

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

Culture, Climate, and Behavior Committee (CCB)
May 5, 2020

A Culture, Climate, and Behavior Committee (CCB) meeting was held on March 3, 2020. Chair Gina Harris called the virtual meeting to order at 6:36 p.m. Committee members present were Dr. Levar Ammons, Talib Becktemba Goss, Janel Bishop, Wendy Daniels, Linda Frances, Karin Grimes, Gina G. Harris, Megumi Hoshi, Greg Johnson, Cheryl Jones-McLeod, Dr. Carrie Kamm, Frances Kraft, Jason Lee, Ralph Martire, Melanie McQueen, Dr. Jackie Moore, Dr. Pruitt-Adams, Kyla Pereles, Dr. Roxana Sanders, Felicia Starks-Turner, Susan Stephens, Chase Thompson, and Dave Walksler.

Visitors: Sara Dixon Spivy, Board of Education member, Christopher Thieme and Jason Hatchko, OPRFHS faculty and staff.

Public Comment

John Duffy and Sgt. Barry Bethesda members of the Committee for Equity and Excellence in Education (CEEE), submitted the following comments: “Committee Members, thank you for your service to this committee. Your work is more important now than ever in these troubling, sad, and disruptive times.

“If you have not heard the discussion of the Board decision to proceed with the \$36.2 million Phase I Imagine Plan, I encourage you to do so.

“I found it difficult, along with many other advocates for equity in the community, to accept the Board’s unanimous decision, and I have worked hard to more fully understand their thinking.

“Most concerning was that this decision went against the recommendation by our administration to postpone any new construction. As far as I know, and we are still looking to fully understand the administration’s rationale, is that their recommendation was not simply tied to our state’s and district’s wildly uncertain financial future.

“We can only hope that the recommendation was also an expression of the likely need for new resources to fulfill all goals around racial equity work tied to school culture, and transformative teaching and learning that can expand opportunity for all of our students, fulfill the plans for Freshman course restructuring, as well as create programs and supports for student academic and emotional well-being when so much now during the Covid-19 pandemic is working against those ends.

“Tonight, CEEE and other equity advocates in our community call on this committee to pause, and, do as other schools around the nation are doing—to reimagine what the learning, health and safety of students will look like and require for the foreseeable future. I ask you--what issue facing our children threatens their academic, social and emotional well-being more than the present crisis. Without a doubt, this pandemic is an unprecedented assault on the cultural, equity, and socio-emotional goals of this Committee and the 2017-22 Strategic Plan. We urge you to take up these new challenges without delay.

“This Committee broadly represents our racially and culturally diverse community. You are uniquely positioned to guide the full board and assure the community that we will allocate program resources,

personnel, and support staff in innovative ways to protect and support all of our students, but especially those who have been inequitable hurt in these trying times. That work is central to the Racial Equity Policy adopted by D 200 just over one year ago—let us now fully live up to the goals and ideals expressed in that policy’s vision.

“In a separate communication, we have provided some resource links to inform your understanding of what others around the nation are thinking about education in this new era. Thank you.”

Melanie McQueen of APPLE submitted the following: “Are we providing virtual tutors and what is the attendance since eLearning has happened?”

Minutes

Dr. Pruitt-Adams moved to approve the minutes of the March 3, 2020 Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee; seconded by Ms. Jones McLeod. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

Housekeeping

Ms. Harris asked that the members of the committee put their computer while on mute and it was not necessary to have their cameras on.

Restorative Practices

Ms. Harris prefaced the meeting by saying all were in the middle of something not experienced and the conversation tonight was to be geared around the student code of conduct, a big piece of what this committee is to do. The Board of Education is waiting for this Committee’s input on this document. As the Committee moves forward, in a virtual world, she asked the committee members about how they were experiencing restorative practices now and how they were. The responses were as follows:

While Mr. Johnson said his family is doing fine with the changes, it has been trying.

Ms. Thompson said that people were doing a better job of relating and communicating about what they were feeling. Her family is fine.

Ms. McQueen stated that the Internet is a privilege. The School offers a reduced or free internet option and it was not an easy transition to eLearning, as students need face-to-face interaction. There is concern about students and adults being tied to technology; person-to-person interaction is needed. As for restorative justice, the Internet can be a dangerous and a mean place for students. Many racist things happen on the Internet and students are using it all of the time. She did not know how to bring Internet abuse forward. Her husband is on the frontline as a healthcare worker. She was one of those people who thought this was a bad flu, but her husband said people were dying every day. Her family is hunkered down. Just she recently joined neighbors from afar. Her pastor had COVID, but recovered.

Ms. Jones-McLeod is not from this area originally. It was emotional for her not to be able to see her grandfather while he awaited for surgery. Regarding restorative justice online, she is finding ways to reach out to the students, staff and faculty who need support. That could be the lynch pin when they return. Many teachers have reached out to her son.

