

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

**An Instruction Committee
September 10, 2009**

An Instruction Committee meeting was held on Thursday, September 10, 2009 in the Board Room. Dr. Ralph H. Lee opened the meeting at 7:40 a.m. Committee members present were Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy McCormack, Terry Finnegan and ex-officio member Dr. Dietra D. Millard. Board of Education members also present were: John C. Allen IV 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 Research and Assessment; 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; Devon Alexander, OPRFHS Faculty Member, Cindy Milojevic, Director of Student Services; and students Kurt Grahnke, Camilla Brewer, and Taylor Christmas.

Approval of August Instruction Committee Minutes

It was the consensus of the Instruction Committee members to accept the August 19, 2009 minutes of the meeting by acclimation, as presented.

Summer Student Experiences

Three students spoke about their summer experiences.

Kurt Grahnke, a junior, spent one month in Germany on an exchange trip. He offered thanks to the Board of Education for providing this wonderful, life-changing opportunity and to the Alumni Association for largely funded his participation. Kurt reported on the cities to which he traveled, i.e., Berlin, Hamburg, Rottenburg, and a small village in Bulgaria in the Swiss Alps. They visited universities, stayed with host families, and visited a German high school. He lived the German lifestyle. German schools have different structures: some days have one class, some days have three classes and some days are nine to ten hours in length. The most rigorous schools are called gymnasiums. He looked forward to welcoming the German exchange students who would be arriving that week to OPRFHS.

Camilla Brewer, a senior, was one of 15 students from the Chicagoland area who participated in the Triton Health Careers Program. This program allowed the students to explore health care careers at Loyola and Prentice Women's Hospitals, and a fire department. Camilla also interned at Fermilab for five weeks with pay where she created new pages for its website, etc., and was able participate in research activities with Fermilab staff. The students in the program also built a radio from scratch and an infrared sensor for robots programmed to go through an obstacle courses. She hopes to major in psychology at Brown University and become a psychiatrist.

Taylor Christmas was one of thirteen OPRFHS who traveled to Ireland for two weeks during the summer. The first week they visited University College in Dublin and studied the author James

Joyce. They stayed at a youth hostel where they met many college students from Boston and Illinois. The study of James Joyce is a course that reoccurs in different places throughout the world.

Standardized Test Report

Ms. Hill presented a report that summarized the results of ACT and SAT tests for the OPRF Class of 2009 and results of the PSAE test for the current senior class for the packet. The report compares the students' results to those of their peers across the state and nation and thus provides a context for understanding how OPRFHS students have performed. Longitudinal analysis also allows comparisons of OPRF cohort groups to one another over time as well as the growth of the Class of 2009 from their EXPLORE scores to their ACT scores.

Ms. Hill reported that there has been a slow and steady recovery in test scores from 2001 when a more select group of students took the test. The disaggregation shows the same patterns seen for years; the differences are predictable by race in all the testing, i.e., PSAE, ACT, and SAT.

According to Ms. Hill, "For the Class of 2009, analysis of matched EXPLORE and ACT scores for 634 students indicates that the greatest gains in each subject area were made by students achieving EXPLORE scores of 20 or better on a 25-point scale—in other words, students at the top of the scoring range demonstrated the greatest growth (Tables 7-10). In three of the four subject areas, students in the lowest scoring range demonstrated growth equal to or better than some students with higher EXPLORE scores. When the data for growth are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, Asian students' scores increased the most in all four subject areas. African American students' scores had the least increase (Tables 11-14).

"OPRF students are more likely than their peers across the state and nation to achieve the College Readiness Benchmarks in each subject area. In the Class of 2009, 39.3% of our students, including Special Education students, scored at or above all four benchmarks, compared to 22% of students in Illinois and 23% of students across the nation (Table 4; note that the state and national figures do not include Special Education students). Overall, the trend appears to be that greater proportions of our aggregate group are achieving the benchmark in science, which appears to lead to a greater percent meeting all four benchmarks (Table 6).

Dr. Lee asked if the score on the ACT and the EXPLORE test were already adjusted so that they meant the same. Ms. Hill responded that they were on the same scale, the highest EXPLORE score is 25 and the highest ACT score is 36. Dr. Lee noted that the average African-American math score went from 14.5 to 18 approximately, while the average White score went from 19 to 25 ½ approximately. He felt it was important to determine the growth and the lack of growth.

Ms. Hill reported that she would be sharing this information with Instructional Council that afternoon and she will ask if FSEC would like a presentation on this.

