

April 11, 2012

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Wednesday, April 11, 2012 in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order

President Millard called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Terry Finnegan, Valerie J. Fisher, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy Leafe McCormack, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, Sharon Patchak-Layman, and John Phelan. Also, present were Dr. Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; Michael Carioscio, Chief Information Officer; Amy Hill, Director of Research and Assessment; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; Lauren M. Smith, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Cheryl Witham, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board of Education and FOIA Officer.

Closed Session

At 6:30 p.m., Dr. Millard moved to enter closed session for 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; seconded by Mr. Finnegan. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

At 7:36 p.m., the Board of Education resumed its open session in the Little Theatre of the OPRFHS.

Visitors

The Board of Education welcomed the following visitors: Jill Haas of the Boosters, Ron Orzel of Citizens' Council, Linda Belpedio, Maxie DeGenova, Jack Elmer, Wyanetta Johnson, John McIlwain, Kevin O'Brien, Becky Peterson, Phoebe Sullivan-Bing, Jeff Weissglass, Jeff White, Elon Sloan, and other community members; John Condne, Joe Hallissey, Allison Hennessey, James Paul Hunter, Heidi Lynch, Catherine McNary, Katie O'Keefe, Nancy Heezen, Elizabeth Kaufman, Tracy Strimple, and other OPRFHS Faculty and Staff members; Jeannie Affelder, Mike Cramer, Eric Davis, Diane Dorion, Julie Foley, Steve Gillenwater, Kate Gunnel, Cheryl Hurtado, Margaret Jones, Melanie McQueen, Mariam Moore, Lynda Shadrake, Nicole Stewart, Elyse Thurman, Domiick Alesia, Nancy Alexander, Mason Astill, Kristin Aston, Fiona Barrett, Carolina Berman, Stephanie Carlin, John Clay, Elizabeth Conrad, Danny Cooley, Jack Cramer, Emi Dammers, Erica Davis, Jake Ellenbogen, Anthony Foley, Anna Garcia Higgins, Jonathan Gilmore, Alicia Hurtado, Kailand Jefferies, Dani Koelling, Anthony Koule, Nora Kraft, John Lay, Nick Mains, Jacob Meeks, Will Meister, Nancy Alexander Nagin, Kristin Nassar, Kevin O'Brien, Rachel Possel, Ethan Ramsey, Madeline Rees, Jake Shadrake, Kelsey Shattro, Nate Shinnars, Peter Slattery, Caroline Stankovitz, Nicole Stuart, Madison Tunney, Elise Thurman, Prince Wald, and Mamie Zwettler, and other students; and Bill Dwyer of the *Oak Leaves* and Bob Skolnick of the *Pioneer Press*.

**Teacher
Reduction in Force**

Dr. Millard explained that the Board of Education and the administration had received communication from all members of the community regarding the annual reduction-in-force of teachers or RIFing, that affects part time teachers and those not yet tenured. She responded to some of the communication but because of other obligations, she was unable to respond to all. The Board of Education scheduled this Special Board Meeting to hear the communities' comments. Discussions will continue in the next weeks about the staffing and the scheduling of students in classes will continue. There is no intention to eliminate programs, either academic or cocurriculars, and in particular the theatre program.

Dr. Isoye welcomed all and referred to the letter that was posted on the website that explained the process. It was also sent through the Skylert.

Dr. Isoye continued that the names of people who are RIF'd are often linked to programs and, therefore, people question whether a program is going to be RIF'd. While staff may be RIF'd, programs will not. The District values student interest. When all registrations are completed, the District has a tally of students' requests for every course in the school, which determines the staffing needs in the divisions so that highly qualified teachers can be appropriately placed in the classroom. Student interest drives this and often extra sections end up creating a full time position or are just extra sections for a part-time position. This changes from year to year. Because this takes place in April and notice needs to be given in March, the District must RIF all part-time teachers, as they cannot be guaranteed they will have a position or how many sections they would have. Throughout the month of April, the sectioning becomes more firm and people are rehired. Along with student interest driving staff, faculty has the opportunity to take leaves or sabbaticals. When someone is on a leave or sabbatical, the District needs to hire a replacement. Often when there is a retirement in that division, it can absorb the replacement. However, when people come back from leave, etc., the District has to RIF non-tenured teachers. It starts with non-tenured teachers with 1 to 3 years and then 4-year non-tenured teachers. The 4-year, non-tenured teachers have recall rights and they would be offered positions first. Regarding merit-only in terms of teacher performance, school districts are required to follow Illinois law and the provisions of their collective bargaining agreements. Though is the law is changing and being implemented in different ways because of Senate Bill 7, there are very few groups that will follow the same course except for the RIFing of part-time teachers because of the way it is developed.

