

April 29, 2019

A special retiring meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Monday, April 29, 2019, in the Board Room of the high school.

**Call to Order**

President Moore called the meeting to order at 7:16 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Fred Arkin (telephonically), Matt Baron, Tom Cofsky; Jennifer Cassell, Craig Iseli, Dr. Jackie Moore, and Sara Dixon Spivy. Also at the table were Dr. Joylynn Pruitt-Adams, Superintendent and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

**Visitors**

OPRFHS Faculty and Staff Greg Johnson, Roxana Sanders, Michael Carioscio, Cindy Sidor, Chris Thieme; Burcy Hines, Cathy Yen, the Cassell family, the Harris family, and other community members; Steve Schering of the *Oak Leaves*.

**Public Comments**

Burcy Hines was excited and thanked this Board of Education for its hard work and support.

Cathy Yen, an Oak Park resident, recognized public servant Fred Arkin for doing the hard work, staying on task, and always putting students above everything. She was proud to call him a friend. She suggested that the Board continue to seek his wise counsel as he knows the map very well. He bleeds orange and blue. She knew he would stay active. She thanked him for spending the last four years at the table. He was needed and he delivered.

**Closed Session**

At 7:18 p.m., Dr. Moore moved to enter to closed session for the purpose of discussing the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees of the District or legal counsel for the District, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee or against legal counsel for the District to determine its validity. 5 ILCS 120/2(C)(1), amended by P.A. 99-646; and Litigation, when an action against, affecting or on behalf of the particular District has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the District finds that an action is probable or imminent, in which case the basis for the finding shall be recorded and entered into the meeting minutes. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(11); and Discussion of lawfully closed meeting minutes, whether for purposes of approval by the body of the minutes or semi-annual review of the minutes as mandated by section 2.06 5 ILCS 5 120/2©(21); seconded by Mr. Cofsky. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

At 7:24 p.m., the Board of Education resumed the open session.

**Minutes**

Dr. Moore moved to approve the Open & Closed Minutes of March 21, April 10, and April 25, 2019 and a Declaration that the closed session audiotapes of August,

September, October and November 2017 are destroyed and a declaration that the closed session minutes from January 1, 1987 through April 2019 shall remain closed; seconded by Ms. Cassell. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Administrator  
Contract**

Dr. Moore moved to approve the Administrative Contract for the Executive Director of Equity and Student Success; seconded by Mr. Arkin. A roll call vote resulted in six ayes and one nay. Dr. Moore voted nay. Motion carried.

**Canvass of  
Vote**

Dr. Moore moved to acknowledge the Canvass of Vote of the newly elected Board of Education members, as presented; seconded by Mr. Iseli. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

**Recognition of  
Retiring Board  
Of Education**

Mr. Cofsky read the following statement: “I thank you, Jennifer and Fred, from the bottom of my heart for your dedicated service to this district. You both quickly earned my respect after joining this board. You both brought a strong commitment to our students and particularly those that have been marginalized. You leveraged your excellent listening skills in our deliberations, showing that listening is equally or more important than speaking while on a board. You were not afraid to roll up your sleeves to get the work done.

The two of you should be tremendously proud and our community should be extremely grateful, as I am, for the Board work that you did over this past four years. Collectively you helped recruit a new superintendent to lead us forward while also helping transition the leadership.

Fred, you played such a pivotal role in getting this District to having a long-term facilities plan and then initiating Phase 1. Your perspective as an Alumnus, as a longtime advocate of your programs were invaluable. While I am disappointed to lose you as a board member, I am thankful to have gained you as a friend.

“Jennifer, your role in the creation of a Gender and Racial Equity policies is irreplaceable. Your ability to work with different constituencies and drive to a common ground that is in our students’ best interests is amazing and appreciated. You remind me of the old EF Hutton commercials, “When Jennifer Cassell speaks, I listen.”

Ms. Dixon Spivy stated that both Jennifer and Fred were the best members she could have served with. They are honorable, dedicated, brilliant, and their legacy is eternal. She will miss them terribly.

Mr. Baron first met Ms. Cassell 20 years ago when they were both covering a different governmental body. He stated that she was truly dedicated and committed to all students, bettering the community and the high school. What was accomplished last week took team effort, but she was the captain. He appreciated her and hoped that what she had done would go beyond her and her youngest child. Her legacy is indelible and long-lasting. He appreciated her as

someone who is here for the right reasons and he thank her for being a role model in that regard.

