

June 11, 2012

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

Call to Order

President Finnegan called the meeting to order at 5:13 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 Assessment and Research, Dr. Tina Halliman, Director of Special Education; 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.

Visitors

Dr. Allan Alson, educational consultant, and Terry Dean of the *Wednesday Journal*.

Agenda & Norms

The Board of Education reviewed the agenda and agreed to the norms.

Discussion of the Reading

The Board of Education responded to the following questions posed by the facilitator about Chapter 5, "Asset focused Factors and Personal Relationships," and Chapter 8, "Why are Some Schools Making More Progress Than Others" from the book *Creating the Opportunity to Learn* by Boykin and Noguera.

- What had they learned? What more did they want to learn?
- What were the implications for OPRFHS and the achievement gap?
- What support and intervention do students receive?

Dr. Lee's had witnessed the same kind of higher-level academic tracking talked about in the book. The school had been set up to keep the academically challenged students from interfering with the educational needs of the smart students. He constantly heard parents in the community say that it was unfair that they could not get their students into the honors courses. He interpreted this to mean that their children were not able to learn because teachers were spending the instructional time assisting other students. He felt it was important for the Board of Education to discuss the subject of tracking this and determine if the Board of Education wanted to change anything.

Mr. Finnegan noted the significant difference in the young children's attitudes when they received positive comments versus negative comments. District 97 and OPRFHS both participated in the research conducted in 2003 by Dr. Ferguson that showed that African-American students were more likely to respond to teachers who were supportive. Ms. Smith noted that more students of color and males in particular receive more suspensions and referrals. That must affect the students' expectations of themselves. Dr. Alson asked if the administrators and teachers have the predilection to work with students to manage those and do they treat all students the same. Dr. Millard noted that the racial differences predominately start in the elementary schools and they are a predictor of the future. There is urgency for the high school to collaborate with the elementary districts.

Dr. Alson stated that some cities have begun to work with many partners serving youth. They work to address particular academic benchmarks: 1) kindergarten readiness, 2) third grade reading, and 3) completing algebra by the 8th grade. Research has shown that if students are lagging in any of those benchmarks, more work will be necessary.

Dr. Alson reported on research that showed that students are incentivized to work toward their goals if they co-construct them, take responsibility for them, and they are supported by receiving honest feedback in order to help build their inference skills, meta cognitive skills, so that they know how to learn. Faculty members from other schools, many from elementary schools, are reporting that students are leading conferences on goal setting parameters and that students are much harder on themselves than are the teachers. Some districts are using this vehicle to do parent conferences. He pointed to the premise of researcher, Carol Dweck, who wrote the book *Mindset: the New Psychology for Success*. Her research has shown that intelligence is not fixed and it is malleable. Students may learn strategies to raise their grades: it is part of being resilient. If one has confidence and a history of success, one will be more resilient. Part of the school's responsibility is to build resilience and to help students when they do not have the confidence to succeed. Dr. Lee suggested that the high school has the opportunity to do this for itself with regard to its own confidence. Changes to the discipline system in the last 4 to 5 years have caused a significant drop in suspensions. He has spoken with a group trying to get the Chicago Public Schools to do what the high school has done in the last five years. He wanted to capitalize on what the high school was doing with supporting data.

Discussion ensued about performance and mastery goals. Ms. Patchak-Layman saw OPRFHS as a performance-goal oriented school, meaning there is "one" best way. Accolades are given to students who exceed, e.g., get into AP classes, etc. The school highlights students in honors classes or AP classes or wherever students are winning in some fashion. If a student has other interests, does he/she get an opportunity to say he/she mastered something? Mastery goal setting is the setting up of rubrics of what is mastery in classrooms. If one has mastery goal setting, are mastery goals being set up to get into the criteria of being performance based? Dr. Alson asked what would a high school with a continuum of achievement look like if the school moved to standards based grading, e.g., in an English course, and there would be feedback on the standards as opposed to more A's through F's. The feedback would be more concrete and specific about the expectations of students.

