

February 22, 2007

The Board meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Thursday evening, February 22, 2007, in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order

President Dr. Barry S. Greenwald called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. A roll call vote indicated that the following members were present: Jacques A. Conway, Barbara P. Fernandez (arrived at 7:50 p.m.), Dr. Barry S. Greenwald, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, and Yasmin A. Ranney. Also present were: Dr. Susan J. Bridge, Superintendent/Principal; Jason Edgecombe, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Jack Lanenga, Assistant Superintendent of Operations; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Amy Hill, Director of Instruction; James Paul Hunter, Faculty Senate Executive Committee Chair; Loie Davis, Student Council Board Liaison; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors

The Board of Education welcomed the following visitors: Kay Foran, Director of Community Relations and Communications; Wyanetta Johnson, Gloria Presie, Meg Reynolds, Scott Berman, Terry Burke, Burcy Hines, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, community members; Sheila Flattery, League of Women Voters; Terry Dean of the *Wednesday Journal* and Christopher LaFortune of the *Oak Leaves*.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Bridge congratulated the students who participated at the Illinois Music Education Association State Festival and their directors Anthony Svejda, Patrick Pearson, Rebecca Jacobsen and Elaine Hlavach.

Dr. Bridge congratulated Dr. Marie Urbanski on her tribute by the Golden Apple Organization as one of its 30 finalists. She was honored at the House of Blues on February 17, and the school received a plaque acknowledging this achievement.

Dr. Bridge also reported that the Girls' Varsity Volleyball Team is the recipient of the Zebras of Northern Illinois (ZONI) 2006-07 outstanding Sportsmanship Award this past season for its positive attitude and sportsmanlike behavior.

Dr. Bridge reminded everyone of the P.T.O.'s Annual Theater Benefit's where *Ragtime* will be presented.

Visitor Comments Scott Berman, parent and resident of 1180 Clinton, addressed the Board of Education.

Mr. Berman stated that while his remarks have been viewed as sometimes contentious, he was cognizant of the fact that he is not ignored and his advice is sometimes followed, i.e. 1) the Board of Education did not revise Board Policy 1200, Board of Education, as it was informed that it would be a violation of the Constitution and would embarrass O.P.R.F.H.S. if passed and 2) the school stopped sending a lawyer to his daughter's IEP meetings as it was interpreted as being retaliatory.

He offered another piece of advice regarding moving the school toward excellence. He was shocked at the achievement gap at O.P.R.F.H.S. and the fact that the school had not met the federally mandated and state-defined AYP goals for African-American students. Seventy percent of the African-American students failed to meet its standards in math. O.P.R.F.H.S. had also not met the safe harbor target, which would have removed the school from the watch list. He joined the A.P.P.L.E. tutoring program on Saturday mornings. He noted that there were problems with the program. He stated that not many students had been coming and that he had not received much cooperation from a student's teacher when he asked about the curriculum, homework assignments and chapters to be covered in the course. He felt the teacher had not been told to cooperate or to encourage other students to participate. He urged the Board of Education to get the message out to every faculty member in the school about cooperating with this program.

He also advised the Board of Education to select a superintendent who had experience with multiracial students, as O.P.R.F.H.S. exists less than a mile from a large minority population. A superintendent is needed who can tell an employee to shape up or ship out. Changes are necessary and possible.

Terry Burke, parent and resident of 1180 Clinton, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education.

Ms. Burke noted her reasoning for being so critical of O.P.R.F.H.S. on some issues was because she felt the school could do so much better for the African-American and Special Education students especially. The District has talented people, resources, and people who care. This is a critical juncture for the high school. She hoped that the Board of Education would choose a candidate who had closed the achievement gap, a candidate who could lead the high school to the higher achievement of students at all levels.

Burcy Hines, resident of 1221 Fair Oaks, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education.

