

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

**Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee**  
**November 15, 2016**

A Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee (CCB) meeting was held on November 15, 2016. Chair Dixon Spivy called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. in the Board Room. Committee members present were: Jennifer Cassell, Sheila Hardin, Naomi Hildner, Lincoln Chandler, Lindsay Moore-Fields, Mary Blankemeier, Melanie McQueen, Dr. Joylynn Pruitt, Nathaniel Rouse, Sara Dixon Spivy, Andrea Riles, Jonathan Weintraub, Wendy Daniels, Lee Williams, Qiana Carswell, Ralph Martire, and Gail Kalmerton Clerk of the Board.

Visitors: Albert Sye, Lita Wembley, Dr. Carl Spight, George Bailey, and Tanesha Pittman

**Visitor Comments**

Mr. Sye commended the committee for this work and he felt the conviction and the passion for the work from the members. The greatest challenge is to get this feeling into the classroom. Mr. Sye noted that he used to be the associate superintendent at OPRFHS.

**Minutes**

Ms. Spivy moved to approve the minutes of August 23 and September 27, 2016; seconded by Dr. Pruitt. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Reflections from the Last Meeting**

Despite multiple attempts at intervention over decades, racial inequities remain deeply embedded in OPRF culture

- The 2003 study and several subsequent studies indicate that racial gaps persist
- Recommendations point to a need for sustained institutional investments, with regular evaluation and clear accountability
- Lack of collective understanding regarding what has been attempted, what has/hasn't worked, and why

In a break from previous meetings, the committee had an open discussion on the state of racial equity at OPRF

- Many committee members shared personal experiences with racial bias on campus, and in the Oak Park community
- Taking action and building empathy vs. strategic planning and consulting data. In reality, we need both

**Timeline**

As a community, OPRF is taking actions to address equity on the whole

- Superintendent, Board focused on making accountability explicit in Strategic Plan

- APPL/CEEE Joint Statement on Equity submitted for Board review
- Draft Equity Statement under Board Consideration The challenge to our committee is to remain focused on seeking equity in addressing behavior and discipline
- Evaluating existing patterns of discipline and implementation of OPRF interventions (MENTA/PSS)
- The support of Mr. Robert Spicer has been secured, a nationally recognized expert on alternative approaches to discipline and necessary conditions for successful implementation and evaluation

**CCB TIMELINE FOR FALL 2017 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Committee generates ideas	Sep 2016
Ideas prioritized (Fall '17, Spr '18, etc)	Dec 2016
Fall '17 proposals developed	Jan 2017
Fall '17 proposals finalized; submitted as recommendations to BOE	Feb. 2017
Communication Plan Feb 2017	Fall '17
recommendations ratified by Board of Education Board of Education	April '17

Timeline

Next Meetings:

December 1	February 16
January 19 (potential conflict)	March 2
February 2	March 13

Committee members were reminded of the need to RSVP, as the committee is governed by the Open Meetings Act and requires a quorum in order to meet.

The Committee's work will not end in April, as this is ever changing work, and the BOE is required to have a formal committee meet at least once per year. As the Strategic Plan is revised, many actions will be folded into it, as well as measures of accountability.

Currently, the school addresses discipline and equity through professional developed centered on racial equity, which stems from Courageous Conversations about Race. OPRFHS has partnered with Pacific Education Group for 8 years and has had its own learning strands for the last five years. The goal was to in-service all faculty and staff in this work but what was not considered was mobility, changes, and the amount of professional development that is necessary. The anchor of this work is the 2-day workshop titled Beyond Diversity. The second phase is the learning strand related to racial equity, which meets on late arrival Wednesdays. Over the last 5 years, the District has tried to balance teachers and support staff and demographics so that conversations can occur in the building about race and equity. Beyond Diversity, work talks about racial disparities, inequities. It is a personal journey. The goal is to be comfortable talking about racial work, create a mindset so that we begin to develop a racialized lens before one speaks, acts, and going about the business of teaching and learning. The number of faculty and

staff who have completed this work is over 250. This year, 127 staff members participated. Ms. Hardin and Devon Alexander are the learning strand experts.

