and English Language Learner students). Research has demonstrated that school sizes within the recommended range perform best. These changes would help increase overall achievement, close the achievement gap, and address equity. While no schools would close through this change, there would be more restrictions on transfers.

**High Schools:** The Board should seek public input on maintaining four high schools with a more equitable distribution of enrollment and programming at each school that provides enhanced career academies and smaller learning communities. Research has shown that smaller learning communities lead to better student outcomes and parent involvement. More equitable

enrollment across the four high schools ensures that each high school is able to offer a full range of programs and services. These changes provide a feasible way of increasing overall achievement, closing the achievement gap, and addressing equity. While no schools would close through this change, there would be more restrictions on transfers.

**Future Expansion:** The Board should seek public input on providing space for future kindergarten and pre-kindergarten offerings. Current state funding for operations limits the ability of the District to increase kindergarten offerings. However, the state may increase funding for kindergarten in the future, and the District has opportunities to partner with other organizations to provide pre-kindergarten. Research has shown that kindergarten is particularly beneficial for students with high needs, and would thus help close the achievement gap and address equity. Including space for future expansion, would likely increase the cost of a school bond measure.

**Potential Infrastructure:** The Board should incorporate several potential infrastructure options in a public involvement process. These options relate to technology, facilities for English Language learners, and facilities for Special Education, but the specific costs could not be determined at this time. The Think Tank recommends they be incorporated into the estimates for school renovations or presented as separate topics for input. These options can help improve overall achievement, reduce the achievement gap, and address equity by ensuring that all schools have the necessary support infrastructure. Including these options would likely increase the cost of a school bond measure.

### **Additional Recommendations**

In addition to the recommendations about options for a public process, the Think Tank also recommended that the District consider several policy and programming changes. The Think Tank believes that these issues are better handled through internal instructional planning and Board budgeting processes:

- Continue to offer kindergarten services, particularly where it helps high needs populations.
- Collaborate with pre-kindergarten providers to increase availability.
- Increase services for ELL students. In particular, develop a Spanish language dual-immersion program and consider grouping students to provide sufficient services.
- Create a technology “scope and sequence” for student instruction, require each school to have a minimum level of technology, and increase technology training for teachers.
- Consider inclusion of students with special needs in excess of state and federal guidelines, improve early screening for developmental disabilities, and enhance partnerships to provide services.

- Increase coordination of Title 1 services and maintain flexibility while increasing accountability. Ensure low-income enrollment at any one school does not exceed 50%.
- Ensure an equitable distribution of students with high needs and help under-enrolled schools increase desirability through new programs or services.
- Treat all schools as “schools” with different attendance boundaries and work to reduce the real and perceived inequalities between “neighborhood schools” and “alternative schools”.
- Provide flexibility of site-based decision making while ensuring accountability and a minimum level of services at each school.
- Increase professional development for teachers and site committees, particularly in relation to students with high needs.

**Table S-1: Full List of Think Tank Recommendations**

<b>Facility and Service Configurations</b>	
<b>1. Elementary School Size</b>	<b>Recommendation to School Board</b>
Which elementary school size options should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input concerning the size of elementary schools. The Think Tank recommends a targeted minimum enrollment of 350 students for each school site, and a maximum enrollment determined by a site's capacity. Further, the Think Tank recommends that the District implement smaller learning environments in elementary schools whose enrollment exceeds 400 students.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning elementary school size, please see page 12)</p>
<b>2. Grade Configurations</b>	<b>Recommendation to School Board</b>
<b>2.1. K-2, 3-8, 9-12:</b> Should a K-3, 4-8, 9-12 model be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board wait before having the community deliberate converting schools to a K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12 or K-3, 4-8, 9-12 model.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning K-3, 4-8, 9-12, please see page 14)</p>
<b>2.2. K-8:</b> Should an option of converting to a K-8 configuration be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board assess the success of K-8 schools in nearby districts before having the community deliberate converting all schools to the K-8 model. However, the District should consider a new K-8 school during its reconfiguration process if it makes sense educationally and financially.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning K-8s, please see page 16)</p>

3. Middle School Size	Recommendation to School Board
<p>Which middle school size options should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input concerning the size of middle schools. The Think Tank recommends a targeted minimum enrollment of 400 students and a maximum enrollment of 600 students.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning middle school size, please see page 17)</p>
4. High School	Recommendation to School Board
<p><b>4.1. High School Size:</b> Which high school size options should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?:</p> <p>Construct 1-2 new high schools to create 5-6 schools with enrollment levels closer to 800 students</p> <p>Reconfigure to 3 larger high schools with enrollment of 1700-1900</p> <p>Maintain current configuration of 4 high schools</p>	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input concerning high school size. The Think Tank recommends keeping the four current high schools as the best feasible option.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning high school size, please see page 20)</p>
<p><b>4.2. Managing High School Enrollment:</b> Should the concept of limiting enrollment at high schools be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on managing enrollment. The Think Tank believes managing enrollment will result in more equitable distribution of high school students and programs across regions, which will have positive outcomes for the District.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning managing enrollment in high schools, please see page 21)</p>

<p><b>4.3. High School Career Academies:</b> Which career academy options should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public? An independently sited career academy? Improving career academy options within present high schools?</p> <p>[Note: a career academy refers to school-based programs designed to train students for careers such as culinary arts, health care, engineering and environmental studies.]</p>	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on improving career academy programs within high schools. The Think Tank recommends enhancing career academy options at each school, particularly through community partnerships (e.g. with Lane Community College).</p> <p>(For the Think Tank’s rationale concerning career academies, please see page 22)</p>
<p><b>4.4. Small Learning Communities:</b> Should smaller learning communities within current high schools (e.g., school-within-school programs) be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on smaller learning communities within each high school. The Think Tank strongly believes that small learning communities will have positive outcomes for the District. Total enrollment at individual high schools might depend on how many learning communities exist at each site.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank’s rationale concerning small learning communities, please see page 23)</p>
<p><b>5. Alternative Schools</b></p>	<p><b>Recommendation to School Board</b></p>
<p>What considerations about Alternative Schools should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on alternative schools. The Think Tank recommends that alternative schools adhere to the same 350 minimum site enrollment as other elementary schools, allowing these schools to meet the needs of all students equitably. The Think Tank believes steps should be taken to encourage equitable distribution of students with special needs in alternative schools (includes Special Education, Title 1 and English Language Learner students).</p> <p>(For the Think Tank’s rationale concerning alternative schools, please see page 26)</p>

6. Early Education Infrastructure	Recommendation to School Board
<p><b>6.1 Kindergarten:</b> Should the concept of increasing infrastructure for kindergarten be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on providing kindergarten infrastructure. The Think Tank believes there is logic in providing sufficient space for additional kindergarten offerings that could be funded by the Legislature.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank’s rationale concerning kindergarten infrastructure, please see page 29)</p>
<p><b>6.2 Pre-kindergarten:</b> Should the concept of increasing infrastructure for pre-kindergarten be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on providing pre-kindergarten infrastructure. The Think Tank believes there would be benefit to providing more pre-kindergarten opportunities within 4J buildings, and encourages the District to collaborate with pre-kindergarten providers.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank’s rationale concerning kindergarten infrastructure, please see page 29)</p>



<b>Operational Options</b>	
<b>7. Operation of Early Education</b>	<b>Recommendation to School Board</b>
<p><b>7.1 Kindergarten Implementation:</b> What considerations about kindergarten offerings should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate about substantially increasing kindergarten services because there is insufficient funding to do so in the foreseeable future. However, the Think Tank does believe the District should continue to allocate funding for extended kindergarten, particularly where it helps high needs populations.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning kindergarten infrastructure, please see page 32)</p>
<p><b>7.2 Pre-Kindergarten Implementation:</b> What considerations about pre-kindergarten offerings should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate about increasing pre-kindergarten services because 4J does not currently provide pre-kindergarten classes, nor is there funding to do so in the foreseeable future. The Think Tank, however, does encourage the District to collaborate with pre-kindergarten providers to increase the availability of pre-kindergarten.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning pre-kindergarten infrastructure, please see page 33)</p>

8. English Language Learner	Recommendation to School Board
<p>Which English Language Learner (ELL) service options should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate <i>how</i> English Language Learner (ELL) services are delivered in the District. However the Think Tank recommends increasing the services for ELL students. The Think Tank believes there is benefit to increasing services for ELL students, with particular consideration of a Spanish dual-immersion program. The Think Tank further recommends that the Board consider grouping students in regions with only a few ELL students (<i>low-incidence regions</i>).</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning ELL services, please see page 35)</p>
9. Technology	Recommendation to School Board
<p><b>9.1 Technology Infrastructure:</b> Should an option focused on providing technology infrastructure be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on increasing the infrastructure for technology (i.e., buildings capable of supporting modern technology). The Think Tank believes there are inequities that currently exist regarding availability and use of technology in schools, which warrant further public discussion.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning technology infrastructure, please see page 38)</p>
<p><b>9.2 Technology Operations:</b> What considerations about technology should the Board forward for public consideration?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate <i>how</i> technology services are delivered in the District. However the Think Tank recommends that the District create a technology "scope and sequence" (e.g., the content and timing) for student instruction. Further the Think Tank recommends that the District require a minimum level of technology at each school. The Think Tank also recommends centralized purchasing and an increase in teacher training around the use of technology.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning technology operations, please see page 38)</p>

10. Special Education	Recommendation to School Board
<p>What considerations about special education should the School Board forward for public consideration?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate <i>how</i> Special Education services are delivered in the District. However the Think Tank does recommend that the District provide earlier and more comprehensive screening to identify developmental disabilities. The Think Tank believes there is benefit to enhancing partnerships with other organizations that provide and coordinate services for special education students, like EC Cares. The Think Tank also recommends that the District consider inclusion of special education students at a level that exceeds state and federal guidelines, where possible.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank’s rationale concerning special education, please see page 42)</p>
11. Title 1	Recommendation to School Board
<p>What considerations about Title 1 should the School Board forward for public consideration?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate <i>how</i> Title schools implement their programs. However, the Think Tank does recommend that the District improve coordination of Title efforts and maintain flexibility on Title Schools’ use of Title funds while increasing accountability for outcomes.</p> <p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends that the District develop policies that will ensure the enrollment of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch does not exceed 50% at a site.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank’s rationale concerning Title 1 issues, please see page 45)</p>



<b>14. School Attendance Boundaries</b>	<b>Recommendation to School Board</b>
What amendments or revisions to 4J's present school boundaries should the School Board forward for public consideration?	<p>Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on attendance boundaries (or "catchment zones"). The Think Tank believes the School Board should adopt catchment zone criteria that encourage equality and diversity in schools throughout the District.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning school attendance boundaries, please see page 55)</p>
<b>15. Site-based Decision Making</b>	<b>Recommendation to School Board</b>
What issues about site-based decision making should the School Board forward for public consideration?	<p>Decision: The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having a public deliberation about site-based decision making in the District. However the Think Tank recommends that the School Board adopt site-based decision making criteria that encourage flexibility and accountability in decision making, but also require a minimum level of services at each school.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning site-based decision making, please see page 57)</p>
<b>16. Professional Development</b>	<b>Recommendation to School Board</b>
What issues revolving around professional development should the School Board forward for public consideration?	<p>Decision: The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having a public deliberation about professional development in the District. However the Think Tank recommends the Board increase professional development around successful support of high needs populations and technology. The Think Tank strongly believes that the success of the District ultimately rests with the quality of its teachers and staff and that professional development is necessary to provide these individuals with growth opportunities. The Think Tank also recommends that the District increase professional development opportunities for school site committees.</p> <p>(For the Think Tank's rationale concerning professional development, please see page 60)</p>

## SECTION 1: DISTRICT 4J CONTEXT—KEY ENROLLMENT AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

This report summarizes the recommendations of the 4J “Think Tank” on key facility and policy issues facing the District. The Eugene 4J School District embarked on a new strategic planning process called Shaping 4J’s Future to address important emerging issues in light of declining enrollment and changing student demographics and needs. A report entitled *Shaping 4J’s Future: Enrollment and Demographic Trends* summarizes some of the key enrollment and student trends facing the District. A summary of these trends is listed below.

### STUDENT ENROLLMENT

- This school year (2006-07) student enrollment is at a 20-year low of 17,357. Over the last decade 4J’s enrollment has declined by 1, 289 students.
- If current trends continue, enrollment in 4J schools is expected to decline by another 1,000 students and stabilize at 16,375 students in 2015.
  - Enrollment at the elementary level will remain stable with 7,345 students in 2006 and 7,333 students in 2015.
  - Enrollment at the middle school level will decline by about 150 students from 3,915 in 2006 to 3,778 in 2015.
  - Enrollment at the high school level will decline by about 830 students from 6,097 this school year to 5,264 in 2015.
- Enrollment projections vary by region (Table 1). Assuming the same pattern of student transfers as in 2006:
  - Enrollment in the Sheldon region is expected to grow by about 240 students.
  - Enrollment in the Churchill region will decline slightly by about 80 students.
  - Enrollment in the North region will decline by about 500 students.
  - Enrollment in the South region will decline by about 660 students.

	<b>Actual Enrollment 2006</b>	<b>Projected Enrollment 2015</b>	<b>Difference</b>
District	17,357	16,375	-982
Churchill Region	3,896	3,817	-79
North Region	4,177	3,697	-480
Sheldon Region	4,865	5,101	236
South Region	4,419	3,760	-659

### STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Student demographics are changing while enrollment declines. If current trends continue:

- Minority student population will grow from 21.5% in 2006 to 30.9% in 2015. A higher concentration of these students will be in the North and Churchill regions. The largest increase in the number of minority students has been Latinos in the North region, followed by Asians in the Sheldon region.

- The number of students eligible for free and reduced lunches, a common indicator of socio-economic status, will increase from 29.8% in 2006 to 39.7% in 2015. Concentration of these students will be in the North and Churchill regions.
- The number of students who qualify as English Language Learners will increase by over 100 students from 406 in 2006 to 517 in 2015.<sup>1</sup>
- The number of students who receive special education services will increase by nearly 500 students from 2,602 in 2006 to 3,079 in 2015.

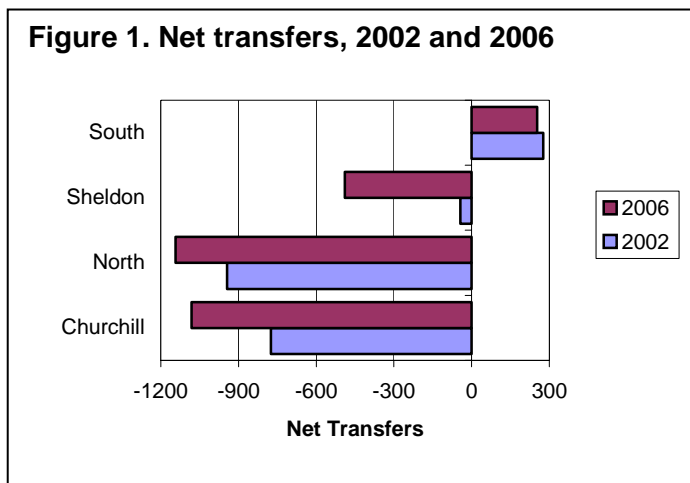
**Table 2. Enrollment of selected populations**

Characteristic	Enrollment 2006 (%)	Projected Enrollment 2015 (%)	Increase
Minority	21.5	30.9	+9.4%
Free and Reduced Lunch	29.8	39.7	+9.9%
English Language Learners	2.2	3	+0.7%
Special Education	15	18.8	+3.8%

## TRANSFERS FROM NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

- A large number of students (approximately 32%) do not attend their neighborhood schools. Rather, they use the District's open enrollment policy to transfer to an alternative school or another neighborhood school.
- The numbers below show the net number of transfers to and from neighborhood schools in each region in 2006.
  - Churchill region lost 1,082 students to alternative schools, charter schools and neighborhood schools in other regions;
  - North region lost 1,142;
  - Sheldon region lost 489; and
  - South region gained 253 students.

