

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

Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee
January 18, 2018

A Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee (CCB) meeting was held on January 18, 2018. Chair Cassell called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. in the Board Room. Committee members present were: Jennifer Cassell, Greg Johnson, Dr. Jackie Moore, Naomi Hildner, Sara Dixon Spivy, Laura Hardwicke, Ralph Martire, Melanie McQueen, Nathaniel Rouse, Wendy Daniels, Gina Harris, Jonathan Weintraub, Dave Walksler and Lee Wade. Also present was Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors: Lincoln Chandler, consultant and John Duffy of Committee for Equity and Excellence in Education

Public Comments

John Duffy noted that he thanked Dr. Devon Alexander for the serious work he had done on Courageous Conversations and Beyond Diversity. The teacher racial consciousness is a prelude to how students think and act. He hoped that the Care Research Teams could bring their action work to the public. He thought this was not a prelude to racial equity but paralleled two other changes: adaptive and technical change. Adaptive change must follow the parallel path of technical change. Technical change is important if done right. Skilled teachers are needed. The District has committed to looking at structures that work against students. The action research teams are looking at how race is affecting instruction. Behavior and culture is not something separate from teaching and curriculum organization. EOS does that well. The all-freshman honors program is another venue in the Strategic Plan. He was sorry to hear that there was no more Instruction Committee and thus the CCB must look at the culture and organization of the high school.

Approval of Minutes

Dr. Moore moved to approve the meeting minutes of November 2, 2017 and December 19, 2017; seconded by Mr. Johnson. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Small Group Presentations

Staff Innovation Faculty Staff Voice and Vision

(Sheila Hardin, Gina Harris, Greg Johnson, Naomi Leach, Lee Williams)

The recommendations of this work group were to:

- Conduct a restorative justice inventory as to which classrooms are already engaged in it
- Build a working definition of restorative justice for OPRFHS
- Provide schoolwide restorative justice training and implement restorative justice practices
- Recruit building leaders to lead culture and climate work
- Breakdown school hierarchy related to faculty and staff race and staff positions
- Offer school-wide book study
- Recruit and retain diverse faculty and staff by offering additional support to make employees feel Welcome and included

This workgroup felt it important to create the framework on how OPRFHS does things--a definition. A cohort of interested people in the building could give more skills and training on microaggressions. The group felt that restorative justice training would be lost on those who were ill-equipped to have conversations about race.

The group proposed looking to people already engaged in Restorative Justice and then bridging them with others so that both could see that it is a movement and move from there.

The group felt that the book studies could be more self-evaluative, i.e. what are the District's beliefs and ideas and how can the bias be shifted to attract new teachers. A book that was suggested was "Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Science." It is relevant to conversations about race and how to have good conversations rather than uncomfortable conversations.

Mr. Johnson added that the conversations focused on Restorative Justice Work and ways to build that and educate themselves. The District linked up with IBARG and hosted a training for 10 to 12 staff to consider these ideas for getting to the end result. Restorative Justice is not just important to the support and training of the staff, it is also important for recruitment of a diverse staff and the retention of staff. Conversations have begun with the Human Resources Department about developing a plan to do that. OPRFHS looks seriously at retention of staff and led by faculty member Bill Young. Adding support staff to this endeavor is being considered and Mr. Young is open to this. Conversations have also occurred about being more deliberate and purposeful in working with a group of teachers to define the District's values, how to work together, and how to hold people accountable, etc.

The workgroup also spoke about people of color not being clear that OPRFHS was "their" place and the desire to provide additional support so that they felt more welcome and included.

Another suggestion was to reconstitute the Faculty Handbook and include an explanation as to what it means to be an OPRFHS teacher, define good practice, and how the District wants educators to positively move forward.

Student and Family Voice and Belonging

(Naomi Hildner, Dr. Jackie Moore, Ryan Moore, Annie Riles, Nate Rouse, David Walksler)

The recommendations of this work group were to:

1. Create welcoming environment for students
2. Improve Welcome Center space
3. Revamp activities fair
4. Reinstate student lock-ins
5. Feature student clubs/activities on TV screens outside of the student activity center
6. Provide opportunities for families to access Kettlestrings Café
7. Rewrite dress code

This workgroup talked about having a welcoming environment for students, reconfiguring the mornings, the Welcome Center; student participation and suggestions for improving and/or expanding participation in extracurricular.

