

MEMORANDUM

To: District 200 Board of Education

From: Members of the Culture, Climate, and Behavior Committee

Date: April 27, 2017

Re: Recommendations regarding school culture, climate, and behavior at Oak Park and River Forest High School, District 200

Background

On January 28, 2016, the Board of Education formed the Culture Climate and Behavior Committee (CCB) to study and make recommendations regarding OPRFHS's culture and climate with the goal of eliminating disproportionate discipline for students of color and making OPRFHS a welcoming environment for all students. The committee consists of Board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and parents.

The 2014-2019 Strategic Plan states "we embrace our diversity and believe race, income, gender, and learning differences should not predict success." However, as of the writing of these recommendations, and despite the implementation of Senate Bill 100 on September 15, 2016, we continue to see disproportionate punishment for students of color, especially males (*see* Semester 1 Discipline Report, January 17, 2017). This committee's purpose is to target those disparities directly by soliciting input from multiple stakeholders: students, families, faculty, and staff. The Board Members and Administrators on the committee have participated as non-voting members. As stated in the Strategic Plan's vision statement, this committee strives to guide OPRFHS to create systems that ensure we are an "ever-improving model of equity and excellence that will enable all students to achieve their full potential." This committee recognizes that to create such systems, the school community will need to hold the Board of Education, Administration, and faculty accountable and that mechanisms of oversight must be built-in to ensure fidelity in implementation as well as constant monitoring and evaluation of progress.

The Board of Education charged the committee with the following tasks:

1. Recommend detailed three-year action step plan for Strategic Plan Equity Action Step 2: Create a school community where all students feel welcome and experience a sense of belonging.
2. Recommend detailed three-year action step plan for Strategic Plan Supportive Learning Environment Action Step 4: Establish fair and just processes and practices that set clear, meaningful expectations to create a safe environment while recognizing the humanity of all students and adults.
3. Review and suggest appropriate changes to the Code of Conduct.
4. Recommend procedures on the application of the Code of Conduct.

As to tasks three and four, the passage of Illinois state law, Senate Bill 100, provided an opportunity for school administrators to rewrite the Code of Conduct and develop procedures to effectuate the letter and spirit of the law with the assistance of district counsel. This work was completed prior to the start of the 2016-2017 school year, as required by the bill. Thus, the recommendations set out below focus on the first two tasks. CCB acknowledges that there must be political will and buy-in from the entire school community for these action steps to be implemented with fidelity.

This committee specifically addresses two areas of our Strategic Plan. The first is Goal 2: Equity which states “OPRFHS will continuously strive to create an environment where the academic achievement and social and emotional growth of students will no longer be predictable by race, socioeconomic status, or other social factors,” and the second is Goal 3: Supportive Learning Environment which states “OPRFHS will create learning environments that support the unique strengths and needs of each individual and will provide a system of supports to meet the evolving needs of all students.”

The recommendations that follow fall into three general categories:

- **Assessment** allows us to take stock of where we are currently in terms of culture and climate at OPRFHS, and gives us the ability to move forward with a well-planned strategy to implement best practices for our school community.
- **Voice** acknowledges that opinions and suggestions of all members of the school community are welcome and encouraged while maximizing engagement among members of the school community. We acknowledge that no one group of stakeholders (students, faculty, families, staff, administration or Board) have all the answers to the school’s needs, and that we must rely on one another to create solutions that best meet the needs of the school community as a whole.
- **Accountability** ensures that we will continue to honor the traditions of our school while encouraging “those things that are best”, and that we will be “an ever-improving model of equity and excellence” for future generations.

The timeline for implementation of these recommendations is meant to be flexible, although it is the intent of this committee that the recommendations will be implemented no later than the dates set forth below. We acknowledge that the best laid plans may need future modification, so once these recommendations have been adopted by the Board, the Superintendent may make recommendations to the Board to change the timeline and will provide a basis for the request. The Board may then vote to amend the timeline if it is deemed to be in the best interest of the district.