**Figure 1. Net transfers, 2002 and 2006**



## U.S. CENSUS INFORMATION

- Between 1990 and 2000, the District's total population increased by approximately 53,000 people, a 43% rise, while the percentage of children between the ages of 5 and 19 declined by 2,570, a 10% decrease.
- Of all households in 2000, only 27% had children.
- By 2015, the largest age group living within District boundaries will likely be over 55.
- In 2000 the largest age group population was split between the 20 to 34 and 35 to 54 age ranges.

<sup>1</sup> The 406 students, noted here in 2006 is the actual number of students served while the full Enrollment and Demographic Trends report uses an Oregon Department of Education "full time equivalent" formula to identify the number of students.

## SECTION 2: SHAPING 4J PROCESS

The Shaping 4J's Future process was initiated in 2006 to address the following strategic question:

“What services and facilities will be needed to support the District’s future instructional programs in order to increase achievement for all students and close the achievement gap?”

The process is underpinned by the School Board’s three instructional goals: (1) increasing achievement for all students; (2) closing the achievement gap; and (3) providing equal opportunities for all students to succeed. In answering the strategic question before the District, the School Board will be taking into consideration declining enrollment, regional enrollment patterns, placement of special education programs, the location of alternative schools, and potential strategies such as boundary changes, grade and school configurations, and school closures and/or expansions (4J Trends and Issues Report 2007, p. 1).

The Shaping 4J's Future process builds upon ongoing instructional planning and previous District plans (see Figure 2 below). It focuses on critical long-range facility and service options that arise from enrollment and student population trends and from related issues that have not been fully resolved previously.

**Figure 2. Relationship to other decision making processes**

<p><b>Board instructional goals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase achievement for all students</li> <li>• Close the achievement gap</li> <li>• Provide equal opportunities for all students to succeed</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Ongoing instructional planning</b></p> <p>District instructional initiatives, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• literacy &amp; math</li> <li>• data-driven decision making</li> <li>• improved testing environments</li> <li>• cultural competence</li> <li>• integration of regular &amp; special education</li> <li>• high school program configuration</li> </ul> <p>Curriculum planning &amp; integration Individualized Education Plans for students with disabilities TAG services Library/media center services Physical education &amp; nutrition education Arts School improvement plans &amp; other initiatives within each school</p>	<p><b>Previous District plans</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Schools of the Future 2000</li> <li>2. School Closure &amp; Consolidation 2001</li> <li>3. Strategic Facilities Long-Range Plan 2002</li> <li>4. Access &amp; Options 2004</li> </ol> <p>Many of the recommendations from these plans have already been implemented. Some recommendations are still to be addressed during Shaping 4J's Future including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• placement of special education programs</li> <li>• location of alternative elementary schools that are now co-located with neighborhood schools</li> <li>• potential boundary changes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Shaping 4J's future</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Special Education</li> <li>2. Title 1</li> <li>3. English Language Learners</li> <li>4. Pre-Kindergarten and Full-day Kindergartens</li> <li>5. High School Sizes</li> <li>6. Elementary and Middle School Size</li> <li>7. Technology</li> <li>8. Grade Configurations</li> </ol>

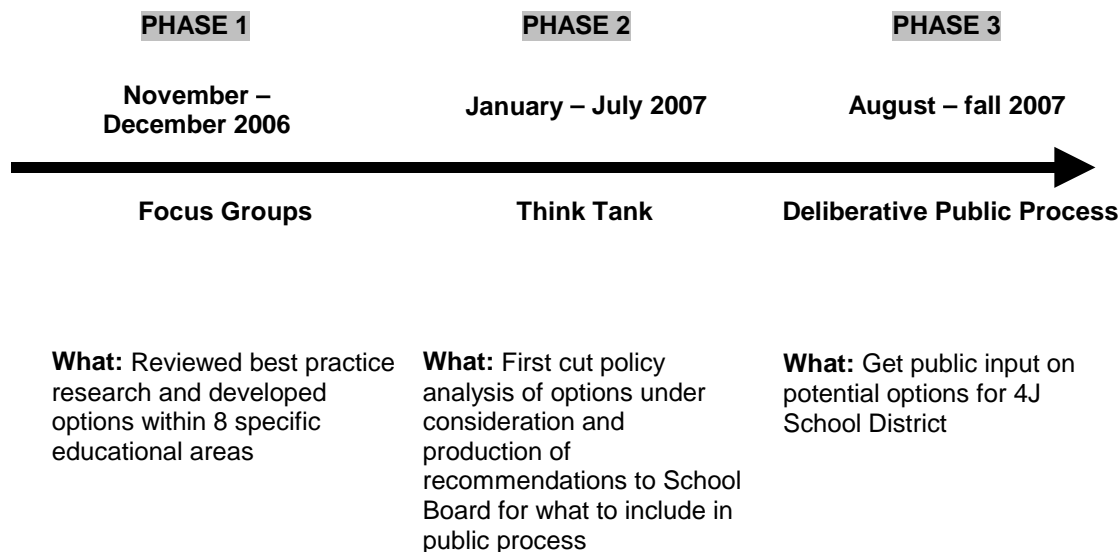


## PHASES OF SHAPING 4J PROCESS

The planning process to address these issues is taking place through a three-phase process over several months (see Figure 3).

1. **Focus groups:** District staff were asked to develop possible options around eight topics: special education, Title 1, English language learners, kindergarten, high school size, elementary and middle school size, technology and grade configurations. To support these groups, the District collected data on best practices and 4J District trends.
2. **Think Tank:** A team from the University of Oregon convened a “Think Tank” composed of community members with broad-ranging experience to help review 4J District data, best practice research, Focus Group options, and other District concerns. They were given the broad charge of recommending options and implications to the School Board for a broader public deliberation process.
3. **Public Involvement:** Based on School Board direction, a team from the University of Oregon will develop a broad-based, deliberative process that will allow the public to learn about current trends and weigh in on the options.

**Figure 3. Shaping 4J’s Future Strategic Planning Process**



### Focus Groups

The District identified eight topics that required additional guidance because they involve “unanswered questions that will have an impact on school size, grade configurations, and the location of schools” (Trends and Issues Report, 2006, p.3). To support the Shaping 4J process, the District compiled information about enrollment and demographic trends, building capacity, and conducted a detailed literature review of best practice information. For each topic, the District formed a focus group to review this information, discuss current District programs and recommend options based on different funding scenarios. The eight focus groups were:

1. *Special Education*: What is the right model for special education in 4J?
2. *Title I*: What is the right model for Title I in 4J?
3. *English Language Learners*: What is the right model for ELL in 4J?
4. *Pre-Kindergarten and Full-day Kindertgartens*: Are 4J elementary schools going to house and support full-day kindertgartens and/or pre-kindergarten programs?
5. *High School Size*: What size high schools, including alternative schools, is the District willing to accommodate?
6. *Elementary and Middle School Size*: What size elementary and middle schools, including alternative schools, is the District willing to accommodate?
7. *Technology*: How will technology support District operations and instruction (regular instruction and such programs as special education and ELL)?
8. *Grade Configurations*: Should 4J consider implementing alternative grade configurations (e.g., K-8 or primary schools), and, if so, which ones?

(Source: Trends and Issues Report. 4J School District, 2006)

## Think Tank

The Eugene 4J District contracted with the University of Oregon's Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management and the Institute for Policy Research and Innovation to convene a Think Tank. The charge for the Think Tank was broad: (1) to explore the information from the District, research on best practices and options generated by the focus groups; (2) to develop a set of integrated options for the School Board to use in a public deliberation process; and (3) offer a preliminary assessment of implications and likelihood of public acceptance of different options. In addition to the issues and options identified through this process, the Think Tank was asked to consider several questions posed by Superintendent George Russell that relate to critical issues facing the District:

- Should we establish school enrollment caps, class size caps or intra-District transfer policies?
- Should we close more schools? Build new schools? Reconfigure existing schools?
- Do we need a boundary change study?
- If we relocate alternative schools, where would we place them?
- What should go into a new capital bond measure?

The role of the Think Tank was not to make direct policy recommendations, but to help review and package information for the School Board's public process.

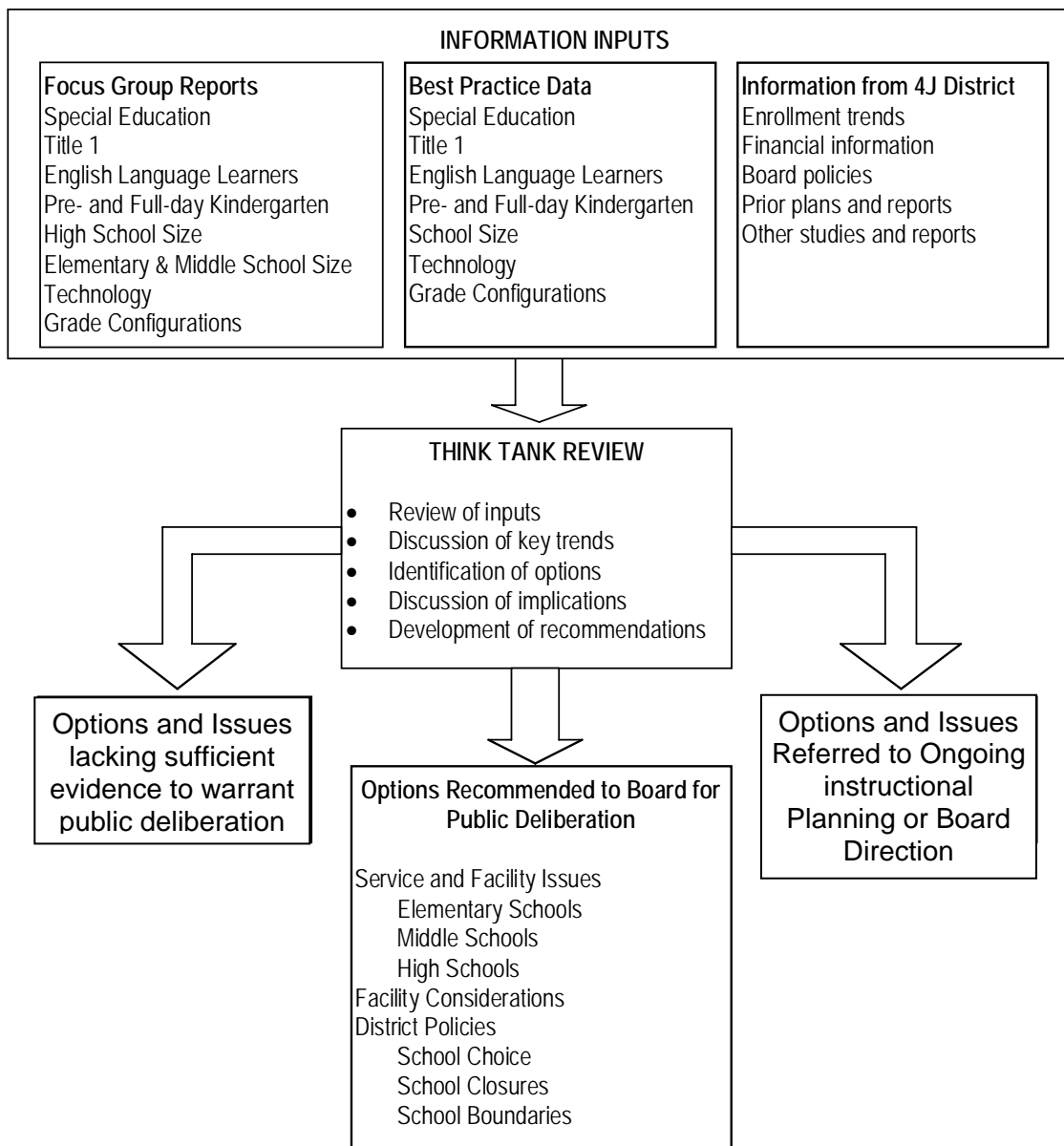
Staff from the University of Oregon's Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management facilitated the Think Tank process. The Think Tank consisted of 12 local residents selected by the UO team to represent a broad range of community perspectives. A complete list of Think Tank

members is included on the Acknowledgements page of this report. The Think Tank met 12 times between January and August 2007.

### Information Inputs

The first four meetings of the Think Tank were dedicated to reviewing the information inputs from the District, including Focus Group reports, best practices data, enrollment trends, financial information and other materials. The UO researchers also provided the Think Tank members with information submitted by community members. During the process, the Think Tank identified additional questions and data requests, and 4J District staff presented information in response to these requests.

**Figure 4. Think Tank Review Process**



## Think Tank Review

The process for developing the options summarized in this report was an iterative one. Input was obtained through the regular in-person meetings and narrowing and feedback on options was obtained through on-line surveys. After initially discussing a series of policy packages, it was determined that these [policy packages] presented artificial trade-offs and would not produce information from the public that would be helpful to the Board. Instead, the Think Tank focused on a series of strategic service and facility issues. These included topics specific to elementary schools, middle schools and high schools, as well as issues that cut across the District. Resolving these issues is not only key to the building infrastructure of the District, but also to providing the range of special needs services and supplementary programming for all 4J children. The Think Tank also deliberated on several School Board policies related to choice, school closures and school boundaries. They focused discussion on these issues because of concerns they raised about equity, special needs services, supplementary programming and operational costs.

During this process there were a number of issues that the Think Tank recommended *not* be carried forward for further public deliberation because the educational evidence did not support the change, the disruptions would be too great, the operational costs would be too great, or the capital costs would not be palatable to the public.

It was also determined that several issues related more to ongoing instructional planning, and these were referred to the District for their internal planning processes (see list of topics in Appendix A). The Think Tank believed these issues were important, but that they involved a level of instructional detail, programmatic complexity or legality that would make it difficult to advance to a public deliberation process.

## Think Tank Recommendations

The result of this process is a series of options for public deliberation that the Think Tank recommended to the School Board. These recommendations, which are outlined in Section 4 of this report, are grouped around three broad topics:

- Facility and service configurations
- Operational options
- District policies and programs

## SECTION 3: FRAMEWORK FOR THINK TANK RECOMMENDATIONS

The question for the *Shaping 4J's Future* process centered on the District's future instructional programs in light of the need to increase the achievement for all students and close the achievement gap. The charge of the Think Tank was to recommend options for further public deliberation by considering this question and providing a community perspective on the options being considered. To this end, the Think Tank often relied on a common set of concepts, which were later called "guiding principles." These guiding principles were used to sort through options and develop recommendations.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Through its discussions and deliberations, six important principles emerged that influenced the Think Tank's approach and shaped its recommendations:

- 1) Increase Overall Achievement:** Overall achievement refers to the educational performance of all students. The quality of education in the 4J District is important to the Eugene community, and affects the economic and social well being of the region. To become and remain effective citizens and competitive professionals, our students must be rigorously prepared for the global marketplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Concerns were raised during the Think Tank process about the number of students failing to meet federal and state benchmarks in reading and math, particularly in the latter years of their education. In considering service and configuration options for the District, the Think Tank relied extensively on best practices research to ensure changes will lead to an increase in overall achievement.
- 2) Decrease the Achievement Gap:** The achievement gap refers to the difference in achievement among groups of students with common characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, English language learner, socio-economic status or disability. In reviewing 4J student performance trends, the Think Tank was influenced by the data indicating that this gap increases between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. The data also showed that some groups have significantly lower achievement levels than other demographic groups, indicating that present services are not as successful in serving these populations. The Think Tank shares the School Board's goal of decreasing the achievement gap, particularly in light of enrollment trends predicting increasing numbers of students with special needs. Therefore, the Think Tank believes it is imperative that the improvements in overall student performance coincide with a decrease in the achievement gap. In other words, the School Board should ensure that any options it considers "improve the circumstances for low-achieving students."<sup>2</sup>
- 3) Increase Equity:** Inequalities exist among schools in terms of their ability to address students' educational needs, particularly for schools serving low income and/or low achieving students. In reviewing 4J District data, the Think Tank was concerned about the housing and demographic patterns that result in clustering of low-income families and special needs students. This issue is exacerbated by the limited incidence of students with special needs who transfer out of these regions compared to the higher achieving students

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<sup>2</sup> Quote by Hugh Prichard at May 21<sup>st</sup> Think Tank meeting.

who tend to exercise school choice. The research clearly demonstrates that students with special needs make tremendous gains if they are integrated with more traditionally high achieving populations and this does not have any negative impacts on high achieving students. The Think Tank considers it imperative that all schools provide an equally rigorous educational experience that all students can access. The responsibility of serving students with high needs should also be shared equitably between schools and regions.

