

Oak Park and River Forest High School
201 N. Scoville
Oak Park, IL 60302
An Instruction Committee of the Whole Board
September 16, 2010

An Instruction Committee meeting was held on Thursday, September 16, 2010, in the Board Room. Co-chair Finnegan opened the meeting at 7:35 a.m. Committee members present were Terry Finnegan, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, Amy McCormack, and Sharon Patchak Layman. Also present were Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; Amy Hill, Director of Assessment and Research; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of Board.

Visitors: Kay Foran, Communications and Community Relations Coordinator; James Paul Hunter, Faculty Senate Executive Committee Chair; Kelly Weiman, Jessica Luttrell, Caroline Connelly, Kyle Farley, Sara McCall, Owen Brady, and Andrew Bacalao, students; Cindy Milojevic, Director of Student Activities, Kara Bohne, Allison Hennessey, OPRFHS Faculty members, and Cindy Muirs, parent.

Approval of August 17, 2010 Instruction Committee Minutes

It was the consensus of the Instruction Committee members to accept the August 17, 2010 meeting minutes, as presented.

Student Summer Experiences

Student Andrew Bacalao, a student enrolled in OPRFHS's CITE program at Triton College reported that the two Triton summer camps he had attended were about 1) baking and 2) health careers. He talked about what he learned and his experience at both camps. Ms. Muir, his mother, spoke very highly of the effort and communication that Amy Hill put forward in navigating these camps for her son and stated that Triton offered many free opportunities for all OPRFHS students.

Ms. Milojevic reported that ten spring break and summer trips went abroad or within the United States this past year. She was inspired by the teachers who took their time and effort to coordinate these trips, many of them doing it every year or every other year. She wanted to thank them publicly for their dedication.

Costa Rica

Owen Brady and Sarah McCall spoke about their experiences on the trip to Costa Rica. They were appreciative of the personal connections they had made. Owen's interests were with science and the environment and this trip affirmed those interests. Their experiences included 1) spending time on a totally self-contained ranch which raised its own food, 2) pursuing scientific research on an unknown species of bats, and 3) exposure to a different culture and ecosystem. Sarah McCall reported on 1) having a family of monkeys swing past their windows as the students were eating breakfast, 2) being at the base of an active volcano, and 3) going on a scavenger hunt which

emphasized the contrast between life in Costa Rica and the United States. Sarah had been inspired to do something with her life other than what she had originally thought.

Tanzania Trip

Jessica Luttrell and Caroline Connelly participated in the twelve-day trip to Tanzania. The work the participants of the trip focused on encompassed conservation biology and educating the locals about the environment. Tanzanians had received over 10,000 trees to replace those that had been used for survival, i.e., building homes, making the fires to cook the food, etc. Every part of the tree, including its roots, is used, causing devastating soil erosion. Both students spoke about how impressed they were with the positive attitude of the Tanzanians and how helpful they were. Jessica had been inspired to study environmental studies. The students went on two safaris, camped on top of a volcano crater, and traveled to the Serengeti where they saw many animals. The trip was described as liberating.

Smoky Mountains Tennessee

The reason student Kelly Weiman participated in the Smoky Mountains trip was because of her interest in science. In preparation for this trip, class work was assigned and day trips were taken to places such as the Indiana Dunes. Kelly continued that the group became familiar with salamanders and that the staff at the Smoky Mountain camp was very welcoming. Kelly shared a PowerPoint presentation depicting some of the highlights of the trip.

Students are exposed to these types of trips through 1) a showcase at the school, 2) Facebook, 3) teachers, and 4) a booklet, started by Dr. Millard.

Mr. Isoye thanked the students for sharing the stories and the teachers for organizing the trips.

Discussion ensued about what the Board of Education could do to allocate resources for these types of trips. It was suggested that the Board of Education should be open to different organizational ideas, even partnering with other regional high schools on trips where OPRFHS might not have enough participation on its own, as was the case with the trip to Tanzania. The cost of these trips can be prohibitive, however. Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that the music department's fundraisers give eighty-five (85) percent of the money raised to a special account for trips. Then, when they travel to Spain, they have fundraised for a couple of years. She suggested that when the District collects fees for plays, sporting events, etc., a percentage of the fee be placed into a personal account to accumulate dollars to use for a trip outside of Oak Park. Any fundraising that they would do as an aside would be put into the individual student account as well. Music students are able to use their accounts for music lessons or every other year trips.