The public comments are an important piece for the Board of Education and the administration, as they will be a lens during the April scheduling.

Public Comments

Jacob Meeks, 914 N. Austin, Oak Park, OPRFHS sophomore, stated that the policy, as proposed by Board of Education, does not work in other applications. The Board of Education has evoked several of its goals to support the RIFing of teachers. Board of Education Goal 3 states: "to build and sustain a positive school culture, respecting and embracing all members of the school community, while providing for a safe learning environment." He asked what methods were being used to measure this on the part of the student. He never received a survey. He stated that if there were no method for determining the impact a teacher has, he proposed one. He presented a petition with over 1500 signatures and comments attesting to the efficacy of the teachers being

RIF'd and with whom he had experience. The Board of Education supported its action by its Goal 2, "...will increase student achievement engagement, through quality classroom instruction, co-curricular, and other enhanced learning opportunities." The American Educational Research Association report on teacher and teacher education in 2005 found that the more educated and the more experienced teachers were, the more likely they were to stay in the field of education and were associated with higher student achievement and lower disciplinary actions. Education and experience were two indicators of quality. Of the teachers being dismissed, one has a Ph.D. and more than one has a certificate to be a principal. Per Board of Education policy, they are no longer eligible to hire. New Trier is consistently one of the top ranked schools of the state, and 88.6% of its teachers have a Master's degree or above, which is 3.6 higher than at OPRFHS. A policy that states that a teacher with a Masters' Degree and more than 5 years of experience will not be paid higher or given pay outside of that bracket higher will create a scenario in which teachers will not be motivated to pursue higher education or model that while employed at OPRFHS. Highly educated and highly qualified teachers might not be motivated to apply for a position at the high school. The teachers took a pay freeze in order prevent this type of situation and now 21 teachers are being laid off as opposed to 4 last year. That represents \$55.2 million savings to the school and a \$2.7 million savings over the next two years. If the board makes these choices, please respect the students and say that it is not in their name.

Jonathan Gilmore, 633 N. Grove, Oak Park, junior, requested of the Board of Education the following:

- 1) develop a more effective method of teacher evaluation with emphasis on student response;
- 2) explain the school budget and an explanation as to why significant money is being spent on projects that directly do not relate to the classroom;
- 3) reform staff requirements to continue to hire qualified professionals; and
- 4) uphold the motto "Those Things that are Best."

This represents the voices of over 1500 parents, students, and community members. The 21 teachers on the RIF list represent "Those Things that are Best." Student time at OPRFHS is short and they advocate for this cause as they want to receive the best education possible and that future generations have the same right to an excellent education. While poor economic conditions are now hitting OPRFHS, this is not acceptable. A solution should be found that does not have a negative effect on the students. He requested that a viable solution be found for the present. He had grown to appreciate what this school has to offer, including when he was studying abroad, in unimaginable ways. He bragged about OPRFHS when he was abroad. He would be disappointed to think that OPRFHS would be willing to allow its standards to slip. As those students who strive to be the best, taught by the teachers who are the best, supported by a school that is the best, he hoped the Board of Education would consider these requests. He thanked the Board of Education members for their time and concern.

Elizabeth Conrad, 806 Harvard Street, Oak Park, spoke of her personal story and that her senior year was the best year she had has because of Mr. Silver's help both personally and academically. It was upsetting to her that other students would not

have him as a teacher; it was unfair to RIF a teacher like him. He is responsive to both personal and academic problems; he is beyond a fantastic teacher. Letting him go will hurt the school and the students.

John McIlwain, 1046 N. Grove, Oak Park, was amazed at the number of students that were here to speak on behalf of the teachers. That spoke to the caliber of the educational system. This is a difficult situation for everyone as the economy is in a terrible place and those in public service have a difficult task to make ends meet. It has affected him personally. In spite of the difficulties in the economy, students want to be involved. The Board of Education is making decisions about letting the current teachers who have touched these students go but is planning to put money into technology, furniture for student center, etc., and none of these things will touch the students in the way these teachers do. He understood that when the budget is set, it has to be spent or it will be lost. He continued that when good teachers are lost, value is being lost. He asked the Board of Education to look closely at how the money was being spent. He and his wife had made a critical decision not to protest their property tax bill because of their support of the school. He asked the Board of Education to support the number one asset of this school—the teachers—and to think critically before spending money on other things.

Becky Peterson, 935 William Street, River Forest, supported the theatre program. She had sent a letter to Mr. Rouse expressing her concerns about the future of the Theater program and she had asked him what steps were being taking to insure its success. His response left questions unanswered. Last year 5,000 people attended 15 productions: 2 musicals, 4 Little Theatre shows, 4 Studio 200 shows run by students, 1 one-act festival, 2 Orchesis Programs and the recently added 2 programs with the show choir. Because the department head had been removed, she asked the Board of Education what the plan was for sustaining and improving this critical school program, as a team approach rarely is effective in these situations.