- 4) **Consider Feasibility:** In considering the options for the District, the Think Tank was influenced by the District's dependence on the State of Oregon for operational funding. With decreasing enrollment, the District expects a decrease in revenue for operations unless there are significant changes in state funding. In contrast, capital costs are paid through bond measures, which must be approved through a local public voting process. However, local bonds are limited by public acceptance of the increase in local property taxes. In considering the options, the Think Tank weighed the operational and capital costs relative to the educational benefits they would have.
- 5) **Minimize Community and District Transitions:** Many of the options being considered in the *Shaping 4J's Future* process could involve significant transitions, such as school closures, mergers, relocations, and grade reconfigurations. These transitions involve human and financial costs. In reviewing the options, the Think Tank sought to minimize community and District transitions by focusing on options with clear educational and financial benefits.
- 6) **Honor Community Traditions:** The Think Tank stressed that the Eugene community has a deep sense of pride in the District, and this has helped attract people to Eugene who want to raise their children in the 4J system. The Think Tank took into account the many traditions and values associated with the 4J School District, including valuing children, community involvement, parental involvement, and school choice. All schools provide unique and distinctive learning environments and high quality programming, and schools that offer district-wide enrollment (alternative schools) are part of that diverse offering. One of the District's more revered traditions is the open enrollment policy, which allows students to attend the school of their choice in the District if space is available. While there are many benefits to this freedom, it also creates inequities among schools, particularly in relation to serving students with special needs. The Think Tank carefully weighed open enrollment with the ascribed goal of decreasing the achievement gap. It sought to ensure that the benefits of changes be weighed against the number of students served and the ability of those programs to efficiently and equitably serve all students and close the achievement gap.

## APPROACH TO DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Think Tank was charged with taking the information from the District and integrating and narrowing it into a more limited set of options that could be presented in a public deliberation process. In developing these options, the Think Tank relied heavily on best practices information and Focus Group reports. Appendix A contains a list of all options initially considered by the Think Tank and the actions taken on those recommendations. There are several reasons why options were not moved forward:

- They were referred to the District's ongoing instructional planning process, because they related to the specifics of instructional initiatives or curriculum planning

- The Think Tank recommended that they not be forwarded because it appeared they did not sufficiently improve achievement, decrease the achievement gap, or create greater equity
- The Think Tank recommended that they not be forwarded because they were too costly, created too much disruption or were logistically unfeasible

## **SECTION 4: RECOMMENDED OPTIONS FOR PUBLIC PROCESS**

This section outlines the issues addressed by the Think Tank. Background information for each topic, and the final recommendations and rationale used by the Think Tank are presented below.

### **ISSUES DELIBERATED BY THE 4J THINK TANK:**

#### **Facility and Service Configurations**

1. Elementary School Size
2. School Configuration
3. Middle School Size
4. High School Size
5. K-8 Schools
6. Alternative Schools
7. Kindergarten and Preschool Infrastructure

#### **Operational Options**

8. Kindergarten and Preschool
9. ELL Programs
10. Technology
11. Special Education
12. Title I

#### **District Policies and Programs**

13. School Closures
14. School Choice
15. School Boundaries
16. Professional Development

### **FACILITY AND SERVICE CONFIGURATIONS**

#### **1. Elementary School Size**

**Overview of the Issue:** There have been significant reductions in enrollment at some elementary schools as overall enrollment in 4J declines. Ten schools have fewer than 300 students enrolled, and



four schools have enrollment levels at or below 200 students. The average size of elementary schools in the United States is approximately 480 students. Each independently located school requires dedicated administration and support services, meaning ultimately it is more expensive to operate smaller schools than larger ones. Additionally, it is not financially feasible to staff small schools with enough personnel to adequately serve special needs students. The result is that special needs students are clustered in larger schools or are under-served within smaller schools. Given current enrollment trends, particularly in consideration of the scarcity of young families in some regions, it is logical that 4J consolidate three or four elementary schools in the near future (i.e. two schools would be closed). The question is whether a more proactive consolidation policy would serve the District's interest in raising overall achievement and closing the achievement gap.

**Key Background Information:**

- Research on best practices has found that schools in the 300-400 range are optimal
- The 4J Special Education Focus Group reported that schools with an enrollment below 350 would likely not be able to provide comprehensive support services to high needs groups
- The enrollment level at 10 elementary schools in the District, and the capacity of six of those schools are below the 350 size needed to adequately serve all populations
- Several new schools in the District were constructed with 500+ capacity, but innovative design allows the school to effectively be split into several sections
- Presently, elementary schools in 4J have enrollments that range between 140 and 550 students, and capacities that range between 175 and 550 students
- Consolidation of elementary school-sites would decrease operational costs by approximately \$177,000 per school-site at the elementary level

**Options Considered and Recommendations:**

Elementary School Size	Recommendation to School Board
Which elementary school size options should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?	Decision: The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input concerning the size of elementary schools. The Think Tank recommends a targeted minimum enrollment of 350 students for each school site, and a maximum enrollment determined by a site's capacity. Further, the Think Tank recommends that the District implement smaller learning environments in elementary schools whose enrollment exceeds 400 students.

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation is consistent with the Think Tank's guiding principles in that it would increase equity amongst schools, and have positive impacts on achievement and the achievement gap.

Presently many schools are under or over best practice enrollment levels. Sites with enrollment levels below 350 students cannot equitably serve all students, particularly special education students. Increased opportunity and integration for all students is required to better meet federal and state special education guidelines, and it is also likely that such action will lead to closing the achievement gap. Administrative services are less efficient in schools with limited enrollment. While consolidation of schools does not save enough to be the sole rationale, the aggregate of savings, increased equity and increased programming, makes consolidation worthwhile. Larger schools would also likely allow richer programming for all students, such as art, music, and PE.

Members of the Think Tank do not believe that an enrollment cap at the elementary school level should be considered at this point. While there is some rationale behind limiting enrollment to around 400 students, larger new schools in the District have demonstrated good outcomes and it doesn't seem rational to decrease enrollment in those schools at this point. That being said, the Think Tank does believe there is benefit in larger schools implementing some form of smaller learning environments.

In addition to size, however, it was highlighted in Think Tank discussions that school sites also need multiple classes within each grade at each site. For instance, two third-grade classes at a given school allow special education students to be split between those two classes, lessening the burden on any one teacher. It is important that, in addition to school sizes being large enough to support effective integration of special education students, each site have multiple classes at each grade level.

**Implications:** The suggested school size preferences, if enforced, will impact the enrollment flexibility of individual schools. This would increase the ability of administrators to predict their student enrollment from year to year, but would likely decrease the ability of students to transfer from school to school. Transfer ability would be limited by minimum enrollment and school capacity. For instance, the current difference between the suggested minimum and site capacity is less than 100 students at seven elementary schools, meaning there is less room at sites for students to transfer into.

The suggested school size preferences, if enforced, would likely result in the renovation of four present school sites in order to increase their capacity to the minimum recommended levels and the closure of two elementary schools. These changes would not be immediate and it is likely that 4J would need to undergo an assessment of sites to determine where expansion and/or closure are logical, based on enrollment and student distribution trends.

## 2. School Configuration

**Overview of the Issue:** School districts across the country have experimented with different grade configuration models, attempting to identify the ideal social and academic environment to best nurture young students. Most recently there has been growing interest in the potential benefits of a model in which students are kept in the same building from kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade (K-8), and a model where young students are kept together from kindergarten through second grade before moving on to a middle school environment. Research indicates there are advantages and disadvantages to all models. The 4J focus groups forwarded options that concentrated on both of these topics for the Think Tank to consider.

### K-2, 3-8 SCHOOLS

A K-2, 3-8, 9-12 configuration has demonstrated positive educational outcomes for young students in K-2 schools, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in this configuration have been higher achievers than 8<sup>th</sup> graders in grade 6-8 middle schools. Similarly, there is some evidence that 8<sup>th</sup> graders engage in less sexual activity and drug use when their schools have a younger orientation than traditional middle schools. These benefits must be weighed against the potential drawbacks, which include: the considerable cost and logistical implications of renovating elementary and middle schools, and increasing the number of transitions between schools for young students. Transitions between schools at a young age have proven difficult for students and are particularly negative for children already facing other academic challenges.

#### Key Background Information:

- Some best practice research suggests that K-2, 3-8, 9-12 models produce the highest achievement among students, though the evidence is limited
- Focus Groups indicated that a K-3, 4-8, 9-12 model makes more sense in Oregon due to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reporting requirements
- 4J administrators have suggested that transitions between schools are difficult for all students, but have a particularly negative impact on students with special needs
- Elementary and middle schools would need to be renovated to adopt a K-2, 3-8, 9-12

#### Options Considered and Recommendations:

K-2, 3-8 Grade Configuration	Recommendation to School Board
<b>2.1 K-2, 3-8, 9-12:</b> Should a K-3, 4-8, 9-12 model be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?	<b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board wait before having the community deliberate converting schools to a K-2, 3-8, 9-12 or K-3, 4-8, 9-12 model.

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes there is inadequate evidence to justify the significant cost and disruptions associated with such a configuration change and this option is potentially inconsistent with its guiding principles.

There is not enough information to make an informed decision on this option. The best practice data provided by 4J during Phase I of the Shaping 4J's Future process was based on a few case studies, and there was little other evidence of the benefits of this model. Further, 4J does not currently have cost data on this reconfiguration option but it is perceived to be very high, involving refurbishing all middle and elementary schools and increasing transportation costs. Including this option in public deliberations would significantly increase the complexity of the public decision making process without enough solid data to aid decision making.

This model also leads to several negative outcomes. This proposed District model would increase transitions for students, which has a negative effect on high needs populations and therefore negates the goal of closing the achievement gap. Furthermore the Think Tank voiced some concern about putting 4th and 8th graders together in the same building.

**Implications:** Without forwarding this option to the public process, the District might pass up a configuration that proves to be effective in increasing student achievement. Furthermore, by not including a K-2, 3-8, 9-12 option, parents and students have fewer educational options from which to choose.

## K-8 SCHOOLS

**Overview of the Issue:** There is some national and local momentum behind adopting a K-8 configuration instead of, or in addition to, K-5, 6-8 configurations within school districts. Portland, for instance, faced with declining enrollment, is converting 27 schools to K-8 schools over the next few years. Research suggests that K-8 models have some social and academic benefits in contrast to other models, but these data are limited and other data have demonstrated little difference between K-8 schools and other configurations. 4J staff have expressed their opinion that “the jury is still out” concerning K-8 outcomes.

Approximately \$261,000 can be saved in annual operational costs by consolidating two schools into one K-8, but one-time conversion costs range between three and six million dollars. Typically conversion of two schools into a K-8 is considered when enrollment is steadily declining at middle and elementary schools within the same general area.

### **Key Background Information:**

- Best practice research reveals K-8 schools have some benefits for middle school students by maintaining an elementary school environment and reducing student transitions
- Capital costs of an all K-8 model for 4J is approximately \$153 million
- Merging an elementary and middle school into a K-8 saves \$261,000 in annual operational costs and incurs one-time capital costs of \$3-6 million (depending on the schools)
- Merging two elementary schools into K-8 increases annual operational costs by \$86,000 and incurs one-time capital costs of \$6-10 million (depending on the schools)

## Options Considered and Recommendations:

K-8 Grade Configuration	Recommendation to School Board
2.2 K-8: Should an option of converting to a K-8 configuration be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?	<b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board assess the success of K-8 schools in nearby districts before having the community deliberate converting all schools to the K-8 model. However, the District should consider a new K-8 school during its reconfiguration process if it makes sense educationally and financially.

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes there is inadequate evidence to justify the significant cost and disruptions associated with such a configuration change making this option inconsistent with its guiding principles.

Without clear evidence that the K-8 model produces significant benefits, the costs of conversion seem far too risky. Conversion projects would be costly and disruptive. With one school within 4J (Jefferson), and many schools in Portland and Bethel adopting the model, more research data should soon be available. It seems logical to await the outcomes of those conversions before considering massive transformation. For this reason the Think Tank believes there is no reason to approach the public about K-8 yet.

The Think Tank acknowledges that there are specific circumstances in which a K-8 conversion might be logical for two schools within 4J. At present the 4J policy is to approach decisions about conversion on a case-by-case basis. The Think Tank is supportive of continuing these assessments to determine if a conversion is logical depending upon specific circumstances. Again, because this approach is already 4J's established practice, added public comment does not seem necessary at this point on this issue.

**Implications:** If the K-8 model proves to have significant benefits, 4J will have lost time in transitioning to this configuration option and subsequently children may not receive the District's best offering. Avoiding the complexity of adding K-8 schools to the myriad options already under discussion helps simplify the process. The potential adaptation of schools into K-8 configurations adds significant complexity to both middle school and elementary size deliberations.

### 3. Middle School Size

**Overview of the Issue:** 4J’s open enrollment policy allows students to transfer freely between schools resulting in an uneven distribution of students among middle schools. Resources are allocated depending upon enrollment levels and, therefore, open enrollment leads to inequities in the programs and resources available at under-enrolled schools. Historically, high achieving students tend to transfer much more often than other students. This trend leaves some schools over-represented by higher need and low achieving students. This in turn creates inequities in the distribution of workload for teachers and continues to exacerbate resource inequities between different schools. While the balance of enrollment between schools is not tremendously uneven in middle schools, the potential for increased inequity is not regulated by present District policies. Jefferson is transferring to a K-8 model, but has an enrollment level just over 300 at the middle school level, and Roosevelt Middle School has approximately 100 more students enrolled than the next biggest school (Monroe at 590 students).

#### Key Background Information:

- Oregon QEM research indicates that middle schools with around 500 students are optimal
- Best practices also indicates that between 400-800 students is an effective size for secondary schools
- Current 4J middle school enrollments range from 309 to 672, though Jefferson is the only school with an enrollment below 400 students
- Current 4J middle school building capacity, which is the number of students that can be accommodated in the building, ranges from 660 at Madison to 1020 at Roosevelt

#### Options Considered and Recommendations:

Middle School Size	Recommendation to School Board
Which middle school size options should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?	<b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input concerning the size of middle schools. The Think Tank recommends a targeted minimum enrollment of 400 students and a maximum enrollment of 600 students.

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase (and protect) equity amongst schools—furthering the Think Tank’s guiding principles of equity, increasing achievement, and closing the achievement gap.

Presently many schools are close to best practice enrollment levels, with only Jefferson and Roosevelt falling outside those parameters. Therefore, adopting enrollment parameters would not create a need for drastic changes in the District. Ensuring that enrollment levels fall within the best practice parameters would, however, fix a set of enrollment guidelines that could become increasingly important in the future.

Again, schools with enrollment levels below 350 cannot provide comprehensive special education services. Additionally, schools serving fewer than 400 to 500 students fall outside the parameters of best practice research. Larger schools would likely allow richer programming, such as art, music, and PE. Therefore adopting a minimum enrollment level encourages increased equity among middle schools and ensures that every school retains a size structure best suited to serve all students. Furthermore, it also ensures that each high school has enough “feeder” middle schools within its area to help achieve optimum high school enrollment targets.

Members of the Think Tank also believe that a maximum enrollment level is prudent for middle schools because the large school sites (e.g., Roosevelt, etc.) have capacities that would allow significant enrollment inequities to arise. A maximum enrollment level ensures that no school grows beyond best practice levels, and increases the chances that students remain equitably distributed across the District.

**Implications:** The suggested school size preferences, if enforced, will impact the enrollment flexibility of individual schools. This would increase the ability of administrators to predict their student enrollment from year to year, but would likely decrease the ability of students to transfer from school to school.

If these suggestions were adopted, the smaller enrollment of Jefferson, as K-8, might be considered an exception to the rule.

It is also likely that if these changes were adopted, enrollment at Roosevelt would be decreased, perhaps raising the ire of the public.

