

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

**Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee**  
**March 15, 2018**

A Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee (CCB) meeting was held on March 15, 2018. Chair Cassell called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. in the Board Room. Committee members present were Jennifer Cassell, Greg Johnson, Dr. Jackie Moore, Sheila Hardin, Naomi Hildner, Aliyah Young, Ryan Moore, Naomi Leach, Sara Dixon Spivy, Laura Hardwicke, Melanie McQueen, Andrea Riles, Wendy Daniels, Jonathan Weintraub, Lee Williams, and Lee Wade. Also present was Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

**Visitors:** Lincoln Chandler, consultant, Melyiah Syrai, Tessa Baielli, Holly Scott, Ryan Napue, Karin Grimes, students and community members.

**Public Comments**

Ms. McQueen, co-president of APPLE, announced that APPLE is awarding a scholarship of \$500 to students. The requirements are 1) a letter of acceptance from the college, 2) an unofficial transcript and 3) an essay. The deadline date is April 1, and the awardee will be named at the May APPLE meeting. She encouraged all students to participate.

**Approval of Minutes**

Dr. Moore moved to approve the meeting minutes of February 20 and March 1, 2018; seconded by Mr. Williams. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Discussion of Small Group Recommendations**

Student Tardiness Report

**Recommendation 1:** OPRF will reduce racial disparities in its student tardy data, which shows that African American students are overrepresented in the “late to class” and “five or more” tardies categories.

Action step 1: Assemble a cohort of interested staff to examine the tardy and excused absence policies through an equity lens and to provide recommendations to the Board of Education by April 2019 for revising these policies to reflect OPRF’s mission and to ensure equitable application.

**Recommendation 2:** OPRF will research the root causes of student tardiness and actively work to reduce student tardiness through positive and consistent messaging about the importance of being in class and being on time.

Action step 1: In the 2018-19 school year, create and release a student-made video addressing the importance of being in class and on time and providing tips on navigating the school’s busy halls during passing periods.

Action step 2: Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, incorporate questions into the school’s annual climate survey inquiring about the reasons for student tardiness.

Action step 3: By June 2019, OPRF administration will draft and distribute a schoolwide statement setting out the district’s expectations surrounding student tardiness, absences, and creation of a positive learning environment that values instructional time.

**Recommendation 3:** OPRF will enhance the operational aspects of its tardy system to facilitate a consistent and equitable application of the tardy policy and the use of HERO tardy passes.

Action step 1: Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, increase the number of functioning HERO scanners available during the school day.

Discussions ensued. A question arose about Recommendation #1. Had it already been completed? And, it read like a mission statement. In defense of the recommendation, all of the staff in the building do not know the attendance policy and, as such, a solid foundation is needed to address excused absences, unexcused absences, tardies, etc. about 1) racial disparities and 2) how students are being treated. Racial disparities appear in the data. Why? Is it because students of color are or are not getting excused absences? Mr. Chandler stated that changing the word “unexcused” to “excused” would make the action step more specific. Another member felt the Board of Education should be the entity to consider this recommendation. Because OPRFHS has not been able to eliminate the racial disparity over a long period, one member felt that Recommendation #1 should be front and center and the subject of evaluations, and a policy change so that over the long term there are no discrepancies by race. The analysis of data highlighted the trends. How the data is used is important.

One member felt that students should have a voice in Recommendation No. 2 via a forum/conversation with an organization such as SAFE so that the student voice could be heard. The administration will be asked to explore the best venue for collecting this feedback. A suggestion was made to add “with students” after “positive and consistent messaging.” Another suggestion was to include parents in the recommendation so that they could talk about what is happening in their homes. African-American and FRL students and parents need to be part of the conversation.

One member noted that students are not engaged in their classes because of something external to the school. Sometimes students have no incentive to be on time and have said “I don’t enjoy the class,” “the class is too challenging,” or “this is not my class.” This member felt that much of the conversation will be with teachers about engaging their students.

It was suggested that the survey results in Action Step 2 be compiled in the fall so that actions can be recommended by second semester.