Additionally, the work of this committee must be ongoing because of the complexity of race issues, but also because this committee fulfills the requirements of 105 ILCS 5/10-20.14 which mandates that the district maintain a standing parent-teacher advisory committee which annually reviews discipline policy. The recommendations below are for the 2017-2018 school year. Recommendations for future years will be forthcoming pending the adoption and implementation of the revised Strategic Plan.

Recommendations

2017-2018 School Year

1. Beginning in early Fall 2017, conduct an annual review of the culture and climate at the high school (e.g. a survey to all students, faculty, staff, and families followed by targeted focus groups) to gather quantitative and qualitative data by which to assess progress in improving the school's culture and climate to create an environment in which all students feel welcome.
 - *Objective: Assessment-* To establish a baseline by which to judge effectiveness of equity initiatives and to provide ongoing feedback concerning school climate and culture.
 - *Description:* Starting in early Fall 2017, the Administration will create a baseline of the school's culture and climate using a survey which will be administered to students, families, faculty, and staff. This data will provide a yardstick by which progress will be measured. To receive qualitative data as well, the Administration will follow up the survey with focus groups. The goal of the survey and focus groups will be to assess equity in the following areas: race, gender, socioeconomic, and special education status. The focus groups will be run by facilitators who are experts in the areas of racial equity, restorative justice, and Title IX which states that "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."
 - *Resources Needed:* Creation of an instrument for the survey, outreach to families to create interest in the survey, time to administer the survey and compile results, identification of restorative justice and Title IX experts, time for focus group meetings, compilation of focus group data, and funding.
 - *Metrics:* Student, faculty, staff, and family responses provided and percentage of respondents in each demographic.

2. Conduct inventory/audit of all initiatives created to improve equity through culture and climate implemented from 2000 to present.
 - *Objective: Assessment-* To understand what programs the school has currently, what the programs the school has had historically, and the metrics and methods by which these programs have been assessed.
 - *Description:* Conduct inventory and audit of all initiatives to improve equity through culture and climate implemented from 2000 to present to determine:
 - a. Why initiative was implemented;
 - b. What are/were the outcomes of the initiative; and,
 - c. If initiative was discontinued, why?
 - d. If the initiative is ongoing, why?
 - *Resources Needed:* Time commitment by assigned administrator or independent consultant, funding if consultant contracted.
 - *Metrics:* Completion of project.

3. Professional audit of restorative justice practices within school, and recommendation for improvement in quality and/or quantity of restorative justice practices.
 - *Objective: Assessment-* To create uniformity in application of restorative justice practices throughout school and determine which additional practices should be implemented.
 - *Description:* Using a restorative justice professional, the school will conduct an audit of all current initiatives. This will include an assessment of the quality of current practices and recommendations for additional practices and supports (such as a peace room or peer juries), and a recommendation for systematizing and integrating restorative justice within the discipline process. Additionally, this will include an assessment of what practices currently implemented are barriers to a restorative justice philosophy and recommendations for removal of those barriers.
 - *Resources Needed:* Identification of an appropriate professional, funding.
 - *Metrics:* Completion of project.

Glossary of Terms

- **Equity** refers to providing a continuum of educational opportunities that meets the needs of each student and eliminating policies and practices that offer advantages to one group of students over another group of students.
- “**Restorative justice practices**’ refers to non-punitive disciplinary responses that focus on repairing harm done to relationships and people, developing solutions by engaging all persons affected by a harm, and accountability. A variety of restorative practices can be used in schools, ranging from brief on-the-spot responses to student behavior in the classroom to community conferencing involving multiple parties, such as students, parents, and teachers.” See U.S. Department of Education, *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline*, available at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>

Next Steps

We ask that the Board of Education approve the above recommendations of the CCB committee and then direct the Administration to implement them.

At an upcoming meeting Board member Sara Dixon Spivy will be requesting that the Board of Education reconvene the Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee (which fulfills the statutory requirement of the parent-teacher advisory committee) and appoint members for the 2017-2018 school year. A list of proposed members will be provided at that time.