Anthony Foley, resident of 1136 Pleasant St, Oak Park, OPRFHS senior, was sad about the RIFing of these teachers. He specifically mentioned Mr. Soffer, Ms. Swartzbaugh, and Mr. Greenstone. He talked about how he had squandered his education in his freshman and sophomore years. Finally, because of Mr. Greenstone's counsel, he changed his behavior and became a student who was on the Honors Roll, the Deans' list and had been accepted at college. He was sorry that future students might not have that same experience. He felt the school had failed in this decision.

John Clay, 1030 W. Washington, Oak Park, OPRFHS junior, asked all those in the audience how many were from the OPRFHS Theatre Department. (A majority of people raised their hands.) In this department, he had found a place where he felt he belonged and where he could grow as an individual. He did not feel that future generations would be able to say that. Mr. Strimple has done many things for OPRFHS, e.g., summer musicals, advisor of the theatre shows, provides students an opportunity to direct (an educational experience), to interpret scripts, and organized the first theatre banquet. She organizes the costume closet and keeps the costumes together for 14 shows. She stresses education. He spoke about his participation in a play where she had challenged him to find out more about the character he was playing. The Theatre Department cannot compare to any other club sponsored by the

school and he wanted to thank Ms. Strimple for that fact. It will be difficult to replace her.

Nancy Alexander Nagin, resident of 1036 N. Austin, OPRFHS senior, thank the Board of Education for the forum about the most important business of OPRFHS. She wanted to speak to specifically about Dan Greenstone, reminding the Board of Education that he had once been tenured and she encouraged the Board of Education to allow him to be tenured again. He represents “Those Things that are Best.” His loss diminishes “Those Things that are Best.” She asked that he be rehired and grant him eventual tenure.

Rachel Possel, 625 Wenonah, Oak Park, OPRFHS freshman, had been thoroughly impacted by the Theatrical Department and she had an exceptionally fantastic year. That department was very welcoming and everyone felt they belonged. Ms. Strimple was very encouraging during the summer musical. She found being in the Theatre Department to be a unique opportunity and she had learned many lessons. The kick-off day at OPRFHS for freshmen was easy for her, as she had made many friends during the summer. If the school limited this opportunity, it was preventing students from finding their full human potential.

Eric Davis, 1112 N. Lombard Avenue, Oak Park, a parent of an OPRFHS junior and middle school student, appreciated what Dr. Isoye said about this being a process. He thanked the Board of Education for allowing people to speak on this issue. He asked that the scheduling database be made public so that people can see the numbers being talked about with regard to scheduling and the RIFing of people. He felt this was a failure to communicate.

Kristin Nassar, 1100 S. Euclid, Oak Park, OPRFHS senior, spoke in support of Ms. Strimple remaining at OPRFHS because she had implemented so many plans, encouraged students to be in the program, utilized new publicity techniques, generated revenue for the school through productions, organized the first Theatre Department dinner. She was thankful for her involvement. Usually only four student-directed plays are held each year and ten students applied. A fifth one was scheduled this year, thus enabling Ms. Nassar to direct. That was very important to her. She said she spoke for the majority of the theatre community when she said losing Ms. Strimple would be losing “Those Things that are Best.”

Mike Cramer, 806 N. Grove, Oak Park, parent of senior, junior and freshman and a management side employment lawyer, stated that as part of his job, he walks people through the RIF process often. He respected and had sympathy for those who had to make the difficult decisions. RIFing should be the last resort. This is not about the teachers. It is about the students, the school, the quality, and doing things that are best so that the taxpayers' return on investment is far greater than the cost of the teachers' salaries. While he did not know all of these teachers, his children mentioned Mr. Silver and Ms. Strimple. He complimented the school on the theatrical productions saying that they were better than some Broadway productions. He hoped the school would not buy another light bulb, drinking fountain, etc., until it looked at the cost of these teachers.

Anna Garcia, junior, spoke in support of Ms. Strimple, as she had inspired her, taught her, and believed in her when Ms. Garcia had not believed in herself. She had gained confidence, grown not only as a performer but also as a person who learned the value of the work. She continued that Ms. Strimple was an asset and essential to the school, not just the Theatre Department. Ms. Strimple provides many students numerous opportunities.

