

July 9, 2013

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Tuesday, June 18, 2013 in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order

President Phelan called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Thomas F. Cofsky, Dr. Steven Gevinson, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Dr. Jackie Moore, Sharon Patchak-Layman, John Phelan, and Jeff Weissglass. Also in attendance was Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; Tod Altenburg, Chief Financial Officer; Michael Carioscio, Chief Information Officer; John Carlson, Interim HR Director; Amy Hill, Director of Assessment and Research; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors

OPRFHS Assistant Principal Jennifer Hoffmann and OPRFHS Athletic Director John Stelzer (departed at 8:15 p.m.); Pat Maunsell and Dr. Allan Alson, Educational Consultants; and David Boulanger, Executive Director of the Oak Park Youth Township.

Visitor Comments

David Boulanger, Executive Director of the Oak Park Youth Township, spoke of the shared commitment with the District, noting that the Township's success was founded on collaboration. The Township's Youth Interventionist program was a prime example of all 11 taxing units in Oak Park and River Forest assisting in its funding. Its unique role is to intervene with at-risk youth to help them and their families make better decisions about their lives, especially in regard to violence, substance abuse and gang activity. A chief factor in our successful work is good communication and cooperation with all its partners.

Mr. Boulanger noted the Township was ready to collaborate on all components of the District's Strategic Plan related to the Township's broad mission in the community, excerpting a few key statements, goals and actions that appear to most complement and reinforce those of the Township's. Working together, they can build on our shared commitment and improve our outcomes in those areas of special concern to the Township, OPRFHS, and the community at large, namely, substance abuse, violence and homelessness among our youth. Formulation of specific strategic action items in these areas would be helpful, but is a Board decision.

From the challenges, Mr. Boulanger cited the second paragraph and that the township sees three times as many African-American students as white students. He noted that the emphasis on collaboration and not isolation, the last section of the opening. Mr. Boulanger participated on the Holistic Community Education group and noted the importance of assisting students.

Mr. Phelan noted that the District appreciated the partnership with the Township.

Framing the issues Dr. Alson thanked the Board of Education for spending the time to understand the work of the Strategic Plan, resulting in a tighter, more powerful plan, one that will address their issues and, hopefully, one that can be supported among the staff and the community. The Board of Education is embracing the community and staff interests: it has a significant role as the governing body that these are the values and directions that it thinks should go forward. Mr. Prale, Ms. Sullivan, Dr. Isoye, Ms. Maunsell and Dr. Alson designed the meeting agenda with the following goals in mind.

- 1) Everyone would be brought up to equal speed as to the substance of what was studied;
- 2) Equity and excellence were the essential foundation and the framework of the report;
- 3) The Board of Education member comments and their nuances. What can be embraced and used to move forward?
- 4) This was time for the Board of Education to build consensus.

Should the Board of Education incorporate a theory of action? It is usually a set of “if” and “then” statements. A strategic plan might state that if the board does the following and the administration does the following and the community does the following and the parents do the following, then students will do X. If the Board of Education feels there should be a theory of action that is part of the framing of the mission, value, and vision, it can be done through a work session, etc. This Strategic Plan is for a school district and a single district puts this building at the core. How will the academic social and emotional lives of the current students advance? What goes into a Strategic Plan versus what are annual standard operating procedures, i.e., budget, hiring, negotiate contracts, etc. that defines the Board of Education work? A Strategic Plan gets to the big picture goals for the health of the students and the district.

- 5) Recognizing the burdens on the taxpayers in Oak Park and River Forest may be an interest.

Discussion ensued about scheduling three additional retreats to finish this work. The first session would be about equity and how this would shape the work of the Board of Education and the strategic plan. The second session would get deeper into the work, looking at the five categories, acknowledging the duplications, and determining what needs to come first, second, and third. What would be realistic in one, three or five years? The third, if necessary, would be to reach closure. If so, a final copy could be approved in November. More sessions could be held if the work was incomplete. The work would be done not only by the Board of Education, but by the administration, e.g., Mr. Rouse, Mr. Prale, Dr. Hallinan, and Dr. Isoye.

Both oral and written Board of Education feedback was used to frame the work of this meeting. Equity is embedded in the Strategic Plan's five goals, and Board of Education members asked to clarify equity and the realistic nature of goals. In the 2011-12 year, Dr. Alson led four retreats on the subject of equity. If the next session would be about equity, he suggested the Board of Education read the book *Leading for Equity*.

