

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

**An Instruction Committee of the Whole Board
November 12, 2009**

An Instruction Committee meeting was held on Thursday, November 12, 2009 in the Board Room. Dr. Ralph H. Lee opened the meeting at 7:35 a.m. Committee members present were John C. Allen, IV; Terry Finnegan, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy McCormack, Dr. Dietra D. Millard 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; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/ Clerk of the Board.

Visitors included Kay Foran, Community Relations and Communications Coordinator, James Paul Hunter, FSEC Chair; Jessica Stovall, Devon Alexander, and Joe Kostal, OPRFHS faculty members; Christy Harris, Concert Tour Association.

Approval of October Instruction Committee Minutes

It was the consensus of the Instruction Committee members to accept the October 15, 2009 minutes of the meeting by acclimation, as modified.

Report on MSAN Student Conference

Dr. Lee apologized for delaying this presentation and making the teachers wait at last month's meeting.

Jessica Stovall and Devon Alexander organized the MSAN Student Conference that OPRFHS and Evanston Township High School co-hosted in Skokie, Illinois at the end of September. Its theme was Sankofa, a term that means "reflecting on the past while building toward the future." The students at the conference worked to identify racial inequity in their school experiences and devised strategies to combat devastating racial inequity. The students used the text "So When It Comes Out, They Aren't That Surprised That It is There: Using Critical Race Theory as a Tool of Analysis of Race and Racism in Education" to interrogate educational racial inequity. Their readings generated discussions helpful in identifying the significance of race and racism in their education. The students produced action plans. They learned that students in the other twenty-seven (27) MSAN districts across the nation were experiencing similar issues of racial inequity. Obstacles on the path of their academic development included: low teacher expectations, stereotyping, a lack of teacher support, tracking/"clustering," the language of the achievement gap, a lack of understanding about racial issues, a lack of mentoring programs, student racial identity, student segregation, white racial knowledge, a lack of adults of color, and racism in the structure, policies and practices of the school.

The conference was a great opportunity for the teachers to talk frankly with the students and to address the issues in their terms. Since the conference, there have been three or four opportunities for the students to receive feedback from students around the country; the consensus is that this was the best conference they had ever attended. The speakers provided examples of racial

inequity in suburban school districts which resonated with students. Then, they walked through what racial inequity looked like in specific terms. The students had an opportunity to hear the experiences of students who were combating racial inequity. The students will make presentations at the regular November Board of Education meeting and they will present two plans to implement by the end of the third quarter.

Having planned the opening night, the OPRFHS students served as ambassadors as well. There was a DJ, each school district was involved in the introduction via a skit, song, etc., and there were thirty (30) acts in the talent show.

This conference made a significant impact on the students as exhibited by full attendance two days a week in preparing for presentation and excited to speak next week about these experiences. Reactions to the conference included:

“I have gained more reasons to achieve in life. I have gained more confidence.”

“At MSAN I learned so much about what it takes to be a leader and how to impact those that do not see race as a serious issue. All the keynote speakers were extremely impacting and helped by connecting with me personally on many levels.

“Being both black and Mexican I feel the effects from racism and racist jokes from both sides. It is most annoying to me when people, especially friends, fail to acknowledge the progress not only my family has made, but the progress of both races in general. Recently I had to lecture my friend on how racism affects me, and how racist “jokes” are more effective than he thinks. Thankfully I had the skills from MSAN to say the right things and after a long talk we made a lot of progress.”

“I was able to gain valuable insight on race as a defacto problem in schools. We discussed why race persists as a problem in schools and how we can fix some of those problems.”

“Before leaving for the MSAN conference, I only had a basic understanding of race, its importance, and how it impacts me. Now, with our new ideas and thoughts about race, which would take me hours to describe, we’re absolutely influential to our decision to start working on the social interactions between teachers and students within the school so that we’ll branch out into the community, classes, and potentially help with school and classroom performance.”

Mr. Finnegan asked if the District could use the MSAN coalition to implement any plans for progressive ideas from the federal government. It was noted that its Executive Director Madeline Haftner planned to apply for a grant to affect six to twenty-five schools. The ISBE guidelines for that grant have not yet been received.