Mr. Baron had leaned on Mr. Arkin for insight and connectedness during and before. He has been a great mentor to him and others for generations. Everything that Cathy Yen had said about Mr. Arkin was so eloquent. He appreciated him and community is way better off because you were on this board and he looked forward as to what comes next for Mr. Arkin.

Mr. Iseli stated that he respected Mr. Arkin and Ms. Cassell for understanding what this Board does is for the students and they understand and take it to heart and operate that way. He had leaned on them to understand what was going on in this building and what people are thinking. Mr. Arkin's position on a number of things, hiring people, and always making sure the Board is thinking of the students and, from a building standpoint, doing the right thing.

He continued that the effort that Ms. Cassell put in on the racial equity policy. He appreciated her insight and tongue lashing when he needed it.

He concluded by thanking them and noting that a huge asset was being lost while gaining a different asset. He would miss them both.

Dr. Moore noted that the Board's configuration with Mr. Arkin and Ms. Cassell were the glue that this Board needed to be thoughtful and to work through challenging and groundbreaking issues including IMAGINE, Culture, Climate and Behavior, Racial Equity policy by pushing and asking questions. She had not known each other when they started on the Board but she knew they bled orange and blue.

Dr. Moore had threatened to write Ms. Cassell's name on the ballot in April. She thanked Ms. Cassell's little girl for understanding that her mommie was gone. Dr. Moore knew that her family was happy to have her attention again. Ms. Cassell is one of the most courageous leaders she has met. No task was too great or too small for Ms. Cassell and she appreciated her saying what she meant. Dr. Moore appreciated her counsel and will miss looking at her as a black, woman leader who steps out for the children as others cannot. In 12 years, Addie will be a freshman and Dr. Moore looked forward to signing her petitions to get back on the Board of Education.

Dr. Pruitt-Adams noted that Ms. Cassell and Mr. Arkin showed up differently. Ms. Cassell has a quiet demeanor and has helped to accomplish much. Mr. Arkin too. Both of them took a chance with her. They said to remember that it will be tough and that she needed to be ready for a fight. They picked up the Strategic Plan and put it into motion. They took on sexual harassment and misconduct, a place for students to feel that they belonged, Imagine, a reorganization, and a revamp of the high school. because you dared to dream for this facility that would impact the students. They are

tearing down the old brick by brick and took the step to hire an Executive Director of Equity and Student Services. This Board has the tenacity, capacity and commitment to say to those here now and those to come that OPRFHS will be on the cutting edge. Both of them were drivers. She hoped to be able to call then when she needs to be centered and focused on things, and Mr. Arkin will still participate in the capital campaign. It has been an honor and pleasure to serve with you under this Board.

Ms. Cassell made the following statement, “I want to begin by thanking the people of Oak Park and River Forest who supported my candidacy four years ago and whose votes of confidence afforded me the opportunity to serve this wonderful school and community.

“We have a community that is incredibly involved and dedicated to providing their perspectives on the issues that OPRF faces. Hearing from constituents has certainly informed my thinking on a number of votes that we have taken.

“That said, one aspect of the Board of Education that evades public understanding, I believe, is what it truly takes to be a successful Board member. There’s a perception that we attend a couple of meetings a month, but beyond that I am not sure that many understand the level of work and commitment that goes into board service. Of course, there are the board meetings that are announced to the public. But there are also the planning meetings, chats with constituents, daily emails, parent group meetings, committee meetings, school events, professional development, and reading board packets.

So board service is not for the faint of heart. I approached my board serve the way that I have tackled many other challenging personal and professional undertakings in in the past. I rolled up my sleeves and worked hard. My goal was always simple but not easy: do what is in the best interest of the students and do my best. This often meant a lot of behind the scenes work that required missing time away from my family.

“So, my family, who is in the audience tonight, deserves my deepest gratitude. I wouldn’t have been able to do what I did if you didn’t do what you do. My daughter, Alexis, was my inspiration to join the school board, just as she has been my reason behind much of what I have accomplished in life. I am proud of who she is as a person and am excited to see all of the lives she will touch when she becomes an educator in a couple of years. As to my daughter, Adelyn, it seems to me that public service is now built into her DNA, because I learned that I was pregnant with her while campaigning for the Board. Finally, to my husband Reggie—I often say that you were the one who put the idea of board service in my head. Sometimes that was said in frustration, but it is truly a testament to your belief in me. You give me the courage to push myself beyond my own self-imposed limits. You spent more nights than I can count caring for your family without me. Thank you for everything.

