

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Tuesday, November 5, 2013 in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order

President Phelan called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Thomas F. Cofsky, Dr. Steven Gevinson (arrived at 6:24 p.m.), Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Dr. Jackie Moore, Sharon Patchak Layman (arrived at 6:18 p.m.), John Phelan, and Jeff Weissglass. Also in attendance was Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; Tod Altenburg, Chief Financial Officer; Michael Carioscio, Chief Information Officer; Dr. Tina Halliman, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services; Amy Hill, ASDR; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; Karin Sullivan, Communications & Community Relations Coordinator; Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors

Dr. Allan Alson, educational consultant; Naomi Hildner, OPRFHS Faculty Member and John Messina, community member.

Welcome and Review of Agenda and Goals

Dr. Alson thanked the Board of Education for its willingness to participate in individual interviews as they helped move the work of the Strategic Plan.

Review Objectives

The objectives of this meeting were:

- 1) Provide summary feedback from the Board interviews;
- 2) Gain Board commitment for key issues of substance and process necessary to frame the Strategic Plan;
- 3) Reach high level agreement on key concepts of the vision, mission and value statements of the Strategic Plan; and
- 4) Agree on the next steps for the November 25 Board of Education retreat.

Dr. Alson stated he would focus the discussion at the concept and strategic levels, making the principles agreed upon drive the work and the administration would work on the wording.

All the Board of Education members had agreed that the plan needed streamlining and prioritizing. Taking that to heart, the writing team, Pat Maunsell and Dr. Alson and the administrators made some suggestions. He outlined next steps.

- 1) Present a draft that the Board of Education would approve at a regular Board of Education meeting.
- 2) Dr. Isoye will form implementation committees.
 - a. Charge the implementation committees with producing action plans that show goals, objectives, timelines (including work that can be accomplished now and work that can be done in succeeding years), persons responsible, and measures of success.

Board Interviews

The Board of Education was asked to review the summary of the Board interviews to see if it accurately reflected their conversations. Dr. Alson summarized the comments:

- 1) Focus should be on the un-served and under-served in terms of academic achievement, especially those students who are in the middle.

- 2) Set clear priorities and align resources/money to those priorities.
- 3) Intertwine excellence as well as equity and attach the word “urgency” to it.
- 4) Possibly include theories of action (if/then statements) in a cascading order from larger to smaller, i.e., if the Board develops appropriate policies to insure the success of the strategic plan, and if the administration successfully directs people to do that, and if teachers and other staff provide personalization, support, and instructional expertise, and students do what they want to do, there will be success. Strategic plans are high-level plans, without explicit detail.
- 5) Raise achievement for all students and close the gaps. How can closing the gap and resources be matched at a high level?
- 6) Learn more about the Common Core and understand the new assessments to take place next year.
- 7) Have regular check-ins, evaluate the work, and measure the progress for both the school and the community.
- 8) Insure that time is not wasted and that the plan be implemented with fidelity. Good practice is to have 1-year targets, 3-year targets, etc. If targets cannot be met, it is important to adjust the document in order to make it realistic. The Board of Education should execute the plan after the creation of the implementation plans that include accountability, benchmarks, etc.

Board Agreements And Questions

Seven key agreements were culled from the interviews. The Board of Education offered possibilities. The object was to build connections to the value, mission, and goals. Discussion ensued and comments included:

