

**Oak Park and River Forest High School
201 N. Scoville
Oak Park, IL 60302**

**An Instruction Committee of the Whole Board
January 16, 2008**

An Instruction Committee meeting of the Whole Board was held on Wednesday, **January 16, 2008** in the Board Room. **Mr. Conway** opened the meeting at 7:45 a.m. Committee members present were Jacques A. Conway, Valerie J. Fisher, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, and Sharon Patchak Layman. Also present were: Dr. Attila J. Weninger, Superintendent; Jason Edgecombe, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Cheryl Witham, Chief Financial Officer; Phil Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Jack Lanenga, Assistant Superintendent for Operations; Amy Hill, Director of Instruction; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistance/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors included: Kay Foran, O.P.R.F.H.S. Director of Community Relations and Communications; Dale Craft, Director of Summer School, James Paul Hunter, Faculty Senate Chair; Dr. Carl Spight, O.P.R.F.H.S. Institutional Researcher; Wyanetta Johnson, Burcy Hines, A.P.P.L.E.; Barbara Nelson, PTO Chair; Terry Dean of the *Wednesday Journal* (arrived at 9:12 p.m.), and Bridget Kennedy of the *Oak Leaves*.

Acceptance of Minutes

The minutes of the December 13, 2007 Instruction Committee meeting were accepted, as presented.

Proposed Summer School Budget –2008

Dale Craft, Summer School Director, referenced the information contained in the packet.

The dates of the 2008 Summer School are as follows:

Wednesday, June 11- Friday, July 18, 2008. Three sessions will be offered each day with the last session devoted to the summer musical. No school will be held on Thursday, July 3, 2008 and Friday, July 4, 2008. This calendar provides 26 days of instruction during the summer session.

No significant changes are planned for the summer course offerings and the District will continue to offer a wide selection of regular, elective, and remedial classes.

Mr. Craft recommended increasing tuition by \$5.00 for each section this summer, representing a 2.9% increase, for a total of \$180.00 per session.

Discussion ensued. Mr. Craft noted that while taking the summer musical is not an important factor in the students' decision-making process of whether to take summer school, it is important for the school to offer enrichment electives so that students may complete some state requirements during the summer to free up periods during the regular school year.

Sports camps are separated from the regular summer school and are not administered by the summer school director.

Mr. Prale reported that about forty (40) students were in the transition program, including those requiring mandatory summer school from Districts 90 and 97. The tuition is absorbed by the school, the two O.P.R.F.H.S. teaching salaries are paid by Title I funds; the two District teachers are paid by District 97.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked for a breakdown of students by class, which Mr. Craft offered to provide. Ms. Patchak-Layman asked, when, in terminating the classes, if the school gave a higher priority to academic classes in trying to add sections, i.e., remedial math or step up classes. Mr. Craft replied affirmatively.

Mr. Craft also noted that there was now a fee for the music class because, typically, this activity goes over budget.

Dr. Lee asked if there were any estimates as to how many students were being referred by District 97 for summer school, yet were not attending. Mr. Prale noted that the general perception is that summer school is a program for incoming ninth graders to get a better feel for the building and to take credits in advance of starting freshman year, e.g. health, etc., but not necessarily to enhance a skill set. The exception would be the math step-up program.

Dr. Lee admitted to trying to determine how students who need better skill sets can be encouraged to come to summer school. Dr. Weninger stated that *The School Code of Illinois* permits two districts to enter into an agreement with which summer school could be made a requirement, provided the student did not have to pay the tuition; the issue becomes if the student does not attend, what is the consequence? It would have to be an intensive one-by-one, student-by-student, and parent-by-parent outreach. Mr. Prale noted that, of the usual fifty-five students recommended from Districts 90 and 97, O.P.R.F.H.S. is successful in having in two-thirds of those students attend.

