

May 13, 2020

A Virtual Special Meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Wednesday, May 13, 2020, virtually.

Call to Order

President Dixon Spivy called the meeting to order at 4:38 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Matt Baron, Tom Cofsky, Gina Harris, Craig Iseli, Ralph Martire, 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

Also present were: Greg Johnson, Associate Superintendent; Dr. Roxana Sanders, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Michael Carioscio, Chief Operations Officer; Dr. Gwen Walker Qualls, Director of Pupil Support Services; and Karin Sullivan, Executive Director of Communications, Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors

Lynda Parker and Dr. Laurie Fiorenza, OPRFHS faculty

Public Comments

John Duffy provided the following public comments: I am John Duffy. I am presenting a statement on behalf of the Committee for Equity and Excellence in Education, Oak Park Call to Action, Suburban Unity Alliance, and community members Burcy Hines and Wyanetta Johnson.

“As racial equity advocates, we are deeply disappointed by your April 23rd vote to proceed immediately with the \$32.6 million Phase I construction--a decision made unanimously and against the recommendation of District administration.

“We ask that the Board halt construction plans and consider the impact of the pandemic on our students, their families, our school, and this community.

“The District’s financial consultant presented serious projected fiscal shortfalls that could cost the District up to \$45 million in lost revenue by year 2025. This projection, combined with other factors - including Illinois having the worst fiscal condition and lowest school funding in the nation- make future school revenues from property taxes and state aid most problematic and uncertain.

“Surely, even the most privileged in our community must recognize that the pandemic has intensified local and national inequities in jobs, housing, food, and education - all of which impact our most vulnerable students and families, and our community.

“Board members commented that new construction supported the District’s equity vision. You asserted that the project will rebuild and modernize the student learning center and cafeteria, add new science classrooms, improve some special education

classrooms, and provide additional physical accommodations for students with disabilities.

“Some of these changes - in the right climate- might be deserving priorities. And, notably, this Board has previously acted on behalf of our most marginalized students: enhancing restorative practices, hiring more teachers of color, and supporting curriculum equity.

“Nevertheless, student needs impacted by long-standing race and class inequities and magnified by the pandemic went unmentioned in the recent decision to push on with construction spending.

“Current articles by educators are replete with analyses of new and aggravated challenges related to the pandemic for students and schools.

“We strongly believe D 200’s dwindling resources must be directed to student needs aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic. These needs include:

- Remediation to address lost learning for all and the widening equity gaps: extended school days and years, expanded summer school options, tutoring, and compensatory services for students with special needs.
- Support for teachers adjusting curricula, developing new strategies, amending materials, applying new technology, and implementing authentic, individualized student assessments to guide learning across settings.
- Services to address health and safety for re-opening: expanded nursing, social work, counseling, and psychological services; updated janitorial procedures and products; and health and public safety strategies.
- Technology expansion and support for students, families, faculty, and staff during e-learning, reintegration into classrooms, and remediation.
- Facility and classroom changes for re-opening: health stations; smaller class sizes; split attendance hours; and reconfiguring large meeting”

Mary Bird provided the following public comments: “I am Mary Bird and a member of CEEE. I continue from John Duffy’s statement.

“While raising deep concerns regarding Board priorities, we recognize and praise the efforts of faculty, staff, administration, and families for their support of students during this crisis. They and our children, however, need more targeted resources and support.

“The \$32.6 million construction project must be halted. We call on the D200 Board and administration to make decisions with careful attention to the complete context schools, students, and families face. Responsible fiscal decision-making is paramount for realizing the educational mission of OPRFHS. Advancing a massive construction project ignores the unprecedented social, emotional, academic, and economic situations students and families now face.

“Importantly, decisions on funding, programs, hiring, curriculum, and new construction must be made with the faithful use of an equity impact evaluation. The D200 Racial Equity Policy mandates the use of that protocol. A racial equity impact assessment lens is a central feature of implementation and accountability procedures Superintendent Pruitt-Adams will soon bring to the Board for approval.