How to fit the Strategic Plan into the timeline of developing the Board of Education's goals is unknown. A request was made to add Board of Education goals to the next meeting's agenda. The administration will provide an update on the 2012-13 goals and recommendations for next year's goals at the July 18 meeting. The Board of Education could use these goals for next year and consider some of tasks from the action plans.

Getting on the Same Page with the Data Ms. Hill shared the same data that the Steering Committee had received, highlighting the predictability of outcomes when the data is disaggregated by race. Graduation rates, GPA, PSAE meets and exceeds, Reading and Math, ACT and EXPLORE scores and discipline data disaggregated were reviewed in graphical formats. Course enrollment patterns, athletic and activities, discipline and completion statistics were also examined and all suggested gaps within the data. African-American students are underrepresented in Honors courses. Note: There is parity in group proportional demographics at the College Prep level.

Ms. Hill also reviewed data that showed group proportionality and disproportionately in the post-secondary data and extracurricular data. Approximately 60 percent in both classes earned 2 or 4 year credentials within 4 to 6 years of graduation.

Discussion ensued about whether there were any identifiable areas in which the District has evidence that it has been able to make a change in the achievement gap going back 5 to 10 years. If so, perhaps, the high school should concentrate its efforts on the areas that have been successful. What should data sets look like in order to answer those questions? While the District has said it wants to be at "x" in five years by taking specific actions which it has done, some of the data is flat-lined. The Board of Education will be challenged to change that. It was noted that much discussion occurred in the Steering Committee and task forces about the disparity in honors prep and honors courses. While the District often looks at students who are in transition or need more reading skills, it has not zeroed in on what happens in the regular classrooms and where students move forward to take honors classes. A suggestion might be to look at data to see what might be a lever for improvement, such as literacy. The Steering Committee received 5 to 10 years' worth data to show trends, whether it was good or bad. State-related data was shared and, in most cases, OPRFHS was above state averages.

A warning was noted about the danger of correlation, as opposed to causation, and the challenge of selecting data that moves the District to specific conclusions. The fallacy is that there is a correlation without causal effect, i.e., economic, racial, or gender whether in achievement or discipline. What has the District isolated that works? The data may be a representative set as it covers a range of experiences, and it addresses what may be the central issues of concern for the community. Mr. Phelan desired data where the District has moved an achievement number, i.e., college prep students and how those achievement numbers have projected and moved. He was encouraged by the ECE as it seemed to offer a database solution that showed that gaps exist at the age of 2. How does the data selection influence the Steering Committee's actions? Was all of the data given to the Steering Committee or did the District have solutions when it started them down the course? Ms. Hill responded that there is no connection of casualty. No one believes that race or gender or income is a cause. The District knows that parents, extracurricular activities participation and social science lead to strong student outcomes. The District also believes there is causality at the intensive tiered level.

Dr. Moore felt the data sets were fairly representative, i.e., test scores, attendance, college rates, demographics, discipline, etc. What needs to be focused on is the gap. Being better than the state does not say the District is addressing equity or achievement. She was impressed with the college prep level as it is an opportunity to have a rigor and standard to push every student higher. Just having Honors, AP and transitional level benchmarks leaves other students forgotten. Students need a true college path.

The District feels it is doing a better job at knowing how students are achieving than it did in the past. The District has continued to improve in ACT and reading scores. While some data has been flat lined, others have not. While the numbers of students in the Free and Reduced lunch program is up again, noting the correlation between income and achievement, the District has been able to maintain its scores. More instructional minutes, support and wraparound services are the most important things to help students.

The District has discussed the gap between the white and African-American students. Another consideration would be to say that the gap was between students of color and the average of white students in the nation. OPRFHS students will not stay in Oak Park and River Forest, and that is the group of people with which they will compete. An external benchmark rather than an internal benchmark would support every group. Doing so would alleviate the perception that more money is going to one particular group. What are the areas in which the District has made progress? How successful are students in College Prep? This could be used to find out what has worked and then trace it back to the cause. Focus on the solutions that have worked and what does that say about the causes. What other solutions does that suggest? Should the College Prep group be targeted? Statistics can lead to solutions that might not be correct and

the District must be mindful of what is presented. What has worked? Has the District looked at the College Prep level, the gaps and trends? Is it doing better at improving achievement and narrowing gaps where there is proportional representation? Where is the data for the narrowed Board of Education goals? Are the narrower goals more effective or is the Board of Education asking for less and getting less? Is there a report on the results? Data without accountability or a standard to some extent causes a lack of ownership, as there is no need to get specific results. Dr. Alson stated an appropriate step for a strategic plan might be to continue to look at data with regard to causality in order to understand effective strategies. What made the difference? Did students self-selected for staying after school? Were teachers more inviting?

