

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

Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee
September 27, 2016

A Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee (CCB) meeting was held on September 27, 2016. Chair Dixon Spivy called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. in the Board Room. Committee members present were: Jennifer Cassell, Lincoln Chandler, Anthony Clark, Wendy Daniels, Melanie McQueen, Lindsay Moore-Fields, Dr. Joylynn Pruitt, Ralph Martire, Nathaniel L. Rouse, Cormac Warden, Kayla York, Sara Dixon Spivy, and Lee Williams.

Public Comment

Melanie McQueen announced that the theme of the next APPLE meeting was AIM HIGH. Its theme was the celebrating of reaching something higher Education. Representatives from Yale, Harvard, Stanford, and Brown Universities, etc., as well as representatives from various sororities and fraternities, would be present. In December, CCB representatives will be asked to speak.

Visitors

Carl Spight, George Bailey, and Burcy Hines, recorder.

Review Feedback and Current Agenda

CCB was formed in Spring 2016 to review and make recommendations to the district's equity policies and practices, particularly the Code of Conduct to comply with Illinois Senate Bill 100, The Code of Conduct was 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 with respect to discipline.

The Committee's norms were reviewed:

- 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

Discussion ensued about the 2003 OPRF Study, *The Learning Community Performance Gap*. The key discipline findings were that there is a strong hypothesis that many of the study's findings with respect to discipline still hold. Black students consistently represent less than 30% of the student body, and account for more than half of total offenses. Black students are far less likely than white students to avoid recording an offense, and far more likely to record multiple offenses. Black and White students charged with the same offense are likely to receive the same consequences; however, as noted above, Black students are more likely to be charged in general. Hispanic, Native American, and a subset of Asian students, (though not explicitly referenced in the 2003 study) will tend to trend with Black students. Culture is a reflection of institutional practices, built up over multiple years, and reflected in predictable

responses. Culture Vs. Climate. Culture is sometimes referred to as the “personality” of the school, whereas the Climate is the “mood” of the school. Us t Climate is more related to morale, which is more likely to vary from teacher to teacher, and from day to day. Historically, efforts that help boost morale without changing practice are ultimately not lasting because they don’t ultimate impact school culture. Efforts that affect cultural change ultimately require questioning practices and, possibly, belief systems.

There is a strong hypothesis that the study’s findings with respect to culture also still hold: Black students were found “less likely to feel safe and happy about school and classroom environments” and “less likely to feel happy about their teachers” and the persistence of performance gaps suggested two communities exist at OPRF - “one for White students that places them at ‘academic promise’, and one for African American students that places them ‘at academic risk’.”

The recommendations from the study called for institutional investment with direct relevance to discipline:

- Resources to determine effectiveness in reducing Code of Conduct infractions, with specific strategies for:
 - Strategies for reducing infractions committed by Black students
 - Strategies for reducing recidivism rates for Black students
 - Methods for measuring the effectiveness of strategies
 - Methods for enhancing the effectiveness of discipline teams
- Evidence-based research of all attendance system interventions

Recommendations from the study also called for institutional investment in several areas addressing OPRF climate and culture.

- Investigation of ways to enhancing positive interpersonal relationships between faculty and students
- Longitudinal study and joint advisory board to monitor academic success and seamless transition (with Districts 90 and 97)
- Parent development interventions and workshops with particular focus on African American students
- Support for campus organizations for African-American student success, development, networking, and mentoring
- Support for African-American Faculty Advisory Council to monitor programs targeted to support African-American students while affirming the collective responsibility of all faculty

The Committee’s collective efforts yielded a broad range of responses for consideration

- Responses were nearly evenly split between actions for OPRF and personal actions
- Responses ranged from very broad (“Practice RJ”) to quite specific (“Eliminate parent overrides”)
- Of the more specific responses, most focus on broad-based prevention of infractions, as opposed to targeted interventions and response

Discussion ensued about the report. How many of the *Learning Community Performance Gap and Blueprint* reports’ recommendations were implemented? Which ones? Why? The process, The administration did not know if all of those questions could be answered, because of the change in

administration. Dr. Pruitt noted that two DLT members were compiling a list of programs because the question was asked as to what was being done regarding equity.

