

**OAK PARK AND RIVER FOREST HIGH SCHOOL**  
**201 North Scoville Avenue**  
**Oak Park, IL 60302**

**Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee**  
**August 23, 2016**

A Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee (CCB) meeting was held on August 23, 2016. Chair Dixon Spivy called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. in the Board Room. Committee members present were: Jennifer Cassell, Mary Blankemeier, Lincoln Chandler, Anthony Clark, Wendy Daniels, Dr. Steve Gevinson, Sheila Hardin, Naomi Hildner, Dr. Joylynn Pruitt, Steven Jackson, Melanie McQueen, Ralph Martire, Lindsay Moore-Fields, Nathaniel L. Rouse, Cormac Warden, Kayla York, Christine Saxman, and Sara Dixon Spivy, Lee Williams. Absent were Anthony Brooks, Anthony Clark, Latonia Jackson, Jonathan Weintraub.

Committee members were reminded of the Open Meetings Act restrictions about dialoguing amongst each other.

**Visitors** Dr. Gwen Walker Qualls, Dr. Kennedi Dixon, Bellamy, Rachque Wilson, Dominique Dowd Craig Larson, George Bailey, Carl Spight, Ale Sye, and Fabian Prince community members.

**Approval of Minutes**

Ms. Spivy moved to approve the minutes of May 5, May 19, and August 9, 2016; seconded by Ms. Hildner. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

**Review Feedback/Current Agenda**

Mr. Chandler reviewed the agenda and provided background on the committee's work. CCB was formed in Spring 2016 to review and make recommendations on the district's equity policies, and practices, particularly the Code of Conduct, to comply with Illinois Senate Bill 100, the Code of Conduct has been revised for the current (2016-17) Academic Year Given these changes, the committee maintains the goal of identifying opportunities to promote positive, equitable policies and practices at OPRF.

**Norms**

The Committee reviewed its norms:

- Work together as a community that values building consensus.
- Be fully "present" at our meeting by being prepared and being attentive.
- Share examples which do not include references to specific individuals or specific situations.
- Invite and welcome the contributions of every member and listen to each other.
- Operate in a collegial and open atmosphere.
- Be guided by the Oak Park and River Forest High School mission statement which enhances success for all students.
- Assume positive intentions from every member and every presenter
- Listen to understand, not only reply

**The Committee reviewed its Reflections from Last Meeting**

**What they learned where:**

- New Code of Conduct and why it was adopted so quickly

- Availability of Support Services

#### What surprised them?

- How quickly the code was developed
- The school no longer has a “real” zero tolerance policy
- Discussion of EAC (Emotional Adjustment Classroom)
- Anxiety from this committee regarding the revised code, given that the offenses are the same

#### What they wanted to know more about:

- What are our next steps/what will we be doing?
- How will we assess on an individual basis and keep the decision unbiased?
- How do we get the student and parent voice involved when removal is the right option?
- What does the group mean when we say “culture” and “equity”?
- There may be confusion without a matrix. Want to know more about the Board Policy to which the Code refers.
- Documentation of factors mandated by SB100. Who sees it once SID completes documenting factors? Do we have a draft form that will be used by SIDS? Yes, a guide for the SIDs is being developed, and the District is learning how to track academic and behavior data in Skyward differently. Also, on the September 9 Staff Development Day, faculty will participate in breakout sessions to role play. Students are no longer receiving ISS for tardies.

The Committee members received a copy of Board of Education Policy 7:190 per a request made at the last meeting.

Dr. Walker and Dr. Dixon shared information about the EAC department, staffed by teachers, social workers, speech pathologist, OT and PT therapists, etc. Special Education provides a plethora of services to students with learning disabilities, social-emotional issues, vision and hearing disabilities, multiple disabilities in TEAM, and to students in the Transition Program, which is for students up to 22 years of age.

The Emotional Adjustment Program (EAC) was created 13 years ago when many students, mostly minority students with conduct disorders, were transitioned off campus to private day schools. The name stems from the notion that those students had a temporary state of being because of the stressors in their lives. The Board of Education approved the EAC program, presented by the administration, the purpose of which was help prepare students to make a successful transition back to the main campus. Thirteen students initially returned to campus and were assigned a social worker and behavior interventionist, attended periods 2 through 7, and were provided transportation services. The program has progressed and continues to work. Ms. Kennedy meets weekly with the EAC team at which time progress reports are reviewed as well as the support given to the students.

Mr. Lee Williams has been part of the EAC Program since its implementation. He has been a mentor, father, and a brother to many of the students in the program. Ms. Andrea Neumann, the Program Chair, deals with the day-to-day operation. EAC is a gateway program from off-campus programs and other SPED classes. The hope is for these students to remain on campus. Mr. Bellamy and Mr. Williams weekly discuss student behavior data and determine targets. Staff meets quarterly with the families of these students; the families are very supportive of this program. Students have to meet a certain measure of behavior to transition out of the program.

