

**Oak Park and River Forest High School
201 N. Scoville
Oak Park, IL 60302**

**An Instruction Committee of the Whole Board
August 15, 2006**

An Instruction Committee meeting of the Whole Board was held on Tuesday, August 15, 2006, in the Board Room. Chair Barbara P. Fernandez opened the meeting at 9:25 a.m. Committee members present were Jacques A. Conway (departed at 9:30 a.m.), Barbara P. Fernandez, Valerie J. Fisher, Dr. Barry S. Greenwald, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, Yasmin A. Ranney, and John P. Rigas. Also present were: Dr. Susan J. Bridge, Superintendent/Principal; Cheryl L. Witham, Chief Financial Officer; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Jack Lanenga, Assistant Superintendent for Operations; Amy Hill, Director of Instruction;

Visitors included Kay Foran, Director of Community Relations and Communications.

Approval of Minutes

Ms. Ranney moved to approve the minutes of June 19, 2006, as presented; seconded by Dr. Greenwald. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Report on the MSAN Conference

Ms. Fernandez thanked the Board of Education for the opportunity to represent the Board's interest at M.S.A.N.'s Annual Conference, which was held in Philadelphia, at the end of June. Board of Education members were reminded that Ms. Fernandez's role at M.S.A.N. involves a one-year commitment and the representatives are expected to follow through with participation. Ms. Fernandez distributed an agenda of the meetings.

Ms. Fernandez attended all of the sessions relative to policies. In her focus, as the Board's representative, she noted what she and other board members from other M.S.A.N. districts tried to accomplish. The board representatives are looking for a person to organize what the members of boards of education should do at the MSAN conferences. Discussion ensued as to the board's role as it relates to academic achievement, emphasizing de-tracking. De-tracking is a system where there is no honors or regular tracking. Ms. Fernandez shared hard copies from a presentation on detracking. Currently, these schools are not tracking at all. De-tracking has brought student academic success.

Ms. Fernandez also noted that several schools had policies on the Board of Education's role in terms of equity in excellence and academic achievement. Chapel Hill schools have policies relative to this. Ms. Fernandez distributed copies of that as well.

Ms. Fernandez continued that it might be worthwhile to build an achievement culture in and out of the classroom. There is a website titled www.tripodproject.org on achievement gap initiatives based upon Harvard University's Dr. Ferguson's research. Harvard University also has a website, www.agiharvard.edu, on the achievement initiatives. One of the keynote speakers, Jennie Oaks, gave a presentation on navigating the politics of de-tracking. Ms. Fernandez distributed this handout.

Mr. Prale expounded on the Rockville Centre School District experience. New York State gives Regent exams, which are a battery of state tests. The state of New York requires every student to pass some Regents tests before allowing him/her to graduate with a Regents. The Rockville Centre effort strives to prepare all students for success in Regents certification or international baccalaureate certification. Moving all students up came out of the middle school math program when the requirement that all students had to complete Algebra by eighth grade. To do that the district had to go back to the middle grade math program to make sure the students were prepared. Rockville Centre is a small district with 1800 students from K to 12 grades. They pushed the math program early as it was the lynch pin between elementary school and high school. O.P.R.F.H.S. had two math teachers attend M.S.A.N. and they heard this discussion.

It was suggested that transcripts of students who graduated in 1997 be compared with those of today. Asked whether this should be pursued with District 97, the response was yes.

Ms. Ranney felt that there were similarities between O.P.R.F.H.S. and Long Island. Ms. Fernandez reported that it had similar socio-economic makeup as O.P.R.F.H.S.

Mr. Prale reported that he and Ms. Hill attended a national school development conference where they heard from many school districts on the achievement of students. He stated that the baseline was that everyone had to focus on a single goal. One large unit district in Maryland was able to obtain significant gains in reading and math using this method.

Dr. Greenwald reported that he recently visited one of his best friends in Rockville Centre and attended various classes with him. He observed a class of seniors having a frank discussion on diversity and inclusion. However, when looking at the senior class, there were only three African-American students. Its diversity is not as it is here.

Mr. Prale noted that one presenter at the M.S.A.N. Conference, John Diamond, the former research director of M.S.A.N. had a well-attended and effective presentation. The work took a hard look at the demographics in a community in order to understand the nature of the achievement gaps in that community.

Other topics discussed were the locations of future M.S.A.N. Conferences. Ms. Fernandez reported that while Oregon was scheduled as the next site for the conference, there would be continued discussion on the most economical site for most districts to attend. The Student Leadership Conference will be held in Green Bay, Wisconsin, in

September, and the next meeting for the research practitioners and superintendents will be in Chicago.

