

The Board meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Thursday evening, February 28, 2008, in the Board Room of the high school.

**Call to Order**

President Jacques A. Conway called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. A roll call indicated that the following members were present: John C. Allen, IV, 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; Amy Hill, Director of Research and Assessment; Jack Lanenga, Assistant Superintendent of Operations; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Cheryl L. Witham, Chief Financial Officer; Don Vogel, Interim Principal; Christian Fernandes, Student Council Representative; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

**Visitors**

The Board of Education welcomed the following visitors: Kay Foran, Director of Community Relations and Communications; Neil Weisman, Mike Brown, Linda Cada, and Betsey Farley, O.P.R.F.H.S. faculty members; Marsha Shipley and Linda Puckett, O.P.R.F.H.S. employees; Dr. Carl Spight, O.P.R.F.H.S. Institutional Researcher; Wyanetta Johnson, Burcy Hines, Meg Reynolds, Kimberly Werner, Merry Beth Kowalczyk, Eric, Linda and Richard Abrams, Justin Moon and his parents, Willey Samuels, Uche Anigbogu, Maddie Slagle, Kelsey Rey, Cassie Pontone, Jam Morrow, Julia Martens, Julia Smith, Lara Jabour, Ellis Coleman, John Burholtz, and Lee Pulliam, students, parents, and community members; Tim McDonnell and Gene Washington, SEIU; Terry Dean, *Wednesday Journal* and Bridgett Kennedy, *Oak Leaves*.

**Student Recognition** The Board of Education recognized the following students:

- Eliot Abrams, Elliott Stoller, and Uche Anigbogu as contributing essayists for an award naming Oak Park as one of the 100 Best Communities for Young People;
- Gabriella Cole, winner of the MLK Oratorical contest;
- Ellis Coleman, IHSA State Wrestling Meet, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place; and
- Officers of Tau Gamma: Maddie Slagle, Kelsey Rey, Cassie Pontone, Jam Morrow, Julia Martens, Julia Smith, and Lara Jabour, for their commitment, dedication, and service to the community

Dr. Weninger asked Eliot Abrams to read his essay to the Board of Education.

“Tomorrow morning I will wake up and go to the last farmer’s market of the year. There, I will have a delicious fresh-baked donut sold for

charity. On the way, I will walk up a street filled with large Victorian homes, and down a street of apartments. I will spot the home of my sister's tutor, the recently renovated public library with its teen lounge, and the movie theatre. I will stroll under the train tracks that carry me into Chicago for doctor's appointments and days spent on Michigan Avenue. I will find some of my friends recovering from the musical festival called Huskiepalooza held at the high school last night. Finally, as I approach the market, I will run into Brian, a freshman in the gym class that I assist with.

"My community is Oak Park and only here is it possible to do everything that I will be doing tomorrow. This uniqueness holds true every other day too. During the week, I can tutor peers in math through the math department, receive help from the English department on essays, stop by the feminist society meeting, participate in the pin pong club, and hear a lecture by an activist based in Baghdad. And I am not alone. Students can help teach high school classes through the senior Instructional Leadership Corps, share serious organizational roles by taking seats on one of Oak Park's many commissions, and donate hours and talent through the high school service club or one of the many local religious organizations.

"However, we do more than just volunteer in Oak Park. We take jobs throughout the community at the local children's museum, grocery stores, Starbucks, ice cream parlors, and fitness club. We participate in martial arts, pottery, theatre, and sports groups. It is amazing to see what we become involved with. Better is the story of who we are becoming involved with. Whether it is working or playing with adults or peers, Oak Park has a diversity that makes all these associations so much more fulfilling. On a bus to a math competition, you might hear Hebrew, German, Mandarin, Italian, and Gaelic being spoken. On a given night, you could go out to a Thai, Mexican, or Greek restaurant. Everyday, you appreciate that your friends are all the colors and shapes possible.

"Oak Park has been such a great place to grow up because within the community I have all the tools and support to be whoever I want to be. I spent this summer in Israel with 26 kids from throughout America and Canada. They all complained, as the summer drew to an end, of going back to a community that was more limiting than our group. At home, they would be with people who understood issues only one way. At home, they would be with people lacking our enthusiasm and empathy. I did not have this same complaint. That was when I truly realized how much Oak Park has helped me."

Uche Anigbogu read her essay as follows:

“I think that Oak Park is a great place for the adolescent, not only because it supports the diversities of styles, beliefs, and culture, it is a safe environment to grow up in. It invites children to reach their high potential in whatever they choose to endeavor in.

“There are several activities for young people in the community of Oak Park. To begin with, there is the Park District of Oak Park, which offers classes in just about any activity one can think off. I have taken a range of classes with the park district from Cooking at the Cheney Mansion, to Soccer Camp. With programs like these, children can be more active, something highly needed in today's society. Young people can also begin to build their networks with other people of similar interest that they meet. The keys to success for any child are stable friends and family and the Park District takes you a step in the right direction. Secondly, there is school, one of the most vital parts of the community for students. Most residents of Oak Park attend Oak Park and River Forest High School. In school, there are also a wide variety of things to participate in with your peers. Quite honestly, everyone has the chance to participate in anything they would like. This is crucial to young people because this is the time we decide who we really are and what we want to do with our life, and we have options so it is left for us to choose. Though Park district programs are available for a price, School programs are completely free and open.

“Oak Park has helped me by introducing me to such a diverse group of people. I was born and raised in Nigeria. When I moved to Chicago, it was a tough transition to make from a place where everyone was comfortable with each other to a place where you were always watching your back. After a few years of living in Chicago, my family and I moved to Oak Park. The atmosphere here was much closer to home. Quickly I found friends and settled into the community. I was introduced to a swim class at the Y, which I loved.

“From then on, I continued to do things with the Oak Park community. Most importantly, I found a church community at Calvary Memorial Church, one of Oak Parks many prestigious churches. Till today, most of my friends are members of that church I have grown to love. I feel safe and a part of something in the larger community of Oak Park and smaller community of OPRFHS and Calvary Memorial. I found my niche as a Nigerian-American teenager in the town I am proud to call my home.”

