

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Tuesday, November 23, 2010, in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order

President Millard called the meeting to order at 8:17 a.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: John C. Allen, Jacques A. Conway, Terry Finnegan, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy Leafe McCormack, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, and Sharon Patchak-Layman. Also present was Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board of Education and FOIA Officer.

Visitors

Dr. Linda Hanson and Dr. Allan Alson at School Exec Connect.

Recap of Last Meeting

The Board of Education reviewed a copy of the Board norms from their previous meeting.

Outcomes

The Board of Education agreed on the following outcomes for the day:

1. gain a deeper understanding of policy development and its implications for Board and superintendent roles;
2. gain an appreciation for the importance of a yearly work plan and the commitments necessary to efficiently and effectively accomplish the work plan;
3. agree to alter current committee practices in order to maximize efficient and effective Board operations; and
4. Define the next steps necessary for building a strategic planning process.

Observations

School Exec Connect offered some observations that it had about the workings of the Board of Education and asked for comment. Discussion ensued about how to have conversations that are important to one member. The Board of Education had no structure for discussion and its culture is to voice concerns at any opportunity. The Board of Education was advised that it should work closely with its goals and the Superintendent's goals. When Board of Education members want to discuss issues, it should do so when the majority of the Board of Education members agreed to do so. The Board of Education members could submit items for consideration and then decide to discuss the top three. One topic of discussion might be that of a strategic planning process, which would include the topics of core values, goals and the process itself. OPRFHS too uses a Calendar of Reports that originates out of the Superintendent's office to build Board of Education agendas. This could be used to schedule those types of conversations. School EXEC suggested not having these at every meeting, however. The Board of Education should consult with the Superintendent about the time the administration needed to prepare for the discussion.

It was noted that OPRFHS's Boards of Education meetings have traditionally gone long; it spends much time talking about how to do something rather than doing it. It is the committee chair's obligation to lead and control the discussion at the meetings, not to be a speaker.

The Board of Education has to monitor itself to limit the time it takes away from the Superintendent, as long as individual Board of Education members have an opportunity to discuss an interest directly with him. The Board of Education was also reminded that it was appropriate for individual Board members to have conversations with each other about the ongoing progress, unresolved issues, new issues, etc. If something of interest emulates from a committee discussion, a Board of Education member could send an email the Board president, with a copy to the superintendent, asking that the topic be placed on an agenda this year.

While a suggestion was made that the minutes of the Board of Education meetings might be too detailed, some Board of Education members felt that transparency was a higher goal than the efficiency of just providing a summary of the meetings. The Board of Education felt its minutes documented what happened at its meetings so that the community has that understanding. This Board of Education is in a transition period of moving from one way of setting agendas, budgets, work plans, etc., to having a 360-degree format. Detailed minutes are especially helpful because the meetings are not broadcast and there is no other record of them.

Transition periods are difficult if no formula exists and no discussions occur about that. The Board of Education needs the opportunity to talk about such things as the budget. At this point, the Board of Education has to think eighteen months ahead as to what students might need. The administration has informed the Board of Education that it cannot direct new programs because the money has already been earmarked for other things.

Discussion ensued about the administrators' time spent in committee meetings during the month, both in the cost of salaries and the inability of the administrators to complete their daily work. Discussion had occurred about holding evening meetings for these same reasons, but no action occurred. Discussion ensued about administrative workloads, particularly that of the Superintendent's. One suggestion was that the Superintendent might develop a work plan so that the Board of Education could see how he spends his time, e.g., 10% on community outreach, etc. If the workload shifted and more time needed to be focused in another area, then discussions could occur about what areas should receive less attention. Some Board of Education members questioned their role in this regard. They did not want the Superintendent's daily plan: they wanted to provide the objectives, the goals, and the priorities and then let the Superintendent do his job.

The Board of Education recessed at 9:30 a.m. and resumed at 9:45 a.m.

Policy Development Cycle The Board members then discussed the policy development cycle at OPRFHS. The Board of Education reviews policies for reasons of compliance, noncompliance, review, and new ideas. Policies are to provide guidelines as to what is acceptable or not. Boards of education usually adopt the policies and the districts provide the procedures. In best practices, an advisory committee exists to write policies and forward them to the boards of education. Any staff person, member of the community, board member, etc, can bring ideas for policies. A process for a new policy could include:

- 1) Using a policy template to bring ideas forward that would include background, suggested language, consequences, etc., and
- 2) Sending the draft policy first to the Principal, then to the Superintendent, and then to the PEG Committee. Sometimes confusion occurs about whether the idea is a policy or an allocation of funds. Boards have the right to tell community members that their idea for a policy may not fit the District's mission or, while it may be worthy of a discussion, it is not an appropriate time. Boards must utilize a structure of body that can make decisions as to the timeliness of an idea when coming forth from a grassroots effort.

