

Oak Park and River Forest High School
201 N. Scoville
Oak Park, IL 60302
An Instruction Committee of the Whole Board
April 22, 2010

An Instruction Committee meeting was held on Thursday, April 22, 2010, in the Board Room. Dr. Ralph H. Lee opened the meeting at 7:42 a.m. Committee members present were Terry Finnegan, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy McCormack, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, and Sharon Patchak Layman. Also present were Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Michael Carioscio, Chief Information Officer; Amy Hill, Director of Assessment and Research; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; Cheryl L. Witham, Chief Financial Officer; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors included Kay Foran, Community Relations and Communications Coordinator; James Paul Hunter, FSEC Chair; Linda Cada, Peggy Markey, Nikki Paplaczkyk, and Francisco Arriaga, OPRFHS faculty members, and Lisa Vincent, Occupational Therapist/Assistive Technology Facilitator.

Approval of March 18, 2010 Instruction Committee Minutes

It was the consensus of the Instruction Committee members to accept the March 18, 2010 minutes of that meeting, as presented.

Assistive Technology

Mr. Prale introduced Lisa Vincent who started contracting with OPRFHS in 2005 to provide occupational therapist services. Her role was expanded in 2007 to provide assistive technology services. Ms. Vincent is now spearheading digital text. She presented the benefits of assistive technology and digital text for students in a PowerPoint presentation. She provided an explanation of the materials, the reasons for using them, and the challenges for the future.

The definition of assistive technology is any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. Digital text provides instructional materials, novels, and textbooks in a computerized format. It is available as both word processing and MP3 file types, and can be used with other assistive technologies. Digital text is mandated for some but beneficial to many. It simultaneously ensures that students can access age appropriate instructional materials.

OPRFHS uses Kurzweil 3000, a reading and writing study tool, because it allows students to learn best with instructional methods that simultaneously activate different parts of the brain by presenting information both visually and auditorily. Kurzweil was first introduced to students with physical disabilities three years ago and more school licenses have been authorized since then. Over 100 students currently use the software. Ms. Vincent has used Kurzweil with struggling readers as well. This kind of instruction does not draw attention to the students. Digital text for over 70 classes is stored in the school's outbox facility. Thirty-five Special Education teachers, thirty English teachers and forty additional teachers attended an Institute Day presentation on this software. IDEA is the law that mandated accessible materials be made available for students.

With Kurzweil, a student has control over the following:

- speed allowing the reader the ability to process text per his/her individual need,
- individualization of the voice, the sex, the language, and the appearance of the text,
- the ability to look up the definitions of words by accessing a dictionary,
- writing notes in the column (annotation) while reading the text,
- a search function,
- making bookmarks, and
- accessing the program from home.

Ms. Vincent gave parent and teacher testimonials about their results including the survey given at the January Institute Day. Seventy-three percent of the teachers said it improves understanding, 64 percent felt it definitely improved student grades, and 86 percent said they would use this tool in class. Sally Shaywitz, author of *Overcoming Dyslexia*, recommends using Kurzweil so that information can be provided visually and orally.

Ms. Vincent encouraged the purchase of digitized text by asking teachers to include language in purchase orders to deposit the digital text version of the book with the National Instructional Materials Access Center. She also advocates for co-teaching opportunities or whole class instruction and she schedules small group training sessions.

Ms. Vincent has been happy to watch this initiative gain momentum during this school year; it is one piece of the puzzle to help struggling readers and one tool that they can have in their hands at once. While the school uses audio books, this is the first time students have been offered an MP3 format. Next year, seventy-four students will have that accommodation.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked why this was not used with all students. Ms. Vincent said that it is a copyright issue. The Chafee Amendment, below, allows those who have visual disabilities to have copies at no cost.

"It is not an infringement of copyright for an authorized entity to reproduce or to distribute copies or phonorecords of a previously published, non-dramatic literary work if such copies or phonorecords are reproduced or distributed in specialized formats exclusively for use by blind or other persons with disabilities."