Ms. Fernandez reported that Dr. Bridge had just completed her term as treasurer and that Dr. Bridge gave a farewell speech about Dr. Allson. Ms. Fernandez was proud of Dr. Bridge's statements.

Dr. Bridge also reported that it was a good conference. Mr. Prale reported that Dr. Allson, while working for the Gates Foundation, would work fulltime at the Chicago Public Schools at its central office location. Mr. Rigas encouraged keeping in touch with Dr. Allson, as Microsoft gave Illinois State University \$3 million dollars. Mr. Rigas suggested partnering O.P.R.F.H.S. with a university that would do the research and then approach the Gates Organization, or Oprah Winfrey, or Bill Cosby, etc., with a compelling story. Dr. Bridge noted that M.S.A.N.'s new director, Dr. Art Rainwater from Madison, Wisconsin, was a strong leader and had a great commitment. Madison is a unit district and Dr. Rainwater has had a profound effect on the leadership.

Ms. Fernandez also commented about a session titled "Listening to the Voices of our Students and Parents." The session consisted of a panel of high school students who randomly answered questions from the audience regarding how they learned, what they looked for in terms of the students' perspective as to effective teaching. The parents had empowered their students to address all issues, i.e., grades, attendance, etc. She found that different from her own experience, which was if there is a grade, homework, or attendance issue, the parent is the advocate. These students advocated for themselves and had a voice in everything. They handled issues well and recommended that students be asked for their input. The session was very informative.

District Approach to Sectioning

Mr. Prale has framed the discussion regarding District Approach to Sectioning as follows:

"Currently, the process for establishing the number of course sections and setting a schedule for those sections occur largely as a result of course selections by students. In recent discussions, several B.A.T. members have raised questions regarding the procedures for establishing the number of sections. The overall approach to sectioning influences the District's financial plan, the hiring process, the creation of the master schedule, the course registration process, and classroom curriculum and instruction opportunities. In these ways, the District approach to sectioning significantly affects the work of each B.A.T. member.

"Before exploring these questions as an administrative team, B.A.T. would like to hear the opinions of the members of the Board of Education regarding the District approach to sectioning."

Mr. Prale commented that the high school was embarking on a professional development program where all teachers in the building would organize themselves in small improvement teams. Instructional Council and B.A.T. will participate. B.A.T.'s improvement team would focus on sectioning. Sectioning is something that the District struggles with each year and is affected by every year. All of the students first register their choices with their dean counselors. Then, Mr. Lanenga runs the numbers, identified the number of sections, and uses the divider of 24 for regular classes, 26 for honors classes, and 18 for basic classes to determine the number of sections. The administration struggles with the FTE overages but has let the student registrations determine the number of sections offered. B.A.T. is always exploring ways to section more efficiently and effectively. He offered the example of the AP Psych course. It started with only two sections and peaked at 14. Now it runs approximately 12 sections. Should the administration allow twelve sections to run or should sections be limited to just eight, as an example? There is precedence for sectioning limits, as this has been done with freshmen. Mr. Rigas viewed the sectioning problem as an FTE-issue. The problem occurs when there are only thirteen students signed up for a class. A decision must be made as to whether to run that section or not. When there are enough for twelve sections, it is not an FTE issue, because students are not taking other classes, thus, freeing up other FTE. Mr. Prale asked what other classes were they not taking, normally it is another elective may become a curriculum issue. Mr. Rigas agreed that the Applied Arts had a problem and this had been discussed over a year ago. Mr. Prale continued that fluctuation was a problem and he used the example AP Government, which started with seven sections and dropped down to four sections. Ms. Ranney asked what happens when teachers are freed up. There is no overall loss of sections in history as they are many other courses to teach. Ms. Witham stated that this is a tough choice for the administration. She suggested that perhaps not as many history classes were needed. Then, does the District reduce FTE? The other part is the addition of courses, which affects FTE as well. A broader discussion is needed about how adding a course affects the entire program.

Ms. Fernandez asked for an update on the AP American Literature course. She was informed that it was being taught this year. It is a revision of the existing junior Honors American Literature course. The course has been revised and all teachers have attended AP conferences. While the course focuses on rhetoric, emphasis is being placed on it to meet all of the standards.