Eric Stoller’s essay was as follows:

“Oak Park River Forest empowered me to show the world who I truly am. I am a jock who could not live without a baseball in one hand and a

bat in the other. And, simultaneously, I am a history geek who is co-captain of the debate team. But to accept and pursue such disparate passions requires more courage than most of us innately possess. And without the nourishment I received, and continue to get, from my community, I am almost sure that I would never have mustered the necessary strength to do what I have done.

“My community does not treat its youth like young kids. Instead, we are given the respect that we deserve. The teachers, the coaches, and most of the adults in Oak Park River Forest challenge us to never accept limitations that others might try to impose on us. So we are in turn inspired to fulfill our potential. As a result of my own experiences, particularly the encouragement from teachers and the prevalent political efficacy in the community, I was driven to write an op-ed piece about Darfur for the local newspaper. It ended up being one of four national finalists and was read by Senator Obama. That is how the youth are treated in my community, and that is why it is one of the best communities in the nation.

“In addition, Oak Park River Forest prides itself on its diversity. It was one of the pillars upon which our community was built, and it clearly distinguishes us from many of our neighboring towns. But I would guess that our diversity, within itself, does not distinguish us on a national level. There are undoubtedly other communities with the same ethnic makeup. But what is special about Oak Park River Forest is the prevalent mindset that actually transcends race. I only had this realization after a recent visit to some relatives near San Francisco. Their community appeared very similar to ours in racial composition and they took pride in their racial diversity as well. But when they started talking to me about all their black and Latino friends, I realized something about my own community that I never noticed before: we don't define our friends and our neighbors by their race. We do not think of it as “I have black friends”, rather, we think, “I have friends with black skin.” Although such a distinction may appear trivial upon first glance, in reality, the difference between the two is enormous. The first way of thinking places the emphasis on the fact that they are “black,” whereas the second way of thinking focuses on the fact that they are your friend. And by doing so, it elevates the content of their character over the color of their skin. In Oak Park River Forest, that is how we think. Yet it is so engraved into who we are that, for the most part, it is hard for us to imagine it being any other way.”

Dr. Weninger asked Gabby Coleman to read her Martin Luther King, Jr. day speech, titled “The Real Issue.” It was as follows:

“Every now and then there are men and women, in history who inspire us to put actions to our words, to do what we said we would, to work like we

promised. They open our eyes to the condition of the world that our present actions have created, instead of allowing us to rest our hopes on the hazy self-promises of the future. So we no longer plan to achieve a goal; we *do* achieve the goal. We no longer spend endless hours strategizing; we move forward. These men and women teach us that respecting others is more significant than planning to do it; that being honest is more important than intending it; that listening is more essential than aiming to do so. These men and women are rare, simply because of their ability to inspire us to action. And looming predominantly among all such people is a man named Martin Luther King Jr.

“You know him. I know him. We’ve all been taught the name of the famous Civil Rights leader since 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Moreover, we’ve been taught that all people are equal, that black and white are simply colors and not the definition of a persons’ character. However, in spite of having superficially accepted this principal, we as a society, a community, and a school still exhibit the marks of segregation. We see segregation when we walk into the academically divided Advanced Placement classes. And again when we realize the infamous lunchroom divide. It’s still Blacks to the left, Whites to the right, and to the rest, just fend for yourself.

“Let me for a moment be completely honest with you. Segregation still exists. It is in our classes, our lunchrooms, at the bus stops, in the halls, at our dances, at our sporting events. But now segregation has changed its shape. It is self-imposed; Jim Crow laws are no longer needed, we enforce them ourselves. But this synthetic segregation is not what I consider the problem. In fact I don’t believe that Martin Luther King’s fight was merely for some *Colored Only* sign to be taken down or *White Entrance Only* placard to be removed. Segregation still exists and it is a problem, but I submit that it is merely a product of the larger issue that Martin Luther King fought for some fifty years back and that we still face today. That problem is one that involves us all. It is not just Black vs. White but the more universal struggle of hate vs. love, honor vs. humiliation, and respect vs. contempt. Martin Luther King fought for human rights-not simply African American rights. He fought for justice not merely against Jim Crow. He fought for universal freedom not just the color line. Martin Luther King fought the fight that we have forgotten to fight today. We have become too caught up in Achievement Gaps, statistics, and seating arrangements in lunchrooms that we have forgotten the truer and more vital issue at hand. The struggle that we are in today isn’t racially orientated but socially orientated. Segregation is the result of ignorance of Martin Luther King’s true goals. Right now more than ever we need to come together in our schools, communities, churches, families, county, and the world. We need to unify ourselves under the banner of humanity not Black, White, Latino, or Asian.

“I believe the message of Martin Luther King speaks louder to us today than it did fifty years ago. It is one of love, respect, kindness, forgiveness,

concern, and selflessness. More than ever this is what we need today. While wars are being fought in far off places by hostile countries, while teenagers our age are dying in needless and unsupported wars like Iraq, while genocide and mass murder are taking place under the nose of the ineffective United Nations, while countries are fearful of attacks by faceless terrorists, while the corruption of politicians and formidable corporations persists, and all the while there are still small naked children starving in dire poverty in the projects of Nigeria. These are the problem that we need to face, not lunchroom demographics. We need to support a message of hope and action, one of sympathy and justice. I don't know about you but I am tired of statesmen fighting over the oil in the Middle East while ignoring the both poverty there and in our own country, I am tired of hearing of the latest automobile and of not global warming. I am tired of communication with no listening; I am tired of meetings without results, of teaching without true learning, of ridicule instead of respect, of chaos instead of peace, and most of all, of words without actions. This is not a feel-good speech, this is a do-good speech. So today let's start doing in this school what should be done everywhere. It doesn't have to be any thing big, because the small changes matter most, but just this week, at just this school, while you're going through your day, why not help someone without being asked, listen to someone instead of just waiting for your turn to speak, show respect to yourself by guarding carefully the words that come from your mouth, and maybe if it carries over outside of school, give your change to the guy at the L-stop who's down on his luck, give up your seat to another who needs it more, apologize to those you might have hurt, and maybe while you're doing this, you'll remember Martin Luther King, and the dream he had. And maybe you'll realize that your actions today are simply the realization of his dream back then."