Limiting enrollment to best practice levels, if enforced, would not immediately impact 4J infrastructure needs unless a K-8 school were also added.

#### 4. High School Size and Configuration

**Overview of the Issue:** There are significant differences in student enrollment at different high schools. South Eugene and Sheldon High School have 400+ more students than Churchill and North Eugene High School. 4J's open enrollment policy allows students to transfer freely between schools and this has resulted in an uneven distribution of students among the high schools. Resources are allocated to schools depending upon their student enrollment levels. Therefore, the open enrollment policy has also led to inequities in the resources available to different schools. Historically, high achieving students transfer more often than other students. This trend leaves some schools over-represented by higher need and low achieving students. This in turn creates a much higher workload for teachers in the under-enrolled schools, perpetuates challenges associated with concentrating low SES students, and continues to exacerbate the resource inequities between schools.

As general enrollment declines over the next five years, the largest decline is anticipated in the high school population. Projections indicate that high school enrollment will decline by 700 students during this time period. It becomes very difficult to appropriately staff the existing high schools if enrollment falls below 1000 students. If present enrollment trends continue, under current open enrollment policies, it seems likely that one of the high schools would eventually have to be closed.

In addition to the issues surrounding the size of schools, there are also issues regarding the instructional configuration of schools. Two solutions under consideration nationwide are career academies and smaller learning communities. There is a growing trend by high schools to use career academies to prepare high school students for post-secondary opportunities. There are many types of career academies but generally they incorporate professional training of students in the use of sophisticated equipment and techniques within a particular area of focus, like nursing. The exact costs of creating a comprehensive career academy are unknown but would be significant, mainly due to the necessity for high-tech equipment, training and supplies. A comprehensive career academy would provide the opportunity to develop professional skills within multiple professional tracks whereas a less inclusive model might involve individual schools creating classes focused on developing specific professional skills.

Regardless of how many students attend school at a given building (site), there are ways of organizing students and classes that foster increased personalization by creating small learning communities. *Small learning communities* aim to limit the number of teachers and other students that youth interact with on a daily basis. Typically students are grouped together according to their interests or skill level, and placed in a "school". Students then interact with only a dedicated set of teachers and a limited number of students (typically 300-500 per learning community). These 'schools' are separated from one another in the same building to the extent that is possible. When compared to larger school environments, smaller learning communities have the advantage of increasing attendance, participation, sense of community, parental engagement, and deterring drop-outs..

#### Key Background Information:

- Research on best practices has found that schools in the 400-800 range are optimum
- The current range of high school sizes is: Sheldon=1,642; South=1,700; Churchill=1,287; North=1,159.



- If equally distributed, present enrollment at each school would be approximately 1,450 students.
- The present capacity at 4J's high schools ranges from 1600 at North Eugene High School to 2176 at South Eugene High School
- Projected high school enrollment in 2015 is 5,082 (current enrollment is 5,788)
- Best practice research indicates that smaller learning communities increase attendance, participation, sense of community, parental engagement, and deter drop-outs.
- There is no recommended enrollment size for smaller learning communities, however, Gates Foundation research suggests there must be fewer than 500 students

**Options Considered and Recommendations:**

High School Size	Recommendation to School Board
<p>High School Size: Which high school size options should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?:</p> <p>Construct 1-2 new high schools to create 5-6 schools with enrollment levels closer to 800 students</p> <p>Reconfigure to 3 larger high schools with enrollment of 1700-1900</p> <p>Maintain current configuration of 4 high schools</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input concerning high school size. The Think Tank recommends keeping the four current high schools as the best feasible option.</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes many of the suggested options are unfeasible due to associated costs, while others create circumstances that might negatively impact student achievement. Both factors are inconsistent with the Think Tank's guiding principles.

The cost of constructing a new high school but would be substantial (The cost of constructing Cal Young Middle School was \$17,450,000). Figures from other districts indicates that a new high school is costs approximately \$60 to \$80 million. Additionally each new building would increase the net cost of administration by at least \$250,000 per site annually. The Think Tank concluded that, in the face of declining enrollment, it would not be logical to construct additional high school buildings.

Consolidating to three high schools would create schools with enrollment levels between 1700 and 1900 students per school. The Think Tank feels creating schools of this size is undesirable in our community. While it is likely that a larger school could offer more diversity in programs, increasing the number of students at a school site seems to run in opposition to creating more intimate, smaller learning communities.

**Implications:** Maintaining the four current high schools is likely the least contentious option. As will be detailed below, however, the Think Tank is not proposing to maintain the four high schools under current policies. It is likely that the cumulative impact of the suggested changes would significantly alter the operation of the current school models. Other implications are discussed in more detail below.

**Options Considered and Recommendations:**

Limiting High School Enrollment	Recommendation to School Board
<p>Managing High School Enrollment: Should the concept of limiting enrollment at high schools be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on managing enrollment. The Think Tank believes managing enrollment will result in more equitable distribution of high school students and programs across regions, which will have positive outcomes for the District.</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase equity amongst schools, and subsequently have positive impacts on achievement and the achievement gap. Both these factors are consistent with the Think Tank’s guiding principles.

4J’s policy of open school choice has created a circumstance where some high schools attract a disproportionate percentage of high achieving and higher income students. This concentrates less mobile, high need and low income populations at specific schools, exacerbating challenges associated with the achievement gap and workload inequities. In other words, the opportunity for success is drastically different for teachers and students within different schools.

Furthermore, the present policy is not ideal for increasing the achievement of all students and effectively promulgates the achievement gap. With this in mind, the Think Tank believes that limiting enrollment at the high school level is a logical step for the community to consider. The Think Tank does not believe a blanket enrollment level, like 1450, across all schools necessarily makes the most sense. Rather, it seems likely that individual circumstances, relating to capacity, school boundaries and smaller learning community models would more effectively dictate enrollment levels for each school. The Think Tank is in favor of schools being similarly sized.

**Implications:** Managing enrollment allows administrators to more easily predict enrollment levels and budget issues from year to year, increasing efficiency and organization of staff and resources within the District. Tighter control will also likely result in increased diversity in the demographic makeup of schools’ student populations, helping balance social and educational circumstances. Managing enrollment at the high school level reduces the amount of freedom offered by the District’s open enrollment policy. Limiting enrollment makes it more likely that students would attend their neighborhood high school. This in turn might encourage a shift in housing patterns where more mobile families would move within the boundaries of historically high enrollment schools.

## Options Considered and Recommendations:

Career Academies	Recommendation to School Board
<p><b>High School Career Academies:</b> Which career academy options should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public? An independently sited career academy? Improving career academy options within present high schools?</p> <p>[Note: a career academy refers to school-based programs designed to train students for careers such as culinary arts, health care, engineering and environmental studies.]</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on improving career academy programs within high schools. The Think Tank recommends enhancing career academy options at each school, particularly through community partnerships (e.g. with Lane Community College).</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes an independently sited career academy would be financially unfeasible, but that the suggested recommendation would have positive impacts on overall achievement in the District. Thus, in terms of the Think Tank’s guiding principles, it could increase overall achievement, but at an unfeasible cost.

The Think Tank believes that career academies provide great potential for boosting post-secondary opportunities for high school students. However, there are significant barriers to implementing any career academy model.

An independently sited career academy would either require construction of a new building or renovation of an existing school to house it. Construction of a new, centrally located building, for reasons outlined in the High School Size section of this report, seems too costly to justify the promising but under-studied concept of career academies.

If an independent career academy were to be placed in an existing building, a host of concerns would be raised about access and equity. The Think Tank’s largest concern is that a career academy would mimic the trend seen with present alternative schools, namely that low income and higher needs students are less able to utilize the offering than other students. Bleeding higher qualified and more mobile students from neighborhood schools would again concentrate low income and higher needs students in neighborhood schools, exacerbating achievement gap concerns.

Additionally, the significant operational costs of equipment, training and operations make a comprehensive career academy unlikely given current District budget projections. The Think Tank therefore favors improving the career academy options available at each high school to the extent possible. It seems likely that this creates better access to participation for the most students. If schools diversify their career academy options, it is also possible that these programs could attract interested students who receive their core curriculum at other schools.

**Implications:** Independent career academies may present an excellent opportunity to prepare older youth for post-secondary opportunities. If this issue is not deliberated in a public forum it seems unlikely that 4J will develop a comprehensive career academy in the near future. If career programs within present schools are made available to all eligible students within the District there may be reason to consider transporting students, particularly higher needs students, to programs outside of their boundary areas.

**Options Considered and Recommendations:**

Small Learning Communities Within High Schools	Recommendation to School Board
<p><b>Small Learning Communities:</b> Should smaller learning communities within current high schools (e.g., school-within-school programs) be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on smaller learning communities within each high school. The Think Tank strongly believes that small learning communities will have positive outcomes for the District. Total enrollment at individual high schools might depend on how many learning communities exist at each site.</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would have positive impacts on overall achievement in the District, and is therefore consistent with its guiding principles.

Research clearly demonstrates that smaller learning communities can improve achievement for all students, but these models also help address many of the specific issues faced in closing the achievement gap. For instance, increased teacher/pupil interaction can help teachers to differentiate their lesson plans depending upon the needs of given students. Such differentiation is a proven technique for improving learning among special education students. The Think Tank believes smaller learning communities would result in closing the achievement gap and lead to many of the other described social benefits as well.

Similarly, there seem to be few economic or social drawbacks to this model. While it is understood that the smaller learning communities model at North Eugene has increased annual operational costs in that school, it is also understood that those increases are minor and should diminish over time. These slight drawbacks are outweighed by the potential benefits.

There may be benefits to adopting different small learning community models within different schools as well, which will increase the variety of learning environments within the District and allow schools some flexibility in adapting their present practices. Having said that, there is not necessarily a need for these “schools” to be thematically distinct from one another. Similarly there doesn’t seem to be any one best range for smaller learning environments. The Think Tank believes the District would be wise to consider implementing smaller learning environments at any school site where enrollment exceeds 400 students.

**Implications:** Opinions of the small learning environments at North Eugene High School have been mixed, and encouraging their implementation at all schools could become a politically charged issue with teachers, students and parents. It will also be important to ensure that all schools, despite differences in size or focus, provide an engaging, relevant and rigorous program that is accessible to all students.

If small learning environments are adopted at all schools, there may be a need to allow some enrollment inequities at different school sites depending upon their spatial needs. For instance, if Churchill had four small learning communities each with 300 students, and Sheldon had three of 500 students each, it follows that Sheldon's overall enrollment might be higher.

## 5. Alternative Schools

**Overview of the Issue:** In order to meet the mandate for an alternative schools charter, schools must be able to exhibit that their programming differs significantly from that offered through more traditional schools. For many years alternative schools have done so and increased the diversity of learning opportunities available to students in 4J. Proponents claim that these distinct learning environments help improve the achievement of students who learn best in environments that differ from those provided in traditional schools. The programs have been popular and have a strong following of engaged and passionate parents and teachers. These programs tend to be smaller and many alternative schools claim their small size is what distinguishes their services from those of other schools. In other words, if forced to grow, the uniqueness of some alternative programs would diminish.

Historically, alternative schools have attracted a disproportionate percentage of higher achieving and higher SES students. Criticisms of these schools claim that the alternative schools create a two-tiered system in 4J where elite students attend one set of alternative schools and other, less mobile, and higher needs students become concentrated in neighborhood schools. This debate over alternative schools has become a very contentious issue in the community.

As suggested in the Elementary School Size section of this report, it is the belief of 4J staff and administrators that there are barriers to serving special education students in school sites where enrollment is below 350 students. At present none of the alternative schools are this large.

The School Board recently decided to end the practice of co-locating alternative schools with neighborhood schools. It was determined that co-location created administrative obstacles that overwhelmed the benefits of schools sharing a common site. Alternative schools, however, can still be co-located with one another.

### **Key Background Information:**

- Several alternative schools are comparable in size to mid-range neighborhood schools (e.g., 293), while others are considerably smaller (e.g., 97, 121, 131, 147)
- Current District policies allow the co-location of alternative schools on the same site (with shared administrative staff), but do not allow alternative schools to be co-located with neighborhood schools
- Currently minority, special education, low income and ELL students are under-represented in alternative schools
- For further specific information about present location of alternative schools please see the Access and Options Report (4J 2004)

## Options Considered and Recommendations:

Alternative Schools	Recommendation to School Board
<p>What considerations about Alternative Schools should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on alternative schools. The Think Tank recommends that alternative schools adhere to the same 350 minimum site enrollment as other elementary schools, allowing these schools to meet the needs of all students equitably. The Think Tank believes steps should be taken to encourage equitable distribution of students with special needs in alternative schools (includes Special Education, Title 1 and English Language Learner students).</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase equity among schools in the District and would further the Think Tank’s guiding principles of equity, increasing achievement, and closing the achievement gap.

There is great value in multiple educational environments from which students can choose the option that best suits them. However, there is a limit to how much the District can differentiate its services and, since other core educational components are impacted, it may be necessary to limit programs that serve small populations of students. As the District begins consolidating schools in the midst of declining enrollment, and in light of our previous recommendations about elementary school size, there should not be one set of size parameters for neighborhood schools and another set for district-wide schools. It would be unfair to apply a minimum size requirement to neighborhood schools to increase equity and not apply the same policy to alternative school sites.

Additionally, all educational options within the District should be equally accessible to all students, and the District should work diligently to eradicate real or perceived elitism in the District. Alternative schools have historically pulled higher achieving students out of their regional schools, leaving neighborhood schools with high concentrations of students with special needs, subsequently decreasing these student’s opportunities for success, and creating inequitable workloads for teachers.

In addition to simply increasing enrollment, the Think Tank believes there are a number of mutually beneficial ways for alternative schools to meet these enrollment mandates. Alternative schools could be co-located with one or even two other alternative schools, allowing them to retain their own small size, but allowing the combined site to meet the enrollment stipulations and therefore have the capability of serving all students. Additionally, if schools were to give up their district-wide enrollment privilege, they could become a program within neighborhood schools, subject to the

same enrollment parameters as neighborhood schools (like the current Rachel Carson program at Churchill).

In addition to creating size parameters that encourage equity in alternative schools, the Think Tank believes other policies could ensure demographic diversification of alternative schools. It is our understanding that the District currently gives some priority to low income students attempting to transfer into schools where students with special needs are under-represented. We encourage the School Board to increase these measures, extending such priority to all student groups over-represented within the achievement gap.

The Think Tank also believes that alternative programs should be equitably distributed throughout all regions, allowing equal access but also attempting to avoid drawing too many students away from any one region. In this vein, the Think Tank also believes it would be prudent for the District to investigate neighborhood schools from which many students are transferring. It may be possible to implement more attractive programs within the region's neighborhood schools, encouraging those students and their parents to stay within their region.

The Think Tank also suggests the term "alternative school" be dropped in favor of calling schools by their given name. While we recognize a name change does not fundamentally change the nature of these schools, it does begin to eradicate the concept that these schools are different from neighborhood schools. Ultimately, these schools must attract and serve a diverse range of students that reflect our community's demographics. We believe other recommendations, particularly prioritizing transfer students with special needs into district-wide schools, will, over time, do away with demographic differences that exist between neighborhood and district-wide schools.

**Implications:** Some existing alternative schools would have to grow in size or co-locate to meet enrollment parameters. With the possibility of closing or merging some alternative schools, there is likely to be a degree of public dissatisfaction.

On the other hand, this policy would clearly demonstrate that equity is a primary priority in the District. The tradeoff is likely to be the closure of alternative schools that are unable or unwilling to increase their school site enrollment levels.



## 6. Kindergarten and Preschool Infrastructure

**Overview of the Issue:** This particular section focuses on the *space* (infrastructure) available for kindergarten/pre-kindergarten classes within the District. The issue of *how* 4J could implement its kindergarten/pre-kindergarten offerings is dealt with in later sections of this report.

Presently 4J offers half-day kindergarten to all students at neighborhood elementary schools. In addition, some programs offer extended-day and full-day kindergarten to qualifying students. Research demonstrates there are benefits to engaging students in kindergarten activities, and it seems likely the Oregon State Legislature will increase funding for kindergarten during the next budget period. Participation in early education activities appears particularly effective for higher needs students, whose skill level entering school careers places them significantly behind their peers. Many states already offer full-day kindergartens within their public school systems.