Standardized Test Report

Ms. Hill stated that she was bringing data sets for two cohorts of students 1) PSAT for the graduating class; and 2) for current seniors. The global view is good as this is the highest composite score test in OPRFHS's history at 24.4. A ten-year trend line shows a steady increase in OPRFHS's ACT composite score during the same time at which the state and national data have been flat. However, when the breakdown of the aggregate occurs, there are disparities in student outcomes that differ by race, special education status, and income level, which are depicted in Tables 3 and 4. This disparity does, however, mirror the data at the state and national levels.

OPRFHS seems to be doing better meeting the college-readiness benchmarks every year with the percentage of students who meet the benchmarks in the four subject areas. And, there seems to be a small upward trend in some subgroups, e.g., African-American students are achieving at a higher rate than they did five (5) years ago. However, a disparity exists between Black and White students.

Referring to Tables 9, 10, 11, and 12, Ms. Hill stated that for the class of 2010, 693 freshmen took the PLAN test and then took the ACT in their junior and senior years. The District has been able to pair their scores on both those tests and measure their growth from one test to the next. This information represents the averages for students that are broken down by PLAN scoring range in the freshman year by race. Amy Hill pointed out that one hundred twenty-five (125) White students on average scored 17.6 in English and their growth was 7. Forty-eight (48) Black students on average scored 17.2 in English and their growth was 2.7. The patterns were repeated in the other three subject areas and in every scoring. The overall pattern is clear and startling; the growth data last year had some unsettling and disturbing trends. Thirty-two (32) is the top PLAN score.

Dr. Lee was happy with this presentation because it was healthy for the high school to move closer to discovering its problems. In looking at the data, i.e., the trends of the PSAT and the ACT for Black and White students, he questioned the big drop in scores for both Black and White students in 2005. He also asked whether there was a blip with Black and White students' scores in 2004. Except for a significant blip, there seemed to be a flat curve across all for both Black and White students, because the number of Black and White students is substantial. Information regarding Asian and Hispanic students varies more because of the smaller number of those subgroups. He felt that if one moved across the decade both parallel and horizontal, forgot about race, and compared the average scores of the lower half and the upper half, it might not be surprising to find two horizontal parallel lines, meaning no change. One might find it disconcerting if the scores were diverging, meaning the lower scores were getting lower for both Black and White students and the higher scores were getting higher for both Black and White students. If converging, the District would be happy. Presently, no information is available to show this because the District has been looking at race and taking for granted that one has to have top and bottom halves. He has if the District had the responsibility to look at this data. He believed that if the two were getting farther apart as time move forward, the reports would continue to look the same and the District would not know if the bottom half is getting worse or the top half is getting better. Ms. Hill plans to show the growth of time to be able to see whether the gap was increasing or decreasing either by percentage of where they were or by numerical. Ms. Hill added that one may also add other factors such as the students in the 16 to 19 range on the PLAN may not be on target for the ACT's college-readiness benchmarks. In Math, a score of 17.6 is below the college readiness benchmarks. The White students in that group who scored an average 17.6 got to 23.3, which is higher than the college readiness benchmark. So their high school experience was a success path. For Black students, the same statement cannot be made. Ultimately, the District must determine what differed for them in their high school experience and what can be controlled. This data comprises test scores from more than one test administration and the District looks for the highest score as a measuring point. Another factor would be the type of test prep class in which they participated. Finding out where these students are in the course of their four years will help the District narrow

the differential outcomes on these test scores and the experiences they have, including their test prep experiences.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked what was expected with a score in the 16 to 19 range. Ms. Hill responded that it would be a 2 or 3 point growth from the PLAN to ACT score, if PLAN were administered in the sophomore year. The growth from the freshman year to the junior year should be a four-point growth. In many cases, White students are exceeding and Blacks are not. Ms. Patchak-Layman responded that while some students are not increasing their scores, some are just staying the same. So, while dealing with averages is good in some ways, these are individual students. Are the students coming in at a high level and are either standing still or sliding backwards being given the rigor or academic challenge to stay with their cohort?

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked 1) had the recommended changes made last year in the junior level math class made a difference? 2) What follow-up had occurred with the previous recommendations? 3) How fast can the District separate the data gathering and analysis and implementation of what would help these students, especially those African-American students in science who are showing low PSAE scores? 4) Are these students receiving added curriculum, counseling, tutoring, etc. to help them move forward? Ms. Hill reported that parents and students received these scores and the scores are inputted into Skyward. Teachers know of their accessibility and Mr. Prale identified some areas in which changes have been made because of this data, e.g., math revised the curriculum and instructional approach of one of its core courses, science is developing and using common assessments for biology, chemistry and physics, teachers are evaluating the data and being surveyed as to their own learning, and English has new leadership.