Discussion ensued about deadlines. It had been the expectation that this committee would not be a one-year process and every year address equity issues. It is hoped that the committee can make recommendations to the Board of Education for a vote in April before the new board members are elected. Equity will be the key piece of the Board of Education's discussion. OPRFHS was able to modify its Code of Conduct to be in compliance with SB 100. The CCB wants the power to make a real change, and while it cannot make policy, three Board of Education members are on this committee, and Ms. Dixon Spivy anticipated that any recommendations would be adopted.

One member stated that OPRFHS has not had a good record before or after the 2003 report because it viewed infractions in terms of punishment. SB 100 is changing that. OPRFHS has been big on evidence research and has done many studies. In terms of positive faculty/student relationships, OPRFHS is making progress in adding clubs and activities and getting students engaged, but it has not been able to recruit and keep African-American teachers in the way it wants. District 97 and OPRFHS had an active program of recruiting students of color to the honors program, and it ended primarily because of a lawsuit. Conversations can no longer occur between teachers about who would be a good recruit for the honors program, Program Scholar, etc. OPRFHS has parental involvement. APPLE's history in the building has gone up and down, over the years and presently it is showing great promise. A big hole, however, is the African-American Advisory Committee. During one faculty member's five administrative tenures, each one handle things differently and things came and went. Another member commented that not having coordinated strategic bases with no defined end game is not the way to solve long-term intrinsic problems. The Board established a subcommittee at the Board level with specified goals in different areas, ensuring there is no statistical correlation between race and academic performance. AP is up to the skillset of the child; it is not because of race. The school should be looking at research-based practices in place across the country, and things of culture. Measurable would be seeing statistical data that the majority of students find it a welcoming environment. District 90 has a committee that has community members and board members; a recommendation was to have a standing committee to monitor the performance and hold the school accountable. The oversight committee has board members, superintendent, community, and principal and meets regularly to achieve the goals. Within OPRFHS ownership is lacking. Other comments from committee members included. 1) The assembly did more in one day than 1000 hours sitting on various committees, as it is about taking ownership. It is not all about quantitative. Is it about what can be done to build ownership? Often committees making decisions are white and female because they don't feel they belong or don't feel they are invited. Ownership means students and families do not feel they have ownership in Oak Park. One black family didn't go to block parties, because they did not feel they belonged.

One member commented about disparaging treatment in a couple of personal settings and said the issue is bigger than OPRFHS. It is a community-wide issue. Part of what people are experiencing as people of color is internal oppression. Sometimes the doors are open but historically people of color do not expect them to be open, and then there is the privilege piece.

Part of the work of this committee is to uncover the menagerie of things taking place and look at them qualitatively and quantitatively to see what needs to happen. Part of the idea behind this committee is to have action, and know what is effective and not effective. Dr. Pruitt stated that she would work to put in timeframes to look at benchmarks, program evaluations, etc. The goal is not to have the same conversation next year. Faculty, staff, administration and the Board of Education must be held accountable to get the work completed. When thinking about what is out there, ask:

- Does it have a theoretical basis?
- Are these outcomes that we see here consistent with the theory?

- Is the implementation consistent?
- Who has authority to make it right?

Ms. Blankemeier noted that when students left the assembly, they were surprised and impassioned about the issue. Everyone had an opinion, and that was the main point of the assembly. A friend of her had no idea that anything like this existed and now understand the frustration of being black in the system. Change is needed to move forward, but this is also about talking with students about having a basic awareness. Discussion ensued about the vigil that was held for the student who had been shot. It was described as a message of empathy, awareness, growth, and ownership. The format of the assembly in the school included people sharing their experiences, performances by Spoken Word, dancers, and it had a 100% positive rating from parents. Empathy is a key component.

Mr. Clark stated that everything has been said before and yet they stand in the same place. Nothing has changed since he graduated in 2001 and the levels of ownership have gotten worse since he has been a teacher. He expressed frustration and was considering resigning from this committee. He felt those people who do not have ownership should be targeted. Ms. Spivy stated, as a white female who was new to the committee, the Board of Education, and the school, she did not know what to do, and that was the purpose of this committee.

Ms. York reported that Success for All Youth had looked at the cost of what it means to come from OPRFHS. While she has lived in Oak Park since the sixth grade, she still feels as though she has no ownership. Taking action is important. Parents and schools are the mentors. Student groups need to enforce and show initiatives with classmates.

