

# Meet Larry Sullivan: SLSD Superintendent

Sullivan set to start July 1 and finish June 30, 2019

By Zach Silva  
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Larry Sullivan was looking forward to retirement.

After over 40 years working in education starting as a school psychologist with various stops including as a lobbyist in Washington DC and as assistant superintendent in Canton, Ohio, he retired from his position as Lane Education Service Director (Lane ESD) superintendent last June.

But then the phone rang.

On the other end was Forest Grove School District superintendent Yvonne Curtis who knew Sullivan from her time as 4J elementary director. She was looking for an interim director for student services and Sullivan said yes. He worked for four months and then went back to retirement.

But after two months, the phone rang, again.

This time it was Raquel Gwynn, who Sullivan had helped hire in 4J, announcing that she was leaving her job as principal of Spring Creek Elementary to work as an education specialist in the office of teaching, learning and assessment for the Oregon Department of Education. In February, Sullivan took the job as interim principal at Spring Creek.

"I think friendship gets you in trouble. It usually does," Sullivan said with a laugh.

Now a year removed from his initial retirement, Sullivan has work lined up once again. This time as the interim superintendent for South Lane School District, a decision was publicly announced at Monday's school board meeting.

For this position, it was not South Lane seeking out Sullivan, but the other way around.

"I have such huge respect for the wonderful things and the stellar work that's being done in South Lane. Whether it be instructionally or working with the community, staff. All those things. And I know that there will be an interim period and that's what I'm interested," Sullivan told the Sentinel.

"I said if you want an interim, I'm very interested in being here. If you just want someone to try out for the job, I don't want to be here. That's not what I want to do. I want to help you get ready and make those transitions. And sort of re-focus yourself."

One of the areas that Sullivan said he is especially excited to be working with is with P20, the program that focuses on helping students from prenatal through 20 years of age.

"They are doing remarkable things from pre-natal to college and career. I want to focus on that. Probably of any district – their P-20 is so vibrant," he said.

Sullivan notes that after being at Spring Creek Elementary, his mindset has shifted away from retirement.

"I've had just a great experience here. And I think in part I wouldn't even have thought of going to South Lane – maybe I should retire and go play golf or something, go surfing or something – but you know it sort of revitalized me a little bit," he said.

This rejuvenation will be welcomed in a district that, after the departure of Krista Parent as superintendent, "needs healing" according to members of the school board. Sullivan believes he is up to the

challenge.

"Transition is one of the things we don't pay a whole lot of attention to. Whether it be business or education or things like that is really transitions... You know, we tend to want to go immediately to the goals of what the change is going to be," he said.

"But there is a whole transition process. You know, sort of an ending of one thing and loss and a whole lot of things that takes a lot of support. I think that's what I will focus on, really supporting."

His familiarity with the district, knowledge of staff and admiration for what is being done has put him in a position where he wants to be in this role and help the district move forward.

"It's really supporting, reengaging and focusing on what we need to do well. There's lots of noise when you make a transition. Whatever transition – a new superintendent, a new principal, whatever it is. People are unsure, people don't know," he said.

"I think focusing on that, focusing on working with the community. Because, schools are really the hub of the community in many ways. And there isn't a person in the community that doesn't think about the school district."

For Sullivan that starts with building relationships around the community and letting the staff do what they need to do.

"My goal, when I go down there is really to spend a lot of time doing the type of work that can allow the administration to get back to their work because all the administration has been doing double duty for a while," said Sullivan.

"So my job is really not getting in the way but helping."

## Interim from A1

a long-term position after being awarded the job by the South Lane School Board last month.

The position of superintendent will be left vacant on June 30 when superintendent Krista Parent retires in accordance to an agreement signed earlier this year with the school district.



Larry Sullivan

"I think we've said plenty on Larry but he has a reputation across the county for building bridges," South Lane School Board Chair Alan Baas said. Baas noted that Sullivan would provide the district with "good conversation" as it prepares to search for a long-term superintendent.

