

Tuesday, February 11, 2019

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Tuesday, February 11, 2019, in the Board Room of the high school.

**Call to Order**

President Dr. Moore called the meeting to order at 6:14 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Fred Arkin, Matt Baron, Tom Cofsky, Jennifer Cassell, Craig Iseli, and Dr. Jackie Moore. Also at the table were Dr. Joylynn Pruitt-Adams, Superintendent; Greg Johnson, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Roxana Sanders, Senior Director of Human Resources; Michael Carioscio, Chief Operations Officer; Cyndi Sidor, Interim Chief Business School Official; Dr. Gwen Walker-Qualls, Senior Director Pupil Support Services; Chris Thieme, Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; Karin Sullivan, Executive Director of Communications; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

**Visitors**

Lee Williams, OPRFHS faculty; Stacey Gibson and Binita M. Donohue of Transform The Collective; and Terry Kelleher, community member.

**Public Comments**

None

**Building on Capacity**

Stacey Gibson and Binita M. Donohue facilitated a discussion on equity work that began on December 18, 2017. They posed three questions:

1. What do you need to release to become more available to this group?
2. What equity work is and is not working?
3. What do you do when you are feeling stressed?

Equity plans are big inspirational, motivational, and have many moving parts. People are pressured to perform, and yet they need to recognize their human feelings. They were asked to participate in two exercises. The first one was what they felt physically and emotionally when they heard the words *American to Me*, how did they respond, and what was the impact when they were their Board of Education member hats. The second one was the same question but from their perspective.

Words used by the participants as to their thoughts on long-range planning included:

- 1) The progress towards the commitment to demographics
- 2) The focus on Restorative Justice and the first step of increasing the number of teachers of color
- 3) The curriculum initiatives are progressing
- 4) A deeper level of commitment to actions
- 5) Revisions to the dress code/ID policy, and the added greeters

- 6) Creation of transgender policy
- 7) Actively involved in doing racial equity policy and procedures.
- 8) Accountability that has led to students having a great role in being leaders at the school.
- 9) Students are holding adults accountable.
- 10) The Board of Education and administration are on the same page with a common goal
- 11) Student engagement and leadership
- 12) More fine-tuned focus and accountability
- 13) Broadened equity leadership

Next participants responded with words relative to *America to Me*.

- 1) Defensive
- 2) More commitment to work
- 3) Feeling teaching
- 4) Hopeful, proud, discouraged
- 5) An opportunity to help someone understand it. Otherwise, it would burn much energy.
- 6) Looking for value in the result of the documentary 1) stories revolving around the kids, and 2) almost the entire community is on the face of it.
- 7) Both personally and professionally feelings of frustration, anger, exhaustion, and inspiration. Frustration because the conversation continues.
- 8) Validation in need for the work to continue.
- 9) Anxiety about the negative feelings already enunciated.
- 10) Equal parts of frustrated and validated.
- 11) Proud and hopeful
- 12) Concerned and frustrated
- 13) Needed and cautiously optimistic
- 14) Exhaustion, relief, frustration, and appreciation to the students and families in the film.

The presenters acknowledged that the pursuit of equity is frustrating and the emotional responses it elicits include: anger, hurt, being caught off-guard and these feelings can lead to being confused, perplexed, disoriented, bewildered, and lost. The response to these feelings is often just to keep working. The presenters observed that the emotional words came from the female voices and the value-orientated words came from the male voices.

This strain leads to disorientation. A suggestion was for the participants to hold space for that disorientation and to look at what it was revealing. The impact of the strain can be 1) embody (women of color), 2) project (do not want to carry),

and 3) disconnect (become exhausted). Psychic changes do cause physical reactions.

One member stated that equity work takes over her spirit. Another said that perhaps it was because of age, but they had less tolerance, and it took more time to release the feelings, etc. Another stated that having a son of color increases the strain, given the politics of the day. Another comment was that it was easy to disconnect and project in order to think the action-oriented-way on what needs to be done with the job. Men feel embodied as well. One person disconnected in some situations because the feeling was that there was enough black voice in the room. Another person disconnected because their world does not deal with racial equity issues on a day-to-day basis and if they did not disconnect, they could not get anything done. It is not a matter of not caring, however. Another stated that becoming more analytical did not mean disconnecting. The superintendent stated that she could not disconnect even when she goes home because of her color and gender. She did not understand the ability to turn it off. She worries about family, friends and students and herself as to how she is being perceived. She was in a quest to learn how to find balance.

One member stated that in the space of being Board members, their goal is to use the racial equity lens in to do the work. The presenters were there to guide the tough conversations analytically and logically. The Board needs to find ways to tap into its discomfort differently than in the past. The hope was for the leaders to get uncomfortable as they cannot afford to sit back and assume that others will do that work. When one member disconnects, it puts more work on the others. Equity work is hard and ongoing. One's response to strain can be to embody, disconnect, or project. When someone disconnects, who embodies the work? Projection is the unconscious process of externalizing difficult and painful feelings onto an outside "container." Moreover, each one can become the "container" and then has to manage unwanted feelings.

Race work is not about being a good or a bad person. It is about building coalitions. The goal of this meeting was the alignment of the head, heart, and body. Otherwise, people disappear or become discouraged, lose momentum, and then disengage.

Discussion ensued about the lack of discussion the Board had about the miniseries *American to Me*. If not discussed, it becomes compounded debt or PTSD as the memory, spirit, and soul have no time limits. Board members were asked to write down a date when the ATM became a disruption and then what was the disruption. Responses included: 1) the administration and the Board of Education had different views. 2) The Board of Education that approved this

movie did so one month before the new Board took office; 3) a long period of silence occurred after the miniseries was filmed and communication with the administration and the filmmaker. One member remarked that the Board had not talked about the movie or series nor the rationale for learning for the Board.

What did the Board think would be the result of the miniseries? Administration Was getting ahead of it and it created discussion; it was more good than negative. The negatives were that the students were the sacrificial lambs that embodied both sides of the spectrum.

One new Board member at the time noted that 1) the distraction of the miniseries had retarded his/her growth as a board member; 2) No forum had been scheduled for the Board members to express their opinions about it; 3) No debrief on the roles and responsibilities took place, and 4) no discussion with the filmmaker had occurred.

The presenters felt the Board should have a conversation to build awareness and capacity as it is about individual and collective trust and communication.

## **Adjournment**

At 9:03 p.m., on Monday, February 11, 2019, Mr. Baron moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Dr. Moore. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Dr. Jackie Moore  
President

Jennifer Cassell  
Secretary