

May 31, 2007

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Thursday, May 31, 2007, in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order

President Conway called the meeting to order at 7:35 a.m. A roll call vote indicated the following members were present: John C. Allen, IV, Jacques A. Conway, Valerie J. Fisher, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, and Sharon Patchak-Layman. Also present were Susan J. Bridge, Superintendent/Principal; Jason Edgecombe, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board of Education.

Appointment of Secretary

In Board Secretary Rigas' absence, Dr. Lee was appointed secretary Protempore.

Visitors

Terry Burke, Burcy Hines, Bridgette Wooten, and other community members.

Visitor Comments

Terry Burke, parent and resident of 1180 Clinton, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education.

Ms. Burke stated there was the perception that because Bridgette Wooten gave an interview to the *Oak Leaves* in January, her son was being recommended for expulsion. Ms. Wooten's relatives were also being harassed. In her niece's case, the Deans of Discipline did not allow her diary, which would have given testimony to the chronology of the events, to be used at a discipline hearing. Earlier this year, legal fees were filed with pro bono lawyers. Another Special Education student was illegally expelled. The Special Education Department had not completed nor implemented an IEP. Ms. Burke wished to make sure that the Board of Education was aware of these instances. She continued that, in March of this year, after running up a large legal bill defending this noncompliance, O.P.R.F.H.S.'s legal counsel recommended that the student be restored to the program at the high school. Ms. Burke learned that the Special Education director had recommended to the Board of Education members in closed session that the student be returned. Special Education did not recommend his reinstatement; the high school's attorneys made the recommendation. Now the high school is recommending that Ms. Wooten's other son be expelled. If the Board of Education approves this illegal expulsion, the mother will have to seek legal assistance to report the student out of school. The boy has not received special education accommodations since the spring of 2006 nor did his IEP follow him to the current the school, as is required by law. He has a

right to the accommodations. Once again, the mother has contacted a pro bono lawyer; the high school will have to pay Franczek Sullivan, its attorneys, to defend another futile case. Ms. Burke stated that the taxpayers were tired of funding legal expenses because the school does not provide services.

Mr. Conway informed Ms. Burke that Ms. Wooten's son is not identified as Special Education. He is not in the Special Education Department because his mother took him out of it when she did not agree with the school that the Special Education Department recommended. He asked Ms. Burke to confirm that with the mother.

Burcy Hines, resident of 1221 Fair Oaks, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education.

Ms. Hines stated that she was coming to the Board of Education because she understood the timeline for the new principal to start was July 1. She cautioned the Board of Education not to rush to make any fast judgment, but to take its time and address the issues of the achievement gap and Special Education. She wanted the opportunity to work together to find someone qualified for the job so that these battles did not have to continue. She appreciated the education her own son had received at O.P.R.F.H.S. and he has made a success of himself.

Mr. Conway responded that the Board of Education would use the necessary diligence and would address those important issues.

Ms. Bridgette Wooten, parent and resident of 216 S. Lombard, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education.

Ms. Wooten wanted to speak about the Board of Education's expulsion of her son. She affirmed that in January, she had taken him out of Special Education because she did not like the two alternative schools that the Special Education Department recommended.

On Friday, May 25, the director of H.A.R.B.O.R. Academy indicated to the mother that if she thought her son needed services, she needed to put it in writing and submit it to the Special Education Department. She did so and was waiting to hear the outcome. She continued that she could attest to what her son did or did not do. However, extreme measures have been taken when any of her family had done something, i.e., her niece and nephew. She, too, spoke of her writing letters to the *Wednesday Journal* and *Oak Leaves* about her children's experiences. She also has a list of families whose children had attended H.A.R.B.O.R. Academy and though they were referred back

to O.P.R.F.H.S. for disciplinary reasons, they were not taken to the Board for expulsion. Ms. Wooten stated that because her son complained about the bus, he was up for expulsion.

Ms. Wooten was thanked for her comments.

At the Board of Education's request, Mr. Edgecombe spoke about the process established for the selecting the principal. It involved advertisements placed on the District's website, the A.A.S.A.'s statewide website, and in the national publication *Education Week*. Local colleges and universities and the 18 members of the Northwest Personnel Association had been notified.

Mr. Edgecombe, Dr. Weninger, two parents, two students, three faculty members, division heads, and non-certified personnel would participate in a committee to select the criteria for the principal. Representatives selected by their respective groups (Faculty Senate, Division Heads, the CPA, and B&G) would make up the composition of this committee. Dr. Weninger will chair the first meeting, Tuesday, June 5 at 3:00 p.m., to discuss the attributes of the principal and credentials. Mr. Edgecombe had drafted the job description and shared it with Dr. Weninger and B.A.T. members. Mr. Edgecombe welcomed the Board of Education's input on it as well. Mr. Edgecombe will lead the interviews, scheduled for June 21 and 22, and Dr. Weninger will be an observer. B.A.T. will also participate in the first round of interviews in order to meet all of the candidates.

That committee will then recommend three finalists. All individuals will be told that if they were successful in reaching the final stage, they would need to return for a second round of interviews on June 26, 2007. On June 26, they will then be interviewed by three committees: students, chaired by Ms. Milojevic; parents, chaired by a division head, and faculty and staff members, chaired by Mr. Edgecombe. If one of the candidates is selected, that candidate will be brought to the Board of Education for approval June 28, 2007. If the results of this process are not satisfactory, Dr. Weninger will propose Plan B, which is yet to be determined.

Dr. Lee asked what the new Board of Education's role would be in determining the role and function of the principal. Mr. Edgecombe stated that the Board of Education asked Dr. Bridge to establish a committee to look at separating the two roles. Part of that process was the delineation of the duties of the superintendent, which left the duties of the principal relatively clear. The principal would be primarily responsible for the day-to-day operations of the building. The superintendent was to have responsibilities that are more external. Mr. Conway added that the Board of Education had wanted the

superintendent to have a major input on the duties and the responsibilities of the principal.