Ms. Hildner had researched other schools' entrances because there seemed a consensus that entering OPRFHS is unwelcoming, because of the closed glass doors. It spoke nothing of the students. The entrance felt "institutional" and prison-like. She provided pictures of schools that were comparable to OPRFHS' space that had more welcoming feelings, i.e. Homewood Flossmoor. Those pictures can be found on the CCB's website at:

https://intranet.oprfhs.org/board-of-education/board_meetings/Culture%20Climate%20and%20Behavior/Packet/Student%20Achievement,%20Community%20and%20Aesthetic.pdf

Other ideas that were highlighted that could seemingly be incorporated easily:

- 1) A desk in the student center.
- 2) Softening the colors.
- 3) A whole wall of students on TV that loops and students can see themselves, possibly on the wall between the north and south cafeteria.

Ryan Moore, while not in attendance, had provided a report to Dr. Moore. He surveyed some students on how they were welcomed in the morning. Students receive comments about IDs and hats. Students did not want to have greeters, because they may not be having a good day and may not be receptive. Mr. Walksler is working to support his staff in these areas as well. What they did want was school leadership to be present between 7:40 and 8:00 a.m.

Ryan Moore felt that all staff should be celebrated, i.e. buildings and grounds, security, food service, etc. Students can build relationships with them. The school community was not able to pay tribute to Joe Beard, SST personnel, who passed away suddenly. He suggested having shoutouts and using personal names.

Ms. Riles was also not in attendance, but she had provided a report regarding student engagement. One aspect of that is the activity fair which is now held in the gym and is poorly attended. One suggestion was to open up the doors between the two lunch rooms for students to see who is participating, make it festive, relaxed and allow those involved to show off their activities. In the past, often the person in charge of the group is not there. Discussion ensued about having the fair outside on the mall in good weather. This would be another opportunity for freshman and sophomores to go outside. Music bands could play. A loop on the TV outside of the Student Activity Center could highlight one activity per month. There is no cost to these suggestions. Another suggestion was to showcase the activities over two days because of the large number of activities. Freshmen attend an activity fair at night where the sponsors are present, the sports teams are present, cheerleaders are present and it is a welcoming activity.

Another suggestion was to bring back the overnights at the school, similar to Snowball. Previously they were well attended and teachers volunteered.

Another suggestion was promote baking contests, etc. in Kettlestrings on the fourth floor and allow the families to participate in those types of activities.

Because of the inconsistencies in the dress code, Students Advocating for Equity (SAFE) spoke to the faculty and staff on the January 7 Institute Day about this. Some of the conversations were difficult for the adults to hear, as the students were not coached on how to present the pros and cons. Currently, SAFE is working on the Oregon Now dress code, which is a universal nonbinary dress code for the world. SAFE will be presenting it to different student groups and bringing forth to the committee. Opportunities to provide student and family voice continue.

It might be beneficial for counselors to ask what club they are joining.

Student Tardiness

(Jennifer Cassell, Laura Hardwicke, Jonathan Weintraub, Aliyah Young)

The recommendations of this work group were to:

1. Assemble a group of faculty to create professional development plan related to consistent application of tardy policy and enhancing classroom management. Use positive words to remind students to be timely.
2. Create student-made public service video on being to school and class on time and what that would

- look like, i.e. appropriate dress, etc.
3. Incorporate questions regarding reasons for student tardiness into school climate survey
 4. Use student ambassadors to help freshmen during the first week of school get to class on time
 5. Increase number of HERO pass scanners available during school day
 6. Ensure countdown clocks in hallways are properly operating

The workgroup discussed current policy and amendments, both recent and historical. Each member of the group did their own research. Tardy data was collected by Lincoln Chandler and is posted on the CCB webpage. It was clear that student tardiness does matter. Forty-two percent of OPRFHS students were tardy at least once and 80% of them were discipline related to detentions. Tardiness is a gateway issue. Racial disparities show up in the tardiness data. The number of African-American tardies is only 25%, but that number accounts for half of the students with 5 or more tardies. The workgroup is looking at “late-to-school” versus “late-to-class” infractions. First-period tardies (“late-to-school” are consistent across races. However, “late-to-class” is where the disparities are apparent. If the tardy policy is not applied consistently, it is unfair to African-American students.

