

OAK PARK AND RIVER FOREST HIGH SCHOOL
201 North Scoville Avenue
Oak Park, IL 60302

INSTRUCTION COMMITTEE MEETING
December 9, 2014

An Instruction Committee meeting was held on December 9, 2014. Dr. Gevinson called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. in the Board Room. Committee members present were Dr. Steve Gevinson, Dr. Jackie Moore, and Sharon Patchak-Layman. Also present were Dr. Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; Amy Hill, Director of Assessment and Research; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; David Ruhland, Director of Human Resources; Gwen Walker-Qualls, Interim Director of Special Education; Tod Altenburg, Chief School Business Official; Karin Sullivan, Director of Community Relations and Communications; Sheila Hardin, Faculty Senate Executive Committee Chair; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors: Ralph Lee, Board of Education member; Josh Seldess, History Division Head, Richard Mertz, Dr. Steve Goldberg, and Michael Soffer, History Division teachers.

Visitor Comment
None

Minutes

Ms. Patchak-Layman moved to approve the Instruction Committee minutes of November 10, 2014; seconded by Dr. Moore. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

Update from History Division

The History Division sought out high interest material for students to foster higher levels of engagement with historical material and themes in history courses. The division is focusing on curriculum development, examining the sequence of courses students take, as well as the skills and knowledge targets in the core courses in the division. Finally, the division has been pursuing a dialogue around racial equity and how beliefs and practices within the division will affect student experience and outcomes in history courses. Some of the recent work in the division includes the following:

- The teachers discussed the use of graphic novels in the World History college prep and honors courses. All World History courses use the same novel as part of the core curriculum.
- Recent hiring in the division and support for curriculum planning and alignment to the common core state standards present important opportunities and necessary work for the teachers in the division.
- The History Division has taken on a common read as well as a review of information describing student experiences in the division as a way to develop ideas for positive change for all students.

Mr. Seldess gave some background on graphic novels now being used in History courses. He highlighted the following:

- Graphic novels have long been popular in Europe and Japan.
- Graphic novels are sequential art—contemporary students have a much wider visual vocabulary than adults.
- Student engagement has increased because graphic novels motivate students to learn and they provide additional opportunities to for those who struggle with literacy tasks.

- Graphic novels help build complex reading skills—every part of each frame plays a role in the interpretation of the text. Thus, graphic novels actually demand sophisticated readers and teachers who can teach them.
- For students who have difficulty visualizing as they read, graphic novels provide a visual sense of an important literacy skill that effective readers utilize when they read.
- The novels combines words (intellect) with pictures (emotions) in a unique way.
- The text is different than film in that students use their eyes and absorb information at their own speed, not at the pace dictated by the filmmaker.

History teachers use the book *Abina* for World History and World Studies because 1) it combines a graphic novel (graphic history) with primary source reading and historiography in a unique and exciting way, 2) it appeals to students across all levels, 3) it addresses central themes and essential questions in the curriculum, i.e., the role and impact of European imperialism in Africa and Asia and the relationships of power including racism and sexism. Students are able to engage the novel and the transcript of the trial and arrive at their own conclusions, while comparing their conclusions to those reached by the author. The novel allows for a written analysis of elements of the text using CCSS (Common Core State Standards).

Dr. Goldberg noted that TCT first encountered this book. It was a great addition to the curriculum and the enthusiasm was validated by every class. It is used in many classes and at every level. A San Francisco State professor originally discovered the transcript of a trial in Ghana in 1876, the case of a woman wrongfully enslaved. The graphic novel began with the trial transcript but then an illustrator was hired to transform it into a visual narrative. The question was then how to turn it into a story without distorting it. Students are engaged by the historical question. Some teachers use the book and they formed a monitored discussion to give students the tools to have a thoughtful, sustained conversation about the text. Some of the students felt the woman had a fair trial, as she had legal representation, etc. This is not just a graphic novel, it is a graphic history. The class discusses questions regarding the historical period, the legacy of slavery, industrialization, colonialism, etc. One member asked if the book is used on multiple levels, do students have a missed level of conversation. Are the conversations at all levels similar or different? The response was that the conversations vary widely at the same level. A number of students complained that the book was actually fiction because of the slight resemblance between the transcripts from the pictures.

Mr. Soffer uses the text *The Watchmen* in American Studies, which is not a graphic history, but a graphic novel with significant historical themes in the Cold War era. He uses it to teach literary elements as well, interdisciplinary English/History course, anti-hero, etc. Pictures are guiding text. Film and graphic novels function in a similar way.

Graphic novels are harder to read than one might think because so much exists in every word and picture. However, students are reading a comic book in their minds and a significantly greater level of engagement has been found and the teachers are doing visual literacy skills. A question was asked as to whether there was a distraction between boys and girls? The response was that only the first day as boys are more engaged at that time, but nothing more.

Mr. Seldess stated that curriculum mapping is helping to document what is happening coherently as some iconic teachers will be retiring. Dr. Goldberg is transitioning teachers to teach his classes while he is here.