“We truly hope all dire predictions are inaccurate and all concerns unwarranted. Our community, however, is responsible for this generation's education. Now - during a pandemic - is not a time to gamble on behalf of our children.

“Finally, CEEE, SUA, OPCTA, and Ms. Hines and Ms. Johnson ask you to provide a response to these questions:

“For the Board:

- 1) Why, in deciding to move forward with construction, did you not consider students’ and families’ educational and economic needs, especially in light of the pandemic?
- 2) Why did the Board elevate its own analysis of the D200 financial situation above the administration’s and that of the administration’s consultant, particularly in light of the pandemic, while families are suffering, including in our community? What were the reasons for ignoring the administration’s (and their consultant’s) recommendation to hold off on construction?
- 3) Does the Board consider the financial state of Illinois relevant to schools in Oak Park? If so, how is that reflected in the construction decision? If not, why are Illinois finances not relevant to Oak Park schools?
- 4) Why was an authentic racial equity impact analysis not applied to the decision to move forward with \$32.6 million in construction?
- 5) Will the Board seek information from D200 regarding the Covid-19 educational and psycho-social needs and costs for its students, faculty, staff, and community? If so, when? If not, why not?

“For the administration:

- 1) What steps is the administration taking to assess the needs of families and students who are considered the schools’ most vulnerable, including students with special needs, students with lower social economic status, and/or students of color, etc. and/or those students and families who have not responded to past surveys or outreach?
- 2) Will the administration present a report to the Board this summer setting forth projected and potential needs and challenges for students, families, faculty, and staff relating to Covid-19? If so, when? If not, why not?”

**Waiver of
Graduation
Requirements**

Ms. Dixon Spivy Moved to waive the graduation requirements as detailed in the summary for the Class of 2020 because of the current extraordinary circumstances; seconded by Ms. Harris.

The ISBE Emergency Rules and April 27, 2020 guidance give school districts and boards of education significant discretion to make decisions regarding graduation requirements

that are appropriate for the students they serve. The Emergency Rules are meant to provide flexibility for students who were otherwise on track to graduate, but now are at risk of not graduating due to COVID-19 school closures. The April 27 guidance specifically indicates, “ISBE encourages educators to make every possible effort to engage and support students scheduled to graduate/receive promotion this spring so that they may do so.”

In order to follow the requirements and intent of Executive Order 2020-321, the administration conducted a review of all state and school-specific required classes that seniors in which were currently enrolled. Based on this review, a list of courses was created that would need to be waived to ensure that all seniors who were on track to graduate this spring are able to do so. This list of courses results in the following recommendation to the Board:

- In order to comply with the five credits waived by Executive Order 2020-321, reduce the overall graduation credits from 43 to 38. This reduction of five credits matches the five credits the state waived affecting History, Math, English, Science, and World Languages/Fine Arts/Applied Arts.

- In order to ensure that no students currently on track to graduate are negatively affected by Remote learning, waive the graduation requirements for:
 - o Computer Proficiency
 - o Financial Lit
 - o Driver Ed
 - o Health
 - o 1 semester of PE
 - o Civics

The effect of this waiver is:

- 757 of 804 current seniors would immediately have enough credits to graduate from OPRF this spring.
- 27 active, on campus seniors who were not on track to graduate prior to the pandemic may still be at risk of not graduating.
- 20 off campus students who were not on track to graduate prior to the pandemic may still be at risk of not graduating.
- Waiving the requirements above would allow these 47 students to better target their efforts for the next three weeks, increasing their chances of graduating this spring.

Students who were on track to graduate will graduate. The 27 active and 20 off campus students who were not on track may or may not graduate. This recommendation should not be perceived as an intent to waive the requirements for any future classes at OPRF.

