

**Oak Park and River Forest High School
201 North Scoville Avenue
Oak Park, IL 60302**

**ADJOURNED POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING
June 19, 2008**

An Adjourned Policy Committee meeting was held on Thursday, June 19, 2008, in the Board Room of the Oak Park and River Forest High School. Dr. Lee called the meeting to order at 9:50 a.m. Committee members present were Jacques A. Conway, Valerie J. Fisher, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, Sharon Patchak-Layman, and John P. Rigas. Also present were Dr. Attila J. Weninger, Superintendent; Jason Edgecombe, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Amy Hill, Director of Assessment and Research, and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors included Kay Foran, Community Relations and Communications Coordinator; James Paul Hunter, F.S.E.C. Chair; and Gerri Rhode, parent; Becca Bloch, graduate, and Emma Lewis, student.

Discussion of Graduation Dress

Ms. Bloch and Ms. Lewis read the following proposal for a new graduation dress code.

- “1. Eliminate the boutonnieres that male graduates receive, and the dozen red roses that female graduates receive, or instead, provide all graduates with the same gift. The current practice assigns clear gender roles to students. Additionally, there is a clear economic issue, as students are forced to pay for this unnecessary and problematic practice.
2. Eliminate the color differentiation between male and female graduates. By assigning a specific color of attire to males and females, the graduation dress code is clearly defining gender roles for students. In order to reflect uniformity and equality among graduates, the new dress code must not delineate between males and females in any way, specifically by the color of their attire. There are several ways that a new graduation dress code could fit this guideline:
 - a) Caps and gowns: Every graduate would wear a cap and gown of the same color; males and females would not be assigned a certain color of cap and gown. This situation would reflect uniformity among graduates while still maintaining the solemnity and pageantry of the ceremony. Caps and gowns are also cost-effective: they cost considerably less than the current outfits graduates must wear, and also provide the option for students to rent them. In response to the argument that caps and gowns are not a tradition at OPRFHS: caps and gowns are a worldwide symbol of academic achievement. Although they might not have been found at previous OPRFHS graduation ceremonies, they reflect a worldwide, centuries-old tradition of academic achievement and of graduation.
 - b) A monochromatic dress code: Every graduate would wear an outfit in the color that the school deemed appropriate for the graduation ceremony. The outfits that graduates would wear would have to follow certain guidelines, but these guidelines would not differentiate between male and female graduates. That is not to say that every graduate would be

forced to wear the same attire. Rather, this new set of guidelines would enable graduates to choose their attire on their volition, and not be assigned attire based on their gender. A possible example of this option would be as follows:

All graduates must wear a black outfit to graduation. Gray, navy, or any other dark colors are not acceptable.

If a graduate decides to wear a dress or a skirt and top, it must meet the following guidelines:

- All dresses must be floor length or ankle length.
- Formal black tops must be worn with floor length or ankle length black skirts.
- Dresses or tops must have straps of some sort. Spaghetti straps are acceptable.
- Strapless, backless, one strap, and off-the shoulder dresses and tops are not acceptable.
- The bodice (chest) and back must be covered and appear black from a distance (no sheer tops, nylon, etc.).
- Dresses or skirts should not be split above the knee.
- Outfits should be free of distracting ornamentation. Simple and elegant is the goal!
- Dresses or skirts must be full enough to allow comfortable and graceful marching and sitting.
- Jewelry should be simple.
- Footwear: black dress shoes or dress sandals. Because of the surface of the field, spike heels are not recommended. Beach shoes or slippers are prohibited.

If a graduate decides to wear a suit or pantsuit, it must meet the following guidelines:

- Black suits, black pantsuits, or a black sport coat and black dress pants must be worn.
- Shorts are not acceptable.
- Plain white shirt must be worn.
- A black tie (no bow ties) is to be worn.
- Black dress shoes with black socks must be worn. Beach shoes or slippers are prohibited.

For all graduates:

- Leave all gloves, purses, hats and head coverings at home. All are prohibited.
- Each graduate will be carrying a diploma and will be shaking hands, so it will be cumbersome to carry additional items. Please leave them at home.

“Either one of the possibilities listed in item 2 would satisfy the grievances with the current graduation dress code as listed above. Both satisfy the issue that the dress code assigns gender roles, and both (although option A does more so) satisfy the issue that the dress code is an economic burden.

“District Policy Rationale

“Currently, there is no district policy regarding graduation, except for the required number of credits a student needs to graduate. The graduation dress code is an issue of administrative procedure, and thusly, the principal and superintendent decide how the ceremony should operate. This goes for the dress code, as well: the last change in the graduation dress code – the decision to allow female graduates to wear white pantsuits in addition to white dresses and skirts – was a unilateral decision by Superintendent/Principal Dr. Susan Bridge. If we are to follow this precedent, our proposal is for Dr. Weninger’s decision to make.

“However, we believe that an issue as important as this should be not only an administrative procedure, but also a district policy. This should be a philosophical stance – not simply a procedural issue – that OPRFHS does not differentiate between students on the basis of gender. The opening statement of the OPRFHS Board of Education policy booklet, which reads, ‘The faculty of the Oak Park and River Forest High School and the members of the Board of Education are committed to a program of quality education for every individual,’ does not differentiate on the basis of gender. This school’s policies, whether they are administrative or pertain to the district, do not differentiate on the basis of gender when they discuss OPRFHS students as a whole, and neither should the graduation ceremony.

“We ask you to recall OPRFHS’s mission statement: “Oak Park and River Forest High School exists to provide all students a superior education so that they may achieve their full human potential.” All students. Not male students, not female students. OPRFHS seeks to enable *all students* to achieve their full human potential. This proposed policy would do just that: enable all students, regardless of gender, to achieve their full human potential as graduates of Oak Park and River Forest High School.”

Mr. Rigas asked if the student body had voted on whether to wear caps and gowns? Ms. Bloch felt that students were apathetic and bias. They would opt for the current system. She felt the Board of Education should choose an approach as to how to educate students, as it is the responsibility of the Board of Education to be concerned about the District and the students. Students are only concerned about themselves, getting into college, etc. She was not advocating for a student vote because it should be the Board of Education decision.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked if they recognized this as an inconsistency with the values and the policies of the school. Ms. Bloch reported that it clashed on paper and intrinsically. Ms. Patchak-Layman asked what kinds of questions they posed to themselves. Ms. Bloch replied that they questioned the tradition. How many societal norms have changed about gender representation? They also looked at the economic issue. Why is it so important versus the real life problems of the student body? She felt antiquated tradition gets in the way. Moving of the tassel on the cap from one side to another and throwing it into the air were alternative traditions to be honored. Ms. Lewis said that she wanted to be a student and not a bride on her graduation.

Dr. Lee stated that the Committee was not ready to make a decision at this time. This discussion will involve further discussion at a future policy committee meeting. Personally, he wanted to pick the time and the choice of the battles at the time. He felt he was fighting enough battles and did not want to fight this battle at this time.

He thanked them for raising the issue. This discussion will be continued at the August Policy Committee meeting.

Adjournment

At 10:15 a.m., the Policy Committee adjourned.