Dr. Weninger spoke about some of the things that the Tau Gamma organization does in community service and volunteer work, often things that go unnoticed, e.g., the King of Hearts Dance, which raises money to give to the Make A Wish Foundation, adopted four family households at Christmas and donated 80 gift baskets to Sarah's Inn. Tau Gamma does thousands of hours of volunteer service. Its sponsors are Betsy Farley and Maureen Grady.

Dr. Weninger spoke about a letter he received that day from a student to whom he subsequently spoke, who ranked 42<sup>nd</sup> at the high school and scored 29 on the ACT, and was a National Merit Semifinalist. She recently reflected on her life at the high school and wrote"

"Dear Superintendent Weninger:

"I was a student at OPRF in the early 80's. One of my teachers was Senor Edward Hayes, although I understand he no longer works there.

Based on what I now realize was my self-centered refusal to take responsibility for my life, I wrongfully refused to treat Sr. Hayes with respect in his classroom. I selfishly complained to the administration about him, and no doubt made his experience and Dean Crouse's experience needlessly difficult. Eventually, I believe the administration made a special accommodation for me and allowed me to continue in Spanish Honors with Senor Albores.

"Sr. Hayes is not the only teacher I treated in this way. This is a pattern with me. I refuse to treat people with respect, and then I blame them for not accepting me. I demand that the world revolve around me and I lash out at everyone around me when it doesn't. I am trying to do things differently today.

"I truly regret the harm that I have caused the administration in having to deal with me, and I am writing to set the record straight. Thank you for your attention in this manner."

Dr. Weninger continued that this person is currently an intellectual property attorney at one of the country's largest law firms. He spoke to her a second time when she called to say that to write a letter was not enough, she wanted to apologize to the teacher face-to-face and asked him to facilitate that. Dr. Weninger stated that that humility came from this home, O.P.R.F.H.S. He congratulated everyone.

**FOIA Requests**

Mr. Conway reported that three FOIA requests had been received and were resolved.

**Visitor Comments**

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

Ms. Hines acknowledged and thanked Dr. Weninger for keeping his promise/commitment made over a year ago to balance the playing field, meaning that all ethnic groups would be represented in the search for principal.

Wyannetta Johnson, resident of 929 S. Oak Park Avenue, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education.

She thanked Dr. Weninger for having so many students in the Board Room and she asked to speak about one more student, a 15-year old boy that the Board of Education was going to discuss in closed session. She asked the Board of Education to give him another chance, acknowledging that he was of the age when mistakes are made. She asked how they would feel if their children had several incidents and not one day of help was given to him, except for the previous day. How can the gap be closed if a student is out for thirty-five days with no counseling, etc.

She congratulated Dr. Weninger for bringing in more Blacks into the high school's board room than ever before. She again offered to help with the students' homework and reiterated her plea that the Board of Education gives the student another chance.

Justin Morgan, student and resident of 807 Garfield, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education.

Justin Morgan spoke of his love of everything about Oak Park, e.g., catching the bus to school, making friends, Barrie Park, playing basketball, and having teachers care about him, etc. He had grown accustomed to Oak Park after moving from Chicago. While he had been suspended many times, blamed no one but himself, he had tried to make a difference every time. He noted that he had never had a behavior problem previously and he apologized to Dr. Weninger, Mr. Vogel, and others. He accepted what he did wrong.

Neil Weisman, O.P.R.F.H.S. math teacher, representing parents who had children in the Childcare Center, addressed the Board of Education.

The daycare center has been used by the school to recruit and maintain high quality teachers and staff; it is a strong selling point and several current staff members choose to work here because of its presence. This benefit does not work if the people who work here cannot afford it. The staff has become much younger at recent years and an affordable daycare is a wonderful way to retain members. It is also a way to stave off extensive absences. He knows that the net effect is only a \$5 increase this year on top the \$35 increased imposed last year. His daughter will remain here as long as he and wife can afford it. It would be shame for us and other children in the future if Huskie Pups were not a real option.

Kimberly Werner, 125 N. Taylor, Oak Park, IL, addressed the Board of Education.

She spoke on the recommendations to improving student achievement. Regardless of programs that are implemented, it is imperative that objective data be used to establish baselines and evaluate performance. When talking about achievement, data does matter. The reasons are to 1) measure the impact of the program, and 2) provide a baseline. The OPRFHS 2007 report card showed that, among African-American students, only 31 percent met standards in reading and only 30 percent met standards in math. If one looks back to see these African American students when they were in the eighth grade, the 2004 District 97 report card shows that 49 percent met standards in reading and 34 percent met standards in math. It would be reasonable to look at a group of students of which less than half of met standards from eighth grade on and

concluded that there is a lot of remedial work to be done. But, for the African-American students who are now freshmen, if one look at how they did in their eighth grade year, one will see that 77 percent met standards in reading and 71 percent in math. Thus, it occurs that incoming students have less of a gap than had been the case. No doubt there is still remedial work to be done, but the data indicates that the higher baseline for incoming students attention should also be given to maintaining the strengths and fostering the excellence that is accustomed to being seen with White students. It is essential to use data to establish baselines, set goals and measure the accomplishment. She thanked the Board of Education for the attention it was giving to the achievement of African-American students. It is important not only for those students, but for community as a whole.

Lee Pulliam, resident of 719 N. Elmwood, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education.

Mr. Pulliam cautioned the audience that he was going to use a word in his remarks that was offensive to some—that word was “black.”

He began by saying he is a baseball fan and that he likes the White Sox. Before the White Sox, there was the Black Sox. He told the story of a newspaper boy seeing “Shoeless Joe Jackson” walking down the street and after hearing that the team lost and saying, ‘Tell me it ain’t so, Joe.’ Mr. Pulliam came to the Board of Education to say, ‘Tell me it ain’t so’ that the Board of Education members 1) were going to take the blackness out of the achievement gap, 2) didn’t get it right the first time, 3) were not ashamed to say the word ‘black,’ 4) were not interested in addressing the black problem, and 5) were going to amend the resolution on the agenda because a Board member missed a meeting even though the Board of Education voted in favor of the amendment by a 4 to 2 vote. He continued the Board of Education was voting to replace the word “black” with “minority” during African American History Month. He wanted the Board of Education to tell him that it had not lost the courage of its conviction and that they had not lost their voice.