Ms. Hardin added that social-emotional learning asks teachers to do things differently than what teachers had done in the past. The primary focus is to expose and internalize. This is a tool that allows for healthy conversations about race. As a white woman, she did not have those feelings about race. She grew up in a loving home and some students have different environments. People have to learn to change the narrative and having healthy conversations is the starting place. Teachers are asked to use that tool throughout all other aspects of the discipline. She is mindful and is able to have healthy conversations and can racialize what happened between the teacher and the student. The District is asking how to deepen the work. All of the learning strands tie back to discipline.

Mr. Rouse's journey included writing a personal equity statement as follows.

Based upon my lived experiences as a Black male, I believe that the American educational system is broken and dehumanizes students of color by continuing to perpetuate the dominant narrative of systemic institutional racism. This means that students of color- in particular, Black males, are not afforded the same opportunities as their white counterparts based upon preconceived notions of the social construction of race.

As a leader for racial equity I must speak my truth, name and interrupt whiteness...even in times where politically and professionally those around me may differ or remain silent...in an effort to better engage, sustain, and deepen interracial dialogue about race and its impact on student access and achievement in the name of equity and equality for ALL students...but most important, the dying young Black male.

Participation in the Learning Equity Strand is mandatory. Most of the data is anecdotal. Mr. Martire suggested that while this program may be effective for one person, it may not be for another person. The District should consider having an alternative plan, one that can be assessed to see if it is working. Not all PD accomplishes all end games. Is this program sufficient to make a difference in the outcomes that are racially biased? In addition to the District's 5-year model, Courageous Conversations About Race are occurring after school and allowing people to strengthen the dialogue. Ms. Hardin noted that there are qualitative and quantitative responsibilities. The first group to go through the Equity Learning Strand were then the racial lens in the other learning strands. One faculty member stated that the District was poised to do this again.

The District is poised to survey the students again, as well. Dr. Pruitt spoke with the assessment person about doing a survey and the timing has to be correct. A need exists to understand what is already occurring. How does one know what is being implemented and what time is being devoted to it? How does the vision manifest itself? Ms. Blankemeier noted that students do not understand why they are taking a survey and do not take answering the questions seriously. Ms. Hildner stated that PD does not exist in a vacuum and after every PD session, feedback is provided. However, one needs to remember that feedback has to be weighed as valuable as data and could be turned into data. Mr. Martire stated that

everything needs to be viewed as data. One member felt that Beyond Diversity would be beneficial for all staff.

**CCB Mission statement:**

Ms. Spivy drafted the following mission statement for CCB and asked for feedback.

“The Culture, Climate, and Behavior Committee provides annual recommendations to the Board of Education on improving equity and eliminating racial disparities in the discipline process so each student feels welcome and supported by the Oak Park and River Forest High School community. The committee makes its recommendations with the understanding that a sense of acceptance and belonging is imperative to fostering social-emotional learning and intellectual growth.

Ms. Spivy noted that the statement would be emailed to all so that they could provide feedback.

Discussion ensued about what things the committee would like to have deeper discussions about relative to its charge. Mr. Spicer will attend the December 1, 2016, meeting to talk more about Restorative Justice. One member pointed out that restorative justice is not a philosophy; it is infrastructure and the District must be willing to pay for it.

Ms. Blankemeier reported that students and staff do not feel as if they have an avenue for implementing what they have learned about, i.e., Restorative Justice, etc.: they have no power or voice. Mr. Rouse invited those passionate students to whom she referred to the next CCB meeting when Mr. Spicer will present on Restorative Justice. He will give a good overarching view and will be able to shepherd OPRFHS if it were to become a Restorative Justice school. Too, everyone needs to agree on a definition of restorative justice.

Ms. McQueen noted that the common thread amongst successful K-12 schools is strong parent involvement. Parents and students should feel welcome, and they should be part of the mission statement. Culture and climate affect the behavior of the students.

