

**Oak Park and River Forest High School  
201 N. Scoville  
Oak Park, IL 60302  
An Instruction Committee of the Whole Board  
February 14, 2011**

An Instruction Committee meeting was held on Monday, February 14, 2011, in the Board Room. Co-chair Lee opened the meeting at 9:20 a.m. Committee members present were John Allen (departed at 10:19 a.m.), Terry Finnegan, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy Leafé McCormack, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, and Sharon Patchak Layman. Also present were Dr. Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; Michael Carioscio, Chief Information Officer; Amy Hill, Director of Assessment and Research; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Lauren M. Smith, Director of Human Resources; Cheryl L. Witham, Chief Financial Officer; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of Board.

Visitors: Kay Foran, Community Relations and Communications Coordinator; James Paul Hunter, Faculty Senate Executive Committee Chair; Tina Halliman, Director of Special Education; Richard Mertz, Division Head for History; and Daniel Cohen, Division Head for English; Joe Kostal and Tom Tarrant, faculty members; Cathy McNary, Marsha Blackwell, and Nikki Paplaczyk, faculty members.

**Approval of January 20, 2011 Instruction Committee Minutes**

It was the consensus of the Instruction Committee members to accept the January 20, 2011 meeting minutes, as presented.

**Class of 2015 Placement Update**

Mr. Rouse distributed the 8<sup>th</sup> grade transition folder which are given to parents of incoming freshmen and include a sample of the *Academic Catalog*, a copy of a PowerPoint presentation on course placement, transition meeting schedules, etc. The registration deadline for freshmen is February 21 and for sophomores, juniors and seniors, prior to spring break. Parents will receive course verification via the US mail.

Mr. Rouse stated that the sectioning process for 2011-2012 will include scheduling the same number of teachers for core classes and he noted that, by and large, almost all teachers are able to teach multiple subjects within their division.

Ms. Hill provided a data summary and tables explaining that OPRFHS had administered the EXPLORE test to the eighth grade residents of Oak Park and River Forest as a component of its process for making course placement recommendations for freshman students. A request was made of a Board of Education member to learn more about the EXPLORE data and the impact of its scores on the placement process.

Ms. Hill reviewed the information provided in the summary of findings. The Class of 2015 performed above national averages in the national norming group; the average scores of incoming ninth grades ranged from 2.8 to 4.1 scale points above the national averages on the four subject area tests and composite; the proportion of the incoming students scoring in the top quartile, nationally, ranged from 62 to 69% on the four subject tests; and 94% of the

Class of 2015 scored above the 50<sup>th</sup> national percentile. Tables 1 and 2 focused on reading and math scores. The mean, median, and modal scores in each subject test as well as the composite were higher for white students than for African-American and Hispanic students. The composite test score distributions across the percentile ranges used to guide placement recommendations for students in their academic courses at OPRFHS suggest that for students in the Class of 2015, if EXPLORE scores were the only consideration, the modal placement recommendation for white, multiracial, and Asian students would be honors courses; the modal placement recommendation for African-American and Hispanic students would be college prep courses. For this same group, if EXPLORE were the only or the primary consideration in placement recommendations, racial distributions among recommendations for college prep courses would roughly mirror the larger racial demographic patterns in the school; however, Black and Hispanic students would be underrepresented among the students recommended for honors courses, and Black students would be overrepresented among the students recommended for basic courses (Table 3).

EXPLORE scores are one of a number of factors that division heads use to determine a student's placement, including the sliding score on the profile sheets from the associate districts and 8<sup>th</sup> grade MAP scores, which are being used for the first time this year. Before deciding to look at other data and make a change in the placement process, discussion must occur about how each of the components is used and the weight given to each of them in the placement process. When a student's test scores are at odds with the numerical scores then a further discussion with the associate school is necessary. Another important piece is parental input with parents having the final say. Parents receive the recommendations in January and parents may talk with the Division Heads and the counselors at that time. Because there is no electronic data keeping of the number of overrides and the outcome, it is difficult to tabulate. However, that information should be available next year.

When asked how the District can change what it does in support of the Board of Education's goal to eliminate predictability for those students who are behind academically, Ms. Hill stated that the school now offers Algebra Block, a freshman reading program, and a summer step-up program. The critical question is what supports are necessary for a student to accelerate. The District has to determine how it places with time and curriculum so that students' classes are sequenced. Their day might also need to be extended or families told that their students have limited course options. An early conversation with counselors might be appropriate to share what the school plans as interventions. That might need to occur in the January timeframe prior to the start of the fall semester. Mr. Finnegan wanted a vehicle to draw students to the school and to have as much good communication with the feeder schools as possible.