- 1) The last box on the first page did not define how to get to equity and excellence.
- 2) The term “two different schools” reflected the belief or perception that is held by some of the community and staff that not all students receive the same quality of education. One member defined “two schools” as being “two tracks” and suggested that the Board of Education have further discussion on this point. Dr. Alson suggested that an action statement in the Strategic Plan could read, “Ensuring academic rigor is in all courses at all levels.” The consensus of the Steering Committee was that not all students were expected to have the same rigorous expectations in all courses. Another Board of Education member believed that “two different schools” was shorthand for a multidimensional problem that involved economics, race, types of academic setting (auto mechanics as opposed to theatre arts), etc., which includes at least three different tracks. The generalization does obviate the meaning but rather is a major symbolic statement for those who feel strongly. One member struggled with where to fit this into the plan and how to get to equity. Two members thought that two schools went beyond race, when talking about equity. It is a perception issue and a discussion issue for the Board of Education as it means different things to different people. It is an issue of inclusion, which may be another thing to add to equity and excellence. One member believed two different schools might be a subpart of explanation as to how to achieve excellence and equity. The Board of Education had already agreed that the emphasis should be on equity and excellence and one member questioned why address the two-school issue, as it was an outlier. Another member felt it was a function of the school and that the Board of Education should acknowledge that the perception was problematic. The bigger question is how to both the school and students come together and moves forward: What does it mean for a student who is at OPRFHS.

Dr. Alson stated that at the Panasonic Foundation, all means all, a sense of inclusiveness for all students.

- 3) Two members reflected that the discussion was about OPRFHS being a traditional high school with a strong academic core: Some students who perform well in that concept and others do not. One could talk about strengthening the school, which could be interpreted as the school is declining and it is using many resources for those non-performing or at risk students to address their individual needs, or 2) a new model is needed, starting with equity. Another member rephrased this as the school having a mold with some students fitting the mold and benefitting and others do not. Many see the job of the school of finding ways for students to fit the mold better. The mission of the school is to meet the highest priority needs for each student and no mold exists for all students. Another member noted that the discussion could not be about OPRFHS in a finite way, as students go somewhere else after 4 years. What is missing is what students do when they leave OPRFHS

Mission Statement

Dr. Alson asked if the following mission statement adequately reflect what is presently in the plan.

Oak Park and River Forest High School embraces its diversity and provides a rich, dynamic, supportive learning environment for all students. The school provides an equitable, holistic education and cultivates the knowledge, skills, and character necessary for success and leadership in a global society.

The Board of Education members reflected on the following four key concepts included in the mission statement and noted what they wanted to keep, delete, or add.

Embraces diversity
Describes positive learning environment for all students
Describes the type of education students should receive (equitable, holistic)
Describes what students should get from their education.

- 1) Good, but what does equitable and holistic mean? Would the school be providing an education that was part of a holistic community effort? The response was that holistic was included because it takes a community/everyone, i.e., parents, feeder institutions, community agencies, social services agencies, to help students be successful. Equitable is about a sense of fairness as to what the inputs are and some agreement about what equitable would be in the end. Is it hoped that all students are college ready? Is it hoped that all students would complete college? It was referring to what the institution would look like if it were ultimately equitable in terms of outcomes for students.
- 2) It was positive because it could mean different things to different people and almost everything to everybody. In this society, it has to be that in order to make room for a broad set of needs.
- 3) One member liked both No. 2, describes positive learning environment for all students and No. 3, describes the type of education students should receive (equitable, holistic), as they described value and characterized a vision. Number 1 is a value and No. 4 is a repeat.
- 4) Add the word “excellence” before the word “equitable.” The mission statement felt clunky and inelegant and while it would sit on paper, it will not live in the

community. Keep everything from “cultivates” and add “for each and every student” at the end. The words could be moved to another place in the document.

- 6) The mission statement should be memorable.
- 7) The statement should provide a north star by which everything can be measured.
- 8) One member suggested starting with “every student” rather than “OPRFHS” in order to make it more personal and then pinpoint what the students are to take away from the statement. Other mission statements say, “Every student will...” Dr. Also noted that it was important to keep the spirit of what the Steering Committee made up of 60 people had put together.
- 9) Keep it simple, global, and memorable.
- 10) The clear focus clear was how to achieve excellence and equity.
- 11) Did the Board of Education need to develop a consensus on what the Board of Education wanted the school to look like. The writing committee can reflect on a high-level agreement of the concepts at the November 25 meeting. The Board of Education fundamentally agreed on what the mission should be saying, but the wording had not been defined.
- 12) The Board of Education has talked about excellence and equity but a tension between excellence and inclusiveness may exist that has not been identified.
- 13) The vision and mission statements could conceivably be delineating two concepts and the Board of Education members may have differing thoughts. How can the Board of Education develop a consensus on what the school should look like?