Jack Cramer, 806 N. Grove, Oak Park, OPRFHS junior, spoke in support of Ms. Strimple. He was angry because the Board of Education had said that the RIFing process was routine and nothing personal. He asked how the releasing of 21 teachers could not be personal. He stated that this action spoke to a general attitude as to how students are treated at the school. He suggested spending money on this thing made students want to learn rather than on alarms, corralling students, etc. With regard to class enrollment, he stated that perhaps not everyone enrolls in acting class. He did not participate in the first week but the end game was that he gave a monologue that had half of the class in tears. He stated that this was a personal decision, as these teachers had affected these students and the future of the world. To make a decision not to rehire these teachers based on that consideration made him angry. Whatever the outcome, something had to change in this process. He hoped that this time was not wasted and that these efforts were not in vain. It cannot be another show of community support and then nothing happens.

Mamie Zwettler, resident of 1019 Superior Street, Oak Park, OPRFHS senior, reflected on how her life had changed because of the time she had spent in the Theatre Department, as it was, perhaps, the most important time in her school career. It not only shaped her as an artist, but a human being. She thanked the Board of Education and the administration for the Theatre Program. She invited them to see a production. She continued that Ms. Strimple was the glue that had united the department. She was involved in every aspect of the theatre department. She felt that without Ms. Strimple all that she had established would fall apart and, thus, jeopardize the experience for future students.

Julie Foley's daughter, Alex, is a senior who had appeared in many productions. She had a rigorous academic schedule for four years and had an early admission to college because of that she was unable to take a theater class. Many students fall into the same category. Ms. Strimple had helped her daughter over the past four years. The Board of Education has shown a disregard for this work. Ms. Strimple had done an incredible job of working with the students and the teachers to build the program significantly. Many parents know that Ms. Foley at OPRFHS as a volunteer and at Rush Hospital. A wonderful leader is necessary in order to get volunteers to return. Ms. Strimple is a wonderful leader. Ms. Foley was concerned about the future of the program.

Caroline Stankovitz, 1042 N. Kenilworth, Oak Park, parent of a freshman, a junior, and a former graduate, felt the process of RIFing was flawed. Her children had been instructed by Ms. Walter. The non-tenured or part-time teachers have a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and they reach out and communicate with their students. They are responsible doers and leaders. She name three teachers specifically, Mr. Greenstone, Ms. Walker, and Ms. Strimple. The elimination of Ms. Strimple was

most concerning as it was eliminating the glue of the Theatre Department, which is a home for many students.

Will Meister, 1331 William Street, River Forest, OPRFHS sophomore, spoke about the detrimental effects of the RIFing process. All staff has the responsibility to create a community within the school. He felt the evaluation process should be more precise. The apparent randomness of teachers who have not received tenure or have not been teaching long enough is bad because some of them are great teachers.

Dominick Alesia, OPRFHS Sophomore, talked an acting class that allowed her to make friends and where she felt welcome. She felt loved by the students and the teachers. Ms. Strimple did everything in her students. She would hate to see Ms. Strimple leave the school. While the school can get a replacement, the same experience will not be seen. She wanted the Board of Education to know how this was affecting the students and to put themselves in their shoes.

Mariam Moore, 1227 Woodbine Avenue, Oak Park, parent of freshman stated that the RIFing process did not make sense. She felt people did not need this type of stress in these uncertain times. She hoped the Board of Education would see, by the number of people in this room who were protesting the decision, that the process was broken. She asked the Board of Education 1) why it was trying to anger this group and 2) to consider re-enrollment before releasing the teachers. She and her husband were happy with the school because of the teachers and less than happy with the administration. Her son is an Honors student. People had supported him, saw his potential, and they continued to work with him. For that, she was eternally grateful. She spoke about Claire Walker who made English come alive for the students. Those teachers give everything they can to these students and now that her son is here and doing well, it was not OK for the Board of Education to do this without thinking about it.

Nora Kraft, 238 Ashland Avenue, River Forest, freshman, was impacted by Ms. Strimple and she had guided her through many things that year. When she first walked into the acting class, she knew only one person. Even though she was shy, she made so many friends because she was in the acting class. Ms. Strimple gave many opportunities to the students. Although when Ms. Kraft auditioned she was seldom chosen, Ms. Strimple had asked her to be an assistant stage manager for a play and she asked if she had wanted to work on the back stage. One of the projects in her English class concerned the OPRFHS Theatre Department. When she interviewed her entire class, many people said Ms. Strimple had affected them the most. Ms. Strimple goes beyond.

Ethan Ramsey, 843 N. Oak Park Avenue, OPRFHS junior, is involved in theatre and he is the president of Model UN at OPRFHS. His sister, who is in college, was the original president of Model UN, and it had been a fundraising club. She was able to get Mr. Silver to be the sponsor of this club and they decided to make it a real club. Mr. Ramsey joined her first year, when the club had a membership of 20. The next year it was 45 and now its membership is 80. No other club has seen that grown in four years. He noted how difficult it was to get teachers to sponsor clubs. In addition, the club received awards for the first time this year. He also spoke of Mr. Silver's profound effect on him personally. He asked that the Board of Education reconsider

and rehire him. Mr. Ramsey also stated that Ms. Strimple brings continuity to this department, which is the best in the state, and brings continuity. Hiring one to teach acting class and someone else to do the musicals makes no sense. There is no continuity.