Ms. Fisher agreed with both Mr. Edgecombe and Mr. Conway and felt it would be helpful for Ms. Kalmerton to provide the minutes of the Superintendent/Principal Committee, which was composed of many faculty members, administrators, representatives from the parent groups, etc. to the new Board of Education members. The committee members also conducted site visits to other districts as well. While O.P.R.F.H.S. has a rather unique demographic, five other schools were visited. At that time, they interviewed the structures that the other schools had in place. They learned that no one else had a combined superintendent/principal position and they were clear about what the superintendent's duties were. Thus, the group was able to compile a list of what they thought the job should be, but the superintendent has to have the ability for input. A formal report was made.

Dr. Lee was not concerned with the process. He was concerned about how to find out what decisions were made because of that process. He assumed that it was put in writing and now a part of the policy of the Board of Education. Mr. Conway stated that it was not yet complete.

Mr. Allen stated that up until now, the superintendent/principal reported to Board of Education. In order to find the desired principal, an outline of the position is necessary. The Board of Education wants to be able to work with the superintendent on the positions. The new Board of Education members are concerned that the new person reflects the desires of the community.

Mr. Conway asked Mr. Edgecombe to provide a draft of the principal's job description to the new Board of Education members.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked to be part of the interviewing process. Her prior experience was that the Board of Education interviewed all administrative applicants in order to give feedback from the Board's perspective. She found that invaluable for both the superintendent and the Board of Education. She was dismayed to see the Board of Education was not part of this process, including the review of the job description. The new Board of Education input should be a reaffirmation of the original affirmations. Mr. Edgecombe felt this was a discussion between Dr. Weninger and Board of Education, as there seemed to be a different philosophy about appointments to the district. Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that the families that come to the high school, 80 percent come through District 97 and are familiar with the Board of Education being involved in the process.

Mr. Allen stated that the new Board of Education members have only had three weeks to gather all of the information and that the old Board of Education members need to be patient with their questions. Mr. Conway stated that Ms. Kalmerton would provide the new Board of Education members with the report mentioned earlier and that they would be welcome to participate in the interviewing process. Mr. Conway asked Mr. Edgecombe to talk with Dr. Weninger about this.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked if the focus groups had the listed qualifications and attributes of the position? Mr. Conway responded yes. Some people felt that the split was necessary because the school was asking too much from one person. When Donna Stevens acted as the principal, she had a laundry list of responsibilities that was just too much. The faculty wanted someone to address their issues. The discipline system does advocate for the students. The dean counselors do not have time to see their students. There was a desire to have a principal who is an advocate for students and faculty.

Dr. Millard stated that when the position of superintendent/principal was split, the Board of Education knew its responsibility was to hire the superintendent. How the Board of Education envisioned the separation had been discussed with the candidates as well as the effect of then having to reorganize/restructure the administrative structure. The Board of Education realized that this would require not just hiring a principal, but looking at the complete structure. The Board of Education made it clear that it was hiring the superintendent to be the leader and the engineer of the program and that he/she might have to put the team together differently. This is the superintendent's job. It will be Dr. Weninger's responsibility.

Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that there were two ways to go about restructuring: 1) I have a job classification and the person to fit it, or 2) I have this person and I will fit the job around that person. She did not know how Dr. Weninger was proceeding.

Dr. Lee stated that he would soon be asked to vote on the hiring of a principal. While four of the Board of Education members felt prepared to make that decision, he did not. Mr. Conway and Dr. Millard disagreed as they had the same amount of information about the process as had Dr. Lee.

Dr. Millard acknowledged the steep learning curve that the new Board of Education members have to absorb quickly. Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that the new Board of Education members have to reaffirm the direction and the new Board of Education members have a bearing on the reorganization.

It was the consensus of the Board of Education to ask Dr. Weninger to provide input on this process at a Special Board Meeting.

Ms. Patchak-Layman reiterated that she would expect to interview all upper level administrators. Mr. Edgcombe noted that the process for which Ms. Patchak-Layman advocated was not the process that has been followed in the last seven years. He will ask Dr. Weninger to contact Mr. Conway about a future meeting.

Check Distribution List Ms. Patchak-Layman asked the reason for the high school paying \$143,000 to the Township Treasurers' Office. Ms. Witham indicated that this would be discussed in closed session.

Closed Session At 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, May 31, 2007 Ms. Fisher moved to enter closed 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), as amended by PA.93—57; Student disciplinary cases 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(10); 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 closed meeting minutes. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(11); seconded by Mr. Allen. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

The Board of Education reconvened its open session at 11:15 a.m.

Approval of Student Discipline Ms. Fisher moved to expel student EXP 05/31/07-32 as of May 31, 2007 for the remainder of the 2006-07 school year through the 2007-08 school year, but to hold the expulsion in abeyance contingent upon completion of enrollment and regular attendance at an alternative educational placement as determined by the administration for the remainder of the 2006-07 school year and the 2007-08 school year, ongoing counseling for substance abuse, and verification and maintenance of residency in the District.

It was the consensus of the majority of the Board of Education members to continue not to include any reference to students being discussed in closed session on the open agenda, contrary to Ms. Patchak-Layman's request.

**Approval of
Check
Distributions
Dated May 31,
2007**

Ms. Fisher moved to approve the check distributions dated May 31, 2007 (attached to and made a part of the minutes of this meeting); seconded by Dr. Lee. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Adjournment

Mr. Allen moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting at 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, May 31, 2007, seconded by Dr. Lee. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Jacques A. Conway
President

Dr. Ralph H. Lee
Secretary Protempore