Dr. Alson noted that the Board of Education members are the policymakers. Part of the effort of the plan is to ferret out what was meant by the constituency groups and then next steps. The Board of Education has the option of creating a new model or using the same mold and building into that. The Board of Education should give a sense of policy direction, building the words in the Strategic Plan that allow the overarching problem to be addressed. One member felt the most practical approach would be to find the best compromise and then define what is being compromised.

The Steering Committee believed that the elements of mission, vision, and values were essential for framing the work.

Dr. Alson summarized the comments 1) it speaks to everyone, 2) make it briefer, and 3) personalize it so that it is reflective of students.

Values Discussion

The Board of Education members reflected on the Value Statement’s four key concepts and noted what they wanted to keep, delete, or add.

Oak Park and River Forest High School will become a model for educational excellence and equity. Achievement gaps will disappear in a learning environment that is characterized by high expectations, integrity, trust, and compassion and that nurtures the human spirit and allows all students to reach their full human potential.

Educational excellence and equity
Close achievement gaps
Definition of aspirational learning environment
Ultimate goal for students

Responses included:

- 1) What does definition of aspirational learning environment?
- 2) Some felt the phrase “nurture the human spirit was too vague, flowery without substance. This discussion had originally occurred in the Task Forces. People knew when student spirits were crushed and they tried to add an understanding of that with words. It is not just high expectations, but integrity and compassion that reach the full human potential.
- 3) One member was uncomfortable with “human spirit” as it had a religious overtone and the suggestion was “nurturing individual well-being.”
- 4) People had responded to dreams and that not all students have the experience as to where they want to go and what their ideas are, and that feeling was missing from these words. Use “inspires students and “is”.
- 5) Put “high expectations” last and to take out “human”
- 6) It is about reaching “one’s potential.” The words “is characterized by...” is a repeat of the value section. Troubling were the words “the achievement gap will disappear,” as one can make them disappear in a not-so-good way, i.e., lowering the standards.
- 7) One member felt it was reflected in the vision statement as “aspirational;” the school would like that to happen.
- 8) No one would be able to repeat the vision statement. Sets of values change based on interactions, not be documents. Neither the mission nor the vision statements would affect change of the education of OPRFHS students. The goal statements would have a greater impact on what people did and what resources were allocated. The belief was also that the effect of this document on behavior would depend on the commitment the Board of Education builds into the document in ways that can be carried out and enforced. Dr. Alson believed that the document would only be as good as it is used. If people’s belief systems are addressed by changing practices, that can inform those beliefs. It is important to have aspirational dreams but a commitment must be made to whatever is put on paper.
- 9) The strategic plan is good process and being a model was not important, only that OPRFHS did the work.
- 10) The Board of Education has said it was paving the way. One member liked having students and aspirations, etc., but they are encompassed in having excellence and equity.
- 11) One member had bracketed the first sentence and then included allowing students to reach their human potential. Excellence and equity sounds like a good school.
- 12) Add something that reflects “each student”
- 13) The high school will be/become/provide a model for excellence and equity.

Value Statements

The Board of Education members reviewed the value statements. Dr. Alson interpreted that the Steering Committee was trying to accomplish was similar to a theory of action in the value statements, i.e., if it is believed that these values are essential to accomplishing the mission then these are the pieces of the puzzle we need in place. It is not value in the abstract but values connected to what would help achieve the mission of the District. The Board of Education responded to the following questions: 1) Are there too many? Is the wording tight enough? What do is liked in the value statements? What is worrisome?