Discussion ensued about the definition of tracking. Ms. Fisher's understanding of tracking was that students who are strong in math but weak in English are forced into a lower level in all of their classes in order to accommodate their need for basic skill building in one area. It is a lock-step type of system. Mr. Phelan noted that a district written about in the book, Riverview, took a systematic approach to eliminating student achievement. It put in place different supports and measured them. If they did not work, the supports were changed. Dr. Lee believed the essence of a tracking system is having low expectations of one group of students, i.e., a system where it is clear which courses are the lowest and which are the highest and the students in the lower-level classes had far less work to do and could easily end up with a "D" average. It would be satisfactory if the system had the students with the lowest

academic skills working just as hard as the top students do in honors classes. Some Board of Education members felt the definition of tracking needed further discussion in order to have agreement.

Ms. Hill stated that the definition of tracking would be a student starting in a transitional level and staying at that level. There might be reasons to differentiate instruction and group the students to address their learning needs, but there is no contradiction about having higher expectations. Mr. Finnegan felt the Board of Education needed to talk about how to expand opportunities in honors classes and he wanted every student to have at least one experience. While not worrying about the definition of tracking, he wanted the high school to make the movement between levels permeable with different supports. Ms. Smith stated that teachers need support in order to do differentiated instruction. Mr. Phelan continued that OPRFHS students are discouraged from overriding a recommendation by being told that they may not be capable of doing the higher course work and that they might not be able to go to a lower level class later. This needs to be a dialogue with the faculty.

Dr. Lee believed that the administration and teachers could decide upon the intricacies of how to allow every student this type experience, but not the Board of Education. The high school does not have the general direction that the student with the lowest academic ability should be expected to work as hard as those with the highest academic ability in terms of efforts. The goals accomplished by the students with the lowest academic ability are just as important as those students with the highest academic ability are.

Dr. Alson reported that academic tracking originated after World War II. At that time, it was a rigid system of identifying students as being academic, business, etc., and when they reached high school, the expectation was that all of the courses would be in lock step. As time evolved, it was clear that tracking of students of color and economically challenged students had occurred. Dr. Alson did not believe that rigid tracking still occurred. He asked what were the permeability and the malleability of the high school's system that allowed students to grow. Mr. Rouse reported that the high school does have performance groupings. Dr. Alson stated that students do not believe they can move out of a track because of a lack of relationships and unintended consequences. It is a sense of hopelessness and self-fulfilling prophesy.

Mr. Phelan was concerned about the responsiveness of administrators to requests for student movement and co-taught classes. While the Board of Education realizes that it is a matter of balancing recourses, the tone is one of discouragement or not providing every support possible. If a student at District 90 does not have his/her homework, he/she must do a homework lab. There is a cost to supporting the students. Dr. Lee suggested using the same ingenuity as that used by the athletic coaches. He stated that the goal should be to provide, to the extent possible, the resources to maximize each student's efforts to achieve the goals of that program. Examples of this would be Special Education or the star performers in the theatre courses, as they get as much individualized attention as the Special Education students. He felt that students in the middle group needed more attention.

Ms. Hill stated that performance grouping is subject specific and ability grouping exists within a subject area. Students are grouped according to any given subject and

they tend to stay within that ability/performance group. Discussion ensued about the philosophy of weighting grades and the effect it has on students. Only those students who receive an A or B may receive the additional weighted GPA. Statistically, it is better for a student to stay in a College Prep class and get an "A" than to risk going on to Honors class and getting a C. Previously, there was a grading policy that students in basic classes were to get C's and students in Honors classes were to get A's and B's. Dr. Alson suggested that a grade analysis might determine what the GPA was at the different level courses. Discussion ensued about whether teachers were using the same rigor in the basic classes so that students may learn the critical thinking skills being taught in the honors courses. One Board of Education member's student received an "A" in her basic science course yet was not recommended for an honors course nor did the Board member feel she would have been successful in such a course. It was explained that the curriculum is based on performance, not mastery and the "A" Grade reflects performance. Science teachers have been encouraged and continued to be encouraged to put into all biology programs common units and common assessments.