Mr. Craft reported that nearly all teachers of core subjects, e.g., English, math, history, etc., are O.P.R.F.H.S. teachers. Division heads encourage the teachers to do this. Outside instructors teach consumer education, art foundation, and health classes, and while more difficult to evaluate, most are proficient. While teachers of health typically apply, last year he had to recruit. Mr. Craft will provide the racial makeup of the teachers to the Committee.

Ms. Patchak-Layman, remembering last year's conversation about the health and consumer education curriculum matching the curriculum taught during the regular year, asked what the standard would be for this year. Mr. Craft was comfortable with the health curriculum, as it had been designed and outlined by an in-house teacher and has standardized tests are used. The same procedures are being followed by the consumer education teacher. Mr. Prale added the caveat that there was a significant reduction in hours, e.g., sixty-two (62) hours in summer school versus the seventy-five (75) hours during the regular school year. However, the summer school curriculum is within the State's guidelines and resembles what happens during the regular year.

It was the consensus of the Instruction Committee members to approve Summer School 2008 tuition, dates, and stipends at the January Board of Education meeting, as presented.

Discussion of Achievement Patterns

Mr. Prale presented the Board of Education with the following memorandum:

“At recent meetings, members of the Board of Education have inquired about the general patterns of achievement at the high school. This short report provides some information regarding grade distribution as of the end of the first quarter of this school year. Additional information regarding success streams for African American students in the areas of math and reading has also been explored with some detail. In the past, the Board of Education has requested data sets as well as summaries of data analysis and both have been provided here. These charts are provided to the Board of Education as an overview of achievement patterns at the high school.

“The first set of charts shows the general achievement patterns for students. Titled Means HonAPAttemptYN=N and Means HonAPAttemptYN = Y (pages 2 through 5) these charts, and in particular the ANOVA tables that follow each chart, map the statistical significance of the course taking patterns for all students.

“The next charts (pages 6 and 7) show cross tabulations of students attempting honors classes by race and gender. These charts show raw numbers and percentages of students attempting honors classes within the total number of students and within disaggregated groups. Again, the rate disparity between African American students and White students is apparent. The next set of charts (pages 8 through 10) show the success fractions (the number of A and B grades earned divided by the number of attempts) disaggregated by race and gender.

“Additionally, we reviewed a small set of thirty African American students, current juniors (Class of 2009), identified as successful in math and/or reading outcomes as measured by attaining college readiness benchmarks on a practice ACT exam given in the spring of 2007. Some of these students were referenced in previous Instruction Committee meetings. Twenty-seven of these students have current schedules in the student information system. Looking at this group of students, seventeen reached college readiness benchmarks by the end of the sophomore year. All of those seventeen students

are enrolled in the honors junior English course and fourteen of the seventeen are enrolled in an honors math course. The correlation between access to and participation in a rich and rigorous curriculum and success on the IACT is powerful. For the remaining ten students for whom we have schedules, six are enrolled in honors English, but only one is enrolled in honors math; four are enrolled in college-algebra trig, and five are enrolled in advanced algebra. This information about the courses and experiences of a set of successful African American students reinforces the importance of providing opportunities for developing curriculum and programs that provide access to and participation in a rich and rigorous curriculum.”

The school’s key to racial designation is as follows:

- Race 1 – White
- Race 2 – African American
- Race 3 – Native American
- Race 4 – Asian/Islander
- Race 5 – Latino
- Race 6 – Multi-Ethnic

Discussion ensued.

Dr. Spight stated that he was exhibiting the nature of the evidence for assertions that one has been making about differences and what one has to seek out as the evidence and the quality of evidence. The fact that White students tend to get more A’s and B’s in core classes is a highly statistical reliability. White students get C’s less frequently than African-American students. African-American students appear to get C’s more frequently than White students, but that is not statistically significant.

It was noted that the definition of a core course was English, math, history, science, and world languages.

Page 4 of the data looked at the honors stream and its distribution. The number in Core 4 is the number of White students who take at least one honors course. The modal grade for White students is A. The modal grade for African-American students is B. The statistical significance of the test on page 5 of the data is high for A’s, but there is not as much as the difference in the B’s.