When asked if any white students had participated, it was reported that one had worked on the planning of this event. Ms. Stovall stated that other students have asked to join but they were asked to wait until after the plan was implemented.

Discussion on Working Group on Grading

This agenda item was a follow up to the discussion held at the October Instruction Committee on grading. Dr. Lee asked that the title of this be changed to more adequately reflect the discussion at another meeting. Its relevancy is what happens to that grade after a teacher has given it, not to the judgment on how the grade was given.

Mr. Prale met with Dr. Lee, Ms. Patchak-Layman, and Cristy Harris of the Concert Tour Association (CTA) to discuss options for proceeding with a thorough discussion of grading that would involve all stakeholders and provide guidance for the Board of Education, including the process for proceeding, the group's composition, and the end product. Mr. Prale provided details of the various options discussed in each of these areas. The Administration asked for a recommendation as to the nature and the procedure for the study group/task force. Specifically, should the study group/task force: 1) meet in public Board meetings, 2) be an internal work committee open to the public, or 3) be an internal work committee. The Board of Education must also consider the extent of District resources that this process could entail.

Ms. Patchak-Layman preferred this group be a Board committee. Dr. Weninger felt this should be an internal committee if the scope of this task force were "grading," i.e., how teachers grade materials and assess work. If the scope included the GPA and class rank and how the GPA was calculated and what was included in GPA, then it should involve stakeholders beyond the internal group. Mr. Prale anticipated that it would be the second items that would be the scope of the committee, e.g., what is the weighted index assigned, two-tiered courses, etc. Last time this was discussed a survey completed by teachers on grading and he felt the discussion might eventually move toward daily grading practices.

Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that the question put forward was, "Can music performance courses count in the GPA?" The question was then broadened when one asked about what would happen with classes in PE, Drivers Ed, etc. This goes to the question of what should be included in the GPA. Dr. Millard noted that it would become a more global discussion if there were an open forum. She saw this as being handled by the school community and did not want it made a Board committee. Dr. Lee felt specific parameters should be used to confine the discussion, e.g., a clear separation should be made as to how a teacher gives a grade from what happens to that grade after the teacher reports it to the school. He felt the assumption should be made that how teachers form their professional judgments is not under discussion.

Mr. Prale noted that the indexing for weighted average accumulates by gaining either an A or a B in an AP or honor level course. That does influence teachers; they tend to give As & Bs because that is where students will get the index. If a student gets a C in an AP or honor level course, he/she might have been better off getting an A in a regular level class. Now teachers publish their grading policies and are able to tell the parent, the division head and the administrator how a grade was determined.

Dr. Lee did not want to limit the scope of this discussion at this time and he asked the Superintendent to develop a detailed proposal for the Board of Education to do three things:

- 1) Develop a recommended stakeholder composition of task force or study group;

- 2) Recommend the full and specific scope of the charge of the task force; and
- 3) Develop an appropriate name for the group.

Mr. Allen felt all courses should be part of a student's GPA. If someone is able to excel in a music class, etc., that excelling should be reflected in the GPA. He heard on National Public Radio (NPR) that there are fewer men in college now than women and the number is accelerating. A student excelling in auto mechanic should have confidence in that by having that grade reflected in his/her GPA. Mr. Allen wanted two things:

- 1) Report grades as numbers, e.g., an A ranges from 92 to 100, etc. Colleges are able to see the numbers and students are able to see the true value of their work.
- 2) The committee should be a hybrid with heavy Board of Education involvement.

Ms. Patchak-Layman preferred starting this work as soon as possible; having a smaller committee would allow the work to move forward more quickly to determine what would be reasonable activities for it. She wanted whatever changes to be quickly in order to allow students to make course selections for next year based on those changes. Dr. Weninger noted that the group's composition could be faculty, administrators, parents, etc. Anything that had to do with the GPA and class rank would not impact current students because their GPA class rank has been based on the system in place. If the ranking changed, there would be a pragmatic and real effect on the students. In addition, the administrative workload now is very heavy with the Board of Education goals, Baldrige, the recruitment and employment of faculty, and the superintendent search.