Mr. Finnegan asked how the school can move each of these groups up in a more uniform manner, as the gain in score range in all four subject areas is much higher as one moves up the scale. Ms. Patchak-Layman felt the reverse would be ideal. Ms. Hill stated that ACT will not use the EXPLORE test as a predictor. She looked to find growth. Should a student receive a score of 15

on the EXPLORE test, it is predicted that there would be a 0-3 gain on the PLAN test. If the PLAN score was 17, then the predictive growth for ACT would be 0. The point spread makes it difficult to pinpoint more precisely. She was not comfortable talking about what is the predicted or average growth.

Dr. Lee asked for an explanation of “matched score.” Ms. Hill responded that there were 634 freshmen who took the EXPLORE test and the ACT in their junior year. While there were 750 students in the total data sets, roughly 120 of them started after the initial cohort of students. For AYP, the students who enrolled after May 1 of their sophomore year were not in the mix but were counted in the overall percentages.

Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that the most of the average scores listed between the District and State on page 10 of the report showed OPRFHS ahead, except for the WorkKeys and the Writing Component. Ms. Hill was unsure as to why there was this discrepancy, but did offer that 1) those scale scores represent a range; there are 30 questions that are accounted for in each of the WorkKeys scale, roughly a three point spread, or 2) the other possibility is that motivation on day two was not as high. Previously, scores correlated well from day one to day two.

Ms. Hill stated that OPRFHS will continue to track and report performance on students’ standardized testing in the context of state and national test results, as that analysis provides one important perspective for evaluating the relative strength of our students’ academic preparation. Equally or perhaps more important is the longitudinal cohort analysis represented here by the data in Tables 7-14. As with other data sets reported to the Board of Education, the growth approach reveals outcome differentials that are predictable by race. Without further analysis, it is difficult to know whether the differences in test score growth represent qualitatively different learning changes for students in the cohort. Data indicated a need for a deeper inquiry into the possible causes of these test score growth differences. The school needs to identify and develop a thorough understanding of those factors occurring within the OPRFHS experience—e.g. course taking patterns, attendance and discipline patterns, honors course enrollments, co-curricular participation—that correlate with student outcomes that differ by race.

Grade Point Average Report

When OPRFHS District leadership first began discussing disparities or gaps that appeared in student data when that data was disaggregated by race, one of the data sets used most frequently was student grade point average (GPA) and weighted grade point average (WGPA). The data presented in this report is at the request of current Board and administrative leadership who wanted to revisit GPA and WGPA.

Mr. Prale presented a series of charts detailing GPA and WGPA for the graduating classes of 2009-2012. The information reflects a snapshot of June 2009 and includes senior students who graduated in June 2009 and current sophomore, junior and senior students. Off-campus program and TEAM students were not included in the information but students who participated in all other Special Education programs were included. He noted a glitch in the number of graduates for 2009 reported in Skyward, but he did not think that would affect the averages significantly.

A preliminary review of the available information suggests the following:

- The disaggregated data show patterns similar to patterns exhibited in the last several years.
- Disparities of as much as 1.0 in GPA and 1.3 in WGPA appear between the data collected on white students and the data collected on African American students.
- Disparities among the data are smaller and less significant when drawn from other disaggregated groups than the data from white students and African American students.
- Data on female students tend to show higher GPA and WGPA than the data shown on male students in similar disaggregated groups.

In talking with counselors, he learned that a GPA of 2.0 is an important benchmark relative to different colleges. A goal to establish might be for all students to achieve a GPA of 2.0.

Mr. Prale responded to a question as to how much weight colleges give to the GPA, by saying that they have a variety of approaches. They may disregard, recalculate, look at the program's strength, and/or accept a GPA as it is presented. Larger schools may look more seriously at transcripts. Mr. Prale explained the difference between the regular GPA and the weighted GPA. An honors level course has an A following the course name. If a student receives an A or a B grade in that course, OPRFHS attaches a multiplier of .01 to it and uses that on the GPA. Students are allowed three weighted factors per semester with a maximum factor of 2.4 for eight semesters of school. If a student's GPA is 3.58 at end of first semester and he/she has taken three honor courses, the GPA would be calculated as follows: 1.03×3.58 which would equal 3.687. There is no limit to the number of honors level courses a student may take; however, there is a limit to the number of honors level points that a student may receive per semester. A student may not receive honors level points for more than three courses in any one semester. "Extra" points from one semester may be carried forward to subsequent semesters and, to a maximum of 24 honors level points, will be included in the calculation of weighted grade point average.

Since the student's GPA is multiplied by the API, this weighted GPA serves to weight the experience of the student, not the individual courses. The philosophy of OPRFHS is to look at the experience of the student. Mr. Finnegan asked what effect there would be on the averages as a result of the school's push to have as many students as possible experience at least one honors class. Mr. Prale suggested that it could be a more rich and rigorous curriculum. An A in a college prep class that is not weighted helps more than a B in an honors class. However, the fact that there are students who want to take honors classes speaks to the strength of the program. Two-thirds of the students take one or more honors classes per year.

