

**Oak Park and River Forest High School  
201 N. Scoville  
Oak Park, IL 60302**

**An Instruction Committee of the Whole Board  
October 25, 2006**

An Instruction Committee meeting of the Whole Board was held on Thursday, October 25, 2006, in the Board Room. Ms. Fernandez opened the meeting at 6:33 p.m. Committee members present were Jacques A. Conway, Barbara P. Fernandez, Valerie J. Fisher, Dr. Dietra D. Millard (arrived at 7:55 p.m.), and Yasmin A. Ranney. Also present were: Dr. Susan J. Bridge, Superintendent/Principal; Jack Lanenga, Assistant Superintendent for Operations; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Amy Hill, Director of Instruction; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistance/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors included members of the Fine & Performing Arts Division: Bill Boulware, Rebecca Jacobson, Michelle Carroll, Penny Ebsen, Sandy Campbell, Mark Collins, Lindy Novotny, John Condne, Jay Fisher, Patrick Pearson, Joe Hallissey, Mark Collins, and Elaine Hlavach.

**Dialogue with the Fine and Performing Arts Division**

Ms. Ranney was complimentary to the photography teachers, as she had seen some of their students' work had created displayed at the Frame Shop. Not only is there student work displayed, but there is also faculty and staff work displayed as well.

Mr. Prale informed the Committee that in the 1980's, Ted Sizer, a leading educational reformer in the United States, wrote about how he thought schools should evaluate student learning and in one book, Sizer specifically talks about the exhibition of student work. No other O.P.R.F.H.S. division does extensive display of student work. This division consistently exhibits the aesthetics and the artwork of the school community. The volume and high standards of exhibited material are exceptional. Mr. Collins' personal work, a collection from the past twelve years, currently hung on the walls of the Student Balcony. O.P.R.F.H.S., monthly, displays new school community exhibits.

Apologies were expressed for Anthony Svejda's nonattendance at this meeting; he had a previous obligation with the Jazz Band. Ms. Ranney appreciated that fact, as her son is a member of Jazz Band.

Ms. Ranney wondered if there might be a way to provide greater exposure of these talents of these students to the entire community. The community is made aware of these opportunities through the following vehicles:

- Information provided to the newspapers;
- Information posted to the website;

- An outreach program exists with both Holly Court and the Oak Park Arms;
- A number of free tickets to performances are sent to the parents of elementary school teachers;
- Middle school students are provided daylong fine and performing arts workshops to enhance their awareness of these programs; and
- Huskie Boosters has an annual benefit whereby a smorgasbord of talent is presented and there is a silent auction

Dr. Bridge suggested including information on the cable access channels.

The Committee enjoyed the Fine and Performing Arts Division video highlighting the various components of the division, i.e., wheel throwing, students rolling clay and their end products, the painting studio, the photography lab, the various music opportunities (band, choir, Jazz Ensemble, Percussion Ensemble, Wind Ensemble, Orchestra) as well as theatrical opportunities such as Stagecraft, Newscene, and Radio/TV Production. This same video is sent to the junior highs to promote the Fine and Performing Arts Department. The courses in this department, with the exception of one fine arts course required for graduation, are all taken as electives. Marketing is pivotal for this department. At the beginning of the year, freshmen receive a list of frequently asked questions regarding visual arts, music, speech arts, and drama opportunities at the high school.

Ms. Fernandez attended the October 16 Alumni Association reception for students who participated in the summer enrichment program. One student had attended Columbia College and had taken a photography course. Did these additional courses and experiences help students to advance to higher-level courses upon their return to O.P.R.F.H.S.? She learned that students must follow the high school's proscribed curriculum. Ms. Carrow reported that while she has had students who have taken independent study classes, she always suggests starting at the beginning in order to become familiar with the high school's materials.

A Committee member asked what students do with the Television Production course. Mr. Condne, a fourth year teacher at O.P.R.F.H.S., reported that many of his students go on to Columbia College, NYU, etc. Some students start working in the field of television before they even finish college. If someone knows the subject and has an amicable personality, it is easy to get a job in the television field. Graduates of O.P.R.F.H.S. continue to be hired for paid work because they are in demand.

Mr. Boulware reported that a comment he often receives from graduates who took advanced classes in high school is that they have come to appreciate what O.P.R.F.H.S.'s offered. Mr. Condne noted that one student, majoring in broadcasting, now attends a college that has no Teleprompters; many colleges do not have O.P.R.F.H.S.'s advanced equipment.

Mr. Conway used to work security for commercials shot in the Oak Park area when he was a member of the Oak Park Police. He was intrigued by the terminology film companies have for various positions. While a few common definitions were given at the meeting such as “gaffers” (the main person in charge of lighting) and “grips” (an electrician), etc., Mr. Conway was suggested to “Google” film terminology for an extensive list.