Ms. Hines spoke about the superintendent search. She attended all of the candidate forums. She, an educator for over 25 years, hoped that the Board of Education would select a candidate who had experience not only in diversity and in closing achievement gap, but would look at this community to be an example. She asked that the new superintendent have experience with African Americans and knowledge of the achievement gap. She suggested that perhaps an African-American was needed to be instrumental in closing the gap and spearhead that initiative. She had listened to all of the candidates. Some of them brought evidence that they had worked with that achievement gap and had closed it. She asked the Board of Education to look at the community, the achievement gap, and to think about giving someone who has the experience a chance. It was time for a change. O.P.R.F.H.S. had been good to her son and she wanted others to be as successful as he had been. She asked the Board of Education to look at its decision closely and to put its heart and soul in its choice of superintendent and to remember that it was looking at the community involved in the achievement gap.

Meg Reynolds, parent and resident of 1166 S. Clinton, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education.

She read from a letter that she had sent to the Board of Education.

“Dear District 200 School Board Members: I wrote to you to engage in open meeting discussions about the serious problems in O.P.R.F.H.S.’s Special Education Division and the proposed upcoming re-appointment of O.P.R.F.H.S.’s Special Education director.

“Last March, despite ongoing reports of serious and systemic problems in District 200’s Special Education Division, Board of Education members quietly and quickly voted to extend the contract of the current Special Education director for another year. There was no public discussion of this in open session, no recognition of your constituents’ very serious concerns about this reappointment. Worst of all, there appears to have been no independent judgment exercised by individual Board members regarding this contract renewal. Just another rubber-stamp decision and another year of serious Special Education problems at O.P.R.F.H.S.

“Now we appear to be on track to have this happen again a few weeks from now when Linda Cada’s contract comes up for renewal. This is appalling. Although the Illinois Open Meetings Act allows personnel decision issues to be discussed in closed sessions of a public school board, this is not required. The problems in District 200’s Special Education division are systemic problems and issues that should be discussed in open session—without addressing the specific personnel decision regarding the Special Education director.

“For nearly four years, almost since the current Special Education director was appointed, Special Education parents at District 200 have begged the Board of Education to do something about these problems. Parents of students with disabilities have made regular appearances at Board of Education meetings to complain of egregious conduct and retaliation by Special Education personnel; systemic violations of Special Education laws; and egregious misspending of public funds for outplacements and legal fees. Yet not once have I heard the Board of Education respond to or discuss any of these issues in a public meeting, though this is required by law. Not once have I heard Board of Education members do anything but deny these problems. Not once have I observed Board of Education members show any recognition of their responsibility to their constituents to do something about these serious problems. Instead, virtually all Special Education-related business at District 200 appears to be conducted in secret by the School Board, in closed and/or off-site meetings or on the telephone, in violation of the Open Meetings Act.

“And so Special Education parents at District 200 continue to have no genuine access to the Board members they elected to represent their interest and their children’s interests. This isn’t for want of trying. Month after month, year after year, Special Education parents have trudged to Board of Education meetings to voice their concerns in allotted 3-minute “visitor comment” time slots, while Board of Education members sit in stony-faced silence, some going so far as to grimace and roll their eyes while parents describe their difficulties with Special Education.

“Meanwhile behind the scenes, at closed meetings and with the full attention of the Board, Superintendent Sue Bridge and Assistant Superintendent Phil Prale vigorously argue to protect the interests of Special Education personnel under their supervision who are accused of misconduct and noncompliance. Where is the fairness in this? “Where is the accountability? Why are these administrators and the Special Education director allowed to discuss these issues in closed session with Board of Education members while constituents have no

meaningful access at all? Why are parents' serious concerns about Special Education practices at O.P.R.F.H.S. repeatedly disregarded and discounted? Why are these administrators and the Special Education director allowed by the Board of Education to freely hire legal counsel at taxpayer expense to cover up Special Education misconduct and noncompliance?

“Currently, school board members are considering a policy change that would allow the superintendent to delegate authority to anyone of her choosing to outplace a Special Education student to an alternative private school at public expense—a practice that currently is costing local taxpayers more than \$3 million a year. Many of these outplacements are forced—i.e., parents are given no choice in the matter. Where is the Board of Education oversight of these expenditures? Where is the independent judgment for which we elected you?