The teachers work primarily to build the confidence of these students. The school focuses on the writing of essays, increasing math skills, expanding horizons, and self-reflection. Many times these students come into the program thinking they were bad students, but they may have just been misunderstood or

needed improved academic skills, etc. Currently, one student is filling out a Triton application and one has joined the football team boasting grades of C or better in all of his classes.

As students improve in the program, they start to receive less support and ultimately transition back into the mainstream. Ms. Dowd, the transition specialist, helps them with employment opportunities. She guides them in resume writing, assessments, taking aptitude tests for jobs, etc. Mr. Williams works with them in the community on job retention. The social worker practices Restorative Justice with them and works with peace circles, meditation, the SIDS and the parents. Every behavior has a consequence, and the students have to follow the rules. Group counseling services are offered weekly. Mr. Bellamy maintains contact with these students, even after they graduate. The beauty of the program is that it is small; it is a family environment.

Mr. Larson, a social worker for 37 years, is instrumental in the planning of the SPED programs, and because of his institutional history and knows what works and what does not work. While there is still room to grow, the Special Education staff is proud of what it is doing. Mr. Lee has 16 years of social work experience and is well versed in Restorative Justice Practices.

Mr. Williams stated that he spent eight years in EAC, and he challenged anyone calling this a punitive environment. It is the support for those students in need of that support. It provides a day-to-day structure, practices, and operations, all of which are imbedded in the Board of Education goals and Strategic Plan. This program is very personal to him. While his parents had three sons, through the interactions with the students in this program, he has 15 to 20 brothers. The environment is supportive now and forever.

#### Framing Our Work

Committee members were asked to fill out a form as to how OPRFHS and they, individually, should do the following:

- Q: What should OPRFHS be doing to improve the culture, climate, and behavior of institution?
- A:
1. Communicate, as it can always improve and it has a good foundation for a start.
  2. Have other opportunities during the day for students to share their opinions with the Board of Education.
  3. Be more interactive with staff members before issues arise about students. Hold staff accountable. FRE traditionally has failed Black boys for last the 25 years. Eliminate the system of the EAC.
  4. Where are the hardcore numbers for the EAC program? Why does it exist? What is the contrast of differences? Received output and input and activities, but traditionally what were the long and short term goals that were met and set. As a parent, concern was raised about two people who died and went through the program and five who were incarcerated.
  5. From a teacher perspective, it is important when enacting whatever policies, which the main issue is the lack of equity and eliminating things are optional. Even teachers accountability needs to be raised and increased. Fellow colleagues feel certain policies are optional, i.e., Restorative Justice. I feel I should be held accountable to close equity gaps in policies, i.e. take attendance, put in grades, etc.
  6. Professional development work in using the TESTA model. Ms. Stovall has a version in her proposal of equity and that could be explored. This work would focus on equity and Restorative Justice, peer-to-peer work in classrooms and it should not be tied to the evaluation of teachers, but teachers working together.
  7. Communicate more to security guards.
  8. Echo low-income student's needs. Work on cultural competency and equity

training. Make sure faculty is able to meet students in an appropriate way, and it is good for students to have equity training and conversations among themselves.

9. Communicate the same message in multiple messages in a variety of menus, reading, listening, etc.. Give students an opportunity to speak about race, culture and climate, and find vehicles to do that more and then listen to those voices.
10. Eradicate drugs, alcohol, and sex, which starts before students get to OPRFHS. What is OPRFHS expectation of African-American students? If they are not disruptive, and their performance level is below average, it is OK. That is not OK in their homes, and they need to be pushed to be at their absolute best level at all times. When a student is polished, everyone wants to award him/her. What about the student who needs to be polished?
11. Collaboration throughout the organization. Beyond that, name the true culture and climate. Lots of avoidance to name the culture and climate. Spend time debating things that are useful and helpful and the luxuries. How many meters the pool should be, but not what is needed in the building. Dead-end conversations occur. The true issues are not discussed.
12. Name race. The word equity is used but not race. Use it when a new program is created and challenge the continuance of it.
13. Keep students at the core of everything. All students at all times. Ensure equal access and opportunity for all, build a sustaining relationship to get rid of the barrier. Rip off the bandages, call what it is. If the focus is on equity, then focus on it.

Q: What would you do to improve the culture and climate?