Ms. Hlavach noted that Robert Clearfield, a former student, took a hiatus from his studies at Roosevelt University to dedicate himself fully to being a jazz pianist. His musical schedule did not allow him time to study. In the October 25, 2006, issue of the *Wednesday Journal*, an article about Evan O’Brien, a 2001 O.P.R.F.H.S. graduate, told of his having attended college in southern California and his now working for George Lucas on the Star Wars series. Mr. O’Brien telecommutes by sending his work via the computer. A part time journalist, wanting to do an article on art department at the high school, authored the article.

When asked if there were any collaboration between the Villages and the students to get their art, jewelry and painting projects displayed at the art fairs, etc., Mr. Boulware stated that advanced students want their work for their portfolios and are hesitant to part with it. The College Board requires AP students to document 45 pieces in slide form.

One of the students mentioned in the article, Joy Jones, had to do a presentation of her gifts to a number of high schools. Mr. Conway noted that the students were amazed by what she had learned and had been exposed to at O.P.R.F.H.S., as well as her ability and her passion. Mr. Boulware reiterated that Ms. Jones was a very talented student did not have a computer at home. He hoped someone could provide her with a loaner.

A committee member asked if O.P.R.F.H.S. taught copyrighting. Mr. Boulware responded that copyrighting was unnecessary in the Applied Arts Division, as there is nothing that needed to be filed or protected. Automatic protection occurs as soon as an item is created.

A committee member learned that the debate classes were not running. While there was some interest for the first couple of semesters, there was no momentum. However, a debate team meets after school and eight to ten students compete regularly. The debate class needs approximately eighteen (18) registrations to run; usually there are no more than six to eight registrations.

Dr. Bridge stated there were no doubts from the comments from the Board of Education and Administration about the quality of the work O.P.R.F.H.S. students are able to produce. She encouraged these faculty members to speak to the Board of Education about topics/issues that should be aired.

Ms. Hlavach noted that an issue of concern was class size. The Performing Arts teachers build a sense of camaraderie of the art form. This is the first year in her ten-year experience that she has TEAM students in her choir. One student is autistic and this is

the only mainstream class of this student's day. The lessons these students learned from this environment are important for all of the students in all of their classes.

Ms. Ebsen noted that she co-teaches an REI class with a special education teacher. That class is the most rewarding period of their day. The first day everyone wonders if these students were in the right class. No conversation occurs about the ability level of any of the students; everyone just goes about doing their work. By the end of the course, there is no need to say anything. Sometimes there may be many as five adults in the class to assist these students; that is positive.

Ms. Fernandez asked if the division could make any changes, what would they be and why. Ms. Campbell noted she would ask for smaller class sizes because so much of the work occurs on a one-to-one basis. If there were twenty-nine (29) students in the class, the teacher only has two minutes to work with each student individually. While the school is fortunate to have its great facilities, time is precious. Mr. Boulware concurred. While some classes may be able to handle larger classes, students, in those classes that have one-on-one instruction, are often lined up waiting to talk with their teachers. Studio classes are like "beehives" and the teachers must have eyes in the back of their heads in order to monitor the students. Ms. Carrow stated that photography would be one of those types of classes. Mr. Hallissey reported that he has the ideal situation with his theatre technology classes. It is important to maintain a small class size. He and Mr. Fisher co-teach this class and comfortably monitor the ten to twelve students who may be using power tools.

Mr. Pearson reported that while music teachers generally like large numbers, O.P.R.F.H.S.'s music department is running out of physical space. Ms. Hlavach concurred. She often sees the doors of the music rooms swung open and students having to participate from the hallway. The choir students are wall-to-wall right now and there is no alternative space to have small groups. Other schools are jealous of the numbers of students interested in O.P.R.F.H.S.' music programs. Mr. Pearson added that while the number of students interested in music classes will plateau for a while, it is going to shoot up. Many students from private schools are interested in orchestra, etc. Four years ago when the orchestra room was renovated, there was plenty of room. Yet, two years later, space is again an issue. Ms. Hlavach stated that while a seventh group of the vocal program wanted to start, there was no space for it.

Mr. Collins, a teacher with O.P.R.F.H.S. for nine years and a teacher of Art Foundations, has observed that freshman students consistently come with a wide range of abilities. Many students do not have basic skills, i.e., the ability to use a ruler. This creates a challenging and disturbing dynamic for the classroom. Ms. Ranney was saddened by the fact that there is a core group of freshman students with remedial reading skills, adding to the mix of deficiencies. Ms. Hlavach observed that some students are able to read the words at the pace of the music, as they are still sounding out the words phonetically. Music assists them and they compensate.

Ms. Fernandez asked if the Dean Counselors sought the counsel of the teachers in Fine Arts when scheduling students. Mr. Prale responded that when Dean Counselors build core academic class schedules, they look for available seats in elective classes. Dean Counselors may not have the time or the flexibility to find out the background of the students. When Ms. Campbell suggests to the Dean Counselor that her class may or may not be the best candidate for a particular class, the Dean Counselor is very appreciative of that information. Ms. Hlavach affirmed that this is a good way to get students needed alternative services.