With regard to development of mission and vision statements, and how racial equity is dealt with in the division, Mr. Seldess stated that they are reading books to develop common language and racial

consciousness about what is being seen both qualitatively and quantitatively. He would like to deepen the division's understanding of the mission and purpose and for that to drive the conversation as to the direction of the division. World History teachers are developing lessons on the Ferguson Missouri police shooting case and community reaction.

When asked about the future of *Interpretations*, Mr. Seldess stated that the last two challenges faced have been an inadequate number of teachers to serve on committee to read through the documents and a fair representation across the curriculum. Most of the work submitted and selected is from AP-level students, so conversations about that include what excellent work looks like across span of curriculum. Is excellence only be defined as writing? Conversations are occurring about electronic journals or websites and showcasing the students' best work.

Many of the division's classes are single semester and the unevenness of the semesters is making the teachers tired. Additional curriculum is being added to second semester. One member suggested using a graphic novel for a couple of weeks.

The History Division may ask for the Board of Education's willingness to engage in the conversation and exploration along the same lines as how to enhance racial equity and if solutions are proposed that the Board of Education support them.

FTE Report and Employee Profile

The Instruction Committee members unanimously recommended presenting the Faculty/Staff Report and Employee Profile Information for 2014-15 to the Board of Education as information at the regular December meeting. The FTE for Faculty includes all certified teachers, supervisors, coordinators, counselors, and the percentage of time the Division Heads are engaged in the classroom instruction portion of their responsibilities. Non-certified employee information included individuals who are in Buildings and Grounds, the Classified Personnel Association, Food Service, the Non-Affiliated Group, and the Safety and Support Team.

Questions were raised about the numbers presented and they will be reviewed again at the Board of Education meeting.

Questions were raised about commencing hiring committees that don't recycle people, and why the District was not attracting black teachers. What is the retirement picture in each division? What is the pool of candidates for new hires? One member counseled that starting with the right questions, setup, etc., is important, noting that there are ways that those qualities in staff can be reflected just in the questions and who the District wants and yet not put up barriers. After a hire, what is done to make them feel welcome? Exit interviews could provide information as to where to start. If 10 people are hired, how would that meet the District's goal? Does a particular division need to look at its outreach?

One member commented that attracting people is one thing and retaining them is another. Dr. Gevinson cautioned drawing any conclusions on hiring minorities based on the numbers or percentages. The process varies from division to division. When he retired, English had the highest percentage of minorities, but other factors come into play and it takes direct effort by many people. He knew how difficult it was to get a decent minority plan and the percentages do not tell the whole process. Another member stated that because this has been a perennial, complex issue, it was time to do things differently.

New hire demographics will be added to this report. Mr. Ruhland saw this as an end-of-the-year report. Corrections will be made and brought to the Board of Education in December or January.

Summer School

The Instruction Committee received the Summer School budget for 2015, its dates, and tuition and voted 2 to 1 to move it to the Board of Education. Summer school will offer 5 different track options, two of which will offer students a concentrated, 14-day experience and 3 that will offer students a 28-day experience. The dates will be Monday, June 8 through Friday, July 17. A wide selection of general, special education, enrichment, and credit recovery classes will be offered. No school will be held on Friday, July 3, 2015.

An increase in the budget was requested for next year to be used in conjunction with additional counseling services and special education resources. The amount of counseling services needed last summer was not anticipated. That must be made more efficient next year. Counselors must determine the student needs, whether he/she has the right courses for college or mental health needs, etc. Discussion ensued. Committee members wanted more documentation to substantiate the budget. A suggestion was made to pilot a systematic, concentrated plan of having additional counselors and guidance people to see how students did. Questions that arose were: 1) Does this reflect the anticipated needs for this summer based on last semester? 2) How much revenue does the District contribute to summer school? 3) Are there deficits within Special Education? Summer initiatives? With regard to summer initiatives, the response was that these come from federal Title I money. While the District contributes the Student Interventionist Director, and while summer school is intended to be self-sustaining, no student who wants to go to summer school is denied as the District provides them with academic grants. The cost of credit recovery courses was reduced as well.

The Finance Committee made the recommendation to keep tuition status quo. The Instruction Committee members concurred with Finance to keep tuition status quo, but asked for documentation to show what was pro-bono, what was paid for, and what additional funds could have been used next year. One member noted that not all of the costs and revenue were part of this budget. More information was desired.

Calendar

The Instruction Committee recommended by a vote of 2 to 1 that the proposed calendar for the 2015-16 school year be forwarded to the Board of Education for approval at its regular December meeting. The honoring of Veterans' Day would be aligned with the sender districts.

The Instruction Committee also recommended that the tentative calendar for the 2016-17 school year be forwarded to the Board of Education for acceptance at its regular December meeting.

Discussion ensued about the commencement date, as it could fall on the Memorial Day weekend. This calendar does not include this date. Ms. Patchak-Layman felt that the school year was starting too early and no discussion had been held about the graduation date.

Adjournment

Dr. Gevinson moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m.; seconded by Dr. Moore. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Submitted by Gail Kalmerton
Clerk of the Board