“These practices and problems cannot continue. I challenge Board of Education members to do what is right on Special Education in District 200 and discuss these issues openly in front of and with your constituents. Exercise independent judgment. Act with conscience. Or do us all a favor and leave the Board. This community deserves better. Taxpayers deserve better. Special education students and families deserve solutions to these egregious District 200 problems, not more of the same.”

Wyanetta Johnson, resident of 727 S. Oak Park Avenue, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education.

Ms. Johnson asked why the concerns of parents regarding special education practices were being discounted or disregarded. She challenged the Board of Education to do what was right with Special Education and to do it in open session.

Dr. Greenwald thanked Ms. Reynolds for the passion in her letter. He stated that he was aware that all parents of special education students were truly concerned about the educational wellbeing not only of their own children, but all the children in the high school. He assured her that he had received and read her email and that she would receive a written response. She had not received a response to date, partly because the Board of Education was engaged in the search for the new superintendent. The Board of Education had a meeting the previous night and left the Board Room at 12:00 midnight, after some had been at the school starting at 9:00 a.m. that morning.

Dr. Greenwald continued that Ms. Reynolds' suggestion in the letter that the Board of Education is convening meetings that were in violation of the Open Meetings Act, meeting offsite and talking on the telephone regarding the issues she raised suggested that she knew the Board of Education was involved in illegal activity. He presumed that she made that allegation, being a lawyer and aware of libel, because she had absolute proof of what she suggested in that letter. To the best of his knowledge, there have been no clandestine meetings about Special Education. Issues pertaining to Special Education should come before the Instruction Committee via the Instruction Committee Chair, Ms. Fernandez, or the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Mr. Prale. He hoped he could to give her an answer that would give her solace that the Board of Education takes seriously the concerns that she offered. He did not think there was anything more the Board of Education could say than that they were trying to do the job they were elected to do. He asked her please to be careful in her accusations that the Board of Education was engaged in illegal activities, as they cut across the line.

Ms. Reynolds asked then when these conversations were occurring. Dr. Greenwald suggested that they have a conversation at another time regarding this. He did not dismiss her concerns or passions nor did any other Board of Education members. The Board of Education takes umbrage when the tone of her accusation suggests that the Board of Education is doing something illegal. Dr. Greenwald noted that all matters of personnel are conducted in closed session because it protects the people.

As a point of information, Mr. Prale noted that evaluation of personnel is conducted annually and considered by the Board of Education via reports made by the Superintendent/Principal in executive session. In matters regarding staff development, reports were given at the Instruction Committee last spring and Special Education was treated the same as every other division with a full report identifying its goals, activities, etc., for the year. The Special Education Division participates in late-arrival learning team programs. Reports are made to the Board of Education identifying the members of the team, the goals of the team, and the measures to be reported out over the course of the year, just as is done with every other division.

Mr. Prale continued that for a full year, the Instruction Committee agenda included Special Education. At the end of the school year, it was agreed that an update would be brought back on an as-needed basis and that the Special Education Division would be treated just as

any other division. There had been no effort to conceal, to be surreptitious or illegal in any way. However, matters specific to personnel or students are discussed in closed session, as that is the appropriate venue.

Dr. Millard asked if Ms. Reynolds had received her email last month in which Mr. Prale offered to meet with her and had suggested several dates. Ms. Reynolds acknowledged receiving the email, but had not agreed to meet with Dr. Millard.

Dr. Greenwald reiterated that issues of instruction should be brought to the Instructional Committee meetings where a dialogue can be had on the issues of concerns and that everyone was welcome.

Board of Education Dr. Greenwald reported that one F.O.I.A. request had been resolved.
Comments

Dr. Millard was appreciative of the communities' involvement and input in the superintendent search process. She encouraged everyone to fill out any evaluation forms and to give as much input as possible.

Mr. Conway reported that he and Ms. Fernandez attended the Black Professional Day at the high school. One hundred and thirty African-American students participated and received valuable information from African American role models. Dr. Tiffany Allison led the day. He was happy to be a part of this and to see how excited the students were to hear about various professions. Workshops were held on different careers. He looked forward to attending this event next year.