Comments included:

- 1) Some are wordy and broad
- 2) Collapse 4 and 5

- 3) Values are in the present tense and they are beliefs that are strong enough that if violated then action occurs. They are important.
- 4) No. 6 seemed to be an action statement. Difficulty with second part of sentence “driving work of institution”
- 5) They are elements or pieces of a working part, not values in the traditional sense of values.
- 6) One member’s experience was that professional development had not existed on a school-wide basis in the District when he was first a teacher but that it was becoming increasingly important because of different leadership. However, values do matter.
- 7) “We believe in and therefore” statements would make it clearer on how one will act on a day-to-day basis.
- 8) These are governing principles, not values. Values are caring, loyalty, etc. The opening statement is a fundamentally critical piece of commitment to educate each and every student in the school, but is lost in the way it is presented.
- 9) Remove guarantees from Nos. 7, 9, and 10, i.e., fully prepare, ensure, etc.
- 10) #10 race, income gender and learning differences ...that language has been worked into the conversation as the working definition of closing the achievement gap and we need to believe before we accept it as governing principals and question whether learning differences will not be a predictor of achievement.
- 11) Statement Nos. 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10 are captured. Shorten Nos. 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9. Take out words about guarantees. Can pursue, however.
- 12) Identify the idea behind each, i.e. No. 6, professional development, No. 5 instruction, and boldface them as that would help to identify and to see what is collapsible or distinct.
- 13) Insert the words “as best we can”

Goals Discussion

Dr. Alson explained some of the thinking that went into the goals and spoke about how another school district had adjusted its plan based on what had been accomplished, charged in the administration to create a balanced scorecard to determine whether progress had been made on the Strategic Plan and to present that quarterly. Measurable targets for each goal were set, i.e., set a goal for five years and set expectations as to what how much can be accomplished in each of those five years.

When asked if the categories were the correct ones for OPRFHS, the responses had to do with how to support all adults in the building in feeling responsible and valuable, which translates into school environment and school achievement. The Board of Education is trying to respect the boundaries between its business and the adults inside the school. Adults could be offered incentives to improve the environment, which would translate into student achievement and a framework for doing so. A theory of action might be useful. In the 1980’s all employees played an essential role in the building atmosphere and they felt supported. One member felt it was included in the value statements but suggested that showing how to do this through everyday actions would add more depth to the discussion. What does “strong collaboration” mean? Could examples be provided of how the actions of all staff would be defended be included in the Supportive Learning Environment Goal? If the District nurtures all of the individuals and sees their value, allow them to take ownership, and rewards them, it should be effective. One member suggested including this in the values as the Board of Education believes that every adult in the building has a role and responsibility associated with the students as it is a matter of behavior and not a goal. There should be an expectation of students in how they treat staff.

- 1) Academic rigor and high expectations.
- 2) Student engagement and support (supportive learning environment)
- 3) PD and support
- 4) Resource allocation needs attention
- 5) Community engagement and continuum of learning (horizontal and vertical piece with community)
- 6) Equity (separated and embedded)

Items identified as not being sufficiently reflected in the goals were:

- Assessment of the splitting of the superintendent/principal position
- Assessment of the administration
- Accountability

Final Thoughts and Next Steps

Dr. Alson complimented the Board of Education on its accomplishments at this meeting. He hoped that the next version of the Strategic Plan would continue to capture the spirit of the Steering Committee and what the Board of Education reflected was important from the policy standpoint for shaping and providing work for the next few years. This document would be refined and provided to the Board of Education the week of November 18 in advance of the November 25 meeting. The Board of Education may feel comfortable to bring this forward then for approval in December.

Dr. Alan suggested having two to three high-level action steps to drive the work of each goal rather than the 37 action steps listed in the Strategic Plan because the Board of Education did know not what could be accomplished in five years.

A scorecard will be developed later and sent to Board of Education members. The Oakland California schools look at a small set of quantitative measures every year, i.e., the California state exams, graduation rate, attendance, post-secondary education, California state law, etc., and then more subjective data is added, i.e., how do students, staff, teachers feel.

Adjournment

At 9:30 p.m., on Tuesday, November 5, 2013, Mr. Phelan moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Dr. Lee. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

John Phelan
President

Dr. Jackie Moore
Secretary