Discussion ensued. The criteria for why Civics was on the list was because being on-campus was unnecessary for this class. A large number of seniors are enrolled in Civics, and 140 seniors need the class for graduation. ISBE has said that it did not want any class to cause harm to students due to the pandemic. The students will still receive grades, but those grades will not impede their graduation. If a

student has an incomplete, or if a student were not passing at the beginning of the third quarter and had not engaged, the requirement to graduate will be waived. Eventually, it will be a grade of no credit (NC). No student can receive a grade of F because of eLearning. It will have no effect on the GPA. The administration stated that if a student is continuously engaged and is turning in assignments, his/her final grade could not be lower than his/her grade in the third quarter.

Some of the students are off campus. The District is awaiting reports on their grades and those students will be given the opportunity to raise their grades. These students are generally making up credits outside of their senior courses. All involved are aware. If they complete their assignments and engage, they can graduate. The other 47 students will get incompletes but have an opportunity for summer school. Most of those students were already on a plan to recover the classes in order to graduate. Dr. Moore asked what the demographics of the 47 students were.

This special meeting was requested at this time because the last senior day is Friday, May 15. If approved, the administration can inform the parents and students regarding their graduation credits and the waiving of the requirements.

The number of graduation credits has been decreased from 43 to 38. Ms. Parker stated that it is being emphasized to students that these grades will count on their college transcripts. The third quarter grade is the benchmark.

Dr. Pruitt-Adams noted that the administration is developing a three-prong approach for next year. There will be more time to plan and communicate its plans prior to the start of the school.

A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Graduation Recommendation

Based on a survey of Class of 2020 students, parents, and guardians, the administration recently announced that an in-person graduation ceremony would be held on Aug. 2, 2020. Since that announcement, however, Gov. JB Pritzker has released [Restore Illinois](#), a five-stage plan for reopening the state. All parts of Illinois currently are in stage 2. The Restore Illinois plan specifies that groups larger than 50 persons will not be permitted until stage 5, when a vaccine or effective and widely available treatment is available or there is elimination of new cases over a sustained period.

The current level of new Covid-19 cases and related hospitalizations and deaths in this region make it extremely unlikely that stage 5 will be reached by August. The first responsibility is to the health and safety of the students, families, and staff. Thus, an in-person graduation will not be held for the Class of 2020. Instead, a virtual graduation is planned for Sunday, June 14, at 3 p.m.

The administration will do everything it can to make it special by replicating as many of the traditional elements of our commencement program as possible. Photos

and the names of all of the graduates will be incorporated (similar to the virtual Honors Convocation); to make it more personal, seniors will be asked to send in a photo of themselves in their caps and gowns to use instead of their yearbook photo. The plan includes archiving the ceremony on YouTube, and working with the Village of Oak Park to air the ceremony on its cable access channel. The decision to hold a virtual graduation on June 14, 2020 was because public health officials have said there is no way to tell where the state will be in either August or December. If the ceremony were scheduled for December, it would be held in the Fieldhouse because the auditorium will not be available. Some students will have moved on to the armed forces, colleges, etc. The administration wanted to affect the majority of students. The administration does want to bring them together for a reception to celebrate each other some time in the future.

Several members wondered whether something could be held in December even with the June 14 virtual date. Mr. Baron appreciated how well the District's Honors Convocation and the distribution of yard signs was done as it is encouraging and morale boosting. Dr. Pruitt-Adams stated that every senior received a sign. Both Mr. Baron and Ms. Dixon Spivy volunteered to distribute yard signs next year to the graduates as well.

Dr. Pruitt-Adams reported that the staff has risen to the occasion each time the administration has reached out and everyone has pitched in.

Ms. Harris has a graduating senior at another high school and the challenge and impact is the most students attend. She felt it would be challenging to have a December event with students being away at college and changing family situations. She asked about students not as plugged in and connected.

Closed Session

At 5:15 p.m., Ms. Dixon Spivy moved to enter 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 and independent contractors and specific volunteers, 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. 101-0459; seconded by Ms. Harris. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

At 5:54 p.m., the Board of Education resumed the open session.

Adjournment

At 5:56 p.m., Mr. Martire moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Mr. Iseli. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

Ms. Dixon Spivy
President

Thomas F. Cofsky
Secretary