Regarding overrides, Mr. Prale noted that there probably more overrides up than down. Every Division Head has a conversation with the parent when an override request is made.

Ms. Patchak-Layman read from the *Academic Catalog* about the College Prep curriculum which says that the student will be able to do problem solving and creative thinking. She questioned whether the EXPLORE test was the right test to fulfill the District's responsibility to find the students that have those attributes. Those are qualities that the District wants all students to have and that is accentuated in the Honors classes. There is

much literature and research about schools doing a poor job of finding giftedness in minority students. The idea of giftedness is set by the white majority and the present system fits that model. She suggested working without any demarcation of student placement for nine weeks in order to have a way to direct programs for individual students. Ms. Patchak-Layman wanted to continue the conversation but was asked to continue it privately with Mr. Prale due to the lateness of the hour.

### **Update on Behavior Interventionist Initiative**

A written update on the Behavior Interventionist Initiative was presented to the Committee. Behavior Interventionist Tom Tarrant is now in his third year of the fifth year of this program. The program's original focus was to return students back to their classes after being sent out for disciplinary action in order for them to miss as little class work as possible. Mr. Tarrant reviewed the summary of findings in his written report. Part of his job is to model behavior in every part of the school day, remind students and staff of expected behaviors, e.g., wearing of ID's, etc., and change behaviors, etc. Statistics are used to define problematic areas. This summer Mr. Tarrant became a Level I Gang Interventionist and now has a different awareness and is informing the parents. Mr. Tarrant proudly stated that students in the EAC II program have had no major infractions at this point anywhere in the building. He is working hard on the issue of truancy and files truancy on the parents. A student who is not in the building during the day is breaking curfew and can be issued a ticket which will necessitate going to court. Due to economic conditions, there is more disrespect and defiance, a spike in hospitalization, suicide attempts, drug overdose, etc. Mr. Tarrant works with teachers on how to diffuse situations by suggesting different models of behavior. Mr. Tarrant also assigns independent study to help 8 to 10 students who are lacking enough credits to graduate within four years.

His next steps for this program are:

- Continuation of support and monitoring of the BI position, tracking discipline and off-campus placement information, maintaining study table and weekly parent contact for failing students.
- Strengthen collaboration with Pupil Support Services on tardy interventions.
- Hold a parent night presentation for ED continuum.
- Meet weekly, or with greater frequency, with Oak Park Youth Services to share information regarding student behavior and to implement interventions to support positive changes in student behavior.

### **SIP Update**

Mr. Rouse reported that Phase I and II of the School Improvement Plan had been submitted. Phase III is the development of an action plan. The three areas in which the District has to focus are based on NCLB's meets or exceeds in the areas of math and reading. Mr. Rouse has established implementation committees for different areas to talk about the efficacy of current programs relative to student achievement needs and future plans. More information will be sent to the Board of Education in the coming months relative to the assigned tasks and overall deadlines. The Board of Education will be asked to approve Phase III at its regular April Board of Education meeting.

### **Reading Initiative Ideas**

Mr. Cohen made the following statement authored by Dr. Halliman and him relative to a reading initiative.

“Both he and Dr. Halliman are deep believers in the power and potential of public education and in particular this public school, which means that all students, all levels and all skills are accepted and have the right to a superior education so that they may achieve their full human potential. Since the case of Brown versus the Board of Education, this nation has struggled to achieve that mission and so has OPRFHS. In 2011, there are persistent and predictable racial achievement disparities and hundreds of students are reading below grade level. There is urgency in the District’s beliefs and in its actions. Achieving the promise of Brown will require it to do something different.

“Peter Senge, an American scientist and director of the Center for Organizational Learning at the [MIT Sloan School of Management](#), talks of another gap. In every profession, a gap exists as to what is known about what should be done and what is actually being done. In the field of education, the gap is the widest. OPRFHS has its beliefs and knowledge and the data to tell it what it should be doing in regards to reading and what it is actually doing. This reading program that you have in front of you is what we should be doing.

“Improving the reading and literacy skills of our students will dramatically impact the entire building. There will be more success, better behavior, more engagement, higher achievement in Science, in Math, in History, in English, in Driver’s Ed and more when students read and comprehend better.

“The multi-tiered plan we provided for you is one based on students’ instructional needs. This means learning more about our students and their reading levels and their reading strengths and weaknesses. Based on those diagnostics we then can provide a program that meets their needs. No longer will a student be labeled a 35 per center and that will determine what class they take or not take. Once again, if we want a new outcome we must take a new path. The new path is that in this plan that percentage is simply the first step in identifying the students’ needs and then we design the program to best fit his or her needs. This plan is an accelerated model where our struggling readers will be gaining at a faster pace than those students reading at grade level. That is the only way to narrow the reading gap.