Ms. Novotny stated that all teachers recognize deficiencies in students. However, they are all able to learn. She has a senior who has less than a fourth grade reading level, yet that student is one of the best students in her jewelry making class. That is reason why she teaches. This student is defeated in all his other classes and for this student to exceed in this one is an exceptional experience.

Ms. Novotny spoke to the issue of class registrations. She noted that there was a discrepancy between the number of students who are registered and the number of students who attend. In one instance, 53 students were added to her classes and later 23 were dropped. That left her with an additional 28 students. Her class size was to have been between 20 and 22, but now it is 28. This increase occurred between the first day and the fifth week of school. While she does not ask the students to make up the missed work, as some teachers do when students arrive late, students do miss learning the skills with which to do their projects. From where do these late students come? The majority of late registrants are African-American and the reason they are late was unknown.

Other division members voiced class size as an issue as well. Mr. Boulware noted that he presently has one class with 17 students and one with 19 students. When school started, 24 were registered for each class. This inconsistency is detrimental, because if not enough students are registered, the class might not run.

Mr. Lanenga explained some of the circumstances that would allow for these inconsistencies, i.e.:

- 1) A student enrolled in a physics class who decides that he/she does not want to continue, asks the Dean Counselor to find another class for him/her to take. The Art Foundations class is often used as a catch-all class, because it is an easier class in which to enroll;
- 2) Another example would be if the student who took art in summer school and did not do well would have to take that class during the year. Mr. Prale concurred that under-registrations occurring in the spring can produce a wave that occurs in the fall;
- 3) Transferring students;
- 4) Staffing decisions are a reason for late registrations; everything is based on staffing decisions.

A method for ensuring that every student has a full load at the time registration is imperative. B.A.T.'s Learning Team is talking about this problem. The maximum enrollment of an Art Foundations class is 28. Music performance has no cap. While this is an issue throughout the school, Mr. Lanenga admitted it was most common in the Fine and Performing Arts Division. Students in the academic divisions generally go from AP classes to honors to regular classes.

Ms. Hlavach had 25 students added to her classes since August due to some move-ins and move-outs. Some students do not find out they have a PE waiver until very late. One hundred music students receive PE waivers. Regarding transfer students, the school has no way to control parents moving in or out of the district. Teachers try to be as accommodating as possible.

Ms. Fernandez asked if those students enrolling four or five weeks into the marking period were encouraged to attend study table. Ms. Campbell stated that there were no art teachers at study table. She hoped that the work was being made up, but arts classes may not be a high priority for students. Time is a problem for students entering late. However, she wanted them to be involved as much as possible as this was the student's introduction into the department and his/her only requirement. Ms. Fernandez asked if the parents were involved in the process. Mr. Pearson responded affirmatively. Ms. Carrow stated that the teachers make many phone calls to the parents informing them of the concepts so that they may have an understanding of the underlying needs.

Mr. Conway and Ms. Fisher felt the division was doing a great job. Ms. Fisher thought these classes were fun and the students would have had years of enjoyment going to different conferences and shows; students get a foundation that stays with them for life. Mr. Conway remarked that these classes give them a way to exhibit their talents and desires, as well as an opportunity to derive satisfaction.

Ms. Carrow shared that the school day was of concern, as graduation requirements were changing. Once all new graduation requirements are phased in, which begins with this freshman class, a full additional year of English, Math and Science will be required. It creates a scenario of gloom for the Fine and Performing Arts Division. When asked for solutions, Ms. Hlavach suggested going to an eight-period day at little or no cost to the District. If Fine Arts students were allowed to take classes during their lunch, it would not cost any additional money. Mr. Lanenga noted that the School Day Committee had talked about extra classes. If given the chance, most students would not enroll in the performing arts classes. He continued that the District would not see an increase in the academic classes because of the vast amount of students already taking the required classes. Ms. Hlavach attested to the fact that Highland Park School allows students to take classes during their lunch hour by allowing them to eat their lunches during the classes. Mr. Lanenga responded that students take an average of 6.33 registrations at O.P.R.F.H.S., allowing them the opportunity to take performance and art classes. The new requirements will not lessen the demand for Fine and Performing Arts classes.

Ms. Campbell encourages students not to take late arrival or early dismissal, so as not to miss out on opportunities to take these classes. Mr. Boulware added that, previously, only students who had jobs were allowed to have late arrivals and/or early dismissals. Now everyone is allowed this option. Mr. Fisher added that students treat first and last period study halls the same as early or late dismissals.

Mr. Prale thanked the Board of Education for allowing this dialogue. Ms. Ranney added that this division makes O.P.R.F.H.S. shine. Dr. Millard appreciated the display of student work in the hallways and that the students' talent is "mind-boggling." Mr. Boulware noted that there has been no vandalism to the work hung in the hallways. Dr. Bridge said that was a tribute to the students and to the teachers for building the respect for this work.

Ms. Fernandez thanked the division again for participating in this meeting. The Fine and Performing Arts is very important to the school's curriculum. She asked that they keep the Board of Education posted on any upcoming competitions, etc.

### **Adjournment**

The Committee adjourned at 8:00 p.m.