

**Oak Park and River Forest High School
201 N. Scoville
Oak Park, IL 60302**

**An Instruction Committee of the Whole Board
January 21, 2010**

An Instruction Committee meeting was held on Thursday, January 21, 2010 in the Board Room. Dr. Ralph H. Lee opened the meeting at 7:37 a.m. Committee members present were John C. Allen, IV, Jacques A. Conway, Terry Finnegan, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy McCormack, and Sharon Patchak Layman. Also present were Dr. Attila J. Weninger, Superintendent; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Amy Hill, Director of Assessment and Research; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; Michael Carioscio, Chief Information Officer; Cheryl L. Witham, Chief Financial Officer; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors included Kay Foran, Community Relations and Communications Coordinator (arrived at 7:52); James Paul Hunter, FSEC Chair; Janel Bishop, Assistant Principal for Student Health and Safety; Lana Geselbracht (arrived at 8:08 a.m.); Christy Harris and John Massena of the Concert Tour Association (CTA).

Approval of December Instruction Committee Minutes

It was the consensus of the Instruction Committee members to accept the December 7, 2009 minutes of that meeting, as presented.

Discussion of Weighted and Ranking Systems Review Committee

Dr. Weninger reported that the Instruction Committee members had charged the Superintendent to do three things as a result of its discussion on grading. They were:

1. determine the charge for such a group (focus and scope), including work to be reviewed, researched, and about which recommendations would be made;
2. develop the composition for a study/group, task force, etc., to include school and community stakeholders; and
3. develop a name/title for such a group.

He put together a team that included Mr. Prale and Ms. Hill and made the following recommendations:

I. A. Focus/Scope/Charge

1. Committee charged by the superintendent to undertake work and monitor progress
2. GPA (what courses are included; what courses should be included)
3. weighted/unweighted systems
 - a. 3 methods are currently available and possible (weighted “select” courses; unweighted “select” courses; unweighted all courses)
 - b. 2 methods are currently used (weighted “select” courses; unweighted “select” courses)
 - c. what other method(s) should we adopt and use, if any?
4. system of ranking

- a. same as 2.
5. reporting of ranking
 - a. same as 2.

B. Research

1. survey of high schools (information regarding their current method of calculating GPA, weighted/unweighted ranking systems, reporting, etc.)
2. survey of colleges/universities (how they view high school GPA calculations, weighted/unweighted ranking systems, reporting, etc., what they do with them, etc.)
3. survey of parents (online)
4. survey of students (online)
5. survey of faculty (online)
6. literature review
7. hold forums for parent input
8. hold focus groups for faculty input
9. hold focus groups for student input
10. financial impact of changes, if any

C. Recommendations to be made by the Committee

1. Recommendation to retain current GPA calculation and weighted systems, ranking, and reporting with rationale and basis for same **or**
2. Recommendation to adopt revised GPA calculation and weighted systems, ranking, and reporting with rationale and basis for same **or**
3. Recommendation to adopt new GPA calculation weighted systems, ranking, and reporting with rationale and basis for same **and**
4. Recommendation(s) for future work, if any

II. Committee Composition

1. Administrators (DLT/BLT: 2-3)
2. Division Heads (5) (different divisions than represented by faculty)
3. Faculty (5) (different divisions than represented by division heads)
4. Parents (5) (representing various grade levels and academic levels in which their students take courses)
5. Students (3) (one representing each academic level)

III. Title of Committee

1. Weighted and Ranking Systems Review Committee

Dr. Weninger recommended that the Board of Education direct the administration to undertake a weighted and ranking system review per the above beginning September 2010 and complete the review with recommendations to the Board of Education by May 2011.

Discussion ensued. Mr. Allen reminded the Committee that he wanted to explore listing grades as numbers instead of letters.

Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that much of the research was begun by CTA parents because they wanted the music grade to count in the GPA. Her recommendation was for the District to continue to collect the research in the spring and summer so that in the fall a discussion about what the research meant could occur and any decision made before January could be included in the *Academic Catalog* for the following year. The administration's plan would mean three years of research with adjustments being made in the fourth year. The question of whether this would affect the incoming class or the current students is a worthy discussion and she suggested including counselors as part of the committee, as they are familiar with surveying colleges and could be instrumental in moving this forward without impacting the work being done by others in the District. Mr. Finnegan supported this idea. While Ms. McCormack felt that in theory this could be done, putting together a survey and conducting focus groups needs much preparation. Ms. Patchak-Layman felt that the steps could be broken down and delegated to a larger group of people. Mr. Rouse stated that counselors are now fully engaged with registering current students for next year courses and soon the sectioning process would start. While he wanted to be part of a committee to move this conversation forward, collecting and disaggregating data, scheduling discussions, etc. would be difficult in an earlier timeline. Ms. Patchak-Layman suggested asking staff to work with Citizens' Council and the Concert Tour Association parents on it.

Dr. Weninger asked the Board of Education to consider also the fact that there were a couple of vacancies in the counselor division at this time. In addition, there has been little turnout from the faculty on Baldrige and the interview teams for faculty positions were forming to begin that process. Dr. Weninger's involvement with two other districts that reviewed their grading policies proved the least amount of time spent on a review of this type was 2 ½ years and the longest was 3 years. Because this issue impacts every student and parent, it will draw a great deal of interest. This process must begin with the school community. If the school includes all courses in the GPA system, another 15 to 20 FTE would need to be added at a significant financial impact. The research required is broad and it deserves much attention. He did not believe there were enough bodies in the building to do this work at this time.