Mr. Prale noted that students taking honors courses tend to enroll in more honors courses. Asian students, as a subgroup, take more honors courses than other subgroups.

Dr. Lee asked if the school looks at the grades of students in basic level courses. Mr. Prale said no because transitional courses are harder to identify, e.g., English Literature RC is considered an English Literature class, and does not carry the designation of a basic or transitional class.

Dr. Weninger asked for the ANOVA table for enrollment in honors courses. While Dr. Spight had not provided that because the probability that White students taking honors is statistically significantly higher than African-American students taking honors, he would do so. Mr. Prale noted the school is often asked how many African-American students are honors students. The answer is that out of 1,910 students who take honors courses 224 are African American students (11.77%); 1,414 are White students (74%). When asked if this included Special Education, Basic and College Prep students, Mr. Prale responded that a self-contained course in Special Education would not be contained in this grouping; to be included in the count, it would have to be a mainstream class. Mr. Prale noted that the data on Page 7 shows that the three-quarters of White students take an honors class and one-quarter of African American students take an honors course. Typically, White students take four and five honors courses and African American students take one or two honors courses.

Data on pages 8, 9, 10 show the success fraction of students course taking. The success fraction is the likelihood that the student would earn an A or B in a course. Achieving at a level, i.e., receiving a grade of B or A, would prepare that student for the next level of work in that program, particularly in honors courses. It is important, when looking at modal grades, that A and B grades show up. Part of mitigating the achievement gap is moving students to the A and B grade level. The success fraction is the percent of A and B grades earned as a fraction of the total opportunities available.

Page 8 shows a significant difference. Eighty percent of White students earn an A or B in honors courses versus 66 percent of African-American students who earn A or B. This may also translate to a discrepancy in the level of readiness in the next class. When talking about success with A's and B's, a student who earns a grade of C may not receive a teacher's recommendation to go on to the next class. A student who earns an A or B is better prepared to go on to the next class.

Ms. Patchak-Layman wanted to see if the grade variation in terms of the non-honors taking students matched the experience of students taking honors classes. Do students taking one honors class have the same experience and will the grade pattern match or is there a different profile because of it being an honors class. Dr. Spight noted that was an excellent question and he offered to provide information as to the pattern of success of non honors courses, the difference by race, and the number of honors course taken. Ms. Patchak-Layman continued that some assumptions stated that students in honors classes have a better educational experience at college rather than basic or transitional level students. If the idea is to get more honors experience, in an effort to give them better preparation for college, there should be some other change in the distribution and the school could take that one experience and use it as a model.

Dr. Weninger noted when looking at the 74 percent of White students taking honors courses and the 11.7 percent of African-American students taking honors courses, there is a statistically significant drop, three clusters. The chances of White students getting grades of A or B are higher than those of African-American students. Mr. Hunter noted that it was clear that African-American males were the issue, not the African-American

females; males generally are less successful than females with regard to grades. However, it is notable that African-American females compete at the same level as White males.

Mr. Prale, in looking at African American students who appeared to be college ready in their sophomore year and could be college ready by junior year, were significantly more engaged in math and English at the honors level. The connection of the student to a rigorous and enriching curriculum appears to be an indicator of success in the high school's curriculum. This needs to be the high school's focus.

Dr. Lee felt the school has not a two-track system, but a three-track system and there is no discussion of differences between the basic and regular level classes. He would like to exclude all students in honors and AP courses and look at the differences in the students between the basic and regular level courses. His experience is that there would be even more differences found in this group than anything presented at this meeting. He continued that the school has paid attention to the students in honors level courses and college prep courses and is leaving the lower segment invisible; he wanted to increase that visibility. Mr. Prale replied that the high school does some of that already by looking at programs in Foundations of Algebra, Physical Science, Elements and Essentials of English, etc. There are approximately 300 students across all four years in school enrolled in basic level courses; that number is fluid because students can take Foundations of Algebra and regular level English. When defining basic-level students, the administration tends to look at them by course and then by grade distributions vs. standardized test scores. Dr. Weninger asked if the school should collect the same data for students who take one or more basic courses and compare that to other non-honors students. There was discussion of jargon and how it cannot be used with statistics. Students who take one or more basic courses may not create true images.

Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that juniors cannot sign up for just any class listed as a junior level course because of prerequisites. Mr. Prale noted that course recommendations, counseling recommendations, and parent overrides are involved in that equation. Dr. Weninger noted that few students take only one level of courses.

Discussion ensued regarding whether O.P.R.F.H.S. had a tracking system. Mr. Prale reported that if one is asking how students arrive in a course, the answer is that students are tested in the eighth grade and Division Heads have conversations with the parents and the students. The same event occurs in the junior year. There is more than one way for a student to arrive in a course. A teacher could recommend a student for a course and a counselor could make a course selection. The student has a four-year plan and the counselor makes selection based on conversations with the student. The Counselor or the Division Head can tell the parent what steps would be necessary for the student to get to a higher level, which could mean enrolling in summer school to enhance the skill level.

Ms. Patchak-Layman, in continuing the discussion on how students are moved up or given the opportunity to move up to other classes, asked why students would have to attend summer school to do that.

Dr. Lee asked to look at data by class/course enrollment, enrollment in honors courses broken down by grade and ethnicity, and the enrollment in basic courses by grade and ethnicity.

The Committee thanked Dr. Spight and Mr. Prale for their report.

Dr. Lee then made the following statement:

“I want to share thoughts on ability grouping as it relates to the achievement. Up until now, I have been critical of just one aspect of ability group which has to do with expectations in the lowest ability grouping. It appeared to me that we should consider more than just the particular aspects I have been speaking about because I believe we do ability grouping based on assumptions not stated. If we are going to continue ability grouping we ought to be able to say the assumptions we are basing this on and how what we are doing actually compares what theoretically we think we are doing. I am concerned because what we have is a system whose basic tenant is separate but equal. I have experienced at least four different kinds of programs based on separate but equal, i.e. growing up in state of Alabama. I don’t feel all separate but equal are bad. My first two years of college was separate and equal, all male. I was able to concentrate on things better than if girls had been present. He believes more research has been done that indicates girls learn more things when separated from boys. I believe it is defensible to have separate students on the basis of criteria, but you must be specific about the hoped accomplishments. I think that these things remain unexamined in our system and we have an obligation to examine them. I feel it is a mistake to condemn them from the beginning. I think we need to do a careful analysis of what we are doing and how we are doing it and using those assumptions and then examine what we are doing to see if it is the same as what we think we are doing. I would like to know more about these things over the next several months.”

OPRFHS Opinion Survey on School Community

Ms. Hill provided the following memo.

“On April 4, 2007, we administered an opinion survey to 2004 O.P.R.F.H.S. freshmen, sophomores, and seniors during a special administrative period, while juniors simultaneously registered for the ACT portion of the 2007 Prairie State Achievement Exam. The survey was the outgrowth of two developments during the fall of 2006; a professional development focus on improving civility in the hallways and classrooms at O.P.R.F.H.S., and the planning for an all-school institute day to include all students and staff. While the survey was promoted by the staff discussions, the student planners on the all school institute day committee embraced the notion of administering a student survey in advance of the Institute Day as a way to provide a focus for the day’s activities. A diverse student group generated the ideas for the survey items during one of the institute day planning sessions. As the administrator who led the planning committee, I developed the students’ ideas into statements and developed the format of the survey.

We reviewed and revised the statements; we asked the Building Administrative Team and Instructional Council for input; and we finalized the survey with 67 items, including demographic questions.”

Ms. Hill provide a copy of the survey as well as hard copies of the PowerPoint presentation she and several students made to the full faculty during the September 7 Staff Development Day and to the Citizens’ Council at its November 8 meeting.