Ms. Riles stated all students should be invited to attend the meetings and she stated that members of security should be involved. Students have felt reluctant because they felt the conversation would be over their heads. Students would be more comfortable in an open forum. Ms. Spivy suggested having a town hall-type meeting in the February timeframe.

One member wanted to explore deeply the behavior outside of school to understand what is causing the behavior; it could be that things are not right at home. Mr. Rouse added that because there is a different reporting mechanism for data, the discipline report will come first to CCB and then to the BOE.

Mr. Martire suggested exploring Project-based learning from Universal Design for Learning to get at the discipline problem; it makes students excited to learn. He suggested that the administration brings things for the committee to review as they were the “boots on the ground” and the administration and the faculty would be the implementers of programs.

Ms. Carswell stated that they don't know what they don't know and, therefore, there is a lack of ownership, a lack of being proud and being a part of it. Twenty-seven percent of students are not involved in extracurricular activities. What are they doing? How are they tied to the school? How are they tied to the school and community? Are they tied in with the Chamber of Commerce? Student voice is important to what matters.

Ms. Daniels said that the parent voice is missing. Many times that is something that is what is missing in public education and unless one has a principal that begs the parents to be involved or the parents insist that they are part of it. This was her sixth year at the high school and the parent voice is missing unless one is on Citizens' council or P4SS or APPLE or Boosters or Applause, but that is the same group of parents. Many parents are not getting the communication. She just joined the Facebook Group 2020 that day.

Dr. Pruitt was at a Minority Student Achievement Network meeting earlier that day at which superintendents from the around the country spoke about the lack of student and parent voices and the need to have both of them at the table. Some of the recommendations to improve these voices were 1) share the list of as to how parents are engaged, 2) hold meetings out of school, 3) provide transportation, 4) set up an opportunity for businesses for the superintendent to talk with neighbors, etc. Dr. Pruitt and Ms. Sullivan will do listening tours, and look at social media sites that parents utilize, i.e., Foxer, and perhaps create different groups. Ms. McQueen stated that parents are looking for a timely response to questions (within a week, 24 hours) from the school. That was a cry for understanding/guidance, so the ad hoc happened. If parents are not getting the information from the school, they will join a social media group to get the information and that can turn negative. Social media takes away from interpersonal communication. She suggested starting with returning emails and phone calls. That is the expectation and if it is not happening, the response will be unfavorable. Also, people need to feel welcome when they come into the building. Regarding diving deeper into discipline, if a student is tardy, the school needs to impact what is happening and that conversation can only be had, one on one. It is a both/and. That needs to be looked at from the individual and social media.

Ms. Daniels suggested that food should be offered as an incentive to get people to participate. Often people come directly from work and do not have time to eat dinner. Ms. Cassell added that the high school could partner with other organizations. The Village of Oak Park has Dinners in Dialogue and the Village wants to partner with the high school about equity issues.

Discussion ensued about the focus/purpose of the Board-sponsored parent groups, i.e., Boosters, APPLAUSE!, Citizens' Council, APPLE, and P4SS as they differ greatly along demographic lines. They all have separate purposes, yet they may want to discuss the same things. On January 19, there may be a joint parent group meeting as there is an intention to get more aligned with each other and not be as duplicative. This may conflict with a scheduled CCB meeting.

Mr. Williams stated that the community voice must be part of the collaboration. Communication is paramount. Information needs to be shared about what things are available. Everyone must be resolved to working with other adults and not stepping on someone's ego. Community groups do want to help, but

the school says “we got it.” Several members noted that people are talking about racial equity, but the subject is so big and political that implementation of anything is difficult. More communication would be beneficial.

Ms. McQueen reminded CCB members that they were invited to participate at the APPLE meeting on December 6.

**Adjournment**

At 8:22 p.m., on Tuesday, November 14, 2016, Ms. Hardin moved to adjourn; seconded by Ms. Daniels. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

Submitted Gail Kalmerton  
Clerk of the Board