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked if there were a difficulty in expanding its use with the school's current technology or if the school needed to buy more licenses. Ms. Vincent stated that she has worked closely with the IT Department; it has expanded the amount of computers in the labs and it is installed in every Special Education classroom. However, if it were used with all students, additional licenses would have to be purchased.

Textbook Approval

In the packet, Ms. Hill provided the Instruction Committee members with a list of textbooks for the following year.

Discussion ensued about digital books. Board of Education members were interested in pursuing this for a variety of reasons, including:

- 1) digital formats would not need to be returned and might save families money, and
- 2) carrying textbooks places a significant physical burden on the students.

Further discussion will ensue with the bookstore about the availability of digital textbooks. Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that the publishers will have to take notice if more and more districts demand a digital format. It was noted that some publishers proactively put books in IMAC.

Ms. Patchak-Layman questioned why some courses require students to purchase books which have readability statistics that are obviously below their grade level. She was informed that many novels have lower readability scores but are valued because for other reasons. Mr. Prale reported that the English Department wanted to have a common read for the start of the school year.

It was the consensus of the Instruction Committee members to recommend that the Board of Education approve the textbooks as presented at its regular April Board of Education meeting.

Additional Items

Ms. Patchak-Layman and Ms. McCormack met with Mr. Rouse about the work of Pacific Education Group (PEG). Mr. Rouse had sent a copy of a tool depicting the work that was being done at the high school. Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that most of the work being done had to do with Phase II, not Phase I, and that may cause difficulty moving forward. Phase I requires that administrators, Board of Education members and others on the equity team to take the Beyond Diversity Seminar as a starting place to develop the vocabulary to move forward. Ms. Patchak-Layman questioned how successful OPRFHS would be if it were able to use PEG's material in terms of this program and whether the high school should be in this program.

Mr. Rouse asked for an opportunity to provide the Board of Education with an appropriate presentation as to where the school is in this training at its May meeting. Due to the absence of time, he was not able to provide a report for this meeting. He did affirm that he is comfortable with the PEG materials and Mr. Alexander does work with PEG regularly, either through direct contact or through his training. He reminded the Board of Education that it had not done the work it had committed to on diversity and felt it was difficult for the Board of Education to assess what the faculty was doing when it had not completed the work itself. He welcomed the discussion regarding PEG to determine the next steps.

Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that the Board of Education has to be involved and PEG says that there is a shared vocabulary learned at the Beyond Diversity Training. It is important for the policymakers and the administration to carry out the policy. Part of looking at the programs of PEG is the desire to make sure that the goals were being provided for both financially and intellectually. The support and understanding of this process rests with the Board of Education and it must 1) determine the dollar amounts to go with this, and 2) send the message to the rest of the school that this is not being done in a haphazard fashion. PEG has offered to give an introduction so that the Board of Education knows what its organization is able to offer.

Mr. Hunter stated that it was insulting for the Board of Education to talk about the faculty's courageous conversations as being done in a haphazard fashion. The work is hard and emotionally draining. He suggested the Board of Education go through the training in order to know what it is like before it oversteps its bounds trying to dictate professional development within the building.

Dr. Lee asked that Mr. Rouse's report in May recommend how the Board of Education should be involved in the process. Mr. Rouse stated that he would attempt to do that with the input from Ms. McCormack and Ms. Patchak-Layman. Mr. Rouse continued that the faculty is ahead in these conversations and one of the things the Board of Education needs to do is bring someone in to help the Board of Education understand how difficult this work is. Ms. Patchak-Layman acknowledged that the work is very important and she appreciates it. She had participated in PEG's Beyond Diversity Training and its summit. While everyone goes through this at different times, PEG provides a shared vocabulary. There are prerequisites that should be adhered to in order to get the full value out of what is happening; it is a continuing discussion and study. She felt a shared vocabulary would help move the training forward, centralize it, and set the direction. Mr. Hunter responded that the point was that everyone was not in the same place. It is difficult for the professionals in the building to say a common vocabulary is needed. He encouraged the Board of Education to complete its own work before making a recommendation to the school.

A status report on the Courageous Conversations About Race will be given at the May Instruction Committee meeting.

Adjournment

The Instruction Committee meeting adjourned at 8:50 a.m. on Thursday, April 22, 2010.