Jake Shadrake, resident of 1100 S. Highland, OPRFHS junior, stated that the teachers being RIF'd were the most inspirational teachers at OPRFHS. Students are only saying how these teachers had changed them. Ms. Strimple taught him many things about himself and she made him the best performer he could be and that is what he plans to be. Kalie Shadrake, his sister, is now studying teaching at Bowling Green University and she was most affected by Ms. Strimple. She had become one of the most beautiful, happy, and perfect persons he knew. The effect that these teachers who are being RIF'd have had on the students in the school is beyond measure.

Jacob Meeks, spoke again, stated that OPRFHS students had worn penitentiary shirts when MCC was evoked. His favorite class, Women in History, has 14 and 15 students, but because of the way the school is growing and more students are expected to enroll over time, he would like to ask how many students have been in a classroom with 30 people. It is uncomfortable and it makes one feel like cattle. He asked how the school would deal with classrooms that numbers of students and who are very vocal, while also getting rid of teachers with Ph.D.'s. He asked if the administrators were taking pay cuts.

Fiona Barrett, 115 S. Harvey, Oak Park, ORPFHS freshman, thanked the Board of Education for addressing the issue. Its participation is essential. He has heard from other students that the teachers to be RIF were essential. Ms. Strimple guided her through her theater experience. When she was in middle school, she did not fit in or get along with everyone. She did not trust. Ms. Strimple fostered trust and that brought out her theatre confidence. Ms. Strimple is a strong leader. Ms. Barrett made personal connections both inside and outside of the theatre department under Ms. Strimple's guidance. She is the glue and is central to the Theater Department. Ms. Strimple has been teaching for five years and her dedication was important to Ms. Barrett and to everyone in the OPRFHS theatre Department.

Prince Wald, parent of junior, asked what problem the Board of Education was trying to fix. He asked if the school was running at a deficit or at a surplus. He asked if any administrative pay was tied to RIFing. He asked if the school as increasing class sizes to reduce the number of sections in order to reduce the number of teachers. With these class sizes, will the number of students in these classes exceed the number allowed in that room?

Dominick Alesia, student, stated that Ms. Strimple embodied "Those Things That Are Best" as she had affected friendships between the cast and the crew. Her own involvement in the Theatre Department helped her academically. After participating in the summer musical, this speaker became a straight "A" student. She felt she had a place and that she was needed at the school. Ms. Strimple was the reason the Board of Education was hearing support for the Theatre Department. Ms. Strimple was the sole safety net for some students and that was being taken away.

Cathy McNary, resident of 1020 Randolph, Oak Park for 37 years, OPRFHS faculty, and had children who graduated from OPRFHS. The reading program is growing and she commended the administrators and the Board of Education for implementing this program. After Ms. Blackwell retires, there will be two reading specialists in the school. Ms. Ramilo saw the need and enrolled in a MA program in reading, however, she is beyond the Masters + 5 cut off. She was saddened that Gisele Ramilo was being RIF'd, as she had proven that she was a very able reading specialist and it will be impossible to replace her at the MA + 5 level. She had a great deal of respect for her and she hope that she would find a place to work where she is valued. OPRFHS was losing someone whom it may not be able to replace with the same caliber of teacher.

Nick Mains, OPRFHS student, came to OPRFHS after a terrible middle school experience and he would not be able to speak in front of all of these people had it not been for Ms. Strimple's support. He was very shy. Ms. Strimple nurtured him to grow and he has a new perspective on things. Ms. Strimple says things are not going to be great, they will be amazing, and that it is OK to be nervous. He has auditioned for every play and he was chosen for three. He used to feel alone but now feels that he has found a new family of people to which he can relate. Because of Ms. Strimple, he now has friends.

Lynda Shadrake, 1100 S. Highland, Oak Park, parent of the student who spoke previously, echoed everything that people had said about the teachers, especially Mr. Greenstone. She had a unique perspective on Ms. Strimple. She had been her long-term substitute teacher and they had been big shoes to fill, as Ms. Strimple is a dedicated teacher and her classroom management style is outstanding. Ms. Strimple has high expectations for her students and had worked up until the day her baby was born. She thanked the administration and the Board of Education for listening and considering all of these heartfelt comments from the students.

Caroline Berman, OPRFHS student, talked about moving from middle school where one is not comfortable with himself, herself, or life in general to the high school. Being a senior, she was able to look back at her life and see the confidence she had gained. Her sister is a freshman and they talked about her struggles as a freshman. She was scared for her because the teachers that she felt had given her the most confidence and ability to believe in oneself were on that list and that surprised her. She worried for her sister and asked the Board of Education to consider those.