1. Continue communication with students, parents, teachers and staff and what I can do to Improve
2. Tell students about things that they might not know about, supports
3. Hold myself accountable in regards to working on closing equity gaps in classrooms and in my scope.
4. If a full mentorship proposal were implement, I would be a mentor.
5. Listen and ask the students in my classes about their opinion of the culture and climate of the school.
6. The conversation has been about the swimming pool. It is an important community conversation and moving forward with different agenda items by January and keep driving that conversation about equity to meet low-income needs better.
7. Support OPRFHS for taking these actions, the administration, and the Board of Education. Suggestion: Review national evidence, project success, return on investment. Use of project-based approach to learning is highly effective in eliminating achievement gaps and more engagement. Lots of promise is Universal Design for Learning--it allows students to take ownership over their learning so that they can demonstrate their knowledge and skill in the way they are comfortable. When one leaves the teaching model and goes to the learning model, one has to take ownership at the university level and in their careers. Also, suggested was good teaching tied in with professional development and conformity of rules (National Equity Project) and appropriate pedagogy (work out of the University of Wisconsin).
8. Parent outreach has to be increased and more community events held. Sponsor community forums about what happens at the high school and what is going on in the community and nation at large. Significant issues are happening between the police and African-Americans, and OPRFHS could have forums on that with students, parents, and presenters.
9. Focus on students and teachers taking on the role of mentors, in addition to teaching. Target lower-level classes worked through the leadership class. When a teacher can tear down student barriers, students learn better.
10. OPRFHS should work on a few infrastructures to make peace circles happen.

If they could happen within each classroom, teachers would be establishing and solidifying safe places for students. The school asks students to go from one 48 minutes of concentration to another throughout the day with a 70-lb backpack. The school needs to set purpose and priorities for public education because it is creating citizens. The rule of this teacher's classroom is to be nice. Being late a minute or wearing a hat is not a problem. The school should focus more on creating citizens.

11. Raise the bar. A lower bar exists for African-American students. Increase communication between the high school and District 97. The high school should have a deeper and wider connection with elementary and middle schools to better prepare all students for the rigor of high school, starting in kindergarten. Everyone needs to make a difference in Oak Park.
12. Have a forum for feelings to be shared. Make sure all families have all of the information.
13. Acknowledge the difference in students because of race and income. Be bold, cannot walk through trigger warnings. This is a better place than CPS schools. Raise the expectations for all students and not just make OPRFHS a place where just traditional students are welcomed. Traditional white students are successful in Oak Park, and everyone should be open in the community. As a student, have an unbiased standard, hold everyone accountable and get other students involved.
14. Continue to be culturally responsible when I interact with all staff members, students, etc., understanding the environment and the students' needs and being true to myself.
15. Hold myself accountable and challenge myself to keep race on the table. Why there are successes, I have to name and identify the problems. Throwing on an initiative does not work. I continue to challenge and support every person on this.
16. Establish, support, and lead the work on equity, and to be a constant for equal access, support, and equity for all students. Provide adequate professional growth opportunities for the staff. Engage the students, faculty, and staff and define what equity means as it means something different for every individual depending on race. Model what I want us to be.

### **Future Meeting Dates and Exit Ticket**

The following committee dates are confirmed:

- Tuesday, August 23
- Tuesday, September 27
- Tuesday, October 11
- Tuesday, November 22

### **Additional dates are needed for the following weeks.**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> week of September
- 4<sup>th</sup> week of October
- 2<sup>nd</sup> week of November
- 2<sup>nd</sup> week of December

Ms. Kalmerton will resend the Doodle.

### **Visitor Comments**

George Bailey felt he had listened to this same conversation in 1998. It is a protracted struggle. The reports dating from 2003, 2015, and 2016 are interesting reading material as they contain much information. He felt the achievement gap had taken short shrift to things within the community. The discourse on the pool was important and grotesque when compared to what is at stake here. This is the tipping point regarding being sustainable as a group of people. If people are unwilling to talk about whiteness, nothing will happen. He has been married to a white woman for 48 years.

Dr. Spight was tired of doing the same and expecting a different outcome, the definition of insanity. Exceptionalism at OPRFHS is observed again. He thought this would talk about education in special education and trying to frame the work of the committee as it reflects on opportunity and mandate. Ends up being so little rewarded by what was witnessed. There are 15 to 20 notions of the framing of the work. Another Strategic Plan effort by a committee like this is not needed. OPRFHS is not unique. He hoped that Dr. Chandler and Ms. Saxman would help do the heavy lifting. This committee invested in a one-hour brainstorming session? Why? Why is the beginning of the framing of the work so close? Culture and climate are always an issue with schools like OPRFHS. Why not look at those experiences?

Fabian Prince, who moved to Oak Park last Saturday, runs charter schools in Chicago and Milwaukee. He was interested in the conversation and echo the comments of the last four speakers, as he was the father of a young African American boy and girl. His family moved to Oak Park because of its excellence of reputation; it was close to Chicago, and because he is concerned as a person who has done reform. It is the same language and discourse, and he feared for the destination mindset of young people. What is not spoken is what they think about when they come to school and what is offered and not offered. What is it that OPRFHS is doing differently? He appreciated the research-based information. He noted that suburban elementary schools were shrinking. The trend is becoming a floodgate of people who are undesirable, unhirable, and unemployable and statistically dragging people down. It is about active listening. He was interested in hearing and witnessing how programs are put together in a place that is resource rich.

#### **Adjournment**

At 8:30 p.m., Ms. Spivy moved to adjourn; seconded by Ms. Daniels. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.