Because some of the current recommendations dovetail with those of last year, Ms. Cassell will consider incorporating those from last year into the recommendations for this year.

#### Community Voice and Connections.

1. We recommend that the Superintendent and other administrators/staff and Board Members participate in regular "Town Hall" meetings held either at the high school or other places in the community, such as the three middle schools or the library.
2. We recommend that the Superintendent and other administrators/staff and/or Board Members request an audience with the various places of worship in the community, at a time/day that works best for the places of worship, in order to share what's going on at the high school/obtain feedback from the community.
3. We recommend that OPRFHS form a student advisory committee to assist in determining ways to reach the community
4. We recommend that OPRFHS enact more family-friendly/community policies for meetings/events at the school, such as earlier notice for Parent Visitation Day, an additional Parent Visitation Day in the Spring (or if just one, schedule for the spring instead), videotaping events at the school and posting on the website for

parents/guardians who are unable to attend; professional development/educational classes offered at the high school (such as partnership with Triton, COD, etc., but not limited to that).

Discussion ensued. District 90 now hosts 3 or 4 town hall meetings per year and attendance has been between 75 and 100 people at each meeting. The subjects have included standardized testing, device utilization (screen time), how parents can positively be engaged, and equity. These meetings are dialogues with the community and the D97 board, expert faculty members, and the administration. Because River Forest is a relatively significant conservative worldview membership and the residents may not be as comfortable with devoting resources to equity, District 90 educated its community on why equity is important with an outside expert leading the discussion. The issues have been relevant to the community's everyday lives or the children's lives or about important issues for the board. The topics vary from year to year. It was suggested that Dr. Pruitt-Adams could host one either at OPRFHS or at the middle schools. It was suggested that either Dr. Pruitt-Adams, Mr. Johnson, or Mr. Rouse could give presentations at places of worship as well.

About Recommendation #3, a suggestion was made that the leadership of current clubs be used as conduits, rather than implementing another student advisory group. This conversation could happen annually.

About Recommendation #4 can begin immediately. A suggestion was made that the timeline and accountability pieces be included with this recommendation.

#### **Faculty and Staff Voice and Innovation**

1. Build a working definition of restorative practices for OPRFHS. Conduct a restorative justice inventory as to what is currently happening in educational spaces. Identify a cohort of interested teachers/staff to study and explore how restorative practices can be further utilized at OPRFHS.
2. Recruit and retain diverse faculty and staff by offering additional support to make employees feel welcome and included. This would include:
  - Development of racially conscious hiring protocols.
  - Reviewing our new teacher/staff orientation to build upon its strengths and provide explicit information and instructions on faculty/staff supports.
  - Examine ways to break down hierarchy related to faculty and staff positions. An example of this would be to investigate the intersectionality between race and the hierarchy of the positions.
3. School-wide book study – there is no way to mandate this unless it is part of our current professional development. There is a current book study occurring within certified and (some) non-certified staff in our PD plan. We are studying Robin DiAngelo's "What does it Mean to be White?" A community book study would not be part of our current plan. \*\*This is information for CCB and not a recommendation to move forward. We included this as an explanation/answer to a previous question.

Discussion ensued. While the District has hiring practices, the administration felt it could do a better job in making its systemic, which it is actively pursuing and is ongoing. While a teacher and the administration collaborate on a new-teacher/staff orientation, a "think tank" has not been formally identified. A suggestion was to include division heads in this "think tank." Exit interviews with faculty are not being conducted consistently. An African-American faculty cohort does exist at OPRFHS whose purpose is to support each other, build camaraderie and help with Black Heritage events, celebrations, etc.