Nicole Stewart, 813 Forest, Oak Park, and parent, was very proud of the people that turned out for this meeting. She was grateful to the Board of Education members for its time in having this meeting, as they were volunteers. She acknowledged the difficult economic times and the RIFing situation. She stated that with all of the intellectual capital that the school has it must be creative and innovative in solving this problem. The return on investment is being considered right now. In addition to being a mom, she is a doctoral student in physical education and what is known is that one significant adult can make the difference in a child's life. The Board of Education has heard about many teachers this evening and many are not on the list, as to who made the difference in one child. She felt there was another way to cut funds rather

than human beings and to prioritize them over line items. These students will manage our social security if it is still there.

Phoebe Sullivan-Bing, 221 N. Lombard, Oak Park, spoke about three teachers being RIF'd. She had not made it through History as a freshman. Mr. Greenstone helped her through her sophomore year by giving her excellent advice. Mr. Silver who taught AP Psychology also got her through that course. Mr. Silver opened so many doors with the Model UN and he is a person to whom everyone can talk. She continued that Ms. Strimple had helped her grow and be able to speak in front of anyone. Ms. Strimple is a mom to everyone in Theatre Department. Having Ms. Strimple leave this establishment is like cutting up a family and she is not going to go silently.

Kate Gunnell, 1008 Home, Oak Park, and parent, did not have the benefit of an OPRFHS education and she often wanted to take classes here. She was very impressed with what each student had to say, their views, the numbers, the facts, figures and she was impressed with those who were hearing their comments. She commended the process and stated that it should have been considered earlier. She wanted very much for this model of being able to hear for the 80th time how wonderful the teachers are. Some in the administration are not eager to hear this. She encouraged the members of the administration to open their ears and hearts. Thank you.

Alicia Hurtado, 841 N. Grove Avenue, Oak Park, OPRFHS senior, expressed that her support for Ms. Strimple. She stated that if this was a money problem, she did not want banners and flat screen TVs and vending machines. She wanted the teachers. She would give up air-conditioning for the sake of the Theatre Department. Teachers make the school.

Emi Dammers, 733 S. Taylor, Oak Park, OPRFHS senior thanked the Board of Education for hosting this meeting and listening to the comments. As an active participant in Theater Department, she wanted to talk about the RIFing process. If she were a teacher, she would not want anyone to go through this. She did not understand how teachers could be repeatedly RIF'd. She stated that the teacher in this school had gotten her into colleges and Ms. Strimple wrote a recommendation letter for her. Ms. Strimple cared about the students and she hoped that the administration did as well.

Dani Koelling, 614 Clarence Avenue, Oak Park, OPRFHS student talked about his own experience of having moved 5 times and attending 11 different schools. As such, he had not been able to develop relationships until he came to OPRFHS where he found teachers and people in the Theatre Department who he truly loved. Ms. Strimple had inspired her. She once had been terrified of public speaking and afraid to be herself. This year she auditioned for something and she was chosen. It changed her life. This school has many opportunities. This was an outpouring of people and she hoped that the Board of Education would listen.

Jeannie Affelder, 304 N. East Avenue, Oak Park, parent of 3 sons, 1 graduate, 1 current, and 1 future student, lived next door and as a taxpayer, she felt money was running the school and she wanted having an excellent education for all students to be the standard. To do that, it means smaller class size, not fewer, more support for students in the classroom and more cocurriculars activities as that is what provides the

most connection between staff, school, and community. ORPFHS and District 97 were the reasons she moved to this community. She would guess that the Board of Education members who give of their time and service to this school had, somewhere in their past, a great teacher or classroom experience that touched their hearts. She hoped that the retention of the teachers would be high on the Board of Education's list. Thank you.

Elyse Thurman, sophomore, had struggled with anxiety and depression for most of her life. She relapsed and for a long time had not told anyone. The second half of the year, she was in Mr. Silver's class and he was able to engage her when she was not engaged in anything. Even when he was not her teacher, she went to him to talk. She was afraid that her two younger sisters would not have access to him. She also noted that one would never find another English teacher like Ms. Walter who was in love with her subjects and even cried when she read from certain works. While Ms. Thurman did not enjoy doing her homework, Ms. Walter got her to do it.

Peter Slattery, 224 S. Cuyler Avenue, Oak Park, OPRFHS student, connected with the teachers on the list. He attends the Board of Education meetings, where almost no one else attends. He stated that people do not understand the outcry of this decision. He had tried to report, through the Trapeze, what was occurring, but the audience is not large enough. Communication about the biggest decisions made at each Board of Education meeting needs to occur before an outcry is made and before misinformation is spread.