Dr. Millard wondered if it were possible that teacher access to these scores could bias the teacher to the expectation of that student. Ms. Hill responded that there is a tipping point and teachers need to be aware of that fact. However, increasing the focus on students who struggle is good and this is just one data point. When asked how good these scores were in predicting the success of the students when they are 22 or 26 years of age, Mr. Prale said this test is an assessment of the learning environment, not the student. The Administration is also exploring a program that would collect longitudinal information about the students for five (5) years after graduating. Mr. Allen observed that while in each of the categories White students were rising on average to the second category, the exact opposite happened in each category of Black students. There was a disparity in improvement even though students were coming in at the same level. To him this meant that teachers were teaching only the students they want to teach. Ms. Hill affirmed his statement, saying this was about the courses that these students take and that needs exploration. Do other things correlate? Is it about course taking, co-curricular involvement, attendance, or discipline, etc.? The students' experiences at OPRFHS are different enough to produce this outcome. Mr. Allen asked how the decision makers that affect the students' lives directly make decisions that benefit the students, as opposed to what they think should happen based on what they are seeing rather than what they reading.

Ms. Patchak-Layman felt the sorting began with the EXPLORE test. Previously, she had suggested putting all freshmen in all honors classes and evaluating them after nine weeks. The fluctuation occurs when the middle group is slotted based on what happened in eighth grade, as

more certainty occurs in the other lower and higher academic ranges. Eighth graders are poor predictors of where they should be in terms of academics at the high school. The variable the District has control over is what happens between 9 and 3 and students cannot score well unless they are given the information.

Dr. Lee stated that testing, data collection, and analysis requires money, time and effort. He asked Ms. Hill if there were enough available resources to do this now and in the future. Ms. Hill responded that the District has the financial resources needed to do the testing because it is accessing the state's free EXPLORE and PLAN tests for the incoming freshman and it is not expensive to give the practice ACT and PSAT testing, other than personnel. If the present testing schedule were expanded, more resources would be needed. A large scale test runs \$7,000 to \$8,000 per class. Other models to consider would be to test in subject areas, as opposed to taking everyone out of class on a day for four hours. Ms. Hill and OPRFHS's new data system analyst, Christopher Thieme, are discussing the District's needs. Professional development will continue in order to do the analysis as effectively and as efficiently as possible. In response to a sense of urgency, Ms. Hill stated that the District has begun to build the mechanisms to look at the students with scores in the 16 to 19 range. The reports should be in place within a month and they will know if the variables can be provided or if the reports cannot be compiled.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked what opportunities would be provided to those twenty (20) students who did not have an IEP to move them out of the warning level. Dr. Lee, referencing the twenty (20) students, noted that they were identified by cut scores and he assumed if the score was moved up or down the number of students could be more or less. He suggested finding out what these students were doing when they arrived. What was known about them at the end of the first year? Were they given a soft IEP? Mr. Isoye stated that a big part of this is RtI, a program mandated by the state, to address both Special Education and other students as well. The District is working on this. On Tuesday, he attended a webinar with the State Board of Education for superintendents on the District Improvement Plan. Single high school districts must have a District Improvement Plan as well as a School Improvement Plan. He forewarned the Board of Education that some work might have to be done quickly. West 40 will meet with superintendents next week. A new software program is also being implemented for the SIP.

Mr. Rouse stated the administration will discuss the District's status and respond to the Committee's question at the October Instruction Committee meeting. The District needs to look at its progress over a two- to three-year period to see what is effective and what is not. Mr. Isoye reported that the state recognizes that is an issue for all schools and has implemented a Rising Star software will allow for better progress monitoring.

The title of "recommendations" in this report will be changed to "next steps," as that is more descriptive. The recommendations do not require Board of Education approval. Because she had expected to see changes in the scores, Ms. Patchak-Layman did not have confidence in the work plan to move the District forward. She asked if reports would be given on these recommendations in the future.

Additional Instructional Matters for Committee

The topic of the Committee having individual meetings with the Division will be discussed at the October meeting.

Mr. Finnegan asked that “Long-term Adult Mentorship Program” be added to the docket.

Adjournment

The Instruction Committee meeting adjourned at 9:40 a.m. on Thursday, September 16, 2010.