Dr. Gevinson favored searching for causality of the problems and success and solutions that work. He wanted to see efforts for correlation other than race, i.e., income, number of persons in the home, culture, etc. What schools have narrowed the gap? Dr. Gevinson objected to the Plan's assumption that the disparity can be seen by race and the cause may be race. He wanted to see teacher data. He was also concerned about the number of African-American male students having discipline issues.

Dr. Moore felt that income and race had a connection. However, nationally an achievement gap exists between white and African-American students when one controls for income. The Board of Education must work for the community, and the work does not have to be race-based. While disparities exist, the goal is to raise the level of attainment for all students. To frame it any other way would be a disservice to the community and to the students.

Mr. Cofsky felt the Board of Education needed to determine the data it wanted to address.

Ms. Patchak-Layman reflected that the Steering Committee Task Forces had the task of determining what could be accomplished completely in five years. At year two, perhaps only 20% would be accomplished. This was difficult for the task forces to do. The idea was that the implementation committees would zero in on the information to finalize for the goals. Equity was to study discipline knowing that they wanted to put in a restorative justice goal, but to look at the numbers with the goal. Would teachers teach low-income students differently? Would they teach differently if a student had two parents versus another student had one parent. Would they teacher differently depending on the race? The conversation focused on racial equity. Everyone in her group hoped the District could move on equity in Special education and/or male/female students. So those questions were off their radar, but this has been the target for five years in order to move off the pattern in place. They said this is not working at the high school, and they want it to be there based on their own experiences, teacher feedback as to what was working in their classrooms, data and anecdotal information. While

the next part was the implementation committees, it was not prescriptive as to how they would be implemented.

Dr. Alson felt the Board of Education could agree to a limited number of measures for improvement in a designated area with annual, measurable goals. The ACT average for African Americans is 18, and the state average is 22.7. A five year goal may be that the ACT scores be 23 with an examination at the end of each year. And/or the Board of Education may want proportionality in discipline incidents.

Dr. Lee felt the Board of Education must say what it considers is the most important aspect of the achievement gap. The Board of Education needed a definition that could be used to pursue a specific course of action. He believed the District had been courageous in committing significant funding to the Collaboration for Early Childhood Care and Education while it would not know whether or not that financial investment was worthwhile for several years. Dr. Gevinson wanted realistic goals. He was not interested in increasing ACT scores or eliminating the differences in discipline. Ms. Hill shared that Dr. Ronald Ferguson at Harvard University said that disparity of income was tied to achievement; test scores represent skills for which employers pay.

Racial Equity

Dr. Isoye reviewed the information shared with the Steering Committee on racial equity. OPRFHS is a founding member of the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) which now has a membership of 25 school districts who look at student achievement with the focus on race. Its base is the University of Wisconsin. Its work is to discover strategies to change school practices that keep these achievement gaps in place. Member districts work collaboratively to conduct and publish research, analyze policies, and examine practices that affect the academic performance of students of color.

OPRFHS is also involved in Courageous Conversations About Race (CCAR) and has offered trainings to staff and has encouraged Board of Education members to attend Pacific Education Group's Beyond Diversity Training. CCAR started about two years ago with a cohort of about 40 teachers who discussed race and understand systemic inhibitors. This discussion expanded into the Learning Strands, and one was on racial equity. Sixty people participated in the Learning Strand last year and an equal number will participate this year. This has brought a different level of consciousness about race, not only in the school, but in everyday life.

Dr. Isoye then reviewed the evolution of Board Goals

2006-2007: Goal 1: Letter b: We will continue to make “Courageous Conversations About Race,” a commitment by all member schools in the Minority Student Achievement Network, an ongoing reality across our school community...

2007-2008: Goal 1: Improve academic achievement for all students with an emphasis on minority and Special Education students.

2008-2009: Goal 1. Student Achievement: The District will develop a multi-year plan to raise student academic achievement for all students, with special emphasis/focus on underachieving African American students, utilizing indices of achievement; identifying and implementing effective instructional strategies by teachers through professional development; incorporating the Board approved six (6) Fall 2008 initiatives; increasing and tracking student co-curricular participation; and conducting separate Board, Administration, and Faculty professional development strands on race and student achievement.