Elon Sloan, 1109 N. Taylor, Oak Park, OPRFHS junior was familiar with two teachers on the list: Dr. Swartzbaugh in History and Ms. Strimple in the Theatre Department. Having a social anxiety disorder, she never liked to talk, but she has never talked as much as she does in Dr. Swartzbaugh's Women in History class. She asked that the Board of Education not take away the necessary resources to rehire her. While not an actor, she works on the stage crew. Her dream job would be work on a Broadway performance, or the opening of another theatre for high school students. That was proof of the dedication that Ms. Strimple inspired. No one else can do her job. She asked the Board of Education to keep these valuable teachers.

Jake Ellenbogen, 642 N. East Avenue, Oak Park, student, felt there was a lack of communication when one has to search through pages of minutes to find the source of this action. It is the job of Board of Education to alert the faculty of what was occurring and it was underestimating what the students wanted to know. He appreciated the members of the Board of Education spending their time on this because they are not paid for it. If better communication had occurred, the outburst would not be what it is today.

Cheryl Hurtoza, parent, spoke of the benefits that her daughter had received from Mr. Greenstone and Ms. Strimple. If one took the hours that Ms. Strimple puts into the program and divided that by her salary, she is probably make \$.10 per hour.

Margaret Jones, 1330 Franklin Avenue, River Forest, parent of three children, wanted the Board of Education to consider the revenue that the Theatre Department receives. She knew that one production, Beauty and the Beast, brought in over \$17,000 in

revue. Her daughter and her husband saw the play downtown and felt that the OPRFHS scenery, the costumes, and the production exceeded that of the downtown production. Her junior is in the Theatre Department and she passed on going to many smaller colleges because she had been disappointed in their theatre departments as they were far less than the one at OPRFHS. Her other daughter's one act play won at state; that was amazing. The passion to be able to speak in public is a life skill. Mr. Silver is awesome. Her child got a five as a sophomore on the AP test in psychology. She was impressed with Mr. Pena who created a modern History course that included information about how Islam came to this country.

Wyannetta Johnson, 729 S. Oak Park Avenue, Oak Park, attended this because her granddaughter had asked her to support Ms. Strimple, as she was a beloved teacher. She believed in the young people and she objective to Mr. Vance's class was being cut after teaching it for 22 years. She wanted to find a way for African-American students to do better. She encouraged the students to keep fighting, praying, and working with the Board of Education.

Caitlin Jeffries, 1221 N. Harlem, Oak Park, OPRFHS sophomore, is the third generation in this area. She looked forward to coming to school every day and going to her history classes because of her teachers. She attested to how amazing Dr. Swartzbaugh was as a teacher by saying that she had even dropped study hall so that she could take Dr. Swartzbaugh's Women in History class.

Maxie DeGenova, 538 N. Kenilworth, Oak Park, was never as proud of the community and students and he was now. He acknowledged a person spearheaded this effort by starting a Facebook group, the petition, letters to the Tribune, the Oak Leaves and the Wednesday Journal and Jacob Meeks. He did not think what Mr. Kramer had said should be undervalued. He had been witness to many changes, e.g., e security guards, security doors, Plastco, etc. He had agreed with Mr. Kramer that while of all of these may be scaring the students to stay in school and following the rules, nothing makes students want to go to class more than good teachers. He felt Ms. Strimple was one of those teachers and a beautiful person. He felt it would be terrible to see her go.

Steve Gillenwater, 1036 N. Austin, parent of an Oak Park graduate and senior spoke to the parents and students. He stated that the budgets are economic documents and are political. They represent the priorities of the people who write them and they can be changed. Years ago, he was a board member of another school and he was able to change the priorities. He asked the students to use their passion and register to vote on their 18th birthday and to remember how the Board of Education voted.

Melanie McQueen, resident of 101 Washington, Oak Park, parent of sophomore, thanked the Board of Education for listening to the comments. The main thing that makes a person exploded is being unable to say something, which is part of the healing process. When she first moved here, people outside of Oak Park told her what an amazing district this was. She was surprised that five of the teachers on the list were her daughter's teachers. She spoke of a Friday night when her daughter asked her to attend the production at the high school, Once Upon an Island. It was so moving it brought her to tears. The students at the meeting are what the high school

should be. Tenure is not all-important. This is what I am talking about and what I wanted to see in this district. Her daughter is not in the Theatre Department, but they knew where to go to see good theatre.

Kevin O'Brien, OPRFHS graduate, affirmed the quality of the theatre productions and he was heartsick that the teachers were being released. It was because of his teachers that he became a coach of the speech team. He has worked with many students at the high school. If Ms. Strimple is removed as the chair of this program, the program will be diminished because one cannot make up the momentum that this department has achieved over the last five years. He asked the Board of Education to consider the signal it was sending to a community that values the arts as much as this one does. He was terrified of the continual contracting of the arts.