One Board of Education member pointed out that not all math students enroll in the class at the same level and it is difficult for those who are in between the next sequence of classes. Those students should progress half a point past the other students because otherwise it does not enhance their learning. They should be provided support so that they can be accelerated to the next level. The use of standards based grade books are difficult to use but they would give the high school the fluidity that teachers need. Technology is still lacking in this area. Differentiated instruction is occurring in classrooms and needs support at all levels.

Dr. Alson stated that the Board of Education's challenge, along with the administration, is to establish the District's goals and to determine where it wants the District to be at the end of 3, 5, and 10 years. Once the goals are in place, the administration can determine what resources will be necessary to achieve them. That dialogue is critical to moving the school forward. Mr. Finnegan concurred and added that a community-wide dialogue should first occur in order to have a shared vision. Dr. Lee felt that it was important to have policies in place to support the implemented programs. Clear communication must be included in the Student Handbook. The Board of Education must trust the professional judgment of the administrators, teachers, and counselors.

It is a constant balancing of resources for all students. Dr. Alson suggested that part of the effort in defining the goals is defining the non-negotiables, the expectations. Is the Board of Education willing to have uniform rules for teachers? What autonomy would teachers have? Dr. Millard was unsure of how much needed to be dictated because mastery goals were what education is all about. How are mastery goals developed, defined, and measured? Mastery goals are needed for the elementary and secondary schools, as it is the creative ability to analyze and that allows students to move to the next step of education. Mr. Phelan suggested adding to the menu of options that of standardized homework. The Board of Education needs to prioritize its goals.

Dr. Isoye stated that many of the things discussed at this meeting were occurring within the District in order to move the school in a certain direction. The key is to be

steady. What the administration is asking the school to do is fundamental. Once teachers are motivated, more would be added. The new PD model is an example of that and it will provide options for the Board of Education and the administration. Teachers may be hesitant to follow through on common curriculum and assessments because that is the nature of schools. Implementation may vary from teacher to teacher. Two key pieces are adaptation and technology, e.g., getting the buy-in and then collecting information, analyzing it, and reporting it with the teachers, etc. It is not just the process of compliance. It includes informing teachers as to what is going to be done and asking them what type of support they will need to do it. Mr. Rouse stated that the administration is providing leadership training and utilizing the tools to hold the administration accountable. Dr. Lee added that when the direction is simple, it could be carried out well. When there are 50 different variables, however, the scenario may be different. A willingness to do such must be present. Dr. Alson concurred that adults who are habituated in the way they do things are hard to change. How can the school create a greater sense of urgency to effect change for the present students? While he heard that there are some formative common assessments for each subject at OPRFHS, it had taken a number of years to break down the resistance at Evanston Township High School. Dr. Isoye added that the Science Division was one of the first groups of teachers who talked about what should be taught in the classroom. Progress monitoring of formative assessments individually in the classrooms is next. Teachers will ask students questions to see if they are gaining skill. This information will lead to differentiated instruction. It is a strategic process. The dialogue between the Board of Education and administration is very important. Ms. Patchak-Layman said this is a communication issue. The high school is saying that there is differentiation in classes and movement between classes. However, parents and the community are unaware of the differentiation and their students cannot move between the classes. Dr. Isoye stated that teachers would demand differentiation models as more student outcome data is collected. Teacher Collaboration Teams (TCTs) generally write common assessments over the summer and they are tested throughout the school year.

It was noted that Senate Bill 7 provides for a smaller process with regard to teacher discipline and the Board of Education has the right to make the final decision. Mr. Phelan suggested consideration of instituting merit pay or bonuses for exceptional achievement.

The Board of Education recessed from 6:58 p.m. to 7:27 p.m.

**Analysis of Board
Goals and
Actions**

The Board of Education considered the previous discussion as to how it might relate to its goal discussion for next year. The first two goal statements from last year were:

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.

Statement 2: Student Engagement and Achievement

The Board of Education will increase student achievement engagement, through quality classroom instruction, co-curricular, and other enhanced learning opportunities.