2009-2010: OPRFHS will provide an inclusive education for all students by reducing racial predictability and disproportionality in student achievement and reducing systemic inhibitors to success for students and staff of color.

2010-2011: Goal 1: Racial Equity. The Board of Education will provide an inclusive education for all students and take action to eliminate predictability and disproportionality in student achievement and reducing systemic inhibitors to success for students and staff of color. (The same as last year). Action: The Superintendent will provide leadership in review of current programs and recommend appropriate measures and courses of action to accomplish this goal

2011-2012: Statement 1: Racial Equity. The Board of Education will provide an inclusive education for all students and take action to eliminate racial predictability, disproportionality in student achievement, and systemic inhibitors to success for students and staff of color. (The same as last year's goal with an internal focus.) Action Steps:

- CCAR and PEG leadership training for systemic wide discussions about race—multiple stakeholders;
- Review of Policy Manual with CCAR participants for racial equity; and
- Drill deep into the data to determine patterns of experience for students starting with course placements and E-PAS data, based on race.

2012-13 Statement 1: Racial Equity. a. Eliminate systemic inhibitors to academic success for students of color, including but not limited to those, which discourage students from attempting higher-level courses or penalize students for pursuing high levels of academic achievement. b. Show evidence of any change in racial predictability in recent years.

Dr. Isoye noted that white students performed the same as low-income African-American students. The District developed a definition of race. It includes nationality (location of citizenship or birthplace), Ethnicity (culture or ethos), and Race (Color—the racial category one is perceived to be). Dr. Isoye noted that

as he was growing up he had to identify himself as Oriental, Asian or yellow. That was confusing to him. Race has both positive and negative experiences, both personal and professional experiences, white and non-white people, and race impacts everyone 100%.

What is the relationship between equity and equality? Equality is the state or quality of being equal, especially in status, rights and opportunities. Equity is the state of quality or the ideal of being just, impartial and fair.

Dr. Isoye noted that the District did track ISS and OSS infractions, but it did not track them by race. In the future, it will do so. The District is moving in the direction of SMART goals, goals that are deliberate and focused. This has been an exciting discussion to help make this a tighter plan.

Dr. Gevinson appreciated Dr. Isoye's comments. He too asked if there were a report on the meeting of the goals. Dr. Isoye noted that more data was being reviewed now than in previous years. The school has struggled with measures. The ACT is a gatekeeper, a piece of information that determines where a student may be able to go in the future. Dr. Isoye did not believe that one should teach to it, but it is beginning to be embedded in the teaching.

Closing and Next Steps

While time and do-ability were issues, it was the consensus of the majority of Board of Education members to meet again in August and to focus on equity and excellence. Short readings will be assigned to start garnering input.

Dr. Alson thanked the Board of Education for its willingness to share views thoroughly and respectfully.

Mr. Weissglass agreed that it was important for the Board of Education to discuss equity and honor the work of 60 plus people. He wanted to continue to shape the present work, possibly through the implementation teams and/or study of the data. He agreed that an option would be to evaluate last year's Board of Education goals, continue with those for the present, and in January begin the process of developing new goals. This would align with this timeline and the budgeting process.

Discussion ensued about the Board goals. Were the goal statements causing questions for the Board of Education members? If so, then the Board of Education should review and approve them or not and then start working on the action steps. The District's compensation plan may or may not be a separate goal as typically this work would be a part of stand operating procedures. Dr. Alson noted that the Board of Education spoke about focusing and landing on measurable goals with defined accountability. He suggested honoring the Strategic Plan's goals, and then considering what measurable goals might be imbedded within each of those goals. One member felt the focus of the goals should be on the highest level of mission, values, and vision. Ms. Patchak-

Layman noted that the task forces had thousands of ideas for action steps based on the people involved. The goal statements were less fluid than the action steps. She suggested using a checklist. Another member felt the Board of Education's goals should be the Strategic Plan's goals, yet things such as governance, management and the organizational structure (school day) were not included. A comprehensive list and rationale for the goals would be desired. Another member felt the goals were part of the discussion of the Strategic Plan.

Adjournment

At 9:25 p.m., Dr. Moore moved to adjourn the Special Board meeting; seconded by Mr. Weissglass. A voice vote resulted motion carried.

Dr. Jackie Moore
Secretary

Gail Kalmerton
Clerk of the Board