Sullivan has worked in education for 40 years, most recently as the interim principal of Spring Creek Elementary and Lane Education Service Director Superintendent. "I have known so much about this district for so long,"

Sullivan said after thanking the board. In a press release following the meeting, Sullivan was quoted as saying, "During this transitional year, it is important to maintain, support and build upon the exceptional programs and services in the South Lane School District. Student learning and quality instruction is our first priority. I am looking forward to working with and listening to

the board, administration, and school staff. The schools are important part of the community, if not the hub. I want to engage and communicate with our many community members, parents, and organizations to help strengthen and improve our schools."

When discussing the details of the contract for the position at an earlier meeting, the board set the salary between \$130,000 and \$135,000 with 10 to 15 vacation days throughout the year.

The board voted unanimously to approve Sullivan's contract.

## WHY I TEACH...

I never in a million years thought I would be a teacher but it happened to me!

Several reasons, each played out in my life to change the course of who and what I am for my students.

When I was 15, I moved to Oregon to live with my father. I was a very frustrated with life and what it had to offer me; I started experimenting with partying, skipping school and as a result my credits and grades plummeted. Soon after, my father lost his housing and we moved in with my grandmother, but with overcrowding I decided to leave. Then, I found out I was pregnant. There I was pregnant and homeless. I knew things had to change in my life. Being a homeless, pregnant teenager changed my life more than I could ever imagine.

I went from skipping and failing, to straight As with extra night school and Saturday school almost never missing a day to be able to graduate on time. With a few AI Kennedy field trips thrown in, I graduated on time from CGHS in 1997.

What resonates for me most is the people that surrounded me in our community; the programs we once had were amazing and the programs that still exist in our community, helped shape my decision to be an educator.

I actually wanted to be a lactation consultant. I was gung-ho on being one. I knew I had to be a nurse so I enrolled at Lane Community College with financial aid and a few local scholarships from a community that believed in me.

I needed to earn extra money and found a work study job at Bohemia Elementary reading with kids. I could walk to it during the day if I put my kid in the high school nursery. My baby daddy-- high school sweet heart--husband (21 years) watched our son during the night after he got off work so I could do night classes.

Working at Bohemia would change my life. I was assigned to do reading with a group of kids in Linda Randall's classroom. I worked there for several months and enjoyed it immensely but still planned on being a lactation consultant. Then, the teacher Linda Randall tragically died mid year. I couldn't leave those students, they were lost. I stayed for the whole year. Those kids needed me, and I think I needed them. I still am in contact with a few of those students in that class.

By the end of the year, I was destined to be a teacher.

I decided to switch my major at Lane, then transferred to Pacific University Eugene Campus. Mentor teachers like Jan Settlemeyer and Donna Perkey worked with me to help me understand how the education system worked and how to be a good teacher.

When I graduated from Pacific University with a bachelors in education in 2002 I became a sub at the district the next year, subbing in elementary, middle, and high school classes. In the spring of 2003, Gay Kennedy called me. She needed to retire due to a family emergency and she wanted me to take her place. I laughed.

I wasn't a home ec teacher. I wasn't into high schoolers but I would do it to because she did so much for me. She told me she believed in me and I was who she wanted to take her job and help teen parents. In doing so, I had to get a masters degree. So I enrolled in a masters degree program.

I was able to start the job in 2004. My first day of class, I was 24-years-old. Scared to death. I started the day at the alternative school. There were kids walking around on campus and I was only a few years older than them and I was to be their teacher.

To this day I remember the

first student who walked in my classroom. She looked straight at me all pregnant and determined. "Oh good it's you! I thought I was going to have some old lady telling me what to do." It was one of my students from Linda Randall's class. I knew I was in the right place. In the right job.

Although I still had lots to learn, and still learn daily from my students and coworkers, I know helping students the same way I was, is my way of giving back for everyone who helped me. I love working at Kennedy High

School and Cottage Grove High School. I also work with Parent Partnership and handle the MCKinney Vento- homeless program for the school district.

10 long years later, I received my masters degree from Central Washington University with a degree in family and consumer sciences and CTE administration.

I love my job, I love my community, I love my students. I am an educator.

-Brandi Baker-Rudicel  
AI Kennedy High School  
Health and Odysseyware

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