If 4J were to offer full-day kindergarten to all students, the District would need twice the amount of space now available for kindergarten activities. Because classrooms are used for other purposes when kindergarten classes are not meeting or in session, there is not space within some elementary schools to offer increased kindergarten hours. In other words, to accommodate full-day kindergarten at all of 4J's elementary schools, two-six schools would need to construct additional classrooms.

In addition to the kindergarten issue, there is also mounting evidence that participating in pre-kindergarten activities has substantial benefits, particularly for students with special needs. States like Texas and Massachusetts are offering pre-kindergarten classes in their public school system. Some schools in 4J host pre-kindergarten activities in their schools, however, 4J does not pay to operate these programs. Organizations like Head-Start operate the programs. Exploring additional pre-school collaborations might be a fruitful way to increase pre-kindergarten offerings. There is not room, however, at current schools to make pre-kindergarten activities available to all students.

### Key Background Information:

- If money for kindergartens becomes available through the Oregon State legislature, there is currently not enough space to accommodate kindergarten programs at all 4J elementary schools
- The capital costs to build kindergarten/pre-kindergarten space is approximately \$410,000 per classroom and full-day kindergarten could require new classrooms in two-six schools
- Pre-kindergarten classes are generally funded by outside organizations

**Options Considered and Recommendations:**

Kindergarten Infrastructure	Recommendation to School Board
<p><b>Kindergarten:</b> Should the concept of increasing infrastructure for kindergarten be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on providing kindergarten infrastructure. The Think Tank believes there is logic in providing sufficient space for additional kindergarten offerings that could be funded by the Legislature.</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase the possibility of closing the achievement gap in the District, which is consistent with the Think Tank’s guiding principles.

If the legislature funds full-day kindergarten throughout the State, 4J should be prepared to take advantage of that opportunity. If there is not enough space at every school, the only option available to 4J would be to offer full-day kindergarten only at schools with sufficient capacity. This situation is undesirable as it creates regional inequities within the District, would likely increase transportation costs, and increase transitions between schools for young children. While construction costs could be significant, it seems worthwhile to invest in increased capacity, given recent discussions in the Legislature about increasing funding for kindergarten. This issue seems particularly attractive as it serves all students, but has larger impact on higher needs students.

**Implications:** Funding for new classrooms would have to be approved within a new capital budget. Renovations within elementary schools might cause disruptions during the school year.

**Options Considered and Recommendations:**

Pre-kindergarten Infrastructure	Recommendation to School Board
<p><b>Pre-kindergarten:</b> Should the concept of increasing infrastructure for pre-kindergarten be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on providing pre-kindergarten infrastructure. The Think Tank believes there would be benefit to providing more pre-kindergarten opportunities within 4J buildings, and encourages the District to collaborate with pre-kindergarten providers.</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase the possibility of closing the achievement gap in the District consistent with the guiding principles.

Research indicates that pre-kindergarten instruction has a positive impact on the achievement of students, particularly students with special needs. Since the operational costs associated with pre-kindergarten instruction are subsidized by other organizations, the costs borne by 4J are limited to any new construction costs associated with offering pre-kindergarten classes. In this manner, creating space for activities is one way 4J can leverage its funding to improve services in the District. While the Think Tank is supportive of pre-kindergarten, the issue appears to have less political momentum at present than the provision of kindergarten.

The Think Tank believes that 4J should focus on ensuring space is dedicated for pre-kindergarten within any school where new construction is taking place or where space is presently available. In addition, 4J should work with the organizations providing pre-kindergarten instruction and determine regional priorities. It seems logical to prioritize space for pre-kindergarten in low SES neighborhoods and Title 1 schools.

**Implications:** Funding for new classrooms would have to be approved within a new capital budget. Renovations within elementary schools might cause disruptions during the school year. Similarly, including kindergarteners and pre-kindergartners would increase the enrollment levels at elementary schools. This could impact the infrastructure needs of certain buildings, requiring additional construction to ensure that schools could continue to provide services for high needs populations and have at least two classes at each grade level.

## OPERATIONAL OPTIONS

### 7. Kindergarten and Preschool

**Overview of the Issue:** This particular section focuses on *how* 4J could implement its kindergarten/pre-kindergarten offerings. The *Space* (infrastructure) available for kindergarten/pre-kindergarten classes within the District is dealt with in earlier sections of this report.

Research demonstrates there are benefits to engaging students in kindergarten activities, and there have been discussions in the Oregon State Legislature of increasing funding for kindergarten. Participation in early education activities appears particularly effective for higher needs students, whose skill level entering school careers places them significantly behind their peers. Many states already offer full-day kindergartens within their public school systems. Presently, 4J offers half-day kindergarten to all students at neighborhood elementary schools. In addition, some programs offer extended-day and full-day kindergarten to qualifying students.

While kindergarten and pre-kindergarten classes have proven effective at improving achievement for some students, offering full-day kindergarten is also costly. First, there must be space dedicated to hosting kindergarten and pre-kindergarten classes. This subject is discussed in the preceding section. Secondly, implementation of full-day kindergarten classes would cost the District approximately \$3.4 million dollars a year. (Pre-kindergarten implementation costs are generally subsidized through other organizations).

In addition to the kindergarten issue, there is also mounting evidence that participating in pre-kindergarten activities has substantial benefits, particularly for students with special needs. States like Texas and Arizona are offering pre-kindergarten classes in their public school systems. Some schools in 4J host pre-kindergarten activities in their schools, however, 4J does not operate these programs. Other organizations, like Head-Start, operate the programs. There is not room at present schools to make pre-kindergarten activities available to all students.

#### Key Background Information:

- Best practice information indicates kindergarten results in some short term gains
- District-wide all-day kindergarten would require an additional \$3.4 million per year, requiring a substantial reallocation of operational funding or increased funding from the state
- Early education programs benefit low SES students, particularly in reading
- Pre-kindergarten programs are currently offered in high schools to serve students who have children and provide students instruction in child development
- Head Start and other providers offer pre-kindergarten programs at some schools.

## Options Considered and Recommendations:

Implementation of Kindergarten	Recommendation to School Board
<b>Kindergarten Implementation:</b> What considerations about kindergarten offerings should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?	<b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate about substantially increasing kindergarten services because there is insufficient funding to do so in the foreseeable future. However, the Think Tank does believe the District should continue to allocate funding for extended kindergarten, particularly where it helps high needs populations.

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes it is currently financially unfeasible for the District to provide full-day kindergarten, making this option inconsistent with its guiding principles.

Offering full-day kindergarten services to all students would cost over three million dollars per year in addition to the capital costs associated with creating space to offer district-wide full-day kindergarten. Without additional State funding, there does not appear to be a way to fund additional kindergarten.

There may be some way to provide targeted full-day kindergarten for high needs populations by reallocating funds within the District. However, 4J already allocates resources in this way whenever possible. Because this approach is already 4J's established practice, added public comment does not seem necessary at this point on this issue.

**Implications:** Providing full-day kindergarten has received significant media and political attention within the past few years. If the public does not discuss this issue, there may be a push for more discussion, or for the District to take action. If full-day kindergarten is funded by the State, public deliberation about how to target kindergarten services will be moot.

Implementation of Pre-Kindergarten	Recommendation to School Board
<p><b>Pre-Kindergarten Implementation:</b>            What considerations about pre-kindergarten offerings should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate about increasing pre-kindergarten services because 4J does not currently provide pre-kindergarten classes, nor is there funding to do so in the foreseeable future. The Think Tank, however, does encourage the District to collaborate with pre-kindergarten providers to increase the availability of pre-kindergarten.</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes it is currently financially unfeasible for the District to begin providing full-day kindergarten, which is inconsistent with the Think Tank’s guiding principles.

4J does not currently offer traditional pre-kindergarten classes. There is neither the funding nor the public interest to make serious consideration of offering pre-kindergarten classes to all students worthwhile. Having said that, the Think Tank is fully supportive of continued outreach to pre-kindergarten providers to prioritize services for those students most at need of pre-kindergarten classes. We believe it makes sense to provide space, where possible, for organizations to implement pre-kindergarten activities. The Think Tank is similarly supportive of the District’s present pre-school offerings at high schools, believing this provides good opportunities for students to learn about child rearing and allow young parents the opportunity to continue their education.

**Implications:** Providing full-day kindergarten has received significant media and political attention within the past few years. If the public does not discuss this issue, there may be push-back from them. If full-day kindergarten is funded by the State, public deliberation about how to target kindergarten services will be moot.

## 8. English Language Learner Programs

**Overview of the Issue:** Two decades ago, the Supreme Court stated that merely seating a child in a classroom is a meaningless gesture if the child can't comprehend what's being taught (known as the sink or swim model). Federal laws have also become increasingly direct about encouraging "scientifically based" instruction for all students, including the provision of services to students whose native language is not English.

The population of students qualifying for the English Language Learner (ELL) program in 4J is on the rise. Projections indicate that over 850 students will be in need of ELL services in the coming years. While the majority of these students are native Spanish speakers, there is also a large Korean and some Russian student populations in 4J. Historically, ELL students are over-represented among low achieving students and have much higher drop-out rates than their peers. Students entering 4J from other districts have typically had less education than 4J students, and are at this disadvantage in addition to dealing with the language barrier. Some ELL students will spend their whole educational careers in 4J while a smaller percentage will enter the District later in their academic careers.

Currently, ELL students receive the majority of their instruction in a mainstream classroom where they may have little, if any, understanding of the materials presented, due to the language barrier. ELL instructors rotate between students in different schools to provide support services, but can typically meet with individual students a couple hours per week.

Different approaches in other districts have proven more successful, particularly when services are offered while students are young. There are both direct interventions, offering ELL students differentiated instruction, and indirect interventions, training teachers to more effectively incorporate ELL students into their lesson plans. In terms of direct interventions, *native language instruction* is one technique, teaching students subject matter in their native language. Additionally *dual immersion programs* combine ELL and mainstream students and instruct all students in both languages. Dual immersion programs have been demonstrated to be a particularly effective way to incorporate ELL students, and teaching English-speaking students another language at a very young age.

Indirect services include a number of techniques that mainstream teachers can learn, to help incorporate ELL students into lesson-plans, including *sheltered teaching*, which prepares ELL students for lessons by teaching them key words and concepts before lessons. Increasing the amount of instruction through summer school classes, tutoring, or after-school instruction have also proven effective.

### Key Background Information:

- Enrollment projections for ELL students is approximately 850 ELL students by 2012
- There is a disproportionate representation of ELL students on the lower end of the achievement spectrum
- ELL students have a higher drop-out rate
- Many of the options under discussion are unique to Spanish because enrollment of Spanish speakers is sufficiently high to support such unique programming

- A dual language immersion program combines half native English speakers with half native Spanish speakers and teaches all of them in both languages. This has been shown to have the highest impact on ELL achievement

**Options Considered and Recommendations:**

English Language Learner	Recommendation to School Board
Which ELL service options should be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate how English Language Learner (ELL) services are delivered in the District. However the Think Tank recommends increasing the services for ELL students. The Think Tank believes there is benefit to increasing services for ELL students, with particular consideration of a Spanish dual-immersion program. The Think Tank further recommends that the Board consider grouping students in regions with only a few ELL students (<i>low-incidence regions</i>).</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the recommendation would increase the possibility of closing the achievement gap in the District, which is consistent with the Think Tank’s guiding principles.

It seems clear that to increase the achievement of the ELL population, 4J will need to increase services to this population. We believe certain direct instructional practices could make a difference, but also see the benefit of providing teachers with an increased ability to serve ELL students in mainstream classrooms.

Best practices indicate the many benefits of dual immersion programs. Dual immersion programs simultaneously increase the achievement and engagement of ELL populations and provide important language capabilities to English-speaking students. 4J’s language programs have proven popular in the past and we believe there would be a positive response from parents who see the benefits of providing their English-speaking children fluency in two languages. It is our understanding that only Spanish-speaking students are enrolled in 4J in sufficient enough numbers to support a dual-language immersion program. It is our belief that a Spanish dual-immersion program should take precedence over other language programs, as it serves the dual purpose of providing language instruction and better serving ELL students and decreasing the achievement gap. Minimally, steps should be taken to incorporate limited-English, Spanish-speaking students into 4J’s present Spanish language immersion school.

If there is sufficient interest among English-speaking students in a dual immersion program, the drawbacks to this option seem minimal. The additional cost of operating a dual immersion program would be minimal, and consolidation of a large part of the ELL population would increase efficiency



of service delivery of ELL services. It seems in the best interest of the District to weigh public interest before moving ahead with an option that would require their substantial involvement.

In addition to a dual language immersion program, there seems to be a number of steps 4J could take to improve ELL services. Offering more core-classes to ELL students in their native languages would be one improvement. Again it seems that classes in languages native to large ELL populations, like Spanish, Korean and Russian, should take precedence over other language classes. Tutoring, after school classes, and summer school opportunities have also been demonstrated to improve ELL student achievement and should be considered.

The Think Tank also believes there is great benefit to professional development around ELL issues. Teachers in mainstream classrooms can more readily engage ELL students through specific instructional techniques, like sheltered instruction, but must be allowed the opportunity to learn the techniques. With a growing ELL population, this will become increasingly important in coming years.

It is also our belief that if services to ELL students can be improved by consolidating students in low-incidence regions, that the District pursue that option. For instance, if there are only two-to-three ELL students in several schools, the school District should identify strategies to merge these students into schools with other ELL students. It is our impression that this would improve efficiency of services and give each student more time in ELL specific instruction.

**Implications:** A Spanish dual immersion program would require dedicated space and teachers within the school District. This program could be large enough to be a stand alone independent school site, or could be a school within a larger school.

Because students would likely be drawn to a dual immersion program from across the District, a dual language immersion program might increase the cost of transportation at the primary school level.

Best practices indicate that dual language immersion programs help curtail the drop-out rates and improve outcomes for ELL students, and therefore it seems likely that this level of outreach would effectively address elements of the achievement gap.

Increasing the dedication of resources to ELL populations reduces the amount of resources that can be dedicated to other initiatives in the District. It is uncertain if the District would be able to identify additional resources to increase ELL services, and if so, what services might be decreased to make a reallocation possible.

Clustering of ELL students improves efficiency of service delivery where ELL enrollment is low and helps reinforce cultural identity. After the recent U.S. Supreme Court case, it appears it is illegal to distribute students to certain schools based solely on their race. 4J would need to be careful about its distribution criteria to ensure they remain within the appropriate legal parameters.

## 9. Technology

**Overview of the Issue:** Technology plays many distinct roles in 4J. Teachers can use technology to aid them in delivering lesson plans. Similarly, student achievement can be increased by use of technology as an instrument of learning, and use of technology is an increasingly necessary tool for students to attain. As use of the internet becomes more customary for day-to-day communications and record-keeping, technology can also bring greater efficiency to school administrators and teachers.

There are many products available to help teachers deliver lesson plans more effectively. Electronic blackboards, access to the Internet, and interactive software packages can enrich classroom experiences. Students utilizing computers to complete lessons can also effectively free teachers to work one-on-one with struggling students. New software programs have proven to be effective aids in some subjects, helping teach students efficiently and effectively. This seems particularly true in assisting higher needs students to improve reading and math skills at an early age. These skills are particularly important as research indicates that students with special needs who attain math and reading skills early in their academic careers become far more productive students thereafter.

Use of technology is an increasingly important skill for students to gain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Clearly, post-secondary employment and educational opportunities require core computer skills. To be competitive, 4J's students will need to utilize and develop skills in technology.

Another major issue concerns staff development and technology support services. There seems to be general agreement that providing resources without also funding professional development for staff will be ineffective. In other words, technology will not improve services unless teachers know how to utilize and trouble-shoot the technology to which they have access.

Presently, there are major differences in the technological resources available at schools within 4J. Mainly these discrepancies arise because individual schools are allowed to make choices about what technology they purchase, teach and utilize. For instance, some schools have a designated technology assistant, some have computers for every student and some have far fewer dedicated technology resources. Title 1 schools tend to be slightly better equipped because Title funds have been focused on acquisition of technology in recent years.