Mr. Prale continued that a change in sectioning procedures would represent a shift in district philosophy. Does the district want to craft programs, talk about FTE sectioning and student course opportunities with more administrative direction rather than student demand direction? Ms. Fernandez wanted to see the high school fulfill the demand for classes that are academic core classes. She felt proud of the students for pushing for the AP American Literature class.

Ms. Witham continued that the reality is that the high school always overshoots. Currently, sectioning is market driven which usually calls for more FTE; that number is consistently over what is budgeted. Even with the staff added for the initiatives, the

number of FTE is over by 1.8. She asked, “How far does the Board of Education want to go in order for O.P.R.F.H.S. to be a comprehensive high school.” Dr. Bridge reiterated that this would be a major shift in District philosophy. Ms. Ranney responded that O.P.R.F.H.S. is known for its vast menu and that it is driven by parent/student choice. It is not an administrative-driven agenda. The Dean Counselors are pivotal in making sure that the student completes, within the four-year time period, his/her graduation requirements, but students do have latitude with their electives. Mr. Prale reaffirmed that this would be a change and it could help to ready students for life post-high school.

Thus, the question to the Board of Education is, should B.A.T. change the approach to sectioning. Should it proceed in studying this area? Dr. Millard suggested leaving B.A.T. to investigate this if a shift would prove beneficial to student achievement. Mr. Rigas noted that O.P.R.F.H.S. has consumer science classes that people take and business law classes that have not been taught for years. He suggested combining them to reach a higher level. He noted that the high school’s computer proficiency test was ridiculous and that most of the people in the building would fail it. He suggested limiting by class, i.e., juniors vs. seniors, just as colleges do. His own daughter took AP Psych as a junior, but seniors could be given first choice. Mr. Prale agreed that there were many approaches, i.e., class, graduation requirements is one approach, guidance, etc. Students on average take three Applied Arts courses, because they have to do so. Ms. Fernandez reminded the Committee that they needed to be mindful of the goals and initiatives as the umbrella and everything must fall under that subject. Mr. Rigas offered that he was happy to have this discussion and saw no downside in reviewing it. Discussion ensued regarding a timeline. Mr. Prale suggested the deadline would be the end of the calendar year.

Dr. Greenwald felt that this change would be to primarily make life easier for the planners and the administrators. He was unclear how it was driven educationally. The proposal is the same used by colleges. He had no problem discussing this as long as the focus of the discussion was on how it will affect student achievement. Discussion ensued about the time it takes a student to graduate from college. The trend in the United States to get a bachelor’s degree is now five years or more at state schools, because many students are working and going part-time to school. Mr. Rigas noted that the cost of private schooling prohibits adding more years of attendance.

Ms. Fernandez suggested that any change could involve more class periods, i.e., a nine- or ten-period day and/or reducing the number of minutes per class. Mr. Prale concurred that it could affect the day and Mr. Lanenga is reviewing that with the School Day Committee. At this point, Mr. Prale did not feel it would mean more periods in the school day.

Mr. Rigas asked whether a true, eight-period day would be part of this process. Mr. Prale noted that it was not part of the process, but it would come into the process as it would help in the scheduling of facilities, labs, etc. and it would relate to the bargaining agreement.

Ms. Fernandez hoped to that B.A.T. would speak with the Dean Counselor about any new structure presented. Ms. Fernandez asked that a report would be given within 60 days and that Dean Counselors have immediate involvement. Mr. Prale stated that schedules might not allow B.A.T. to complete this process in that amount of time.

Textbook Review

Instruction Committee members volunteered to review the following books as follows:

History Division:

The Challenge of Democracy, to be reviewed by Mr. Rigas

Special Education Division:

World Literature; Pacemaker Curriculum, to be reviewed by Dr. Millard

World History, to be reviewed by Ms. Fisher

AMP Reading System – Level 1, to be reviewed by Ms. Ranney

AMP Reading System – Level 2, to be reviewed by Ms. Fernandez

AMP Reading System – Level 3, to be reviewed by Dr. Greenwald

Miscellaneous

Dr. Greenwald suggested Committee members have a discussion on the assessment of student program as students move through the school year, referenced in an article that appeared on page 59 of the August issue of *District Administrator*.

Discussion ensued about for the Committee members meeting with individual divisions in the evening, as it had last year. Mr. Prale reported that the remaining divisions were History, English, Fine & Applied Arts, as well as ISIT, the Deans of Discipline, and Community Support. It was the consensus of the Committee to continue these meetings. Mr. Prale will provide some possible dates to the Committee members via Ms. Kalmerton.

Adjournment

The Committee adjourned at 10:25 a.m.