What actions would be needed to close the achievement gap. What is the work of policy and the administration in terms of programs, staff, and expectations? Can there be shared goals?

Time was spent deconstructing the goal statements and deciding if Board of Education members were still in agreement with them. The question was asked as to what an “inclusive education for all” meant. Discussion ensued. Dr. Millard believed that she, as a Board of Education member, had to provide a policy manual that addressed the needs of every student that attends the high school, those at the lowest level, and those at the highest level, for their personal, intellectual, social, cultural, and experiential experience, realizing that there would be variables because of the limitations.

Dr. Halliman believed it mean that it was inclusive of all ability levels and across all racial lines.

Dr. Lee said that the subject of this conversation deserved to be at the policy level, as it went beyond an annual goal. The goals that the Board of Education adopts annually are relevant to the superintendent’s evaluation for that year. A mention was made that Policy 101, Human Dignity, did reflect this conversation. A goal might be a policy that needs to have more work. The Board of Education has had similar goals for many years. Mr. Phelan, remembering that the Board of Education last year had adopted goals that were very similar to the previous year’s goals, suggested choosing something more specific that could be accomplished in a shorter time.

Ms. Patchak-Layman looked at an inclusive education as being the opposite of an exclusive education for some. The District does not want to provide an exclusive education for some students. The District wants all students to be included within the school. She did not see the school segregated.

Discussion continued on measurements of this year. Dr. Lee suggested the Board of Education agree to the wording of a policy and adopting it within a year. He was not satisfied with Policy 101. Discussion ensued about what was more effective/useful: a policy or a goal. Dr. Lee felt that a goal would be more useful for the first few years, but after a time, people would become immune to it. Ms. Fisher believed that restating a goal annually kept it in focus and she did not believe there was a conflict in having it both as a goal and as a policy. The bigger question is whether the action steps are helping to accomplish this goal. Dr. Alson believed that strength was given when it was both a policy and a goal.

What would the high school look like if it were to “eliminate racial predictability”

- 1) Class position would no longer be a predictable of level of achievement;
- 2) Reductions would occur in racial achievement gaps for the student growth and outcomes, e.g., ACT averages, college readiness benchmarks, etc.;
- 3) Discipline numbers would mirror the student population;
- 4) Correlation coefficient between race and any given measure of academic achievement would be zero; and

- 5) Faculty and staff throughout the District would be reflective of the student demographics.

Dr. Lee felt that the data and support systems were not capable of achieving these steps in the coming year. Mr. Phelan concurred, believing that the setting of goals was to give the administration direction for next year.

What might be a step to take 2012-13 to help the school make progress?

- 1) The District is isolating race to see what inhibitors the District needs to change, e.g., discipline policies and procedures, including experiences for staff and faculty.

An example of a racial equity goal, based on this discussion, might be to eliminate barriers to students who want to challenge themselves in their curriculum and create supports to help them achieve. Dr. Alson spoke of the Oakland Public Schools that set as its main goal over 3 to 5 years, the building of full service community schools and that San Diego set a goal of building a quality school in every neighborhood and specified what that would look like. He guided the Board to set the goal of eliminating racial predictability in academics, extracurricular, discipline, or college going rates, etc. and then tracking that data over time. Using the example of student discipline, he suggested tracking teacher referrals as to race and charging the principal with informing the Board of Education as to the current state and what can be implemented to reflect the student population. The ideas may, may not work, or may not work to the extent desired, but it would prove there was good faith effort with the resources provided.

Dr. Lee felt an achievable goal would be to think about the GPA of black students at the end of the freshman year in a basic English course and how much lower that average GPA is from all members of the freshman class. If it is only 75% of what it should be, the goal could be through the reading program to raise it to 80% of what it should be. If that were not achieved, then a determination could be made as to what should be done.

Dr. Isoye felt that in terms of taking steps to eliminate racial predictability, the District should look for trends. If the District sees a trend that lends to a certain makeup that leads to predictability, i.e., class placement, then the District has to be more deliberate in that statement, go beyond the parents' request, and ask what factor race plays.