Dr. Lee asked what effect shifting emphasis in the discipline system had on the GPA. Mr. Prale stated that this was about growth, e.g., tracking courses and programs that promote growth. In order to determine if discipline affected the GPA, a larger database would have to be used to include the GPA, various programs, attendance, discipline, etc.

Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that a few years ago there was a suggestion to put all freshmen in honors classes and to make no adjustments to that schedule for nine weeks. Patterns of plateaus have been seen for a long time. There is no major activity planned that will move the school forward and break that pattern. She used the analogy of dieting. When one continues to plateau, one must do something as dramatic as fasting. She suggested bringing this suggestion to the larger community and saying to the parents that the school is putting their children in honors classes and

they may only get C's, but something else might happen. Mr. Prale thought it was an interesting suggestion and suggested considering weighting A, B, and C. He stated that this could have a positive effect on the school experiences of African-American students. Ms. Patchak-Layman felt something must be done to change the pattern.

Mr. Prale concluded that this report would be issued regularly as discussions regarding gaps that appear in student outcome data are useful and should continue as they move school faculty and staff to improve administrative and classroom practices. Administration and faculty should continue to report on and evaluate current targeted programs, academic and student service support programs, and consider changes to grading, course enrollment, and curriculum policies.

Evaluation of Public Speaking for Students

Ms. McCormack's interest in public speaking was renewed when she spoke with a debate group about institutionalizing school debate and the importance of public speaking. Both she and Dr. Millard discussed this and there was a feeling that it might be better to institutionalize this from the school. At one time, OPRFHS had a public speaking graduation requirement. This may be the time to revisit that idea. The world today is changing dramatically in terms of how students communicate and public speaking is a way to address that fact. One observation is that there are more opportunities for public speaking in the elementary and middle schools than in the high school.

It was suggested that public speaking be defined and the graduation requirements be defined as well. This will be discussed at a future meeting.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked where writing and writing instruction occurred. She asked if juniors should be required to write college essays, etc. Ms. McCormack added to Ms. Patchak-Layman components about the writing component. She has heard from parents with concerns about their freshman students not receiving enough writing instruction. One parent spoke of her child who was in AP English at OPRFHS and ended up in a remedial writing class at the University of Michigan. More emphasis needs to be placed on written and oral communication.

Additional Instructional Matters

The Administration was asked to provide the attendance figures for both staff and students on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Staff should be aware of these holidays and take them into consideration when planning athletics, tests, quizzes, assignments, due dates, etc.

Ms. Patchak-Layman brought up class size and FTE, noting that in the last two years the Board of Education has not had a conversation relative to changing class size. Mr. Prale stated that the District has nothing about class size in any of its contracts or policies. Should the Board of Education want to establish a number via a policy or a discussion, there could be ramifications to FTE and finances. Mr. Finnegan felt the Board of Education had done a disservice to the administration by having two basic goals that conflicted with each other: cost containment versus doing what is best for students in terms of academic performance. While Ms. Patchak-Layman concurred that finances were a major part of this, it is not uncommon for boards of education to set parameters. She suggested that a discussion of goals, FTE and finances could be discussed by a committee of the whole.

Mr. Prale noted that presently three-quarters of all of the sections had fewer than 26 students enrolled. The Board of Education must have an overall view. Dr. Lee concurred that the Board of Education should not get involved in administrative decisions.

Dr. Weninger agreed that there was an inherent conflict with the financial resolution passed earlier in the year and the present situation. The administration is trying to strike a balance between target numbers and the Board of Education's financial concerns. He reviewed a report showing every course, every section, and the enrollment numbers. He continued that there is a reaction that takes place at the beginning of the semester and the enrollment numbers have not settled. The administration will continue to review the numbers. The administration cannot schedule a Board meeting for the purpose of approving FTE, so rather than waiting for approval; it made the decision to add FTE.

Mr. Hunter felt that there was a lack of fluidity between the actual numbers and the places available for students. Students enrolling now find the classes are full. A history of the target number of students in the three categories of students is as follows:

	Basic	College Prep	Honors
Previous	18	24/26	26
Present	18	26	28

Mr. Allen asked if two more students in these classes were too many. Mr. Hunter replied that while research does not show class size to be related to achievement, it is related to how well teachers can build relationships with students.

Adjournment

The Instruction Committee meeting adjourned at 9:18 a.m. on Thursday, September 10, 2009.