Tim McDonnell, Vice President of Service Employees International U, 1165 N. Clark Street, Chicago, IL, addressed the Board of Education.

He noted that the SEIU represented a large number of the workforce at the high school. Three months ago, he received several calls about an ongoing racial problem that existed at the school, e.g., nooses hanging in the basement, and nothing was done by the administration about it. When some management personnel were approached whether anything had been done about this situation, management said it had been a joke, it had happened around the time Hussein Saddam was hung, so it is not an

issue. For certain members of his group it is an issue; it has become an issue, a big wedge issue, amongst the workforce at OPRFHS.

Mr. McDonnell stated that he filed a grievance; a meeting was held on the issue, he sent a letter to the Board president to move it to that level. While he did not receive a call from the Board president, he did receive a call from the Superintendent who said that he was not part of the grievance and that it had to be taken to the Board of Education level. There is a disconnect when it comes to this issue as no one wants to meet to discuss what happened and what was done by the school regarding this problem. By hiding things and putting them in the backroom, it just creates more of an issue with the workforce here. He hoped for a meeting with the Board of Education and to, hopefully, come to a resolution. The union voluntarily asked that OPRFHS have diversity training; SEIU is willing to set it up and to pay for it. He believed it was necessary. He said that he would wait until after the meeting if they wanted to meet with him or to set up a meeting. He continued that SEIU assumed part of the blame because its representative at the time did nothing either. He then introduced the new representative, Gene Washington. Mr. McDonnell continued that the former representative no longer works for him because he will not tolerate someone not doing something on something like this.

Gene Washington, SEIU, addressed the Board of Education.

He stated that there were a tremendous number of problems within the bargaining units. He gets phone calls daily from the members of the Oak Park workforce about different problems in the Oak Park school district. He did not want to get into the details at that point. He wanted to have a meeting to try to settle some of the issues; there are some insensitive situations. While he would not call this racism, he said it was marginal and that sensitivity training was absolutely needed at OPRFHS.

**Board Member  
Comments**

Ms. Patchak-Layman commented on four issues. They were:

- 1) Amend the February 19 meeting minutes as follows to read as follows: “Ms. Patchak-Layman felt that the bidding and letting of contracts are public business. This would include all discussions of contracts, including the preliminary question of should we consider going to contract must be held in public. Ms. Patchak-Layman handed out a copy of HB 1347 to highlight the role of the Board in this process of bidding contracts.”
- 2) The Zoning Board of Appeals decision on stadium lights that had started as a public discussion and the Board of Education owes it to the community to have a continuing discussion as a follow up.
- 3) The school suspends students for up to ten days, amounting to fifty hours of instruction, and yet the school only provides tutoring, which

is spotty at best. She asked the Board of Education members to reconsider how the school can help improve the institution, and remember that the school's primary responsibility is to a student's education.

- 4) The need to go out for a Request For Professional Services for legal services. She was disturbed by the commentary made at another meeting that the District's legal firm does not support the wills of the community or what is best for the students. There is no equation for what the law requires and what is best for students. O.P.R.F.H.S. needs a law firm that would put it on the side of Brown in the lawsuit Brown vs. Brown. The school needs to go out for bids.

Mr. Allen thanked the Board of Education, the administration and the community for participating in the workshops in February, as work had been accomplished. The next workshop is scheduled for March 15; the Board of Education is past the initial stage and beginning to get to the heart of the matter. He recommended that the Board of Education consider holding its next session in closed session to make individual Board members feel more comfortable. He thanked the press and the community for their cooperation. To the community that does not trust this Board of Education, he asked for its trust anyway in this regard.

Mr. Conway noted that a community member suggested that the Board of Education meetings be televised; the school is working with the Village and the staff to determine if and how that would work. Ms. Fisher was concerned about the costs.

Mr. Conway looked forward to the meeting with the union and the Board of Education would look forward to speaking with staff about what is happening within the building.

Mr. Conway supported the amendment to Board Resolution I about the achievement gap issue. He wants to move forward no matter what it is called.

Lastly, Mr. Conway stated that when this Board of Education considers the discipline cases of students very seriously and, speaking from his own experience, he has not found any board member who has not considered the best interests of the students and the community. When the Board of Education looks at the community, it appreciates its comments. There is much to be done and the Board of Education considers everything.

### **Principal's Report**

Principal Vogel reported that the Athletic Department held a coaches symposium for all coaches on Saturday, February 23, 2008 around the theme of 'building a team culture' and seventy-three coaches attended. The program was very well received. This was the first symposium as a

part of the new professional development program for coaches designed by Mr. Stelzer.

Principal Vogel congratulated Jessica Smith who placed fourth at the IHSA State Speech Tournament in Radio Speaking; Eric Hallman who placed 26<sup>th</sup> in the 200 meter and 500 meter Freestyle events at the State Swim meet; Phil Meyer who placed 15<sup>th</sup> in the State Diving meet, Ellis Coleman who placed third at the State Wrestling Tournament, Latin Club for their showing at the Junior Classical League convention bringing home four ribbons including first place in interpretive art and second overall for school spirit, German Class for first place in skits at the UIC German Day competition, Patrick Clardy for 4<sup>th</sup> place in spelling and third in Essay Writing, and Lakshmi Sundaresan for Top Speaker at the SCOTTIE Tournament of Champions at the College of DuPage.

Principal Vogel reported that the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual TEAM Huskies versus West Leyden basketball game was held last Friday with over 2500 spectators in attendance. The Huskies defeated West Leyden 50-48. Special thanks were given to the Special education staff, Physical Education Division, Building and Grounds, Music Department and Athletics for making this a truly special occasion.

Principal Vogel reported that students from the television program are serving as cast and crew in the new Gen Y TV series on WTTW that premiered on February 17. The program features hot spots, restaurants, fitness centers, and boutiques around Chicago for young adults.