During the last school bond election, voters approved the bond, but at a reduced amount. So, 4J reduced the funding dedicated to technological improvements, as these were perceived to be the least critical services at the time. The result, however, is that 4J is not on par technologically with some other districts in the state and nation.

### **Key Background Information:**

- Software programs can benefit special needs populations, particularly early interventions in reading and math for ELL and special education students
- Computer-based education can increase scores and reduce the amount of time needed to achieve outcomes, particularly in writing
- In addition to providing educational support and technological literacy, technology is also needed to help administer 4J programs. For instance, some schools lack wireless internet access

- The District provides limited IT staffing, employing three full-time district-wide support positions to service the instructional needs of school programs, but a number of schools are able to use their own resources to hire additional technology staff
- The District can include technology for infrastructure in bonds for new buildings and major reconstruction
- The District currently allocates \$5 million in general funds for technology

**Options Considered and Recommendations:**

Technology	Recommendation to School Board
<p><b>Technology Infrastructure:</b> Should an option focused on providing technology infrastructure be forwarded to the School Board for consideration by the public?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on increasing the infrastructure for technology (i.e., buildings capable of supporting modern technology). The Think Tank believes there are currently inequities that exist around availability and use of technology in schools, which warrant further public discussion.</p>
<p><b>Technology Operations:</b> What considerations about technology should the Board forward for public consideration?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate how technology services are delivered in the District. However the Think Tank recommends that the District create a technology “scope and sequence” (e.g., the content and timing) for student instruction. Further the Think Tank recommends that the District require a minimum level of technology at each school. The Think Tank also recommends centralized purchasing and increased teacher training around the use of technology.</p>

**Rationale** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase overall achievement in the District, which is consistent with the Think Tank’s guiding principles.

It is critical that all students be trained in the use of technology if they are to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Use of technology should be incorporated into students’ daily academic lives to the extent it is economically and academically feasible.

Providing wireless access and other technological infrastructure at all schools is a critical first step. This would allow teachers and students increased access to the Internet, and allow administrators to access 4J's server for records and information. These infrastructure issues could be included within the next bond and therefore would not necessitate reducing resources in other programs of operations.

We believe the District is most able to provide a quality technological education by establishing a minimum set of skills that all students in 4J are expected to master throughout their education. This would provide a baseline for all students, but allow schools with additional funding to expand upon the services they provide. This also ensures that schools are equitable in terms of student access to technology. Clearly, the District would need to ensure that funding was available to individual schools to meet these minimum requirements.

A similar tactic concerning the technological resources available to students and teachers at school sites is also important. Each school should be required to have a minimum level of technology available for use. Again schools with additional funding could expand upon this minimum level of equipment.

Associated with these two ideas, we believe it may be logical to centralize the purchasing of technology within 4J. It is our understanding that centralizing purchasing would reduce costs, potentially allowing some schools access to technology that would not otherwise be within their grasp. It also seems that centralized purchasing would allow administrators to track and update technological resources more efficiently. In addition to developing a scope and sequence, it is critical that teachers be trained to use the technology available to them.

**Implications:** Developing a technology scope and sequence and centralizing technology purchasing would reduce the present decision making freedoms within schools. Schools that have dedicated funding to technology in the past may be disturbed if the District purchases similar equipment for other schools out of the general fund.

It may be that the school District would need to save for several years before funding a technology scope and sequence with the necessary equipment to accompany such a move. Funding increased use and purchasing of equipment would reduce the amount of resources available for other initiatives in 4J.

It seems that developing a technology scope and sequence in the District would improve the competitiveness of our students in their post-secondary pursuits.

## 10. Special Education

**Overview of the Issue:** School districts are mandated to provide a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities, without regard to the severity of the disability or the cost of the program. There is a wide spectrum of services required by different children. The special education population is growing at the national level, and particularly in Oregon and 4J. This is especially true for children with autism. The bulk of children (approximately 90%) require minor interventions, but some have more severe disabilities, requiring fairly intensive services.

The state of Oregon provides the District with twice the amount of funding for a special education student as it does for general populations. Despite this, the District tends to spend more than the State allocates to serve this population. Most students require relatively inexpensive services, like speech therapy. However, meeting the needs of a small number of students is very expensive, costing the District between \$25,000 to \$50,000 a year (the average allocation is approximately \$6,000 per student for mainstream students). The federal government mandates that special education students receive certain services, like an individualized education plan (IEP,) that require significant investments in time from teachers and administrators to create and implement.

Minority, ELL and low SES students are over-represented in special education, indicating misdiagnosis of challenges associated with these populations. For instance, African American children are up to four times more likely to be placed in the mental retardation and emotional disturbance disability categories as white children.

There is some indication that providing certain services, particularly early in a student's academic career, can reduce the amount of services they require in later years. For instance, some software programs that effectively teach reading skills to special education students can eliminate the need for 18% of these students to continue receiving special education services. The later in their school career a child is identified as having developmental challenges, the more difficult it is to provide such assistance. .

Federal mandates concerning services to the special education population are specific. Mandates require that school districts provide services to special needs populations from birth to 21 years of age, if other services are not available to provide for these individuals. Legislation like the No Child Left Behind Act now requires that special education students be taught in the "least restrictive" environment, meaning that they be taught as much as possible within the general education curriculum. Federal guidelines dictate that 80% of special education students receive 80% of their education in mainstream classrooms. The State of Oregon dictates that 70% of special education students receive 80% of their education in mainstream classrooms. These percentages are not yet requirements, but may eventually become tied to state or federal funding. At present, 4J serves 60 to 65% of special education students in mainstream classrooms 80% of the time.

At present 4J has "Learning Centers" at some schools that allow special education students to access basic educational services during classes they are unable to participate in with mainstream students. The District also has Regional Learning Centers at specific schools within each region. These Regional Learning Centers provide more sophisticated services for students with greater needs. Schools must have an enrollment of at least 350 to allocate sufficient support staff to serve special education students. Students who require services from the regional learning center must travel (paid for by the District) to its location to receive services.

There is considerable momentum behind including special education students in mainstream classrooms, which supports the recent direction of federal legislation concerning this issue. Research indicates that special education students do not detract from the achievement of mainstream students, but teachers, staff, parents and students indicate that a concentration of special education students in a classroom can be overwhelming. At present, the percentage of special education students in some schools is much higher than in others, creating significant inequities for teachers.

**Key Background Information:**

- The number of students who receive special education services will increase by nearly 500 students between 2006 (2,602) and 2015 (3,079)
- The District currently operates learning centers at each school that serve most students with disabilities, as well as regional learning centers for students who need more assistance
- Programs such as individualized instruction, differentiated instruction, and early intervention have been shown to improve special education outcomes
- Some evidence indicates that technologically-assisted programs are particularly effective. For instance, one special education reading program resulted in 18% of students no longer needing special education services after one year
- The federal government has set a benchmark that 80 % of students with disabilities participate in general education classroom 80% of the time
- There is no negative impact on non-disabled students when special education students are integrated into classrooms

**Options Considered and Recommendations:**

Special Education	Recommendation to School Board
<p>What considerations about special education should the Board forward for public consideration?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate how Special Education services are delivered in the District. However the Think Tank does recommend that the District provide earlier and more comprehensive screening to identify developmental disabilities. The Think Tank believes there is benefit to enhancing partnerships with other organizations that provide and coordinate services for special education students, like EC Cares. The Think Tank also recommends that the District consider inclusion of special education students at a level that exceeds state and federal guidelines, where possible.</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase the possibility of closing the achievement gap in the District, which is consistent with its guiding principles.

The issue of inclusion is already addressed through federal and state mandates. 4J must identify effective ways to integrate more special education students into mainstream classrooms. The issue is no longer *if* special education students should be integrated, but *to what degree* and with what kind of support they will be integrated. It is our recommendation that 4J attempt to exceed the level of integration proposed in federal and state mandates wherever possible.

Special education students require significant financial and human resources and at present these requirements are taxing certain schools and teachers more than others. It is important that the District identify a way to more equitably share the challenges associated with the growing special education population.

First, it is logical to reduce the number of students who need extra services. Early intervention and screening of special education students has proven an effective means to reduce the number of students who need special education services in later years.

The Think Tank reviewed the Focus Group and best practice research and agreed that every school needs to be large enough to accommodate special education students. This influenced several recommendations about schools and school site size. The Think Tank also noted it was important for equity reasons that these services be available across the entire District.

In addition to size, however, it was highlighted in Think Tank discussions that school sites also need multiple classes within each grade at each site. For instance, two third-grade classes at a given school allow special education students to be split between those two classes, thereby lessening the burden borne by any one teacher.

Increasing the number of schools that special education students can attend should help disperse them more equitably throughout the District, but does not guarantee this outcome. We believe further measures should be taken to assist dispersion of special education students and other students represented in the achievement gap, by encouraging them to transfer to schools where the special education population is below the District average. Student transfer applications could be prioritized in the same way that low SES students have been prioritized for entry into alternative schools. Dispersion efforts might also include redrawing boundaries to effectively disperse special education students.

**Implications:** To effectively disperse special education students throughout the District it is important that all schools have the ability to serve these students. This will require that some smaller elementary and alternative schools increase their size. Larger schools will result in a decrease in the number of schools open to students and decrease the flexibility allowed by the District's open enrollment policy.

As classes become more impacted by inclusion, it will also be important that teachers be offered more professional development opportunities focused on special education. Without an increased ability to assist and support the growing numbers of special education students in their classrooms,

integration will be less successful. Coordination between mainstream classroom teachers and special education staff will also be critical to successful integration.



## 11. Title I

**Overview of the Issue:** Title 1 is a federal program initiated to alleviate some of the educational barriers faced by families living in poverty by improving the services available at schools with a high percentage of such families. The federal government allocates funds to the State of Oregon, based on the number of students who qualify for educational services. The State of Oregon then disperses funds to individual school districts based upon the number of children enrolled in each district. Districts then have some liberty in deciding how these funds are utilized.

Presently, 4J allocates its Title 1 funds to elementary schools based on the number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (FRL), an indicator of families living at or close to poverty level. Schools where more than 43% of students qualify for FRL are designated “Title 1 schools.” Title 1 schools are allowed to utilize their Title 1 funds to serve all under-achieving students in their schools (called school-wide programs), and not just those who qualify for FRL. Research indicates that school-wide Title programs are more effective at increasing the achievement of students who qualify for FRL than targeted programs.

There are a variety of ways different schools utilize their Title funds. District staff have indicated it would be very difficult to require all schools to adopt the same type of Title programming, due to differences in the circumstances at each site. There is also little monitoring of the outcomes of the various Title 1 programs, and some concern that programs at some schools do not reflect best practices as indicated by research. For instance, some Title 1 schools still implement programs targeted at FRL students.

It is also worth noting that Title 1 funding, while helpful, is not significant. Essentially, schools designated as Title schools get approximately enough funding to allow two more teaching positions at their school.

The overarching issue in the discussion of poverty, however, has less to do with Title 1 services and more to do with the concentration of poverty. There are large discrepancies in the average incomes of families at different schools. The State of Oregon publishes SES Ranking for all schools in the State, allowing an easy comparison of the economic status of enrollees at 4J’s schools. While Sheldon and South Eugene High Schools ranked in the 87<sup>th</sup> and 86<sup>th</sup> percentiles, respectively, North Eugene was in the 54<sup>th</sup> percentile. Cesar Chavez and River Road Elementary Schools rank in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> percentiles, and the Fox Hollow Immersion School is in the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile. There is a wealth of information suggesting that once enrollment of FRL students at a school exceeds 50%, achievement begins to decline. Perhaps, therefore, the bigger issue is what should be done to alleviate the challenges of concentrated poverty in the District.

### Key Background Information:

- To qualify as a Title 1 school in 4J, 43% or more of a school’s students must qualify for free and reduced lunch
- Research suggests that achievement levels begin to decline in schools where more than 50% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch
- At present there are four schools in 4J where approximately 70% of their enrollment qualifies for free and reduced lunch

- Programs such as tutoring, early intervention, and supplemental programs (after school and summer school) have positive impacts on achievement

**Options Considered and Recommendations:**

Title 1	Recommendation to School Board
<p>What considerations about Title 1 should the Board forward for public consideration?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having the public deliberate how Title schools implement their programs. However, the Think Tank does recommend that the District improve coordination of Title efforts and maintain flexibility on Title Schools’ use of Title funds while increasing accountability for outcomes.</p> <p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends that the District develop policies that will ensure the enrollment of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch does not exceed 50% at a site.</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes that it is logistically unfeasible for the District to dictate how individual schools utilize Title 1 funds. Thus, facilitating a public discussion around this issue would not be particularly productive.

At this point there is not sufficient research or evidence to indicate that a one-size fits-all approach is appropriate for Title 1 resources. Similarly District staff have indicated that enforcing implementation of one model for Title 1 across the District would be extremely difficult. However, best practice research indicates that schools are negatively affected when enrollment of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch exceeds 50%, leading the Think Tank to recommend the District ensure this does not occur.

It is our impression that there is little evaluation of outcomes associated with Title 1 programs at present. We are in favor of flexibility in programs as long as schools are able to demonstrate that Title 1 funding is being used efficiently. In cases where effective programming cannot be demonstrated, we favor encouraging adoption of a different Title 1 model.

There was discussion of whether Title 1 funds should be extended beyond just the middle school level, but there are simply not sufficient funds included in State allocations to make further dispersion of those funds worthwhile. Because there is so much evidence that early interventions

have greater impact on long-term student achievement, we believe it wise to continue to target Title 1 dollars to elementary schools.

**Implications:** Increased monitoring and evaluation of how Title 1 funding is spent in the District is likely to cause discomfort for some principals and administrators, as it reduces their freedom and increases their workload. It is likely that increased evaluation would increase the District's ability to identify what practices are effective in assisting low income populations.

## DISTRICT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

In addition to the options presented by the Focus Groups, the District also asked the Think Tank to weigh in on several broader issues that have arisen during the Shaping 4J's Future process, including specific issues from Think Tank discussions.

### 12. School Closures

**Overview of the Issue:** With significant reductions in overall enrollment expected in 4J over the next five years, some schools will need to be closed. At present, 4J has a closure policy that dictates schools be closed when they can no longer meet District criteria for instruction programs, including inclusion of a variety of programs and allowances for flexible scheduling.

4J also has guidelines concerning the size of schools within the District, but these guidelines have not been used as a rationale for closing schools when they fall below those enrollment levels. For example, 4J's present elementary school guidelines indicate that schools should not have fewer than 250 students enrolled, yet four schools have enrollment levels below 250 students.

It is very difficult to predict enrollment at specific schools from year-to-year due to the open enrollment policy that allows students to transfer between schools. This flexibility makes assessing enrollment at particular schools difficult.

#### Key Background Information:

- 4J Board Policy FL School Closures (re: school closures):  
*Because of declining enrollment and resources, the board believes that its obligation to provide equal educational opportunity district wide may not permit the continued operation of all schools. Therefore, the board believes that a school should be closed upon demonstration that it cannot maintain, without additional resources, efficient operation of a program while meeting district criteria<sup>3</sup>.*

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<sup>3</sup> "District Criteria" means those aspects of the program commonly provided in the District schools that are essential to the instructional program, e.g., auxiliary staffing, variety of offerings, flexible scheduling, etc .

## Options Considered and Recommendations:

School Closure Policy	Recommendation to School Board
<p>What amendments or revisions to 4J's present school closure criteria should the Board forward for public consideration?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on the criteria regarding school closure. The Think Tank believes several additions should be made to the school closure policy, including considerations of additional special uses, unique service of the school to the community, real estate value of school sites, and equity considerations.</p>

## PRESENT 4J BOARD POLICY SCHOOL CLOSURES

### School Closures

Because of declining enrollment and resources, the board believes that its obligation to provide equal educational opportunity district wide may not permit the continued operation of all schools. Therefore, the board believes that a school should be closed upon demonstration that it cannot maintain, without additional resources, efficient operation of a program *while* meeting District criteria<sup>4</sup>.