Ms. Ranney thanked Ms. Kalmerton for her work in handling all of the logistics regarding the superintendent search.

Regarding the search for the superintendent, Ms. Fernandez stated that the Board of Education was using a process to choose a superintendent who had the skills and the knowledge to lead the way for the future of the school community. She wanted the Board of Education to remain objective and not become solely subjective so as to overshadow the true and sincere effort and integrity of the process. She wanted the community to realize that the efforts that the Board of Education members were making, as elected officials, were for the benefit of all students. The Board of Education was trying to choose the candidate who had knowledge of the academic achievement gap, Special Education, and finances. She stated that the decision she would make would sincerely be for the best for every student, staff and community member. She would vote with her heart.

Dr. Millard stated that the Instruction and Policy Committee meetings scheduled for February 15 had been cancelled due to the Board of Education's continued superintendent deliberations. The agenda items for these committee meetings will be forwarded to the March 15 meeting date.

Consent Items

Mr. Conway moved to approve the consent items as follows:

- The open minutes of January 25, February 12, 13, 14, and 15, 2007;
- Personnel Recommendations;
- Resolution Ratifying and Confirming Execution of certain vouchers and payment of certain bills and expenses, fund transfers and list of bills for February 22, 2007 (attached to and made part of the minutes of this meeting);
- Resolution Authorizing Execution of Certain Vouchers for the Month of February 2007;
- Check Disbursements for February 22, 2007;
- The recommendation presented by the Northern Illinois Independent Purchasing Cooperative to roll over the Request for Proposals from the 2006-07 school year (attached to and made a part of the minutes of the meeting);
- Childcare Fees for the 2007-08 school year (attached to and made a part of the minutes of the meeting);
- Student Fees for the 2007-08 School Year (attached to and made a part of the minutes of the meeting);
- Contract with Wight & Co. for the Ten-year Life Safety Inspection, which will include the building and infrastructure, building conditions, and educational adequacy, as well as decennial inspection;
- Bid proposals for the Fall Athletic Uniform Bid as recommended (attached to and made a part of the minutes of this meeting); and
- REV Track contract as present for on-line payments as presented at the February 13 Finance Committee Meeting;

seconded by Ms. Ranney. A roll call vote resulted in five ayes.
Motion carried.

M.S.A.N. Conference Mr. Conway expressed his interested in being the Board of Education liaison representative at the upcoming MSAN Conference in Eugene, Oregon, June 24 to the 26, 2007. Other participants at this conference will include the new superintendent, principal, Ms. Hill, representatives from the math and English Divisions, as well as a member of the African-American Faculty Advisory Council.

District Committees Liaison Representative Reports Student Council—Ms. Davis reported that Student Council was adopting Key School, a Chicago elementary school on the west side. Members of Student Council plan to visit the school sometime during early March. They will determine what things for which Student Council can begin to fundraise. This list will be used as a starting place for a school supplies drive. Student Council may have a fashion show to which some shops have already committed to donating clothes to this event. Ms. Milejovich is assisting Student Council with the selection of dates for a fashion show. Another fundraising venture may include a garage sale in the Fieldhouse.

Alumni Association— Ms. Fernandez reported that on February 12, the Alumni Association held an unofficial meeting, because it did not have a quorum. Discussion ensued regarding a fundraising event to be held either May 3 or May 10 at Molly Malone’s or Fitzgerald’s. The objective will be to increase alumni membership. A brainstorming discussion ensued about the meaning of membership vs. solicitation. Instead of the word “member” being used, it was suggested that the term “contributor” or “supporter” be used. Discussion continued about researching donor firms to explore the kinds of donors who bestow funds. Ms. Fernandez extended an invitation to everyone to attend the Alumni Association meetings, held every second Monday.

P.T.O.— Dr. Millard reported that at the February P.T.O. meeting discussion ensued about its business activities, its liaison program, its finances, and the PTO Caucus process. Dr. Millard noted that the PTO’s major fundraiser, the dinner/theatre event, would feature “Ragtime.” The P.T.O. caucus met two weeks ago and interviewed candidates running for the Board of Education election.