While offering to go into more detail about the professional development (PD) on racial equity work being conducted through the building at a later time with the students, Ms. Hardin explained that by next year all faculty, staff, and administration will have attended a 2-day Beyond Diversity Program put on by Pacific Education Group (PEG). Other PD about racial equity includes: 1) A Racial Equity Learning Strand lead by teachers, 2) TCT Work on late arrival days, 3) and full day PDs. While teachers collectively had not read the recommended books during PD opportunities, they do read things individually to intensify their own understanding. Next year, this process will transfer to the classroom. PD has been developed for the next five

years. Because of the work that has already occurred on racial equity, no one in the building is surprised when asked the question, “What does race have to do with it?” Equity work is now expected. Racializing a decision is no longer shocking. That has been a mind shift. Normed conversations about race are expected. Ms. Hardin continued that while people did not want to do book studies, individual departments did about race because of necessity. Ms. Hardin suggested removing Action #3. Teachers have had a 5-years of PD to give them the protocols to have healthy conversations about race so that the conversation does not automatically go to a place of defense. Mr. Rouse added that people struggle with this work because it addresses systemic issues. He, as principal, has his own journey in this regard. Racial consciousness within the building may be the trigger for microaggressions and unintended consequences.

Dr. Moore felt a disconnect was occurring with the work that is happening with the staff and the daily experiences of the students. She questioned where the prescribed PD was working because students were not seeing it in the classroom and felt assaulted daily. Everyone needs to be held accountable and to make safe spaces for students. Ms. Riles stated that it is difficult to hold people accountable because no policy says if someone is being racially insensitive, OPRFHS may not be the place for them. While the responsibility to better oneself is up to the individual, what happens if he/she do not? Teachers who have gone through the training may continue to treat students the same way in their spaces because nothing prevents them from doing so. Mr. Williams stated that after people are hired, it is difficult to say “you are a racist.” He suggested having more adept hiring protocols that emphasize the characteristics that OPRFHS expects of its employees.

The question was asked what process is used for intervention when micro or macro aggressions occur. What happens to the adults in the building that break the rules or the code? How often does a student or faculty/staff member report such actions? Who are the teachers who interacted with these students on a daily basis? If the students were 80% of color, that would provide concrete information.

As a teacher, Ms. Hildner believed that one of the most powerful tools is the Beyond Diversity Training and suggested that students may also benefit from it. Ms. Hardin informed the group that a student version is available. Ms. Hildner continued that what D'Angelo deals with mostly is a white person who does not realize he/she is doing something wrong, triggering something, or, in some way, acting racist. Thus, the reaction is that he/she will say he/she is not a racist. It is not about getting away from something; it is feeling that one is doing the right thing and is not racist. That is the work that needs to be done primarily with white faculty and staff. Part of this racial work with faculty would be valuable to have students who feel they have experienced racial inundations or triggers to talk to faculty during PD time. Ms. Hardin objected to the writing of professional development during the CCB meeting because it could be misinterpreted as bashing teachers.

Dr. Moore was concerned that students had nowhere to share or register their negative experiences and have them investigated. Students felt those experiences were being discounted or that the experiences were unintentional. Whether something is intentional or not, it affects. She continued that it was about making sure that the power dynamic was understood and to not wait for training to be the only way students are allowed to state their experiences on a daily basis to inform the process.

Ms. Hardin reiterated that the students had asked about professional development and the conversation had turned to talking about the firing or the tracking of teachers, which is not the purview of this committee, as it went beyond the details in the recommendation being discussed. Ms. Riles responded that teachers have said things to students they should not have said and they have no one to tell and that teachers continue to say things to students that seem racist, and they still work at OPRFHS.

In reviewing the student voice recommendations, Ms. Cassell stated that this needs further contemplation and that a recommendation from last year was to have an ombudsman person for students go to or facilitate peace circles. Dr. Moore had hoped that the CCB meetings could be viewed as a place for discussion and to inform the recommendations and not to disparage but to allow people to speak honestly about the recommendations to

move the school forward. Ms. Cassell stated that Ms. Harris would lead CCB members through a peace circle experience to open up this discussion and to refine the recommendations.

Any additional questions should be forwarded to Ms. Kalmerton.

### Student and Family Voice and Belonging Group

#### Student Voice Recommendations-

*“I belong here. I come here to learn and feel accepted.”*

#### **1. Restructure Student Activity Fair-**

Currently Student Activity Fair is held in one of the gyms. Tables are set up for various clubs and students are allowed to get information during their lunch periods. The event is sparsely attended as most students don't have or take time during lunch to leave cafeteria.