Ms. Patchak-Layman responded that it is the parents with students in school now who are interested in whether music performance is part of the GPA or not. There are instances where students have chosen not to be part of music performance classes because the grade would not be part of the GPA. She felt the administration's thinking that the Board of Education could not make changes for the students presently in school was wrong. The Board of Education must act on the concerns of the parents who have children here now. Ms. McCormack suggested that this too would be an appropriate discussion for the focus group itself.

Dr. Weninger will be responsible for providing a report by January on this subject.

Preview of Course Proposals

Ms. Hill presented the current version of course proposals for the 2010-2011 Academic Catalog (attached to and made a part of the minutes of the meeting). Since last Wednesday when the course proposals were submitted for inclusion in the Instruction Committee packet, further conversations regarding a particular proposal in the Special Education Division yielded a change in the proposals. The deletion of Environmental Science from the LD continuum is being withdrawn and instead the proposal is to delete the Environmental Biology course. The curricula in the two courses have overlapping elements, and enrollment patterns do not justify keeping both courses on the books. Discussion ensued.

It was the consensus of the Committee members to recommend to the Board of Education that it approve the Course Proposals for the 2010-2011 Academic Catalog, as presented.

Ms. Patchak-Layman was informed that the first class on creating websites was a gatekeeper class and students would have easy access to it and attempt by the Business Education Department to increase enrollment.

The committee was also informed of the following:

- 1) Classes that were being deleted had not run in four to five years.
- 2) World Music is not a performance class and is counted in the GPA; it is a music appreciation course.
- 3) The REI Spanish course is a class offered to students who may need some sort of accommodation to be successful and as a preparation for post graduation plans where they may need a foreign language.

Mr. Hunter referred to the science course listed on page 25, Bridge to AP Biology. He objected to this course because the Science Curriculum Committee had not signed off on it. He and the curriculum committee questioned the rigor of the class as it was being offered during summer school as an online, distance learning class that would replace eighteen (18) weeks of classroom instruction during the year. Usually the content curriculum committees sign off on a course. Only the Science Division Head wanted to bring this forward; it was an awkward bridge to an AP course. Mr. Hunter was also concerned as to how teachers would be paid to do distance learning opportunities as these offerings were not a part of the summer school contract or part of the CBA. His other concerns were students signing up for social networking sites. Mr. Hunter felt collaboration was critical and this precedent was dangerous and undermined a semester's worth of work. This class is not now offered during the summer because the students do not get exposure to 18 weeks of instruction. He asked that the administration be directed to have all of the questions explored and to converse with the Science Curriculum Committee, not just to its Division Head.

Mr. Prale noted that this class was considered part of summer school which is not part of the CBA. This is the District's foray into online, distant learning opportunities to see if they help students. OPRFHS is behind the curve in this venue. The Curriculum Committee had reviewed this course proposal, but chose not to sign it.

Mr. Prale stated that initially Instructional Council looked at this course; the Science Division Head was told to have the Science Curriculum Committee review it. Dr. Weninger noted that the purpose of this course is to increase participation of minority students in AP Biology; it is another attempt to engage students in a different type of learning.

Dr. Lee felt another venue should deal with contractual issues but he did indicate a level of understanding of Mr. Hunter's concerns. Mr. Hunter agreed that while the achievement initiatives were important, he felt it was disingenuous for the administration to say that the science division had been included in this decision. He was very concerned about the role of summer school if offerings are expanded in the summer as a replacement for classes during the year.

Dr. Millard was unsure how this class would bring more minority students and she would have been interested in seeing the objections of the committee. The evaluation of the course would be very important.

Mr. Allen was disappointed that the courses being deleted by the Business Department were core business courses. A male leaving the high school and starting a business would have no experience with accounting, business law, etc. He felt that if there were a way to recruit for these classes, the District should do so. He hoped that the District could find a way to reinstate these core classes.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked if there were criteria for continuing a course when it was tied to an individual and that individual was scheduled to retire, etc. Ms. Hill responded that it is looked at on an individual basis. Often teachers are groomed to take over that course.