Ms. Francis stated that all was well with her family. She is fortunate to have a job that continues remotely and practices providing a fair amount of grace with respect and ability to act. However, she feels removed and disconnected from young people.

Ms. Bishop said her family is doing well. She feels busier than when she was working in the school. She has children who are four and seven. She tries to connect with those students who are not connecting with teachers. The compassion and flexibility of the teachers are helping the students to succeed in this type of learning.

Ms. Kraft was doing well. The crisis started when she had a child on each coast. There were several days of things being good and positive and then a day where it was awful. Being online with everything is so intentional. It is beautiful to see people opening up. Restorative practices are about healing when things are unsettled.

Ms. Grimes works from home so the pandemic has not changed that for her. Her brother-in-law died of leukemia during this time, and her family members were unable to enter the hospital. Another family is looking for a job when no one else is looking. So much about the pandemic is calling into sharp relief into society, i.e. health disparities, not being able to do eLearning, etc. How to have restorative practice calls into question what is needed to be done after the pandemic.

Dr. Sanders is working more than ever. This pandemic has brought the need for grace more than ever. The school is trying to do that. Many groups are not used to technology and it is challenging for them, but with patience and understanding, it pays out.

Mr. Becktemba Goss had heard that teachers were understanding. Students have different standards. Now is the time to work on Restorative Practices within the family and in the world. He thanked Ms. Kraft for donating books to Freeload libraries in the Lawndale area so people may have books to read.

Mr. Martire said that Restorative Practices is imperfect at best, because people lack training, just as with eLearning teaching. His daughter will not get to go to prom or graduation and she does not feel reached out to and supported. This is a major loss to seniors. His son had a virtual graduation. A close colleague of his had an uncle passed away from COVID. Mr. Martire's family is from New York and Connecticut and it is scary. His nieces and nephews are on the frontline. They still have jobs, are at home, with his son and daughter.

Dr. Kamm stated that she was doing well with self-care. It is fortunate that the District 97 teams prioritize relationships with care and grace. People are reaching out to one another and she was grateful that the community values that.

Ms. Stephens is hearing the positive restorative outreach that is happening among the school and she finds it inspiring but there is work to be done. It is important to see that and what needs more work. It is good that there are many Zoom opportunities to use circles with each other. Otherwise, this period would be so isolating. She goes out every night and claps and that, personally, is good for her. Her family is good and she felt fortunate to have that. Knowing the inequity of society globally is painful. The analogy is being in that split and thinking about. While positives have arisen, she is troubled by what is happening to many people.

Ms. Starks-Turner's family is in good health, most have gainful employment, and she feels blessed. Her mom has a caregiver who is coming into her parents' home. She echoed the comments about relationships and grace. That is part of conversations with principals, staff members, and parents. They are trying to help everyone understand grace because people are experiencing this situation differently.

People are thinking about future ideas to build upon relationships and how things will be done differently when onsite learning begins again.

Dr. Pruitt-Adams noted that students were struggling. Some students were being harmed at home. The deans are addressing those who they know were harmed and the new harm and finding a balance between virtual perspectives. She is proud of the work that has been done because students are hurting. The school is trying to support and heal them during this time when so much is going on. She participates in virtual meetings all day. She has been impacted by two COVID deaths. She, herself, is in the vulnerable group as she is 65 years old, an African-American, and has high blood pressure. It is scary that her friends are dying.

Mr. Ammons said his immediate family was safe. He has friends and family in Florida who are dealing with COVID. He stated that the motivational mentor program coordinators have done a wonderful job of remaining connected with frequent flyers and they were continuing daily check-ins on students on Friday. Push forward that restorative work is being done but how disparities in society are being defined right now. An affinity group, AAFA, meets weekly and they continue to make sure they stay connected and that students are staying engaged with remote learning. This is imperfect at best.

Dave Walksler is looking at things with a different lens. He is reaching out to his team members and checking in on them.

Wendy Daniels reported that her husband suggested that they use Restorative Practice as a talking piece with her daughter about college. It worked great. Her daughter made her decision that same day. She said she had to set boundaries for her clients about working hours as they assumed that her time was unlimited. Her husband is a manager for Fed Ex who did not provide protective gear. Four people had contracted COVID-19. It is stressful work. His mother lives alone and is a social butterfly, she wants to die. She will do a drive by on Mother's Day. This is a difficult time for her. While doing well, she is adjusting to a new normal and wondering if her daughter will go to school in the fall.

Mr. Chandler was fine, but was less busy than before and he was pining over what he had lost. This experience exposed many inequities. Many things do not to be rebuilt and this is an opportunity to rebuild something different.

Dr. Moore is personally doing OK. Her daughters are home as their college days have been interrupted and they were adjusting to their responsibilities at home as well because her mother is living with them. She has lupus and has not been able to see her son other than from the car window. She echoed everything said about restorative practices and those things have been part of her family and world and it is helpful to have that in the toolkit. As a Board member, she wants to make sure this work continues. She is seeing in the community how differently things are valued. It has been a moment to reflect on her own issues of empathy and perspective taking and how she builds relationships in certain circumstances and that seems nearly impossible.