The Board of Education responded to the question as to what might eliminate systemic inhibitors to the success for students and staff of color

- A) Placement process
- B) Access to and percentage of students of color into AP and Honors Classes
 1. Specific means for students to accelerate into those more rigorous experiences
- C) Lower expectation of time spent on tasks
- D) Uneven expectations for student achievement
- E) Black students in honors courses make lower grades than white students in honors courses
- F) School climate
- G) Advocacy by counselors, students, and parents

- H) Navigation system skills (engagement and allowance of transparency into those processes)
- I) User friendliness
- J) Communication
- K) Lack of ownership for all students (examples: know the student's name, offer help in specific areas, offer specific compliments about progress, etc.)
- L) Lack of understanding of the importance Teacher/Student Relationship Quality (TSRQ) and Adult/Student Relationship Quality (ASRQ)
- M) Definition of success.
- N) Not having a goal setting system for students.

Ms. Patchak-Layman felt that success was now based on individuals excelling in certain areas, yet in many cultures and with many individuals, being able to collaborate is being successful and sometimes more successful than individual competitions. "White success" means beating another person in order to get to the next step. It is not necessarily the value or definition of success across groups of people. Dr. Millard concurred, as many students are successful even though their GPA may not show it because of their other responsibilities. How can the District acknowledge these students? Mr. Prale stated that the mission of a public comprehensive high school is to prepare students for college, career, and citizenship. Ms. Patchak-Layman observed that when one starts talking about the different aspects, it means that barriers are being built and students cannot change their minds when they are 18 or 19 years old.

How can the Board of Education use the above list in the goal-setting process. The Board of Education considered whether its goals were too broad; should they be more specific? What systematic inhibitors to success were eliminated last year? The website update? Had the Board of Education had just the goal of having racial predictability eliminated, more progress would have been occurred. Long term programs such as CCAR, will not have an immediate effect. Dr. Isoye noted that the action steps under the goal statements were recommended by the administration. He noted, however, that actions occur outside of the recommended changes but they are not articulated. Programmatic changes that begin to address racial disparities are brought to the Board of Education in order to support its goals. More conversation needs to occur about race. The administration will submit more generalized action steps. When the analysis of data begins, information may be discovered that may cause a shift in the District's resources in order to move a student in new and different ways. The District needs to communicate more clearly, as to what is occurring with the action steps. It is important for the administration to have direction at the beginning of the year and the action steps could be amended or removed from the original action steps. Dr. Alson stated that the more specific the Board of Education is with its goals, the greater satisfaction there will be at the end of the year, i.e., action and measurement. Frustration grows from having big goals without discrete steps as to how to get there. However, he did caution the Board of Education about discarding the frame of its goals, the five lenses. He asked them to consider how each goal might be stated in more actionable, narrow terms for the coming year. Next year the District will start on its strategic plan. The idea is to build alignment among the goals.

The discussion of the goals will be included on the June Board of Education meeting agendas and based on those discussions brought for approval at the July 12 meeting.

This timing will allow the goals to be presented to the faculty and staff in August. Mr. Finnegan stated that focusing on long-term goals would allow the school to function better.

**Strategic Planning
Facilitator**

Dr. Alson addressed the Board of Education about a strategic planning process from August 2012 through May 2013, in time for next year's budgeting calendar.

He suggested the theme of "Success for All Students" way to label the plan so that it has meaning for all constituents. "All Means All". "Excellence Plus Equity" "High Expectations in a Caring Environment." This is similar to the OPRF Community Foundation of "Success for All Youth" in its strategic plan for the entire community. The Foundation has engaged him about doing its plan.

The proposed duration would be for 6 years: one year for planning and in place for five years. During the five years, he would meet with the Board two times per year. In year 7 to 8 year, the process would begin again.