Progress Reports

Test Prep ACT/PSAE Prep Programs Class 2009

Ms. Hill had shared the results of three test prep programs used by OPRFHS students 1) EXCEL Edge; 2) Revolution Prep, and 3) College Admissions Prep (CAP) in her written report. Excel Edge and Revolution Prep are offered to junior students at large and CAP is a for-credit course that runs during the school day second semester which is targeted for juniors identified from prior standardized test scores as being on the margin of potential for meeting PSAE standards. The highest scores achieved by students were in the Excel Edge program, followed by Revolution Prep and then CAP.

Ms. Hill reported on the success of the CAP program. Of the 126 students targeted for participation in the CAP course, 38 enrolled, 16 enrolled in Excel Edge, and 72 did not enroll in any test prep program offered through the high school. CAP students' average ACT scores were equal to or slightly lower than average scores for non-participants. Their average score was slightly better than the 16 ExcelEdge participants' average math score, but the ExcelEdge participants had higher average ACT scores in English, Reading, and Science than did CAP students. CAP student's rate of meeting and exceeding standards in reading was the lowest.

CAP students outperformed non-participants in their growth from the sophomore year Instructional ACT to the junior year PSAE-ACT in all subject areas. The differences in English and Math were slight, but in Science CAP students grew on average a full point more than non-participants. CAP students' growth exceeded that of ExcelEdge participants in Math and Science, while ExcelEdge participants showed more growth on average in English and Reading.

The District will continue to work with the private companies Excel Edge and Revolution Prep. Based on the growth analysis, test scores increase more as a result of enrollment in CAP than when students do not participate in test prep programs, the District will run two sections of that course second semester. Will not know results of the program

Ms. Hill was told by the counselors that opportunities for test preparation during the day have proven worthwhile for those students who have taken advantage of them.

Algebra Block

Mr. Prale provided an update on the Algebra 1-2 Block Program. This item was tabled until the December Instruction Committee meeting. The report provided information that included how the Algebra 1-2 Block Program was introduced to the school in the 2006-07 school year. The program provides students with an average of 120 minutes of additional class time each week, the equivalent to an extra semester of math each year. The first students who completed the Algebra 1-2 Block course are now current seniors and they took the ACT-PSAE in April 2009.

Mr. Prale provided tables which provided summaries of 1) the algebra course taken by student and whether or not the student reached the meets or exceeds level on the math portion of the PSAE; and 2) data comparing white and African-American students.

The information suggested that this program is not promoting significant changes in the percentages of Algebra program students who meet or exceed state standards, but the total number of students meeting or exceeding increased for the Class of 2010. The number of students enrolled in basic level math in the ninth grade decreased from 154 to 114 for this class. Perhaps Algebra 1-2 Block places more students in the regular level program which provides access to more academic rigor.

Additional tables showed a consistency similar to other growth analyses of test data. Gaps appear between white and African-American students and between students who meet and those who score below state standards. However, a relatively small number of African-American students who took Algebra 1-2 Block showed high growth on the math subtest between the PLAN and the ACT test. It was suggested looking at their experiences more closely. And, for each pair of growth averages, the average growth for the composite score is greater than average growth for the math subtest EXCEPT for the African-American students in the class of 2010.

Thus, the administration recommended continued review of academic program effectiveness and consideration of the following:

- Continue to offer Algebra 1-2 Block, but more effort should be made to align the curriculum standards and assessments more closely with the Algebra 1-2 program.
- Improve the percentages of students who take either Algebra course and meet or exceed on the ACT-PSAE. The Algebra 1-2 Block class has been effective in reducing the number of students who enroll in the transition or basic level ninth grade math courses while maintaining the percentage of students who meet and exceed. More growth progress would be realized by reducing the number of students who take basic level math and increasing the percentage of students who meet standards.
- Consider supplemental math courses for students who, after completing Algebra 1-2 or Algebra 1-2 Block, are not projected to meet state standards. Students who enroll in Advanced Algebra are better prepared for the PSAE exam and are more likely to meet state standards. A supplemental math course for targeted students, either as a summer school or a regular school year course, could lead more students to enroll in Advanced Algebra or in a more challenging math course in their junior year.

Additional Instructional Matters for Committee

The issue of divisional restructuring will be an agenda item at the regular November Board of Education meeting.

Adjournment

The Instruction Committee meeting adjourned at 9:08 a.m. on Thursday, November 12, 2009.