- Create Planning Committee comprised of Student Activities Director and student and sponsor representatives to:
  - Design a festive, inclusive activity fair similar to those on college campuses.
  - Create an event that showcases student groups and allows performances, exhibits and time for interested students to talk to group participants.
    - § Venue options-
    - § Outdoor mall during all lunch periods- Music, cookout, display tables
    - § Combine space of two cafeterias-
    - § Will allow better flow for students to learn about clubs and activities and see participation across grade levels. Typically two cafeterias are separated with Fr/Soph in one and Jr/Sr in other. Removing wall for this event can foster school spirit.
- 2. **Review current clubs for duplication and encourage collaboration of clubs with similar missions.**
  - Decrease student and sponsor fatigue as many students belong to several clubs most of which meet weekly.
  - Strengthen visibility and capacity of clubs to allow for greater participation.
- 3. **Celebrating All Of Our Students' Talents-**
  - Promoting more student activities-
    - Have choral performances, debate, plays, spoken word recorded and shown on monitors outside student activity center and lunchroom.
  - Increase scope of Spirit Assemblies, which are typically for athletics.
  - Provide Student activities other than formal dances-
    - Screen on the Green-Movie night for students
    - Return of MORP's
    - Lock-Ins
- 4. **Welcoming Environment**
  - Redesign Welcome Center- See attached
  - Create appealing spaces for families and visitors that feel more personal and less institutional.
  - Change the tone of morning-
    - Have building leadership presence at three entrances of student arrival. Want the first faces our students see to be educational leaders instead of security staff. Students and families want our school to feel like a school.
    - “We're scholars not suspects.”

- Provide Customer Service and restorative practices training for Safety/Security Staff
  - o Foster sense of community,
  - o Relationship building
  - o Positive environment

### Family Engagement and Connection

1. Increase opportunities for families to be a part of school community.
  - o Promote family centered activities.
    - Kettlestrings Café-
      - Cooking Classes/Demonstrations
      - Family Dinners
    - Family Game Night
2. Support Family Outreach Coordinator’s efforts to promote family engagement.
3. Develop “Speaker Series,” modeled after those at Glenbard West and ETHS on issues related to school, family, adolescent development
4. Book Club -Wide-ranging topics 2-3 times per year

Discussion ensued on these recommendations. Some clubs may not want to merge with another club and the question was asked if it would be optional or mandatory. Even though two clubs may have the same mission (MSAN, SAFE, and BLU), not everyone wants to be together. The response was that it would be encouraged. The administration stated that the Stipend Review Committee should review combining clubs. More visibility of the clubs should be encouraged.

One member felt the fee structure of dances should be reviewed.

### **Next steps.**

Ms. Cassell and Mr. Chandler will refine some of the key points in the recommendations. Ms. Cassell and Dr. Pruitt-Adams will present the draft recommendations to Faculty Senate on April 4. Mr. Rouse will include information regarding PTAC and information to be included in the Student Handbook, i.e., peace circles, etc., at the next meeting.

The goal is to present the recommendations to the Board of Education at its regular May meeting.

Discussion ensued about how the proposed recommendations would be tracked if approved. Will this committee monitor them? Will accountability metrics be put in place? Will the committee make recommendations every year? Last year’s recommendations were to have been level-setting and absent their implementation, the committee’s current recommendations are being made in a void. Once a baseline is had, future recommendations would be limited as there would be built-in accountability. Some members felt the Board of Education should give this committee some authority, as District 90’s board has given to its equity committee by making it a permanent committee with oversight, i.e., establishing metrics, reviewing implementation, etc., because what is not reviewed or held accountable does not happen. District 90’s committee consists of two board members, three or four parents, two faculty members, and two administrators.

One member added a request to conduct the climate survey this year.

### **Adjournment**

At 7:58 p.m., Mr. Martire moved to adjourn; seconded by Ms. McQueen. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.