Administrative Procedures for School Closures (*with language recommended by the Think Tank in italics*)

#### 4. Facility Considerations

- 4.1 What are the potential alternative uses of each building to be closed?
- 4.2 What are the estimated costs of remodeling a building to accommodate additional students due to closing of another school?
- 4.3 Will the consolidated building(s) provide space for special use (i.e. special education, *career academies, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and handicapped students*)?
- 4.4 Will operating costs be reduced or increased at a consolidated school?
- 4.5 Are there legal or binding contracts, deeds or other issues related to the building and grounds of a school being closed?

#### 5. Community Impact Considerations

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<sup>4</sup> "District Criteria" means those aspects of the program commonly provided in the District schools that are essential to the instructional program, e.g., auxiliary staffing, variety of offerings, flexible scheduling, etc .

- 5.1 Will the District be able to continue to provide community use of District facilities?
- 5.2 What effect will it have on city and county planning (i.e., long-range plans)?
- 5.3 *Does the school serve the community in unique ways (i.e. are there unusual detriments to closing a particular site)?*

## 6. Fiscal Summary

- 6.1 What is the fiscal impact on the District due to school closures?
- 6.2 *What is the actual real estate value of schools being considered for closure?*

## 7. Equity

- 7.1 *Would closure of a site negatively impact enrollment patterns?*
- 7.2 *Would closure of a site negatively impact distribution of special needs populations (e.g., socioeconomics, Title 1, ELL, Special Education)?*

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase the possibility of closing the achievement gap in the District, while taking financial and educational outcomes into account—outcomes that are consistent with the Think Tank’s guiding principles.

Changes are suggested for item 4.3 to incorporate the benefits of having a diverse student population (and avoiding concentration of special needs students), and infrastructure that is flexible enough to support a variety of uses. We believe that school sites that are not flexible enough to accommodate kindergartens (at the elementary level) or career academies (at the high school level) might be considered, if closure is necessary, before schools that could offer such flexibility.

Item 5.3 was included to highlight the importance of some schools to the communities in which they are located. For instance, the rural Coburg school site serves students that require extensive travel to attend other schools. Furthermore, the school site serves as a crucial meeting space for the Coburg community. Closing that school would disrupt that community in unique ways. While a similar case might be made for all schools, the Think Tank believes it would be possible to determine when a school is truly utilized in unique ways by the community in which it is located.

We also believe it wise to consider the real estate value of schools while contemplating closure of particular sites. It seems inevitable, for instance, that the value of schools located on main arterials will continue to rise.

Last, the present school closure policy does not seem to account for the impact of school closures on enrollment patterns. Given our focus on school equity and closing the achievement gap, it seems evident to us that such considerations should be included in 4J’s school closure criteria. For example, it is important that the District take into account the best practice research demonstrating declining achievement levels when the enrollment of students receiving free and reduced lunch exceeds 50%. We recommend that the closure policy incorporate items that would encourage administrators to contemplate how school closures would impact the dispersion of special needs

populations and similarly if a closure would likely lead to inequitable enrollment levels at other schools.

**Implications:** The criteria for closure can affect regional enrollment, transportation costs, facility, maintenance and renovation costs, and have crucial impacts on particular communities. The Think Tank believes the additional changes to 4J's school closure policy allow for a richer assessment of potential site closures.

### **13. School Choice**

**Overview of the Issue:** School Choice has long been a highly-debated issue in the District. On one hand, school choice offers students the option of attending any school in the District, provided there is space at the desired school and they are able to provide their own transportation. Not requiring families to live in the same areas as the schools their children attend increases the opportunity for parents to choose schools near their places of employment, schools their other children attend, and schools with programming that seems to best meet their child's needs. The policy also allows the District to make changes to school programs that are less attractive to parents.

On the other hand, the school choice policy has a number of negative ramifications. Historically, school choice has mainly benefited middle and high income students who have greater mobility and ability to make use of the District's policy. Higher income students tend to transfer out of lower-income schools, leaving those schools with an even higher concentration of special needs students. In this manner, school choice exacerbates the achievement gap.

4J data indicate that the primary reason parents choose to transfer their children out of schools into other regions is a perception of superior offerings somewhere else. Partly due to this reason, South Eugene High School and Roosevelt Middle School have the highest enrollments in the District, but would have the lowest enrollment levels if there were no transfers from other regions.

School choice also makes predicting enrollment at particular school sites difficult, subsequently making budget and staffing allocations more problematic. The school choice policy also makes it harder to regulate equity between schools. Teachers and resources are allocated based upon projected enrollment levels. Therefore schools with higher enrollment receive more resources. At a certain level, larger schools are able to extend their resources farther than smaller schools, leading to real inequities between the programming schools can offer. As mentioned earlier in this report, we believe there is benefit to encouraging greater resource equity between schools.

#### **Key Background Information:**

- The 4J District has a long history of open enrollment
- The District requires alternative programs to be distinctive and draw students from throughout the District (for more specific information see 4J Board Policy IGBH Alternative Schools)
- The majority of students exercising school choice are from families with higher socioeconomic status who have resided in Eugene for some time (for more specific information see 4J's Access and Options Committee Report)
- The combination of equity and access issues has created a two-tier system (for more specific information see 4J's Access and Options Committee Report)



**Options Considered and Recommendations:**

School Choice Policy	Recommendation to School Board
<p><b>School Choice Policy:</b> What amendments or revisions to 4J's present school choice policy should the Board forward for public consideration?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on school choice policies. Better distribution of students with special needs between all schools is a goal for achieving greater equity within the District. Further, the Think Tank believes there is reason to use specific criteria to prioritize students with special needs (e.g., Special Education, Title 1 and English Language Learners) at schools with "District wide" enrollment. The Think Tank also recommends that the District review under-enrolled schools to increase desirability where possible.</p>
<p><b>Naming "Alternative Schools":</b> Should the District use another term (such as district-wide schools) in place of "Alternative Schools"?</p>	<p><b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having a public deliberation about the language used to describe schools. However the Think Tank believes that the District should strive to eradicate any potential elitism by encouraging equity amongst all schools. To achieve this, the Think Tank believes the District should stop using the term alternative schools, and instead use school names to describe each school. Descriptions of schools in District literature should indicate whether an individual school accepts applications from outside its neighborhood boundaries.</p>

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase equity amongst schools in the District, helping to close the achievement gap in the District. Both of these outcomes are consistent with the Think Tank's guiding principles.

There is a benefit to having a variety of learning environments for students within the District, but all schools should provide a similarly rigorous level of education, be accessible and reflect the diverse population within the District. There are particular benefits to avoiding the concentration of low income or special needs students in only a few schools and regions. The present school choice

policy does not meet these goals. We do not advocate elimination of the choice policy, but do advocate putting more restrictions on enrollment to encourage achievement of 4J's broader goals.

With that in mind, we believe further measures should be taken to assist dispersion of special needs students. This can be achieved in two primary ways: (1) by encouraging students with special needs to transfer out of high needs areas, and (2) encouraging high achieving students to remain in their neighborhood schools.

We believe that special education, ELL, and low income students should be encouraged to transfer to schools where high needs student populations are below the District average. Student transfer applications could be prioritized in the same way that low SES students have been prioritized for entry into alternative schools (by prioritizing their applications). Dispersion efforts might also include redrawing boundaries to effectively disperse special education students.

In addition, schools with a high number of students transferring out could undergo assessment to identify what additional programs would entice students and teachers to attend their neighborhood schools. By adding attractive programs, students would be encouraged to stay at their neighborhood schools.

The Think Tank identified other actions earlier in this report that will impact the school choice policy. Tighter regulations on school enrollment levels, larger elementary schools, and caps on middle and high school enrollment levels would all decrease the flexibility of the school choice policy.

**Implications:** Decreasing flexibility in the school choice policy is likely to be unpopular in the Eugene community. The most engaged and vocal parents tend to have the same demographic profile as those that utilize the school choice policy. Increased management of enrollment will also require a closer assessment of present boundaries, and likely require additional staff time and energy.

## 14. School Boundaries (“Catchment Zones”)

**Overview of the Issue:** Present school boundaries generally provide parents and students with options that can most readily serve their needs in their neighborhood area. Due to the District’s school choice policy, however, boundaries do not determine which schools students will attend.

New research indicates that certain circumstances within schools can help ensure the highest achievement among a school’s student population. If school boundaries had greater impact on where students enrolled in school, it would be possible for 4J to manipulate school boundaries to create ideal demographic conditions in its schools. The school choice policy at present means it is very difficult for 4J staff to determine the demographic makeup of different schools. For instance, there is a high concentration of poverty at some schools. If boundaries were shifted to reduce the number of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch at these schools to below 50% by including higher income neighborhoods within a particular school’s boundaries, research indicates that the achievement of all students in these schools would improve.

Shifting boundaries could have significant impact on the percentages of students with special needs enrolled in each school. Greater equity of dispersion of these students increases the likelihood that teachers experience workload equity, that schools enjoy resource equity, and that the achievement gap can be closed.

A number of the Think Tank’s recommended actions would reduce the degree of transfer freedom available to students and parents. Reduced choice makes any boundary choices more contentious.

### **Key Background Information:**

- The Access and Options Report (4J 2004) recommends the District consider attendance boundary changes to address demographic changes impacting neighborhood schools. The report noted that some schools are overflowing while other schools are struggling to maintain their enrollment.
- School boundaries currently have limited effect on enrollment and student composition, due to exercise of school choice options.
- The current District policy regarding school boundaries states: “Attendance boundaries have been established to ensure adequate facilities for all students attending School District 4J schools. The superintendent is authorized to make boundary changes which are necessary as a result of the opening or closing of a school or adjustments to balance enrollments between schools.” (4J Board Policy JC Attendance Boundaries)

## Options Considered and Recommendations:

School Boundaries	Recommendation to School Board
What amendments or revisions to 4J's present school boundaries should the Board forward for public consideration?	<b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank recommends the Board seek public input on attendance boundaries (or "catchment zones"). The Think Tank believes the School Board should adopt catchment zone criteria that encourage equitable and diverse schools throughout the District.

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase equity amongst schools, increasing the possibility of closing the achievement gap in the District. These outcomes are consistent with the Think Tank's guiding principles.

If choice is not managed, there is effectively no point in identifying distinct boundaries. As suggested earlier in this report, we believe that to close the achievement gap the District will have to manage enrollment more closely. When enrollment is managed more tightly, school boundary areas became a much more important issue.

An advantage of tighter enrollment controls is that it allows 4J administrators to better organize schools' demographic profiles to reflect the diversity of 4J's student population. To this end we believe it is logical to create a set of school boundary criteria. To the extent it is possible, these criteria should be designed to:

- Create catchment areas that encourage school sites large enough to serve all students, meeting 4J's enrollment targets
- Disperse low SES students equitably throughout the District, keeping the population of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch at all schools below 50%
- Disperse special education students equitably across the District's schools
- Avoid isolating ELL students at schools where very few other ELL students are in attendance
- Account for transportation costs, including traffic and neighborhood impacts
- Create circumstances where few students have major geographical barriers to accessing their school. Major considerations include such things as the river and beltline highway.

The Think Tank would also like to highlight a recent Supreme Court ruling. While the ruling focused on the illegality of assigning students to schools based solely upon their race, the ruling likely has broader implications about gerrymandering boundaries too closely to distribute students

based upon their characteristics. One way to help deflect negative attention from the issue is to call boundary areas “catchment zones” or “attendance areas”.

An ongoing issue deliberated by the Think Tank is the inevitable connection between housing patterns and the demographic break-down within schools. If neighborhoods are not economically diverse, it is difficult to have economically diverse schools. While 4J does not have direct control over housing patterns within the city, the Think Tank encourages increased dialogue between 4J, the City of Eugene, and the Eugene community to address this issue.

**Implications:** Without adjusting 4J’s current school choice policy, adjusting school boundaries will have minimal impact. If the School Board and Eugene community choose to adopt some of the other recommendations in this report, however, the issue of school boundaries will assume greater importance. The criteria for a school’s catchment area can affect regional enrollment, transportation costs, facility, maintenance and renovation costs, and have crucial impacts on the demographic profile of individual schools. It seems likely that housing would become a bigger factor as parents are forced to consider school boundaries more closely when purchasing or renting homes. Reducing the ability to transfer between schools is likely to be unpopular unless the community comes to understand the negative impacts of the school choice policy, which include effectively concentrating poverty, special education students, and creating an inequitable distribution of workload on certain teachers within the District.

## 15. Site-Based Decision Making

**Overview of the Issue:** Currently, while 4J school budget allocations are based upon enrollment figures, school sites have some autonomy in determining how those funds are spent. The decisions schools make impact how services are delivered, how schools are staffed, and what types of instructional programs are available at different schools. For instance, one school might decide to spend a portion of its staffing budget to hire a part-time technology aide, while another program might spend those dollars to hire a drama teacher.

To make these decisions, each school creates a “site-committee” comprised of teachers, administrators and parents. While these site-committees are charged with the responsibility of helping determine how discretionary funds will be spent, realistically some site-committees are given more authority than others. Part of this discrepancy is due to a lack of training of committee members, differing skills, and level of comprehension of the issues.

The question of which decisions fall under the purview of site-based decision makers and which decisions are determined by central staff is also unclear. This gray area could lead to lack of accountability.

### Options Considered and Recommendations:

Site-based Decision Making	Recommendation to School Board
What issues about site-based decision making should the School Board forward for public consideration?	<b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having a public deliberation about site-based decision making in the District. However the Think Tank recommends that the School Board adopt site-based decision making criteria that encourage flexibility and accountability in decision making, but also require a minimum level of services at each school.

**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase equity amongst schools in the District, which is consistent with its guiding principles.

There is a need for flexibility at schools. School staff, administrators, parents and students are best positioned to make determinations about an individual school’s needs, based on its demographic profile and unique school culture. Such flexibility often results in innovative programming. Having said that, the Think Tank is also in favor of ensuring that each school offer a basic set of programs for its student populations and monitor the educational outcomes at individual schools to ensure discretionary programs are producing the desired results. Therefore, the Think Tank suggests adopting site-based decision making criteria that incorporate the following items:

- A minimum service provision: that each school be expected to offer a minimum set of programs and services for the general population and special needs students

- Flexibility: that schools be given the flexibility to offer special programs and services suitable for the population it serves
- Accountability: flexibility offered to schools should be balanced by some measure of accountability for educational outcomes for all students, and a review of the authority and training given to each site-committee

The Think Tank would also like to stress the importance of providing training to all site-committees, allowing them to make useful and actionable recommendations in a manner that encourages participation. The authority and scope of these groups should have a meaningful impact on operation of school sites. It is critical to involve parents in the operation of the District, and site committees provide a valuable opportunity to do so.

**Implications:** We believe adoption of the aforementioned criteria would allow schools to retain the flexibility of site-based decision making while ensuring that site-based decision making results in positive educational outcomes. Increased training for site-committees would have associated costs.

## 16. Professional Development

**Overview of the Issue:** To effectively serve students with different needs, teachers need experience and training in how to effectively work with that diverse range. Since educational best practices evolve with changing demographics and further research, the initial education teachers receive is not sufficient to keep them up to date. This becomes an ever more important issue as an increasing percentage of the District's students are identified as students with special needs.

Effective professional development could greatly help reduce the achievement gap, allow for increased inclusion of students with special needs into mainstream classrooms, and reduce teachers' workloads to manageable levels. The ability to work effectively with diverse groups has great relevancy for Special Education, ELL, technology, Title 1 and Title 9 students in the District. It is difficult for the Think Tank to identify a specific recommendation in this area. However, we felt it is an important issue to emphasize.

There are presently four half-day teacher-development programs for teachers in 4J during the school year. One of these is a state-wide in-service day and the others are dedicated spots on the 4J calendar. These days are typically split between professional development and planning days where teachers spend half the day attending training and the other half grading or planning.

As addressed in the site-based decision making section of this report, there is also an issue of the skill base of site-committees. With varying knowledge about school related issues, and experience in group decision making processes, the efficacy and ability of these groups to contribute appropriately varies.

