

February 7, 2008

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Thursday, February 07, 2008, in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order President Conway called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: John C. Allen, Jacques A. Conway, Valerie J. Fisher, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, Sharon Patchak-Layman and John P. Rigas. Also present were Dr. Attila J. Weninger, Superintendent; Jason Edgecombe, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Cheryl Witham, Chief Financial Officer; Amy Hill, Director of Assessment and Research; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board of Education.

Visitors Bill Gregory, Executive Director of the Center for Management Development at Indiana University Northwest; Dr. Carl Spight, O.P.R.F.H.S. Institutional Researcher, Devon Alexander, O.P.R.F.H.S. faculty member; John Williams, Oak Park Youth Township; Greg Marcy, Trustee of the Village of Oak Park; Kimberly Werner, George Bailey and Samuel Willey, community members; Angelica Kuehn, League of Women Voters; Terry Dean of the *Wednesday Journal*.

Visitor Comments Kimberly Werner, resident of 125 N. Taylor Avenue, Oak Park, read the following statement:

“I am providing comment as an individual. I am here tonight to express my appreciation for your commitment to address the problem of underachievement in African-American students.

“I do not share the concern of some members of the community that the effort to address the documented underachievement of African-American students will in some way disadvantage students who are already achieving. And, while I am aware that African-American students are not the only identified group whose achievement is not making expected levels of yearly progress, I see the effort to address underachievement in African American students, not as a single project, but as a first step in assuring that we are meeting the needs of all the groups that have been identified as underachieving. This is clearly something we should be doing.

“It is also worth noting that there is some overlap between African American students and other underachieving groups. For example, we know that approximately 25 percent of our total student population is African American but that approximately 40 percent of our special education population is African American. And we

know that students in special education are another population that has been identified as underachieving. It seems to me that, as we address the needs and seek to improve the achievement of the African American students in special education, we cannot help but learn something that will inform our efforts to improve the achievement of all students in special education. A similar situation exists with low income students, which is another group for whom the data documents an achievement gap.

“There is another, perhaps selfish, reason why I support your efforts to improve achievement among African American students. I am among the many parents and taxpayers whose move to Oak Park was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to live and raise my children in a community where racial diversity was present and positive. The underachievement of African American students is a canker that undermines quality of not just our schools, but our community as well. If we mean it when we say that we value every student and every member of our community, then we must never hesitate to, through whatever means necessary, take action to assure that all are succeeding. Thank you. I wish you the very best in your efforts.”

**Approval of
Check
Distributions
Dated February
7, 2008**

Mr. Rigas moved to approve the check distributions dated February 7, 2008, (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.

**Discussion of
Goals for
February 9
Meeting**

Mr. Allen reminded the Board of Education that in December it had started conversations regarding the raising of student achievement but had run into time blocks. The Board of Education agreed to hold a series of conversations to get to some of the underlying issues in the school and actual achievement. Dr. Lee’s resolutions were meant to spark discussion and they succeeded in that regard. With the Board of Education’s consensus to have a facilitator, Mr. Allen was able to enlist the help of Bill Gregory, Executive Director of the Center for Management Development at Indiana University Northwest, to facilitate the Board of Education’s understanding of the goals of the future meetings. The Board of Education welcomed Mr. Gregory. Mr. Gregory noted that while he was also a former Oak Parker and that some of his family had attended the high school for a time, he had no vested interest in the outcome of the discussion. Mr. Gregory reiterated that he was there to help the Board of Education discover what it wanted to accomplish with the longer

discussions, noting that sometimes one has to start from the end of the process in order to get to the beginning.

The process that Mr. Gregory used to accomplish the goal of the evening was to ask each of the participants, which included Board of Education members, administrators, and the present public, to complete one or more of the following statements.

At the end of Saturday's discussion,

We will develop a plan to:
We have identified the causes of the root problem of:
We will have agreed to:
We will have accomplished:
We will have a timetable to:
We agreed upon steps necessary to;
We will have a strategy for:
We will be able to:
We will have started to:
We will have completed or finished.