She stated that survey was administered on the same day as the juniors were registering for AYP; thus, the juniors were not surveyed. She thanked Dr. Spight, Dr. Frank Danes, and Pat O’Shea for beginning a more in-depth analysis of the interaction between race and gender and race and sexuality. More of a difference might be indicated when the data is broken down by the demographic categories. Ms. Hill reviewed the information on the PowerPoint with the Committee members.

The items with corresponding frequency/importance ratings were:

- 1) Adult use of profanity: relatively low frequency, relatively low importance; and
- 2) Student use of insulting language: relatively high frequency, relatively high importance.

Some interesting combinations of frequency/importance ratings:

- 1) Student use of profanity (80% rated common, 66% rated minor problem or not a problem)
- 2) Student public displays of affection (59% rated common; 77% rated minor problem or not a problem)

Students’ primary concerns based upon ratings of “Importance”

- 1) Lingering prejudice and discrimination
- 2) Disrespect among students

Top issues, based upon combined “moderate problem” and “Major problem” responses

- 1) Stereotyping on the basis of race/ethnicity (59%)
- 2) Stereotyping on the basis of appearance (59%)
- 3) Prejudice/discrimination among students (53%)
- 4) Use of racial/ethnic slurs at OPRF (51%)
- 5) White students having advantaged because of their skin color (51%)

African-American students and female students were more likely to perceive the survey items as important problems, compared to the general student body, and to male students, respectively.

Disaggregated responses indicated that the students’ perceptions and/or experiences differ on the basis of gender, race/ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation.

Some items suggest that African-American girls felt the school environment was more negative. Ms. Hill has started to lay the foundation for focus group sessions across racial groups, African-American girls, African-American males, and, perhaps, a comparison of White females and males. She has spoke with Dr. Ted Manley about scheduling that. She added that natural focus groups with a rapport already exist and they might be a good place to start, i.e., Mac Scholars (African-American junior and senior boys **mentoring** sophomore boys). The teacher-in-charge is Devon Alexander and he will lead the focus group. While she had not considered being present, Dr. Manley encouraged her to be there so that someone with background knowledge of the survey to monitor the interviewer, as he/she might emit empathy with the students and, thus, elicit a response rather than have the students defend the statements and ask for assertions. There are also girls in a history class that is racially balanced, and Ms. Hill planned to attend and draw on their experiences.

Dr. Lee asked if she had the opportunity to compare this survey's conclusions with the conclusions drawn by Denise Rose and her study of a smaller number of adults, as he felt the conclusions drawn were very similar. Ms. Hill responded that she did not. Mr. Prale noted that the methods used were much different, i.e., the Denise Rose survey was done via the interview process.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked at what point does the school take this information and do something to change what appears to be a less-than-optimal experience in terms of climate at the school. Ms. Hill stated that based on last year's conversations with the faculty and to a lesser extent the survey data, some things had already happened. A group of students involved in the all school institute day and survey formed the group Young Visionaries; its intent is to raise awareness of issues within the building. Earlier in the year, they made a flyer "I have seen homophobia at OPRFHS and it needs to stop." The school's job is to institutionally address these questions. She does not feel confident to make recommendations without further analysis of the results. Hopefully, the focus groups will provide more information; if there is a mass sentiment that certain things occur repeatedly in these pockets and in these ways, the school can say it has identified the problems. She continued that the survey questions were not specific enough, i.e., why do African American students perceive White advantage.

Faculty will engage on the question of institutional excellence.

Dr. Weninger noted that this survey was administered last year and this year changes have been instituted to improve school climate, e.g., the PSS Teams, Safety and Support Teams, and others. He felt the issue was what kind of school climate can be created for students of color.

When will recommendations be made about this survey? The administration needs to look at what things have now been implemented and to the Board of Education's discussions on race and education.

Discussion ensued as to how students would know of the school's attempt to better the climate. Ms. Hill stated that informing the entire student body would be challenging as there are not many existing opportunities to disseminate the information effectively.

Textbook Review

The Board of Education will approve all textbooks brought to it by the administration under the consent agenda of its regular Board of Education meetings.

Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 9:50 a.m.