“I also want to thank my partners in this work - each of my fellow board members. I have truly appreciated all of the skills and individual viewpoints we have

contributed to this board. Even though my current journey with the board ends here, I'm heartened to know that the important work that led me here in the first place will continue on with the next iteration of the Board.

“My departure from the Board is particularly bittersweet given that I'm joined by my good friend Fred Arkin in retirement. I have appreciated Fred's friendship, his honesty, and his support these four years. Fred has more connections to this community than any of us, and I only wish that the community could have recognized what I know to be true about Fred: he doesn't just talk the talk, but he walks the walk. For several decades, Fred has been a champion for kids of color in this community and beyond. The one solace that I have is that I know he will continue to serve our children for years to come.

“To Sara, I know that you will continue to promote the work that you, Fred, and I started together 4 years ago. You bring years of experience in law and politics, and working toward intergovernmental cooperation is one of the strengths you bring to the Board.

“To Matt and Craig, it feels as though these two years working together has flown by. Matt, you and I have known each other for many years as community news reporters. Though I don't think either of us ever imagined two decades ago that one day we would end up on the other side of the dais together. Craig, I've truly appreciated the thoughtfulness that you've brought to every issue that we've considered. Your business acumen has proven to be useful, but I've also really appreciated your willingness to be vulnerable and listen to the perspectives of others when it comes to complex and emotional issues. I think that will be even more important as the district moves forward with its strategic plan work steeped in racial equity.

“To Tom and Jackie, I have so much admiration and respect for you both. Tom, there is no doubt that your financial astuteness is critical to the success of this board. I've also come to appreciate your gifts at analyzing all issues from a systems perspective. And personally I've just enjoyed sitting next to you for the last four years - laughing at all of your jokes. As a person who sometimes can take life too seriously, I've appreciated the levity that you've brought to these meetings. I've truly enjoyed getting to know you.

“Jackie, you are the heart of this Board. I commend you for your leadership, particularly as president over the last two years. I've appreciated the wisdom, expertise, and personal experience that you've brought to the board. But I've learned something more important than politics from you; I've witnessed how a person leads with empathy, compassion, and grace. That is the person who I want to be.

“I feel immensely proud of everything we have accomplished as a board and school community over the last four years. During the course of my term, we have:

- Ensured that all students have access to technology by providing every student with a chrome book;
- Reduced student fees for low-income students;
- Approved a new teacher contract that recognized the talents of our excellent faculty and also controlled the District’s long-term costs;
- Accepted a master facilities plan and took the initial steps in completing the first major facilities renovation in 50 years;
- Championed restorative practices and committed to RJ training for adults throughout the building;
- Taken action to support our most vulnerable students, which is particularly important in this current political climate, including:
  - o Adopting a safe haven resolution
  - o Passing a policy and accompanying procedures to protect transgender students
  - o Strengthening the sexual misconduct policy and procedures; and approving a long overdue racial equity policy.

“Finally, the most important thing that we have done as a board: hiring a courageous leader in Dr. Pruitt-Adams. Choosing you to lead this district is by far the single best decision we’ve made. Your decades of expertise and personal tenacity will provide the fuel that this district needs as it moves forward. I have so much admiration for all that you’ve accomplished during your life and tenure here. You’ve built a remarkable team of administrators and I look forward to watching how the district continues to excel.

“I know that Dr. Pruitt-Adams cannot do this work alone. Beyond administrators, the one person whose skills keep things running like a well-oiled machine is Gail Kalmerton. Thank you for all of the support that you provide to the Board - we could not have functioned without you.”

Mr. Arkin read the following statement, “I abhor losing! As an uber competitive person I have taken my share of losses in my life. I normally assess the situation, make corrections and move on to the next competition better prepared for victory. The loss of my bid for re-election to this board has been quite different because there is no next competition. Over the past few weeks I have experienced a myriad of emotions; feelings of disappointment, anger, betrayal, frustration but I have come to the realization that these feelings are only self-serving.

“The core reason I have served and will continue to serve is: I am someone who simply loves his community with a focus on our youth and their success, this is my passion! The development of our youth and working with the incredible adults who teach and mentor.

“I have no outside agenda, represent no special interest groups, have no trendy sound bites to garner attention. So I have reconciled myself that feeling these personal emotions are borne out of narcissism and selfishness, traits I abhor more than losing.