Principal Vogel reported that the Empty Bowls dinner on February 15 was a sellout with over 500 soup dinners served in bowls made by the Art Club, ceramic students and local community potters. Over \$12,000 was raised for PADS, Global Alliance for Africa and the Oak Park Food Pantry. A very complimentary message was received from a local resident about this event and the recent Japanese Festival. This person was impressed by the number of students participating in both of the events, the high caliber of the events, and the graciousness of all the students and staff.

Principal Vogel reported that the Thirteenth Annual NAAPID dinner was held Monday evening and featured students from Spoken Word, Gospel Choir and Gabby Cole, the winner of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Oratorical contest. The program was very well received with over one hundred parents in attendance on the snowy evening.

Mr. Conway asked that first semester discipline reports be provided at the March meeting as well as reports on intervention programs, e.g., MUREE, FREE, etc.

**Mid-Year Graduate Certification** Mr. Rigas moved to certify the January 2008 mid-year graduates, as presented (attached to and made a part of the minutes of this meeting); seconded by Mr. Allen. A roll all vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Superintendent's Report** Dr. Weninger provided the Board of Education with a Demographic Study Report completed by John Kasarda, a nationally known school demographer. District 97 joined the study as well.

The report outlines three scenarios for short and long-term enrollment projections based on his study of the community, population, and housing trends. The series are A) the minimum number of students that may be anticipated; B) the most likely number of students that may be anticipated; and C) the maximum number of students that may be anticipated.

This tool will be used to help develop the five-year plan. It was noted that the projections were close to current projections. Dr. Millard asked if it were possible to target reducing the number of dropouts. She asked the administration to think about this as the District focuses on academic achievement issues and how it can reach those students. Mr. Lanenga receives a monthly report and he will compile the numbers. Mr. Rigas commented that this report does not reflect a projecting tail, even though, because of the baby boomers, it would be expected.

Dr. Weninger stated that the cost to the District was approximately \$3,000; Dr. Kasarda received his research information from each of the Districts, he did not have to travel to Oak Park to do this study.

Dr. Weninger stated that the school would work to increase the population in its bands, as most districts in which he has worked have between 250 to 270 students in bands. He met with several people of the PING organization about the opportunities it provides to middle school and talked about how to motivate high school students. Ms. Patchak-Layman added that PING provides many instruments for students and the housing of them has become a problem. Dr. Millard commented that PING would gladly accept old, donated instruments.

Dr. Weninger reported on the status of the principal search. OPRFHS received thirty-two applications for the position, eleven candidates were interviewed and three of them were selected for final interviews. The candidates are:

Don Vogel      Nathaniel Rouse      Lionel Allen

The process will continue with faculty forums for each of the candidates, a round robin with groups of students, community members, and staff, a community forum for each candidate, a writing exercise, and a DLT interview. Dr. Weninger specifically told the three candidates that if they were selected as one of the finalists, there was no turning back. Dr. Weninger was happy with the pool of candidates and credited the work of the search firm Hazard, Young and Attea for its assistance. Dr. Weninger also thanked the committee members for their work: Jason Edgecombe, Amy Hill, Burcy Hines, Aaron Saunders, Janel Bishop, Marcia Hurt, Jason Dennis, John Lesniak, Kris Johnson, Karen Dale, Kathleen R. Pasulka-Brown, Tom Kirchner, Lillie Asbury, Paul Noble, and Steve Schwartz.

**District Liaison & Community Reports**

Student Council—Mr. Fernandes reported that the Mr. O.P.R.F.H.S. competition was scheduled for March 16. Tau Gamma will help run the event and the group, Students Making a Difference, will assist.  
Alumni Association—Ms. Fisher reported that the next Alumni Association meeting would be March 10, also one of the nights of the principal forums. Ms. Fisher passed the minutes of the Association’s last meeting to Ms. Kalmerton, for anyone to review.

A.P.P.L.E.—Dr. Lee reported that two staff members from the ISBE attended and it was a very useful meeting.

Early Childhood Collaboration Care and Education—Dr. Lee attended an all-day workshop at Percy Julian Middle School sponsored by the Collaboration in which childcare providers from all over the Oak Park area came for a series of presentations on different aspects of early childhood education. It was a rich mix of experiences and just one way in which the high school’s efforts were being shown. Dr. Millard and Ms. Patchak-Layman also attended this event and they were very impressed with the information provided.

**External Reports**

Mr. Conway reported that he and Deacon Willey attended a meeting called “Community of Assets,” where it was discussed how all of the agencies and stakeholders of Oak Park, River Forest, and Forest Park can use their assets to building a community for youth. It was good gathering of representatives throughout the three villages.

**Consent Items**

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked that Item E, Check Disbursements, be removed from the consent agenda.

Ms. Fisher moved to approve the consent items as follows:

- Open Minutes of January 24, February 7, 9, and 19, 2008, and the Closed Session Minutes of January 24, February 7, 9, and 19,

2008, with the modifications noted by Ms. Patchak-Layman to the February 19, 2008 meeting;

- The Resolution Ratifying and Confirming Execution of certain vouchers and payment of certain bills and expenses, fund transfers and list of bills for February 2008 (attached to and made part of the minutes of this meeting);
- the Resolution Authorizing Execution of Certain Vouchers for the Month of March 2008 (attached to and made a part of the minutes of this meeting);
- Childcare fees for 2008-09 school year;
- Student Fees for the 2008-09 school year;
- and the Check Disbursements dated February 28, 2008, (attached to and made a part of the minutes of this meeting);
- The textbook *Exploring Biological Anthropology: The Essentials*, for the Science Division;

Ms. Witham explained that student fees were increasing because of a \$25 increase for Drivers' Ed for sophomores and an increase of \$5 for transcripts.

**Approval of  
Check Distribution  
List dated  
February 28, 2008**

Mr. Rigas moved to approve the check distribution list dated February 28, 2008, as presented; seconded by Ms. Fisher. A roll all vote resulted in six ayes and one nay. Ms. Patchak-Layman voted nay. Motion carried.