“This plan calls for all of us to see ourselves as teachers of reading and to be responsible for improving reading and literacy. That is why we are calling for all teachers, division heads and district administrators to play a role and to be held accountable for building and sustaining a culture that promotes reading and provides all that is necessary to improve reading comprehension. It is this institutional commitment that will allow us to narrow the gap between what we know we should be doing and what we are doing.

“Lastly it is important for us to share with you that we stand here on the shoulders of many people in this building who have worked tirelessly to keep reading on the forefront in the hearts and minds of this community. We want to name a few of them now: Catherine McNary, Marsha Blackwell, Sarah Rosas, Andrea Neuman and Nikki Paplaczky and Phil

Prale. Without them and others, Tina and I would not be here now moving this plan forward.

“The plan is an accelerated program for those students.”

Discussion ensued about the budget, noting that the implementation of the recommended Reading 180 Program would cost approximately \$426,000. This program is being recommended for freshman students. A portion of the Title I funds can be used for professional development of literacy instruction and for staff salaries. While the document presented to the Board refers to grant funding, the Board of Education should be aware that OPRFHS will not get any more grant funding as a result of the proposal. Currently grant funds support portions of teacher salaries in their work with students at the pre College Prep level. Existing funds will have to be evaluated and redirected. Mr. Prale did not believe that current grant of would cover all of these costs; the District was now in its budget building process. Mr. Finnegan wanted to see the current model from the budgeting standpoint.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked how the 96 students were broken down between the areas of General Education and Special Education. It was estimated that half of these students needing intensive instruction would come from each area. The Essentials of English class provides some reading support, but not as extensively as outlined in this proposal.

When asked what Board of Education support was needed, Dr. Halliman stated the following:

- 1) Support the ability to keep parents from overriding class placements as that might negate the placements made relative to lower scores;
- 2) Support the recommendation by several members to link with a university to host a cohort on OPRFHS premises to have reading endorsements, i.e., a train the trainer model;
- 3) Support that all levels in the District are invested in this process whether it be professional development or sustaining culture.

Mr. Prale suggested assigning a central person to reading.

When asked how things such as dyslexia, eye-hand coordination, hearing long- and short-term memory, etc., be addressed, Dr. Halliman stated that the District classifies those needs through the established process of identifying deficiencies and moving forward until a screening is required.

After reading this proposal, Dr. Lee’s first thought was that it reflected a level of thought and effort and intentionality that he had not seen in 28 years. He thanked them for the report. He understood that this was the beginning, not the end, and he fully supported almost all of it. He was concerned, however, because he had always thought that the teaching of reading was as complex as the teaching of physics and chemistry. He asked if reading was so unspecialized that anyone could pick it up through in-service workshops. Could the backbone of the proposal come successfully from existing faculty? From where would the leadership for this program come? Does it come from the experience of teaching

and reading? Mr. Prale stated that students' instructional needs would drive the teaching. Reading teachers must take a diagnostic approach to accelerate those students' needs. A reading specialist is necessary and the District has to have an engaged literacy program across entire school. A reading specialist has 45 hours of master classes.

Dr. Isoye thanked the administrators for their report and noted that this was a start. A reading teacher is trained to teach students how to read. It is sometimes unrealistic to think English teachers can teach students how to read. All students need to read to learn. The District can provide technical reading strategies to all students in the content areas to help them read to learn, but that is different from learning to read. There will be different costs as well and concerns from parents whose students are not able to read or read well. Consideration will need to be given to instructional coaches to talk about how peers can become the experts to support the greater number of teachers. The Read 180 Program is an ongoing assessment, divided into small group of cognitive-type learning. As the District begins to work with the MAP assessment, the information coming forward will be more triangulated.

The goal of the Reading 180 program will be to help those students read at the 12-grade level by their senior year. The current program is to increase the reading level by 1.0 in one year; those students who fall below that expectation would be a candidate for this program.

Ms. Patchak-Layman wondered what the results would be if \$1,000 were given in one-to-one services to those needy students. The District will receive an unexpected \$500,000 from the River Forest TIF and this money might be used for this purpose. She felt the District was staking its numbers on this program because it did not believe in spending the money on tutoring or computing. Mr. Finnegan suggested setting up benchmarks.

### **Institute Day Review**

Mr. Prale shared information relative to the January 24 Institute Day.

### **Adjournment**

The Instruction Committee meeting adjourned at 11:08 a.m. on Monday, February 14 2011.