### Options Considered and Recommendations:

Professional Development	Recommendation to School Board
What issues revolving around professional development should the School Board forward for public consideration?	<b>Decision:</b> The Think Tank believes there is limited benefit to having a public deliberation about professional development in the District. However the Think Tank recommends the Board increase professional development around successful support of high needs populations and technology. The Think Tank strongly believes that the success of the District ultimately rests with the quality of its teachers and staff. Further, the Think Tank believes that professional development is necessary to provide these individuals with growth opportunities. The Think Tank also recommends that the District increase professional development opportunities for school site committees.



**Rationale:** The Think Tank believes the suggested recommendation would increase the quality of instruction, leadership, and administration of schools, increasing equity amongst all schools. These outcomes are all consistent with the Think Tank's guiding principles.

The impact of the changes inherent to many of the issues discussed is limited less by the service provided or the configuration, than by the ability of individual teachers to engage students in an effective way. Teachers need increased training to interact effectively with student populations. As the percentage of students with special needs increases, the workload of all teachers will increase. By supplying these teachers with a powerful arsenal of tools to assist their students, our District stands the best chance of providing quality experiences for its students.

As addressed in greater detail in the site-based decision making section of this report, the Think Tank also believes there is great benefit from engaging parents through membership on site-committees. In order to increase meaningful and effective participation, it is important that the members of site-committees be provided the skills and related knowledge they need to make informed and effective decisions as part of those groups. Therefore, professional development opportunities should be extended to site-committees as well.

**Implications:** Additional professional service days provided by the 4J District in the future will allow teachers and staff to have access to training that will support the integration of programs and services. Increased training for school site committees will require additional funding, but improved training can help support and improve the role of these groups.

## **SECTION 5: GROUPING OPTIONS FOR PUBLIC DELIBERATION**

Section 4 describes the issues deliberated by the Think Tank, and explains its recommendations for further public deliberation. The Think Tank was also asked to provide recommendations on how this information might be grouped and organized for the public deliberation phase.

For the public deliberation phase of the process, the UO team and 4J staff will prepare more detailed documents that describe background information and present the options in a way that is understandable and will provide useful input to the Board. The Think Tank recognizes that in developing the documents for this phase, the District may choose to organize the information differently to make it easier for the public to understand. This section explains the recommended approach for organizing the public deliberation process (see Figure 5 below for a summary).

### **ISSUES FOR ONGOING 4J PLANNING**

The “issues for ongoing 4J planning” involve issues and recommendations that relate to District policy or ongoing instructional planning. In developing the public deliberation options, the District may need to incorporate some of these into the service and facility considerations. However, there did not appear to be a specific policy question that would be suitable for a public process. For example, the Think Tank affirmed some of the recommendations from the Title 1 Focus Group about coordination of Title 1 efforts, but did not feel that taking this issue to a public process was warranted. Instead, these issues are better addressed through ongoing instructional planning.

### **ISSUES FOR PUBLIC DELIBERATION**

The “issues for public deliberation” are those that the Think Tank believes involve significant facility and service questions that would benefit from public deliberation.

### **SERVICE AND FACILITY ISSUES**

The Think Tank recommends that the service and facility issues be grouped around the three categories of schools: elementary schools, middle schools and high schools. There were several reasons for this approach:

- The recommendations have different effects on different categories of schools (e.g., likely elementary school closings, but no middle school or high school closings)
- It is important for the public to understand how recommendations about school size affect not only buildings but also programming and services
- The public is more likely to understand how issues come together within one type of school

- District policies (e.g., school choice, closures, boundaries) are difficult to understand unless they are presented in a more specific context. However, because some of these policies may have crosscutting implications, the District may need to provide multiple avenues for input

## **FUTURE EXPANSION CONSIDERATIONS**

The Think Tank recommended that space for future expansion of kindergarten and pre-kindergarten should be deliberated in a public process for the following reasons:

- The Think Tank did not believe that District-wide kindergarten is warranted at this time due to current limitations of operational funding
- It was noted that Oregon's legislature may provide more operational funding for kindergarten in the future, which could lead to a shortage of space at elementary schools if it is not considered
- The Think Tank believes the District would benefit from a public deliberation about the cost of providing future kindergarten and pre-kindergarten space in a bond measure

## **OTHER POTENTIAL FACILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES**

Several other issues that the Think Tank considered may involve significant facility or infrastructure considerations. However, the specific impacts and costs cannot be determined until the District conducts a more detailed analysis. The Think Tank recommends that during the public deliberation process the following issues be incorporated into facility and service options or presented as separate topics for input:

- Technology infrastructure: particularly infrastructure that may be included in a bond measure
- English Language Learner facilities: particularly facilities that may be required for support services and potential dual language immersion programs
- Special Education facilities: particularly facilities that may be required to support the integration of services across the District

**Figure 5.**

**Issues for Public Deliberation**

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**Service and Facility Issues**

<b>Elementary Schools</b> Size Configuration Services Enrollment Management School Choice School Closures School Boundaries	<b>Middle Schools</b> Size Configuration Services Enrollment Management School Choice School Closures School Boundaries	<b>High Schools</b> Size Configuration Services Enrollment Management School Choice School Closures School Boundaries
<b>Future Expansion Considerations</b> Kindergarten space for future expansion Pre-Kindergarten space for future expansion	<b>Other Potential Facility and Infrastructure Issues*</b> Technology Infrastructure English Lang. Learner Facilities Special Education Facilities  *May be bundled into facility options listed above	

**Issues for Ongoing 4J Planning**

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**Service and Facility Issues**

<b>Think Tank Operational Recommendations</b> Special Education Services Title 1 Services English Lang. Learner Services Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten Services HS Career Academies & Learning Communities Professional Development Central vs. Site-based Decision Making	<b>4J Ongoing Instructional Planning</b> (Several Focus Group recommendations were not deliberated by Think Tank due to their focus on ongoing instructional planning. These issues will be addressed through internal 4J instructional planning processes.)
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## **APPENDIX A: OPTIONS DISCUSSED BY THE THINK TANK**

During the Think Tank process, many options were considered. The sources for these options included the 4J Focus Groups, members of the Eugene community, 4J staff, and Think Tank members themselves. This appendix describes how these options were handled during the Think Tank process.

The Think Tank used information provided by the District, the Focus Groups, the literature review and other sources to guide its decision making about facilities, services and policies. However, several options identified during Phase 1 of the process were deemed more closely related to ongoing instructional planning. The Think Tank, in consultation with District staff, concluded that these issues would be better addressed through ongoing instructional planning once the more strategic service and facility issues had been resolved.

During its deliberations, the Think Tank considered the financial impacts of options on infrastructure and operations. District staff advised the Think Tank that a 30-40 million-dollar educational capital bond was a realistic top range, given previous community support and current needs. Money generated from such a bond could only be used to fund construction and other infrastructure changes within the District. At present 4J has no room to augment its funding for operational issues, unless the Oregon Legislature increases educational funding.

For some of the options it considered, the Think Tank did not believe there was enough information available to allow a productive public dialogue about the topic. Generally, in these cases, the Think Tank believed current practices should be continued until new data or experiences allow a more informed decision to be made. Similarly, when there was insufficient evidence indicating that an option would increase achievement and/or decrease the achievement gap, the Think Tank deferred the item until more information is available.

**Table 1: Options and Corresponding Think Tank Recommendations**

Sources of Proposal: Letters in parentheses indicate the group that developed each option:  
 FG=Focus Groups, BP=Best Practice, 4J=4J Staff, TT=Think Tank

Option	Think Tank Recommendation
<b>OPTIONS AFFECTING ALL GRADE LEVELS</b>	
Require "school wide" programs at each Title I school (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Replace Learning Centers with integrated service delivery (80% of SPED students receive 80% of instruction in general education classroom) (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The Think Tank recommended earlier and more comprehensive screening, and supported the inclusion of special needs at levels that exceed state and federal guidelines. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Support native language literacy (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The Think Tank recommended increasing ELL services in general. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Locate a family resource center at each eligible school (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Restructure ELL staff support of schools (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Cluster ELL students in low-incidence regions (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Standardize Title 1 curriculum, instruction and assessment (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. Think Tank recommended more coordination of Title 1 efforts, increased accountability for the outcomes from the use of Title funds while maintaining flexibility in how they are used. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Increase staffing for Title 1	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The

Option	Think Tank Recommendation
coordinators at each eligible school and for the District's Family Resource Center (FG)	specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Expand Welcome Center for ELL students and families (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Provide parent transportation to expanded Welcome Center (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Establish a dual language program (FG)	The Think Tank supported the development of a dual language program. Because a dual immersion program could require some dedicated infrastructure and the involvement of a high number of English-speaking students, the Think Tank recommended that these costs be incorporated into the public deliberation process. Some specific operational issues were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Increase native language classes for ELL students (BP)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The Think Tank recommended increased services for ELL students and providing access to native language instruction in regions with only a few ELL students. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Targeted class size reduction (4J)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Reallocated classified staffing to hire regional technology specialists (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Centralize hardware and software purchasing (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The Think Tank recommended the Board consider more centralized purchasing, increased teacher training, and a minimum level of technology at each school. The specific options were deemed to relate more to internal policies and instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Hire District webmaster (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to internal policies and instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility

Option	Think Tank Recommendation
	and service issues have been resolved.
Decrease student : Title I staffing ratios (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Implement targeted tutoring programs (BP)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Implement targeted summer school programs (BP)(FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved. .
Implement targeted after school programs (BP)(FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Increase funding for homeless and delinquent youth (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Increase family engagement, particularly for low achieving students (BP)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Aggressively recruit general education staff that are qualified to teach students with limited English language proficiency (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Hire regional instructional technology coaches (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The Think Tank recommended that the Board provide increased teacher training around the use of technology. The specific options were deemed to relate more to internal policies and instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Increase use of differentiated instruction (instruction meets all students needs - teacher training issue) (BP)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Individualize instruction for special	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The



Option	Think Tank Recommendation
education population (BP)	specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Provide sheltered subject training opportunities (BP)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Phase in primary (K-3) and intermediate (4-8) and high school (9-12) (FG)(BP)	The Think Tank recommended the K-2, 3-8, 9-12 and K-3, 4-8,9-12 models should be removed from consideration. Literature isn't compelling enough to change all schools in the District to this configuration given the estimated cost of refurbishing and renovating buildings to support such a change. The increase in transitions in a student's life can be particularly difficult for high needs students. It might also be more disruptive and disadvantageous to have 4 <sup>th</sup> graders and 8 <sup>th</sup> graders in the same school.
Phase in K-8 schools District-wide and maintain 9-12 high schools (FG)(BP)	The Think Tank believes this option would be financially insurmountable. Furthermore, the impact of K-8 models on student achievement did not have sufficient weight to make the financial risk worthwhile. However, the Think recommends the District consider the K-8 school option at the time it meditates closing or merging schools if it makes sense educationally and financially. The Think Tank believes continued assessment of K-8 models is important and recommends that the District monitor the progress of other K-8 schools.
Phase in one K-8 school district and maintain 9-12 high schools (FG)	The Think recommends the District consider the K-8 school option at the time it meditates closing or merging schools if it makes sense educationally and financially. Without a particular circumstance to consider, it seems unlikely the public could contribute effectively to a discussion regarding conversion.
<b>OPTIONS AFFECTING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL</b>	
Target math and language arts instruction to students in grades K-2 (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Increasing kindergarten infrastructure (4J)	The Think Tank recommends that the District seek public input on creating additional kindergarten space in elementary schools to allow for increased kindergarten offerings if funded by the State. Providing the additional space would affect the size of a future capital bond.
Increase preschool infrastructure on elementary school campuses (FG)	The Think Tank recommends that the District seek input on additional pre-kindergarten space in elementary schools. While operational expenses of pre-kindergarten are mostly absorbed by partner organizations, providing the additional space would affect the size of a future capital bond.
Targeted kindergarten (4J)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations, including the need to need to provide early intervention services for students with special needs. The specific options were deemed to relate more to

Option	Think Tank Recommendation
	instructional planning and ongoing budgeting, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Extended day kindergarten (4J)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations, including the need to provide early intervention services for students with special needs. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning and ongoing budgeting, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Early interventions in math and reading (BP)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The Think Tank consistently emphasized the importance of early intervention. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning and ongoing budgeting, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Operate 300-400 sized schools (BP)	<p><b>Elementary Schools</b> – The Think Tank recommended that the District seek public input on elementary schools in the size range of 350 to that site’s capacity. Enrollment below 350 is not big enough to serve all students equitably and is fiscally inefficient given operational funding limitations. The Think Tank determined that setting an upper limit equal to the capacity of the site allowed the District to continue to utilize larger, newly renovated elementary schools. However, it recommended that the District provide schools with more than 400 students with a smaller learning environment model.</p>
Smaller schools: elementary @ 250, middle @ 350, middle (co-located) @ 250, K-8 @ 350 (FG)	
Schools at QEM levels: elementary @ 350, middle @ 500, K-8 @ 500 (FG)	
Larger schools: elementary @ 500, middle @ 650, K-8 @ 650 (FG)	
Larger schools: elementary @ 350-capacity (with small learning community provisions for larger schools) (TT)	
<b>OPTIONS AFFECTING MIDDLE SCHOOLS</b>	
Middle @ 400-600 (TT)	The Think Tank recommended that the District seek public input on a middle school size range of 400-600. A size range of 450 to 550 was considered, but it was agreed that a broader range allowed more flexibility. A size range of 350 to occupancy for the site was also considered, but removed because some 4J middle school capacities greatly exceed best practice enrollment figures. By capping enrollment, the Think Tank believes there will be greater equity in programming and services across the District.
<b>OPTIONS AFFECTING SECONDARY SCHOOLS</b>	
Expand course offerings for ELL students	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations.

Option	Think Tank Recommendation
at secondary level (FG)	The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
Establish a dual language K-8	While the Think Tank is recommending strong consideration of a Spanish-English dual language program, the issue of whether this program is a K-8 or not is too specific for consideration by the Think Tank. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved. .
Establish a Newcomer program (ELL) for grades 6-12 (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.
<b>OPTIONS AFFECTING HIGH SCHOOLS</b>	
Limit enrollment at each high school to 1450 students (FG)	The Think Tank recommends that the District seek input on a more equitable distribution of high school enrollment. While 1450 may not be the right number, capping high school enrollment will provide greater equity in programming and services across the District.
Establish some stand-alone small schools from 400-800 students (FG)(BP)	The Think Tank believed this option would be financially insurmountable because it would require the construction of several new high schools.
Establish a career academy at each high school for grades 11 and 12 (FG)	The Think Tank recommended that the District pursue this option because it allows for equity between schools and regions. If each school had a career academy, access to this opportunity would be made available to the full range of students. Unless there are specific infrastructure costs associated with this option, the Think Tank recommends it be implemented through internal instructional planning and budgeting processes.
Establish a district-wide career-institute for grades 11 and 12 (FG)	The Think Tank believed this option would be financially insurmountable because a stand-alone building would have to be furnished or remodeled and transportation costs would increase as well. The Think Tank was concerned that a separate facility would create the same sort of socio-economic divide now present at the District's alternative schools.
Limit enrollment at each high school to 800 students (FG)	The Think Tank believed this option would be financially insurmountable because it would require the construction of several new high schools.
Establish a Newcomer program (ELL) at each high school (FG)	Issue was considered during discussion of facility and service configurations. The specific options were deemed to relate more to instructional planning, and were forwarded back to District for ongoing planning once broader facility and service issues have been resolved.

Option	Think Tank Recommendation
<b>OPTIONS AFFECTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	
Increase teacher training/development to benefit SpEd students (BP)	The Think Tank strongly supported professional development for teachers, staff and site-committees, particularly regarding students with special needs and technology. However, it felt that the specific the kind of professional development provided should be determined by the District through its policies and ongoing instructional planning.
Increase teacher training/development to benefit ELL students (BP)	
Hire staff to implement online staff development (FG)	
Subscribe to online professional development (FG)	
Increase professional development training for teachers and site-committees, particularly with regard to students with special needs (TT)	