At the end of this exercise, three groups were formed, a scribe assigned by each group, and the instructions were to write their answers on flip charts. The total responses were as follows:

- 1) We will begin to understand the value of race/culture in achievement gap
- 2) We will have achieved an understanding of how the Board of Education's resolutions impact the "October" achievement plan and a timetable for implementation
- 3) We will have achieved consensus about the first achievement initiatives from the October Plan to implement in 2008-09.
- 4) We will agree that racism has an everyday impact on activity/ education at the high school.
- 5) We will have a greater understanding of how racism is reflected in every day situations.
- 6) We will have developed a strategy to review those everyday actions/decisions that the Board of Education has responsibility for and will make the changes necessary to have new practices.
- 7) The Board of Education will have completed the first of _____ workshops on race and student achievement.
- 8) The Board of Education will have reached an understanding on the vote race has on student achievement
- 9) The Board of Education will decide the number of workshops to be held on race and student achievement.

- 10) We will agree to honestly discuss all aspects of issues without fear of judgment
- 11) We will start to trust each other enough to know that the “School” is each participant’s top priority.
- 12) We will have started a personal process of a better understanding of specific factors that impair/limit
- 13) We will have agreed that we will need
- 14) We will have agreed on the goals of overall activities/meetings.
- 15) We will agree to the norms of discourse on this process.
- 16) We will identify root causes of the problem that limit effective communication about the achievement gap.
- 17) We will have developed a strategy for developing a plan to raise African-American student achievement or the beginnings of the development.
- 18) We will have outlined the time required to accomplish the overall plan – a rough timetable.
- 19) We will agree to make all necessary changes in policy, curriculum, teacher, administration, staff behavior as it relates to achievement.
- 20) We will agree on a strategy to utilize a text focused on antiracist pedagogy/critical race theory (Singleton/Linton Courageous Conversations about Race) Identify a text to be used.

Mr. Gregory reviewed each of these with the Board of Education members and clarification was given to those when necessary. Discussion ensued about having to define the limits of open involvement of all community members. After distilling the responses, the Board of Education determined the priority of the above items to be discussed further at the February 9 Board of Education meeting to be as follows:

- I. Outcomes
 - A. How do the Board’s Resolutions impact the student achievement plan?
 - B. Prioritize the plan for student achievement.
 - C. Decide which initiatives of the student achievement plan will be implemented in 2008-2009.
- II. Outcome

Agree to reach a consensus as we identify the factors that affect student achievement, that we will make all necessary changes in policy, curriculum, and administrator/teacher/ staff behaviors that impact the identified factors.

- III. Outcomes
 - A. Agree that racism has an everyday impact on activity and education at the high school.
 - B. Agree that racism can be reflected in everyday/ordinary decisions and actions.
 - C. Will develop a strategy to review those everyday actions/decisions that the Board of Education has responsibility for.

- IV. Outcome
 - Start a personal process of a better understanding of specific factors that impair/limit achievement of African American students at the high school.

Mr. Gregory suggested starting every meeting on this topic with the above affirmations of what the Board of Education wanted to accomplish.

Dr. Weninger noted that Mark Janda, the facilitator for Saturday's meeting, was aware that this meeting's discussion would affect Saturday's meeting, but for the general discussion, Mr. Janda put together a general packet of reading information for the Board of Education members. This was distributed to the Board of Education members. Ms. Patchak-Layman provided some further reading material and Dr. Lee provided his thought on the process for beyond Saturday's meeting. Dr. Weninger noted additional material could be provided to the Board of Education members at the Saturday meeting thanks to Mr. Devon Alexander, Ms. Hill and Mr. Prale.

Adjournment

At 8:45 p.m. on Thursday, February 07, 2008, Mr. Rigas moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Dr. Millard. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Jacques A. Conway
President

John P. Rigas
Secretary