Ms. Harris said that the time in this meeting for this was important. Conversations about Restorative Justice and what that means to be involved takes time and relationship building. This is not a quick fix. Hearing each of the members' sharing is foundational to what this Committee can do. First and foremost whatever veil has been lifted; people cannot hide behind it. One can listen to these comments and identify who has been impacted more by what has happened. This work of looking at the Code of Conduct and informing and supporting the administration is going to be split between this and the next meeting. The impact of the recommendations need to be rooted so that inequity is so clear, so present and so prevalent, that one cannot hide from it or pretend it does not exist and the Committee must make recommendations from that space. When this Committee looks at the recommendation of the

administration with all of the stakeholders, this Committee needs to evaluate them from a perspective of how equitable this is in all spaces including virtual. The work of the Committee will be impactful if the Committee maintains the focus of equity because it has had the opportunity to look at the racial equity policy and the committee will have to dig into that work deeper.

Role of CCB

To save time, this was delayed.

Student Code of Conduct

Because of COVID and the advent of remote learning, the focus on the Code of Conduct shifted as everyone keyed up on remote practices. Over the past several weeks, the administration began conversations with teachers who were originally trained in Restorative Justice and asked for their comments. The next step is to set a framework to relate what has happened. The administration will continue the necessary conversation with the teachers and bring them to the June 9 meeting. Mr. Johnson continued that in March meetings were scheduled to gather feedback. A month was lost due to COVID, the April meeting was canceled. Dr. Pruitt-Adams added that the student leaders group will be asked for their feedback as well.

Ms. Parker stated that it takes grace and mercy to educate students through the trials in the situations they find themselves. This involves an universal mind shift throughout the building. Conversations with staff are needed as to what they think discipline should look like. Restorative Justice challenged that and Senate Bill 100 mandated it. It says that Out of School Suspensions and In School Suspensions are frowned upon because one is being removed from their learning environment. That should only happen if it is very severe behavior. Alternatively, how do we shape the behavior so that it does not continue? Restorative Justice tends to be a progressive approach rather than being a one and done situation. The District needs to know who the students and the data. It is not about addressing the infraction but it is about addressing the student. The administration is thinking of Code of Conduct more holistically and thinking of it as a behavior education plan. Students are nurtured into their behaviors. As such, other behaviors can be taught. This is about educating students to understand what is happening, why, who was harmed, what needs to be done to make it better and is driven by beliefs, expectations and the actions in order to help students learn different ways of doing things. It is the responsibility of adults in the building and peer to peer to work together Restorative Practices requires involvement. People do not want to be harmed further. The work is in having the information shared between so that there is a true understanding of what happened so not to have it happen again. This is about the whole student as a social and academic human being in the school.

Ms. Bishop says this speaks to establishing a culture of warmth (COW) and building relationships and how they will drive the work and behavior in classes. The administration is working with UMOJA and developing cultures that are warm and safe.

The revised Code of Conduct will be about progressive discipline, not zero tolerance. Some believe a set something should happen if something is done, but that is not a behavior plan. Note: This is about the whole building. Restorative Justice practices sound good until it is one's own child. It has to be universal and all students need to be embraced. Students need to be educated and helped. The plan needs to illustrate the absence or decrease the use of zero tolerance policies. Even if an event is bad, the law still says the student needs to be educated. The lesson is learned in the consequence. This is where the mind shift comes as to what the lesson is and how that lesson is achieved. The school, family, and community has to be involved in the process. The District must provide a fair and appropriate education to all students. At the last board meeting, disparities were addressed. It is not right for some things to happen

in one group and not another. The Code of Conduct and education are about problem solving and proactively reacting.

While the restorative approach needs to be communicated that it is about treating human beings as a whole, it does not mean there are no standards and expectations. Children learn the behaviors they have and the District has to teach them the other behaviors. It is about building relationships and not destroying relationships. An open mind is needed. If expectations are set, the students will rise to them. This is challenging the District to move to a higher place and children will learn. Currently the Code of Conduct is organized by behaviors and acts and now it has to be organized by adult response.

Dr. Pruitt-Adams noted that children learn their behaviors and they have to be taught other behaviors with care in an environment of trust. An open mind is needed to do that. Mr. Bishop stated that currently the Code of Conduct is organized by behavior and acts and the desire is to have it organized by adult response, not just the child.

Ms. Harris wanted the Committee to engage in this discussion and in order to be stewards of the Student Code of Conduct in the community, they will have the most information to share with other community members as to how hard and difficult this is. More information will be sent othe Committee before the meeting in June. It is important to get this feedback.

Adjournment

At 8:05 p.m.Ms. Harris moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Dr. Pruitt-Adams. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

Submitted by: Gail Kalmerton

Clerk of the Board