“My dear friend John Phelan recommended a book to me, although I am not a voracious reader but the week before last, while I was away I had the opportunity to read the book; *The Coddling of the American Mind* by Gregg Lukianoff & Jonathan Haidt. (I am going to ask Gail to forward their preceding article in *The Atlantic* to all) I found the book almost cathartic, putting many of turbulent events of the past 8 months we as a district have experienced in perspective. My biggest take away is that kids today grow up much differently than I did in the 1950s & 60s. There is a culture of safetyism` amongst families today which strips youth of their social and emotional immunity to risks and challenges that I and my contemporaries developed because we were allowed much more freedom and engaged in less structured activities and had more free play in our developing years. Because of this we had to be able to develop skills allowing us to confront challenges, endure uncomfortable situations, develop relationships and resolve differences.

“As a part of the Student Leadership Advisory committee I encountered a situation that deeply concerned me; one student expressed that he had differing political views than most in his classes. I have known him for several years he comes from a military family has a very structured home life and is conservative in his views. However, he expressed that he doesn't feel comfortable expressing his views in class and to friends because fear of confrontation, ridicule and ostracism. After that meeting a girl expressed to me that she did not feel safe in that meeting because of the boy who held differing political views. So I asked the question at the next meeting: what is the difference between a safe and a comfortable space, how do we differentiate? We had a robust conversation but is quickly became obvious to me that some students actually fear for their safety in a space that I define as uncomfortable, but would never in my mind rise to the level of unsafe. My point to this board and administration is that a huge challenge in equity will be addressing the social and emotional issues of our youth. We know that a fundamental factor in realizing equity is providing a safe, nurturing and comfortable environment in which all students can achieve. I believe counseling and mental health services will be a crucial growing need for our students of the future.

“During the campaign a voter approached me and asked; `Hey aren't you the wrestling guy.' I said; `yes I am the wrestling guy!' Yes over the past 41 years I have directly worked with youth, getting them to achieve not only on a mat or a field but in life. We have a pretty simple paradigm that has produced incredible success. And if you look closely at ATM you will see it being informally utilized by most of the adults featured, especially Jessica. The paradigm has trust as its foundation. Once as a leader, mentor or teacher establishes trust then they can

follow with a relationship that sets high expectations and they can create accountability feedbacks and finally must celebrate success. If you look at Jessica's work with Keyshawn until she was able to establish a bond of trust with Keyshawn she got nowhere. But once he started to trust her the relationship grew and he was able to achieve.

"We were asked on the campaign trail what surprised us most about ATM, I stated the fact that the actual work the board did during that year was omitted. We had a special board meeting on May 24TH 2016 where our sole topic was equity, kinda the theme of the series. "The major takeaway I had from that meeting, which was left on the ATM cutting room floor, was that of **trust**, how African Americans go through life with a sense of distrust and trust must be earned, and whites at the table grow through life with implicit trust and trust can only be lost or betrayed. So there it is...the dichotomy for a teacher who has both white and black students, relationships have to be developed in different ways to create and maintain trust. As the district's work goes forward I hope that trust is understood to be the fundamental factor in establishing equity. This trust has to pervade all of the work the district does and must include not just student/ teacher trust but include the administration, all of the staff, families and community. In an atmosphere where trust is gained our students and community will flourish.

"Back in 1981 when I was running the Little Huskies wrestling program I got a call from the man who ran the Cicero youth program. He explained the father of two young boys wanted them to wrestle however he couldn't have black kids on his team at Morton. I was flabbergasted! That brought me to the reality of race in our society. I eagerly accepted his referral and the boys who lived in Maywood became an integral part of our program but more importantly wrestling and its character building precepts made indelible impacts on them as young men. About 4 years later we engaged in a high profile competition with that Cicero team in front a huge college crowd just before Northwestern and Wisconsin wrestled. With the participation of a handful of boys from Maywood we handily beat them and this man came to me and stuck his finger in my chest and declared `You will regret this day and that this happened`. All I could do is chuckle in his face and thank him for sending the boys from Maywood over. But this incident illustrated to me how deep seeded racism is in our society, and I have made it one of my life's mission to fight that battle. That is why I am so thrilled I was able to vote to approve our racial equity policy last Thursday.

"I have a guest here tonight, I would like to introduce Torry Early, Torry in my view is a Huskie Hero! I have known Torry for about 8 years, and Torry has always marched to the beat of his own drummer. He entered OPRF 4 years ago in the shadow of his older brother who is an elite athlete State Champion & NCAA All-American wrestler. Torry has always kept to his own pace, but a few years ago through the EOS program he was identified as a student who was capable of doing very high level honors and AP work.