Mr. Clark stated that for him it was about capital. Race is the tool. The lack of resources is the issue. Ms. Hines encouraged learning about how APPLE started and the results it has had. Mr. Duffy did a major study on how it began at OPRFHS; before 1998 APPLE had its own room in the high school.

Mr. Williams said that based on conversations and experiences, he asked for honesty. Are they dressing up the “isms?” Racisms through the committees, studies, data, etc. Are attitudes of racism being dressed up and that is stopping the work? He believed that having the conversations and struggles were paying the price of integration. There is no end game. He was happy to hear Mr. Clark say this is where the conversation should go. Mr. Rouse and Mr. Clark both said some things that started down the path of attitude. It is being dressed up because of the talk about data. He wanted to talk about existing attitudes. It is the nature of this place and change. Not being from Oak Park or River Forest, he could see the changes are affecting those in this community. They are paying the price of integration. Oak Park has some resources and capital that would cause people to fight for their feelings. This is about attitude.

Mr. Martire quoted Winston Churchill who said "Lies, damned lies, and statistics." While correct in some ways, data is also a powerful way to get people who do not experience racism to understand that it exists and they should take efforts to change it. His organization uses data. He spoke about the number of African-American students children who live in poverty. Illinois relies on property taxes to fund its schools. For the last 25 years, \$1,500 less was spent on every African-American student than a white student. The data says academic attainment correlates to economic viability today more than at any other time. This disparity will show up in wage data. The wage data differentiation for African-American and whites has gotten worse by 197%. This is a way to show it exists and provides opportunity. It is what motivates people to action. An endgame is needed to show progress, or the system will not change, and this committee will exist in 20 years.

Ms. York believed in goal setting and fighting for equality, but it is important for students to have black mentors. Ms. McQueen never liked statistics, but stated that if one were tortured long enough, one would

confess to anything. If African-American students move up 3 points, it would cost \$40,000. That money should be mainstreamed. For her, the statistical part is separate from quality. Moving it just a little is not successful. Mr. Clark said that data did not build empathy. Equity and ownership are issues. Building equity with those who have resources and build empathy with those who have the advocacy within this committee. Having speakers at the assembly and the vigil made it personal. Ms. Fields Moore also stated that data would not change people's perspective on things. For those people who don't want to acknowledge issues, data will not make a difference. Mr. Martire stated that the personal story is a powerful way to reach audiences. But data motivates a different type of person. Seeing more African-Americans in leadership roles and mentorship roles is an evidence-based practice that has shown to improve the achievement of African-Americans over time. It is not anecdotal information. Some evidence-based practices that have been implemented in schools that made a difference in schools and made a better learning environment for all students, particularly for minority students. That is how one uses data. One has to know if the practices are as effective. A system has to be in place that allows one to measure effectiveness and, if not, change course, find a new way and change the current situation to make it better.

Ms. Daniels did not understand why there was a debate about one way versus another. Both have to be accomplished. Her husband is the type of person who wants research. She is more emotional about things, will be moved and give to one's cause. If not doing enough is being done on the emotional impact/outreach, then more needs to be done. Data is important. She read *Southside* by Natalie Moore, which is filled with data that helped her understand the communities and why they continue to be the way they are, and that is why both data and the personal touch is needed.

Ms. Hildner suggested getting a pattern of what the District has done and put the initiatives in the pattern; it would eliminate having to revisit what has already been done. That is the reason for having the same problems again and again.

The next meeting is October 12, 2016.

Dr. Pruitt stated that the Board of Education had asked her to look into equity, accountability, and the Strategic Plan. Educational equity is permeated in the Strategic Plan's core, but there are missing pieces. On September 29, a conversation will concur about the two Strategic Plans, common messages, and outcomes. The Board of Education will talk about the community's strengths, aspirations, equity, etc. Feedback will be sought as to where it wants to be at various times.

Reflecting on the conversation and hearing the passion and sense of freedom that people felt in saying what they were feeling was the start of empathy. That is the beginning of wanting to make a change and holding each other accountable. If the data points, quantitative or qualitative, are not known, people will not know the commitment. The members of this committee want to do something. This is a great conversation and actions will need to be put in place.

Adjournment

At 8:54 p.m., Ms. Dixon Spivy moved to adjourn; seconded by Ms. Daniels. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.