Mr. Rouse stated that in addition to agreeing to change and perhaps grandfathering in classes, significant adjustments would have to be made in Skyward. Mr. Carioscio affirmed that typically software is not setup to have two rankings. When one moves out of the core system, the probability of mistakes is much greater.

Ms. Harris favored starting the research and populating the committee in the spring and she also supported the concept that the new administration needed to be in place. From her perspective, she and other CTA members would make sure that the research would be completed in the spring. North Shore schools have many ways of calculating the GPA. She stated that the CTA would be happy to survey the colleges. Dr. Lee noted that this was a much bigger issue than just music performance grades and to have groups with special interests do the research on something much bigger than what that group is interested in was unhealthy. Ms. Harris stated that CTA was not looking at only music grades, but how schools calculate their GPAs.

Mr. Finnegan added that reaching out to universities is critical as it was a way to strengthen a relationship that can be tapped over and over again.

Mr. Rouse asked for an invitation to talk with the members of CTA about this.

Discussion of EETT Grant Opportunities

Mr. Carioscio and Mr. Prale informed the Committee members in writing that OPRFHS had applied for a competitive grant as part of the Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) program. OPRFHS is eligible for this grant because of its NCLB status. ISBE is offering a one-time opportunity for eligible applicants to acquire low-cost laptop/ultra-portable netbook computers to create fully integrated, state-of-the-art learning environments. The project will involve a full integration of technology, particularly in English and math courses and every ninth grade student will use his/her own netbook next school year. OPRFHS requested the maximum grant amount of \$900,000 with one third of that going to professional development to support the transformation of the curriculum to make full use of the one-to-one technology. While the funding for the hardware must be spent by June 30, 2010, the funding for professional development can go forward for next year. A consideration has been to use on-line textbooks as they would always be up to date.

The administration looked at this as an opportunity. From the sustainability aspect, depending on whether the District gets the grant, the District could look more closely at the scope of the project and how well it will be honored, etc. Some of the money will also be spent on infrastructure so that there is wireless access throughout the school, offering places after school where students who do not have Internet access at home can spend time doing their work, and some money has been earmarked for lost or stolen netbooks.

Ms. Patchak-Layman was surprised by the proposed increase in student fees as that suggested that the Board of Education wanted to do that. Mr. Carioscio stated that the state asked for a sustainability plan, but the one presented did not have to be the one used. He recognized that increasing fees and these textbooks would need Board of Education discussion/approval.

When Ms. Patchak-Layman asked if the District's ultimate goal was for every student have their own computer/netbooks, Ms. Hill stated that it had not been included in any school improvement plan, but it could be.

Dr. Weninger reiterated that this was an opportunity that arose and the District was nimble enough to apply for it minus a greater plan.

Discussion may also ensue regarding the tracking of students who are struggling and see if they start being successful using technology. This thought process will not die if the District does not get the grant. Perhaps, however, it could be a worthwhile endeavor to look at a pilot with targeted students.

Additional Instructional Matters for Committee

Dr. Lee asked if the Board of Education reports could be sent electronically.

It was suggested to Dr. Lee, if he chose, to draft a policy on requiring graduates to have a minimum standard of reading and submit it to the PEG Committee for consideration. Dr. Lee felt this was an issue of basic educational policy for students who were not special education

students. He felt the Board of Education should set the benchmark. Mr. Rouse stated that the OPRFHS is governed by sanctions related to state and student achievement and one of those sanctions is graduation requirements, which the school has. The District does not have a disclaimer that speaks directly to reading. Ms. Hill added that should the PEG Committee consider this, it should also address not only a minimum standard but the growth a student makes. Dr. Lee felt that could be separate from whether students should have a minimum standard for graduation. Mr. Prale cautioned that this would have significant effects. If all students not attaining a certain measure were required to take a reading class, the Board of Education would have to support administrative decision to keep students from selecting certain electives; also, additional teachers would be needed at a significant financial cost to the District. Mr. Hunter concurred as this could be one-to-one instruction, which is very expensive.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked if the District tracked students whose parents have requested overrides into honors classes, etc. If so, was it kept by grade level or was it just for freshman. Mr. Prale responded that there is a transaction report in Skyward, but Division Heads keep their own records. While Ms. Patchak-Layman suggested that the report could be done manually, Mr. Carioscio stated that any reports for the long term should be kept electronically. Board of Education members requested raw data, e.g., how many requests were for lower classes and how many were for higher classes, by class, gender, race, etc., and asked when this report could be delivered. Ms. Patchak-Layman thought it might be helpful to have an anecdotal report from the divisions as to the number of overrides and their experiences of overrides. Dr. Weninger expressed concern about anecdotal information.

Mr. Rouse stated that Division Heads explained how recommendations were made at the middle schools' parent night and the importance of understanding what were the components of the decision making process.

Adjournment

The Instruction Committee meeting adjourned at 9:08 a.m. on Thursday, January 21, 2010.