Katie O'Keefe, OPRFHS resident for 33 years, OPRFHS teacher, asked the Board of Education to consider things at the macro level.

- 1) Some teachers are assigned to teach out of their area of expertise, not their endorsements. While she is endorsed to teach Italian, she has not spoken it for over 20 years. She would not have confidence to teach it.
- 2) Class size. She has heard that the foreign language classes will be over 30.
- 3) A reluctance to promote from within the school. OPRFHS used to be seen as a destination school in someone's career as there were opportunities to move up, but now it seems as if it is a stepping-stone in one's career. One just stays here a few years and then moves on to a better position.
- 4) Not hiring teachers at higher level.
- 5) Electives. African History and Latin American History are not being run. While the Latin American History class does have a low enrollment, the students talk about issues relative to them. Juan is the name of one of her students. This is the only class where he feels comfortable using that name. In his other classes, he is called John.
- 6) Pay Freeze. In the great depression, teachers in Chicago taught with no pay and she had been asked if she would do that. She had said that she would have it the administration did, but she could not say that this year because she voted for a pay freeze.

Madeline Rees, 330 Gale St., River Forest, OPRFHS junior, urged the Board of Education to not only rehire the teachers that were making the school amazing but to actually fix the problem. Good, untenured teachers are being rified and bad tenured teachers remain. The students and faculty are being punished for decisions that were made decades ago. The Board of Education can work to fix the rules so that great teachers cannot stay because they are not tenured. Merit should be part of the equation. The students are willing to share their ideas and give their support, as this was a situation that needed to be addressed with the Board of Education's help.

Jeff Weissglass, 304 N. East Avenue, Oak Park, parent was proud and awed by this community. How was the District communicating on this with the community? Was there something different that happened this year that had not in previous years? He asked for what the statistics were on RIFing teachers in the past. The question of class size and teacher qualification and what was the Board of Education policy was to who will be hired have not been communicated. He stated that it was important for any

good organization to have the right people on the bus and the high school had many great people on the bus and it is important that they stay there.

Stephanie Carlin, 816 Wisconsin Avenue, Oak Park, OPRFHS freshman and member of the speech team, stated that Ms. Strimple loved what she did.

Diane Dorion, 141 Park Drive, River Forest, parent of four daughters said that her oldest had been accepted by Tulane University. The president of Tulane had explained in during a college visit that when he had visited 27 colleges, the questions not answered for him were about the people, the programs, and the purpose. The people, the faculty at OPRFHS, far exceeded any expectation of what she could have had coming from New York to Illinois. She has many nieces and nephews on the East Coast and they talk about their educational experiences. What goes on at OPRFHS is special; it is a reflection of the faculty. The teachers are magic and magical and she supported their retention. The teachers give the students purpose, they have a happy, healthy life, and that means something. The course selection offered was impressive. Oak Park is just 13 miles from Chicago and the class trips students are able to take are wonderful. Her senior is part of theatre program and she has become so inspired by it; it will be part of her life. She had not attended production at which she did not cry.

Mason Astill, 1124 S. Harvey, Oak Park, OPRFHS sophomore, supported Ms. Strimple, as she had changed his life in a way that no other staff member could ever do. She helped him focus on his life and academics. She helped him audition when his fears overwhelmed him. She helped him conquer his fears outside of theatre as well. He wished that all of the Board of Education members could sit in on one of her acting classes and witness what she does. He appreciated the Board of Education's attendance at this meeting.

Jill Haas, 818 N. Euclid, Oak Park, parent of graduate, a present senior and also the president of OPRFHS Huskie Booster Club too was amazed by the attendance at this meeting and the passion and the spirit of the students. She stated Boosters has appropriated close to a \$1 million dollars to the school and she would take back every penny in order to rehire these teachers. She had never seen such support and passion at the high school and she hoped the Board of Education could find a way to keep as many teachers as possible.

Julie Foley, 700 S. Kenilworth, Oak Park, said the community needed to count on the Board of Education to do something about this situation. The Board of Education should do what it was elected to do—to make this school the best.

Dr. Millard thanked everyone for sharing his/her comments and concerns. The Board of Education has much to discussion and the administration will bring more information to it. The outcome is unknown at this time. She encouraged all of them to vote as had one of the speakers earlier had said and they were welcome to attend the Board of Education meetings. Ms. Patchak-Layman complimented them on their organization. Ms. McCormack was impressed with the comments by every person and she appreciated all that was stated.

Adjournment

At 10:40 p.m. on Wednesday, April 11, 2012, Dr. Millard moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Ms. McCormack. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

Dr. Dietra D. Millard
President

Amy McCormack
Secretary