Policy Matrix A recent discussion at a PEG meeting occurred because OPRFHS has a policy that states that the Food Service Department has to be self-supporting. As such, newly hired employees in some positions are paid at minimum wage. When it came to the Board of Education's attention that this practice was occurring, some members suggested that the starting salary of these positions be hire. However, in order to do so, a policy adjustment may have been needed so that the Food Service Department could do this. Confusion exists about policies versus practices. While the District has many practices that may need to be written as policy, when is it appropriate for the Board of Education to become involved with practices?

It was suggested that the Board of Education develop a systematic review of its policy book and it charged the PEG Committee to discuss how to move forward with that. The Board of Education questioned whether the current practice of reviewing policies was the most efficient use of its time. The Board of Education now acts as both the advisory committee and then does first and second readings. Some boards have policy advisory committees, which several Board of Education members supported. Discussion ensued about the advisory committee membership, as there could be intended and unintended consequences. One member felt that because the committee was Board of Education directed, the Board should have a major presence in it.

Discussion ensued about whether the governance procedures for the Board of Education should be considered policies. As a point of clarification, School Exec Connect informed the Board of Education that all procedures are under the jurisdiction for the Superintendent to create for the

implementation of the policy. Procedures are most important for the internal community. The Board of Education must also trust that the Superintendent will carry out the procedures and he may inform the Board of Education of changes.

Discussion ensued about the categories of policies, e.g., educational, financial, management, etc. Some Board of Education members sought more clarification about education in its policies. What is known about teaching and learning and how does an institution answer that question through its policies? Dr. Hanson said that those questions should be part of a large strategic process to be agreed upon by the Board of Education and the community.

Using gender and race equity as an example of a policy, Dr. Alson felt that all districts should have equity policies, and there should be a treatment component, an academic component, etc. A policy provides the framework that gives the strength to go forward. The expectation is that the Superintendent will create academic structures that will enable all students to exceed and remove any barriers. He will implement a strategic plan of actions and the Board of Education will hold the Superintendent responsible for executing that plan.

Some Board of Education members wanted more involvement in policy making regarding education but they felt rebuffed because they were not the “experts.” Boards of education members should be allowed to provide their own expertise and to ask if a policy meets all the criteria, i.e., fairness, equality, classroom setup, teacher overload, etc. Some felt the Board of Education had to trust the administration and allow it to do its work, as a fine line can be drawn between the responsibilities of the Board of Education and micromanaging. One member felt that only when it was about education was it considered micromanaging. When asked if the Board of Education should engage in a conversation about educational policy, Dr. Alson stated that if the outcome were to increase x by x amount in a year, as an example, it would be reasonable to ask the Superintendent how he would execute that plan.

Book Discussion

The Board of Education members had been asked to read *Leading for Equity*, which is a book about how the Superintendent of the Montgomery County Public Schools transformed that system into one that was committed to breaking the links between race, class, and academic achievement. Its superintendent used the “root cause analysis” technique called the “five whys,” a method used in various continuous improvement processes.

**Agreement
Summary**

It was the consensus of the majority of the Board of Education members to change three of its current practices in order to improve the quality of the Board and Committee work. They were:

- Create and implement a policy proposal form;
- Implement a Policy Advisory Committee without Board of Education membership as long as the Board of Education is able to see the suggestions and give input; and
- In January 2011, consider the reasons for developing a strategic plan to begin in the spring, e.g., what is the problem? Is the problem budget, achievement, unions, planning, hiring, etc.? Any goals developed in January could be adjusted depending on the components of a strategic plan. If a strategic plan were something the Board of Education wanted to pursue, it could assign the Superintendent to provide guidelines for a 3-5 year timeline and a proposal as to how to accomplish it.

Other suggestions included:

- Hiring someone to do an index of the policy manual;
- Leaving procedures out of the Board of Education's discussion of policies unless they arise to the level of urgency, i.e., separating the policies from the procedures; and
- Isolating the question/problem in order for the Board of Education to know what conversation to have in order to get an outcome. To what is the Board of Education trying to give guidance?

Adjournment

At 12:15 p.m. on Tuesday, November 23, 2010, Mr. Finnegan moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Ms. McCormack. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Terry Finnegan
Secretary

By Gail Kalmerton
Clerk of the Board