Tardies increase 20% to 25% on late Wednesdays as compared to Tuesdays or regular Wednesdays (90 versus 120 tardies). Transportation is a problem for some. While the bulk of the students are late only once, a smaller group of students are never late to school. This committee is the right forum for the discussion about the racial disparities and a larger policy issue.

Mr. Walksler noted that he had reallocated SST officers at different locations and hoped that would change that data. He also added SST posts on the first and third floor.

One member noted that sometimes middle school students are not used to having consequences for being late. The focus of this work will be on students who have 2 to 8 tardies with a lens on racial inequity. HERO is not creating racial disparity; it is how it is implemented. It may also be a classroom management issue. Teachers are asked to greet students in front of their doors as it is more welcoming, safe, and it creates more of a community.

While the main problem discussed was not having enough security staff to give out passes, the question was ask if other staff could give out passes.

Community Voice and Connections

(Wendy Daniels, Ralph Martire, Melanie McQueen, Dr. Joylynn Pruitt-Adams, Sara Spivy, Lee Wade)

The recommendations of this work group were to:

1. Visit places of worship to reach a broad cross-section of the community
2. Increase use of video and social media to engage students, highlight student voice, and educate community
3. Partner freshman parents with parents of older students
4. Survey parents/community about effectiveness of school communication
5. Offer workshops related to general topics of interest to adults in the community
6. Offer additional or differently structured family visitation days
7. Reach out to student advisory group to inquire about increased parent engagement
8. Hold regular town hall meetings
9. Consider ways to improve school response to public comment
10. Encourage use of home visits by counselors

Ms. Dixon Spivy felt that there were two pieces of community voice: 1) the greater community of parents and 2) the District as a whole to be served. How can the District engage parents more organically, be more inviting, engender trust so that the community trusts that districts being made?

People felt that reaching out to the community by having administrators visit churches after worships would be a way to interact with people where they were.

With regard to videos, a suggestion was to play “72 questions” where one person would be highlighted in the school and they would be asked questions through the day. It would be fun for the students to see, learn from, and share via the school’s TV station, etc. Sharing positive videos about the work being accomplished would be beneficial. While websites like Facebook are available, it is more visually pleasing to hear and see a person talking about something. District 90’s board president highlights things from the board meeting via a video. Phones can now take videos, so it would not take any more time or equipment.

Another suggestion was to offer workshops to adults on topics of interest to them, as the high school is a community place; it is not just a high school. Classes could be offered on reentering the workforce, health issues, Excel software, parenting, a Saturday resume writing course, understanding phones and the Internet for grandparents, etc.

Mr. Martire noted that District 90 has changed the format of its meetings. They are forums on a particular topic, i.e., testing, and 75 to 100 parents attend. It is structured differently. It is interactive and the Board responds to questions. All taxing authorities did a survey and over half responded that they wished there was more townhall-type of forums on topics of interest. Forums are a good way to do outreach and get more participation.

Discussion ensued. Mr. Wade noted that he was a blended family now. His daughters graduated in the late 80’ and early 90’s and they “don’t get it.” Now he has 2 grandsons. These ideas will help develop consistencies throughout their four years at the high school.

Dr. Moore stated that she had seen former counselor Catherine Marshall who started talking about her work at the high school and she felt home visits were paramount.

Ms. McQueen noted that tardies are similar to other schools for the same reasons. She congratulated the idea of making the school more welcoming. While the idea of using frosted glass and paws on the glass was suggested, it might be a safety issue. Counselors should create a culture of expectation by saying that students need to belong to a club or activity. It was noted that during freshman orientation, all PSS Teams do strongly speak about participation and students needing to be part of the community. It will be interesting to see the results after four years.

With regard to book reads, Ms. Hildner suggested having a book-of-the-month club on various subjects in the Little Theatre and inviting the whole community. Ms. McQueen suggested adding an element of fun and going for the title of the “largest book community.”

These recommendations will be discussed at the next CCB meeting. If anyone has any questions, they should send them to Ms. Kalmerton.

Adjournment

At 8:05 p.m., Dr. Moore moved to adjourn; seconded by Ms. Hildner. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.