Ms. Patchak-Layman had asked for an explanation for a check for \$21,000, as no descriptor was listed. While she was informed that the explanation needed to take place in closed session, she felt a descriptor of some sort was necessary.

**Approval of  
Policy 5115**

Dr. Lee moved to approve Policy 5115, Bus Conduct—Special Education Students, for Second Reading, as presented; seconded by Mr. Rigas.

Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that the policy did not address the IDEA regulations, as the school was not providing another means of transportation and the student suspended from the bus was a Special Education student. She felt the District had an obligation to provide transportation to get the student to school, based on IDEA. Mr. Edgecombe disagreed because the policy indicates that the procedures for Special Education students were included in the policy.

A roll call vote resulted in six ayes and one nay. Ms. Patchak-Layman voted nay. Motion carried.

**Approval of  
Policy 5117**

Dr. Lee moved to approve Policy 5117, Tuition and Residential Status for Second Reading, as presented; seconded by Dr. Millard.

Ms. Patchak-Layman restated her proposals for amendment to this policy that she made at the Policy Committee. The other members of the Committee did not support these proposals.

- 1) Providing a checks and balance was needed when residency is questioned. If the District looks for additional information, it should extend the courtesy of telling the family why the additional information is being asked for to clear up any misinformation for the family, including home visits and observations, which she did not believe the District should use;
- 2) stipulating that certified mail be used when sending important mail to families;
- 3) notifying the Board of Education in the early stages of a residency investigation; and
- 4) Continuing to educate the student until the court provides direction in the event of a parental appeal.

She added her concern that the forms being used in enrollment divided homeowners and renters. The community for many years has tried to have a unified community and she was concerned that this effort would be eroded. She was also worried about the possibility of redlining, as the District could be accused of looking at renters first and homeowners second. Mr. Conway stated that the District has the obligation to provide a free education to the residents of the District. If a person were found to have falsified information, does Ms. Patchak-Layman believe the District should be prosecuted fully? Ms. Patchak-Layman felt it rested with the collective wisdom of the full Board of Education. She also felt the packet should include a form for homelessness.

Dr. Millard stated that Ms. Patchak-Layman's procedural concerns were addressed in the procedures, but not in the policy, and the Policy Committee members had agreed that they would abide by the court's decision in the case of an appeal. It had been the consensus of the Committee that it need not be written in the policy, but in the procedures, which it was.

A roll call vote resulted in six ayes and one nay. Ms. Patchak-Layman voted nay. Motion carried.

#### **Approval of Policy 104**

Dr. Lee moved to approve Policy 104, Philosophy of Grading, for First Reading, as presented; seconded by Ms. Fisher. A roll call vote resulted in six ayes and one nay. Ms. Patchak-Layman voted nay. Motion carried.

Ms. Patchak-Layman was advised to bring her additions to this policy to the next Policy Committee meeting when it comes for consideration for second reading. When asked if there were significant changes made to

the policy, if it would go for first or second reading, she was told that it was the decision of the entire Policy Committee.

Mr. Allen, remembering conversations of the past summer about certain departments establishing unwritten policies on their grading scale, were unaddressed in this policy. He wanted to make sure that teachers maintained the autonomy with respect to their grading scales. He was reminded that the conversation during the summer was about a parent whose student was in a science class and the parent felt the grading scale was too hard versus that of another teacher teaching that same course and the parent wanted a uniform grading scale across the entire science department. Mr. Prale stated that teachers publish their grading scales in their course profiles. Mr. Allen asked whether divisions created their grading own scale. Mr. Prale replied that the Science Division has had that discussion; there is no policy because individual teachers have their own grading scales. Mr. Rigas added that was contrary to what members of the community were complaining about this summer; the reality is that one could strictly define the grading scales and it could have no reality as to what was going on in the classroom; it is impossible to take their individualism away. Mr. Prale stated that teachers have the ability to diverge and what constitutes the grade is more important than a grading scale.

Dr. Lee stated that part of the problem was what had been announced by the Science Division and how that was interpreted by the community. This policy does not address that issue. What needs to be addressed is when a division announces that there is a policy and there can be no other policy for an individual division. Perhaps there is a need to state that no division can make a policy that differs from a policy. Dr. Weninger recalled the situation in the summer and that the parent continued to reiterate that concern throughout the fall.

**Approval of  
Policy 1100**

Dr. Lee moved to approved Policy 1100, Partnership with the Community for First Reading, as presented; seconded by Dr. Millard. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Approval of  
Policy 1120**

Dr. Lee moved to approve Policy 1120, Access to District Public Records for First Reading, as presented; seconded by Mr Rigas. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Approval of  
Policy 1125**

Dr. Lee moved to approve Policy 1125, School Auxiliary Organizations for First Reading, as presented; seconded by Mr Allen. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Approval of  
Policy 1130**

Dr. Lee moved to approve Policy 1130, Use of Mailboxes and Mailing Privileges for First Reading, as presented; seconded by Ms. Fisher. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Acceptance of Gifts & Donations**

Dr. Lee moved to accept with gratitude the gifts and donations, as presented (attached to and made a part of the minutes of this meeting); seconded by Dr. Millard. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Hearing on Life Safety Amendment**

At 9:45 p.m., Mr. Lanenga called a hearing to order on the Life Safety Amendment. Hearing no comments, the public hearing was closed at 9:46 p.m.

**Approval of Life Safety Amendment**

Dr. Lee moved to approve the Life Safety Amendment #18 for turf replacement of the Stadium Fields, for the reason stated below; seconded by Mr. Allen.

It has been determined that there is a substantial, immediate, and unavoidable threat to the health, safety, and/or welfare of pupils due to disrepair of school sidewalks, playgrounds, parking lots, or school bus turnarounds; that all buildings are in compliance and that repairs must be made to said school playground.

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

Mr. Lanenga reported that the stadium turn, installed in 2002, has a manufacturing defect causing the carpet to delaminate at the seams. The result is that the surface has required numerous repairs, all of which have been temporary. There is consensus that the turf is in need of replacement at this time because the seams are creating a hazard to athletes and Physical Education students using the fields.