“To his credit Torry accepted the challenge and will graduate with over a 3.8 GPA. He has been accepted to St Olaf, North Central, WI Parkside and Coe College. He is going to major in Computer Science but because he is a man of high character I hope he will consider teaching as a profession.

“Back in Feb Torry was wrestling in the semi-finals of the IHSA sectional tournament. I was running the tournament and the match unfolded right in front of me. He was wrestling a kid from DeKalb and it was a very tight match going back and forth. Torry has a counter wrestling style rather than being super aggressive. So that hard fought match went to overtime and Torry pulled out the victory and qualified for the state tournament. During the end of match procedure as Torry’s hand was raised the crowd, mostly white adults started to boo. They probably were booing Torry’s less than aggressive style or what they thought was a poorly officiated match or the fact he was from OPRF and the Illinois Wrestling Community loves to hate us. But the bottom line is they were booing a Black teenage boy. Then Torry did something I found to be remarkable, in a mature and measured way he responded by putting his finger to his mouth in a shoosh motion. The official immediately penalized Torry for misconduct, a warning as any gesture is not allowed. As the meet continued I noticed boys making all sorts of gestures, pointing at parents, heaven, blowing kisses, crossing themselves and none of them got penalized. So I have asked why the double standard? This situation has been brought to our state and national officials and will be used in coaches and officials’ educational updates for next season. I tell you this because in that one brief moment Torry heroically sent a message to all of the adults in that building that: Hey be quiet, you cannot do this to me. This is why Torry is a hero to me.

“I leave this board tonight a fulfilled man, I am very proud of the work and progress we have made. I believe Jenn and I leave this district in a much better place then where it was when we came on to this board. The initiatives we have passed and the work we have done are too exhaustive to list, but the big three areas or major accomplishments are Equity, Finances/Taxes and Facilities.

“I have said before as a member of this board I am an anecdotal man in a data driven world. I ran for this board because I believe our district needed a grassroots perspective. I want to leave with this advice, decisions here are made by people that will affect people. Please be aware that data should inform decisions and not drive decision making.

“I do need to get into one area of specifics, I have advocated for minority hiring since my first day on this board, I am thrilled we found Roxana Sanders to lead this work, I want to say please do not hire minorities for the sake of hiring minorities. Please hire people of high character. I have always believed character should trump skills in the process.

“Skills can be taught and developed, character in adults is intrinsic. This is why I have been so enthusiastically supporting a grow our own program. By encouraging our students to consider teaching as a profession we have the opportunity to know and develop their character. Off the top of my head here are a half of dozen names of our graduates who are in college now, of very high character and displayed a desire to return here and teach: Adam Lemke-Bell, Alexis Chandler, Kendall Moore-Fields, Jamari Moore, Kendale McCoy & Bryce Scott. The grow our own list starts here.

“I need to say thank you Dr. Pruitt-Adams and her entire administration and especially Gail. We have some amazing talent and I look forward watching as change unfolds. I would also like to thank all of my colleagues to whom I have served on this board, to Jackie for her quiet and effective leadership and to Tom for his championing of the contract negotiations. I would also like to express my deepest thanks to Lynn Kamenitsa and Mike Poirier and the Imagine team for their incredible work in creating a facilities master plan under some very difficult pressures. I want to thank Mary Matticks & Cathy Yen for being my support they have talked me off the ledge several times over the past 4 years. I want to thank Sheila Hardin for her work as faculty leader I see her passion for her members and I truly appreciate her dedication. And to all of our faculty...thank you for work and dedication to our youth, it is you and your work that defines us and makes this school the most valuable asset in our community.

“Finally, I cannot say enough about my colleague Jenn Cassell whose `EF Hutton` style has brought this district action on equity work that has been too long been a sound bite without the bite. Thank you Jenn for making it happen!

“Although I am disappointed by the results of the election I am undeterred, I will always be around if you need me you can probably find me in the wrestling room high atop the fieldhouse where the roof leaks, the bricks are falling out and the mats come a part. But most importantly teenagers are becoming adults. Adieu”

## **Adjournment**

At 8:15 p.m. Dr. Moore moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting Sine Dine; seconded by Ms. Cassell. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

Dr. Jackie Moore  
President

Jennifer Cassell  
Secretary