Who should be involved on the steering committee? Fifty to sixty people, including two board members, the Administration, Faculty, Support Staff, Students, parents of recent graduates, parents from OPRFHS and Districts 90 & 97, Government, the unions, Businesses, Social Services, Philanthropic entities, Community Colleges, and Alumni members, and it should have racial and gender diversity. The Board of Education would receive monthly progress reports from the steering committee, which would meet two times per month from August to January. After January and until the plan was finished, it would meet once per month. Once steering committee has established its goals, focus groups, reflective of its goals, should meet two times per month from November to May. The composition of the focus groups would come from the steering committee, as well as those who have the necessary expertise. The first part of the process will be to define the current state of the District in various categories, e.g., racial equity, engagement, and achievement, learning environment, finance, and governance and then determine what data needs to be collected to do the needs assessment that defines this. Surveys would be constructed that would make them easy to tabulate. Focus groups from various constituencies would be asked as to what is and is not working well and what defines that current state. Once the Board of Education knows the current world, it can determine what the District should look like in five years. The mission statement will be reviewed to make sure it is still applicable. He expected the Board of Education president and the Superintendent to provide a charge from the Board of Education to the Steering Committee, which should lead to board goal setting. From those goals, action plans and objectives will be determined on how to achievement them. While by next May there might be action plan for the goals, his experience tells him that one needs to have committees to monitor progress. The action plans will to be continually refined and include the goal or the objectives, the owner/staff member responsible for a particular goal, the participants, the measurements, and the necessary resources.

Dr. Alson continued that transparency was critical to this process as well as the ability to make mid-course corrections is essential and making all constituents groups as aware as possible. Monthly updates may include something on the websites. The groups need to know who is on the Steering Committee, their email addresses, etc., in order to have good communication.

Dr. Alson's experience includes:

- a high school math teacher
- a principal
- the superintendent of Evanston Township High School
- the founder of the Minority Student Achievement Network
- a Board President from 1998-2006
- Consultant 2006-Present
- Gates Senior Fellow
- CPS High School Transformation

Dr. Alson's Strategic Planning work includes:

- San Diego Public Schools
 - Facilitating with partner Plan Development March 2011-present
- Oakland Public Schools
 - Facilitating Plan Implementation November 2011-present with two partners and charged with implementation
- Lockport, IL High School District Facilitated Plan & Committees March 2010-June 2011
- Laraway, Illinois – Elementary District May 2009-July 2010
- Glenbard School District – 2008-present
 - Worked with two committees to build greater AP involvement for students of color and to hire staff of color.
 - Facilitated a series of meetings with their six feeder districts on how to boost math achievement for students of color. The first meeting was held in October and by January, one feeder district admitted to not realizing how many barriers students had, it made the decision to move 50 students up, and 40 of them were doing very well.

He asked the Board of Education to consider a partner, April Ervin, and he reviewed her background:

BA – Northwestern University

MBA – Michigan

Ran Chicago Office for the New Leaders for New Schools

Developed strategic plan for the following:

Network for College Success

University of Chicago

CPS Area High School District

He felt having someone of color would be interesting and valuable to this process.

The cost would be approximately \$50,000 to \$60,000, depending upon his time. The breakdown was as follows:

Daily rate - \$1200

Approximately 35 Days X \$1200 = \$42,000

Planning Document Preparation would be 8 to 15 day or \$9,600 to \$18,000.

Because the Board of Education elections are scheduled for next April, should the timing of the strategic plan be tighter? Dr. Alson stated that it is essential that there is

time for new board members to have buy-in and commitment. Those who are considering running for the Board of Education they should become a member of the Strategic Plan Steering Committee. The purpose of this committee is to collect evidence, evaluate the mission, vision, and goals, and from that, task forces would be formed. The Committee will continue to meet to hear the task forces' progress and to ask questions. Early in the process, either the Superintendent or the Board of Education will develop a staff writing committee so that the plans being drafted could be reviewed on a regular basis. Every time a task force would bring something forward, it would be put into draft form so that there was a progressing viewpoint for review. Staff could debrief on what is being accomplished and communicate that to the larger faculty who could then offer concerns for the committee to review.

Adjournment

At 9:30 p.m. on Monday, June 11, 2012, Mr. Phelan moved to adjourn this special board meeting; seconded by Mr. Finnegan. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Terry Finnegan
President

Amy McCormack
Secretary