Citizens’ Council— Dr. Millard reported that Citizens’ Council had a review of the school’s finances and facilities by Ms. Witham and Mr. Lanenga. There was a synopsis of all the various school renovations and discussion of the stadium lights and what would the next steps be.

A.P.P.L.E.— Mr. Conway reported that the new School Resource Officer, Eric Locke, gave a great presentation at the last A.P.P.L.E. meeting. Officer Locke brings many benefits to the student body. He continues to familiarize himself with the student body and had been the resident beat officer before this position. Mr. Locke also had off-duty security assignments at the high school. Mr. Locke once attended O.P.R.F.H.S. before his family moved to Chicago.

Huskie Boosters— Mr. Conway reported that discussion of the lights for the stadium was held at the last Boosters' meeting. The question was raised as to when this would be presented to the Village Board, as there were students who were interested in lobbying their support for the lights. They also asked if anyone had \$200,000 to cover the purchase of the lights and their installation. Mr. Lanenga indicated that he was meeting with the Booster president, Mike Gibbs, the following week. Boosters had reassured the school that the money used for the lights would not supplant any other support it gives to the high school.

Collaboration on Early Childhood—Ms. Fernandez reported that the Collaboration of Early Childhood was having its first seminar titled "It All Adds Up," a seminar on math, on February 20 at Julian Middle School. All parents and educators were invited to attend this free seminar. Breakout sessions in which math games and strategies for infants or toddlers will be presented. The Collaboration's next meeting is scheduled for Friday, March 9 at 9:00 a.m. at 820 Lake Street, Oak Park.

**Certification of
Mid-Year
Graduates**

Ms. Ranney moved to certify the Mid-Year Graduates, as presented (attached to and made a part of the minutes of this meeting); seconded by Dr. Millard. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Mid-year graduates are invited to the commencement ceremony in June.

**Approval of
Closed Session
Minutes**

Ms. Fernandez moved to approve the Closed Session minutes of January 25, February 12, 13, 14, and 15, 2007; as presented and declared that the closed session audiotapes of August 2005 be destroyed; seconded by Dr. Millard. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Appointment
Of Citizens'
Council
Member**

Ms. Fernandez moved to appoint Iris Zaldivar to a two-year term to Citizens' Council; seconded by Ms. Ranney. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Swanson
Scholarship
Appointment**

The appointment of an active member to serve on the John C. Swanson Scholar Fund Committee for a two-year term was tabled for a future date.

Closed Session

At 8:42 p.m., on Thursday, February 22, 2007, Ms. Fisher moved to go into closed session for the purpose of discussing the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees of the District or legal counsel for the District, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee or against legal counsel for the District to determine its validity. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1), as amended by PA.93—57; Student disciplinary cases 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(10); Collective negotiating matters between the District and its employees or their representatives or deliberations concerning salary schedules for one or more classes of employees. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(2); Litigation, when an action against, affecting or on behalf of the particular District has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the District finds that an action is probable or imminent, in which case the basis for the finding shall be recorded and entered into the closed meeting minutes. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(11); seconded by Mr. Conway. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

The Board of Education reconvened its open session at 10:56 p.m., on Thursday, February 22, 2007.

Student Discipline

Dr. Millard moved to expel Student EXP 2/27/07-28 as of February 22, 2007, for the remainder of the 2006-07 school year through the first semester of the 2007-08 school year but to hold the expulsion in abeyance contingent upon completion of enrollment and regular attendance at an alternative school for the remainder of the 2006-07 school year through the first semester of the 2007-08 school year; satisfactory academic progress at an alternative placement, ongoing counseling, and verification and maintenance of residency in the District; seconded by Mr. Conway. A roll call vote resulted in five ayes. Ms. Fisher abstained.

Other

Ms. Fisher asked to have a full discussion regarding the Oak Park TIF by the entire Board of Education.

Adjournment

At 11:05 p.m. on Thursday, February 22, 2007, Ms. Fisher moved to adjourn the Board of Education meeting; seconded by Ms. Ranney. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Dr. Barry S. Greenwald
President

Barbara P. Fernandez
Secretary