Mr. Lanenga pointed out that this is a manufacturing defect, not the result of usage. The B&G grounds men make daily repairs. He is also looking at an eight-year third-party bond on the product to see if it would be cost effective. The company that did the original installation went bankrupt and, therefore, it cannot honor the eight-year warranty. He hoped to go out to bid immediately and for the work to be done July 21 through August 10 with a leeway of three days before or after these dates. The field will not be cordoned off until that time. Ms. Patchak-Layman noted one of the shoe companies has a program that donates turf. Mr. Lanenga will explore that avenue. Ms. Patchak-Layman's goal was to minimize the cost of this project so that more dollars go into classroom education. Mr. Lanenga also noted that they were trying to recycle the existing turf. Ms. Patchak-Layman added

that she was pleased that the District would not have to bond for this expenditure.

**Approval of Contract for Youth Services** Ms. Fisher moved to approve the contract with Jewish Council for Youth Services, as presented; seconded by Dr. Millard. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

The contract is for Snowball, a student activity, to use the Jewish Council for Youth Services' Conference Center.

**Sabbatical Leave Applications** Mr. Rigas moved to approve the Sabbatical request of Sarah Rosas for the 2008-09 school year; seconded by Dr. Millard. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Raising Student Achievement Recommendations** Dr. Lee moved to approve the plan for student achievement as provided and direct the administration to begin planning for implementation in fall, 2008, as presented; seconded by Mr. Allen. A roll call vote resulted in six ayes and one nay. Ms. Patchak-Layman voted nay. Motion carried.

Dr. Weninger stated that it is the District's desire to collect data and to get the technology tools to analyze it. As the comprehensive wraparound program is measured, it is essential that data be used to evaluate the program. Dr. Millard stated that it would be the same as for the current programs. She urged the using of non-conventional means such as tracking them after they leave college. In response to her question regarding the drop out rate, she learned that the graduation rate is 99.3 percent. The drop out rate as provided on the State Report Card is derived by a convoluted process using the number of freshmen and then factoring in such things as those students who transferred to another school, those who entered since freshman year, those who dropped out, those who the school dropped for lack of attendance, those students who passed away, etc. Dr. Lee noted that the State of Illinois reports that the percentage of students in the Chicago Public School system who graduate is only 50 percent.

Dr. Millard reiterated a point brought up by faculty, community members, and students that there are interactions that occur within the school that may unwillingly inhibit the success of a student. She hoped that the information gleaned in the survey would be teased out further and that the District would look at the intangibles.

Dr. Weninger noted that the administration would address the academic rigor of freshman classes.

Dr. Weninger emphasized the four steps of professional development, regarding race and student achievement would be addressed with all staff.

Just as the Board of Education had begun its work, the administration will embark on that as part of its administrator's academy this summer.

Ms. Patchak-Layman wanted clarification as to how this plan would affect the goals of meeting AYP and Safe Harbor, as a minimal goal of this and next year's classes. How would the current initiatives master that challenge? Mr. Prale stated that number 4 of the 9 to 12 initiatives references a behavioral interventionist. As reported to the Instruction Committee meeting, the District found it was not making AYP in Special Education subgroups, specifically in one area of the curriculum. That has been a discussion with those teachers, the outcome of which was to hire a behavior interventionist to intervene with student behaviors before they caused the student to end up in the discipline system, e.g., working with the student directly to prevent consequences, reaching out to the student and to the parents, etc. Academically, semester-end results are positive.

Dr. Weninger did not know if the establishment of the African American Leadership Roundtable would have an impact on the students, but he felt it was a place in which to move forward. He felt the same about staff development in CRISS and PBIS. Most of these programs will affect students by their very nature.

Mr. Conway pointed out that, based on the proposed amendment to the resolution, the terminology should be parallel; it is not just "African-American" students, it is "minority" students.

Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that the plan was a plan to plan. She had hoped as this was being developed, there would have been more opportunities and actions involved with this other than planning to plan. Reading it, the parent component is getting together to develop the plan, e.g., the Roundtable, something that could have existed all along. When she reviews the conversations held this past summer as to whether to engage in a strategic plan versus this plan, she feels the District would be further along if it had chosen to do a strategic plan. She was disappointed with this plan. The emphasis on the freshmen is fine, but there should be equal access to the school. None of the programs had anywhere near the number of students the District was seeing in the raw data across the District. The only program that did so was Spoken Word, one teacher going into classrooms and influencing 2,000 students. She did not think that would get the District to its goals this year. Mr. Prale added that 2,000 students already make AYP. When identifying the 125 students, the District looks at those margins. If the District can bring those 50 to 100 students to a level of "meets or exceeds," the District will achieve AYP. To parse the numbers more, to make safe harbor is not impossible. One of the District's initiatives already in place is intensive test preparation. Some students are within a point or two of making AYP and the hope is

that with the help of the more intensive test prep, the students who are on the edge will meet and/or exceed.

Dr. Weninger, recognizing he is an employee of the Board of Education, responded to the description of these proposals being called a plan to plan and he outlined seven months of history as to what had been accomplished. If the Board of Education will remember, when the PSAT scores were received last spring, the phrase that was used by one Board of Education member was “a call to action” and at the same time offered the consideration of a strategic plan, which is a plan to plan. He took exception to this proposal being called a plan to plan as it was unfair, inaccurate and did not reflect the work that had been done in the last seven months.

Ms. Fisher, acknowledging that the plan had evolved tremendously, stated that it originated from the Board of Education’s discussion on the use of tax dollars during the phase in and the initiatives developed at that time, before the current superintendent was in the building. She has seen this plan made specific and honed with specific goals and she expressed her appreciation for this work. She responded to Mr. Prale’s comments with respect to numbers of the students, stating that perhaps fifty does not sound like a large number, but it is large when one is talking about moving into state standards, as defined by the State of Illinois, and especially as the students respond to them. One would not expect to see many of the proposals applied to a large number of students. She appreciated the different approaches being applied at the same time. Mr. Prale stated that the District is also identifying large areas of programs that need review to affect a larger number of students, albeit they are not mentioned in the document.

**Amendment of  
Board Resolution**

Mr. Conway moved to amend Board Resolution I, as follows:

“Be it resolved, that this Board of Education considers the continuous narrowing of the academic achievement gap between minority and non-minority students in this District to be its top priority.”

seconded by Dr. Lee. A roll call vote resulted in six ayes and one nay. Motion carried.

Dr. Lee stated that one of the statements addressed by Lee Pulliam had to do with how a change in the wording of the resolution reflects the Board of Education’s commitment to the idea of making closing the achievement gap or narrowing the achievement gap the number one priority of this goal. He did not believe that the specific wording of that resolution was the most important indicator of this Board of Education’s commitment to closing the achievement gap. It is one indicator, but the wording proposed

is simply to say the Board of Education considers it its number one commitment to close the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. While that he is not his way of stating it, he believes it is adequate to do what needs to be accomplished. He is especially aware of the fact that there are several other indicators of the Board of Education's commitment to closing the achievement gap. He believes a true indication of the Board of Education's commitment to the goal of narrowing the achievement gap will come in at least five other ways. They are:

- 1) The Board of Education's willingness to state clearly exactly what criteria the District will use to determine the quantitative extent to which the gap is being closed;
- 2) The Board of Education's willingness to devote time and effort to consideration of the details of the obstacles that exist in improving the academic achievement of the lower level students, especially in the form of reading deficiencies.
- 3) The Board of Education's willingness to seriously consider the issue of whether or not our real expectations of black students, especially those enrolled in basic level courses, are both appropriate and are in the best interests of our students.
- 4) The Board of Education's willingness to examine the basic premises that we use to justify the basic foundation on which our entire curriculum rests: termed ability grouping, including why we do it, how we do it, and what the total spectrum of results that result from having done it;
- 5) The Board of Education's willingness to continue to examine closely the relationships between what we do in the discipline system and measured student achievement.

Ms. Fisher believed that everyone on the Board of Education supported the spirit of Dr. Lee's first resolution regarding student achievement. She expressed her appreciation to the Board of Education for taking the time for this discussion of equal protection under the law. This consideration is not a divergence; it cannot and has not derailed the Board of Education's focus on student achievement and, in fact, the Constitution provides the foundation of what school boards should do.

Ms. Patchak-Layman thinks words are important and they are important to the community. The Board of Education sets precedence. Many people in the community have been willing to work on the elephant in the room for a long time and diluting the resolution takes that hope out of the picture. She did not support the amendment.

**Non-agenda Items** Dr. Lee hoped to see the quantitative relationships between the changes made in the discipline system and GPAs. While only one semester's data is available, he understood it would not be a trend.

Ms. Patchak-Layman learned that the Childcare Center did not have a parent council. She felt the teachers raised a good point in that many of the new teachers are at the beginning of their pay scale; she felt the addition of a parent council would be good so that parents would have an opportunity to be involved with the support, questioning, and dialogue involving this. She did not know if an opportunity for those conversations was stipulated in the contract. Mr. Edgcombe explained that the Childcare Center was not a contractual obligation, but a benefit. This entity is self-supporting by the fees paid by the parents. Ms. Witham had presented the fees at the Finance Committee meeting and a parent was there for that discussion. It has been the practice to bring any decision first to the Board of Education rather than any other group. Dr. Millard added that the District is trying to accommodate as many faculty members as possible and it was important to have the resources for them. Ms. Patchak-Layman reiterated her concerns 1) this may have been the first time the parents heard of this and 2) there is not a continuing dialogue of parents who work both inside and outside of the school.

When asking if recommendations for classes came from the feeder schools, Mr. Conway learned that division heads make the recommendation for the classes after talking with the middle school teachers and reviewing the standardized test scores, except in the case where a student has attended a private school. The process used is as follows:

- 1) Middle school teachers fill out profile sheets created by the division heads for every area of the students' learning e.g., attitudes, writing abilities, most recent reading test scores, etc.
- 2) The Division Heads receives the results of the EXPLORE test.
- 3) Division Heads have personal conversations with all middle school teachers, except for the students coming from private schools.

When asked if the parent had to have a personal conversation with the Division Head about his/her child's placement in a specific class, i.e., an honors class, or could the parent just demand it, Mr. Prale responded that the parent would have to obtain an override form from the Division Head. The Division Head has the conversation with the middle school, knows the specifics of the program, and is responsible for the curriculum and for articulating clearly with the child. Counselors are facilitating the relationship with the parent and making a smooth transition. Registrations are made in a group counseling session. Mr. Vogel informed parents to talk directly with the Division Heads if they had questions and they should have received override forms prior to the week of registration. Mr. Conway noted that his third child was in the process of registering for classes. His child had received straight A's in eighth grade, a 4.5 GPA, and yet he was not recommended for honors courses. Mr. Conway has

had to secure overrides for all three of his children. He asked what system was in place. Is the District looking at a child or is the District just lumping students into classes? What were his counselors doing? Mr. Allen stated that this sounded like a case of making sure what one thinks is happening is happening. Counselors should be working with the student and the parent to develop a schedule. Mr. Conway asked for further discussion regarding this issue at the Instruction Committee meeting.

**Closed Session**

At 10:50 p.m., on February 28, 2008, Mr. Rigas moved to go into 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, 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; Collective negotiating matters between the District and its employees or their representatives or deliberations concerning salary schedules for one or more classes of employees. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(2); Student disciplinary cases 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(10); the placement of individual students in special education programs and other matters relating to individual students 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(11); seconded by Dr. Millard. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

At 12:20 a.m. on Friday, February 29, 2008, the Board of Education reconvened its open session.

**Student Discipline**

Mr. Rigas moved to expel Student EXP 2/28/08-05, as of February 28, 2008, through the end of first semester of the 2008-09 school year, but to hold the expulsion in abeyance predicated on enrollment and successful completion at an alternative school; seconded by Dr. Millard. A roll call vote resulted in five ayes. Mr. Conway and Ms. Patchak-Layman voted nay. Motion carried.

**Adjournment**

At 1:15 a.m. on Friday, February 29, 2008, Mr. Allen moved to adjourn the Board of Education meeting; seconded by Ms. Fisher. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Jacques A. Conway  
President

John P. Rigas  
Secretary