

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Wednesday, December 23, 2009, in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order

Dr. Lee called the meeting to order at 4:08 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: John C. Allen, IV (arrived at 5:15 p.m.); Jacques A. Conway (arrived at 5:15 p.m.), Terry Finnegan, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy Leafe McCormack, Dr. Dietra D. Millard (attended electronically from 4:08 to 4:44 p.m. and in person thereon); and Sharon Patchak-Layman. Also present was Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board of Education.

Visitors

Kay Foran, Communications and Community Relations Coordinator; Dr. Steve Gevinson, English Division Head; Chuck Feldman of the Oak Leaves, Dr. Linda Hanson and Dr. John Sawyer of School Exec Connect (departed at 6:46 p.m.).

Visitor Comments

None

Discussion of Superintendent Search Process

Dr. Hanson and Dr. Sawyer presented an action plan for the superintendent search process. Dr. Hanson noted that Allan Alson would be part of the search process if the dates were workable.

The Board of Education concurred that focus groups should be held with the school community as to the desired qualities and characteristics of the next superintendent. An online survey will also be made available. Ms. Foran and Ms. Kalmerton will develop methods to invite the school community and the communities at large to participate in these focus groups as well as the survey after available dates are provided. Ms. Foran will put together a press release.

It was the consensus of the majority of the Board of Education members that Dr. Millard would be the search consultant's Board liaison with adjunct help from Ms. McCormack. Ms. Kalmerton and Ms. Foran would be the staff liaison members.

Dr. Hanson provided a template used on School Exec Connect's website, a sample letter inviting participation in the search process, and a sample copy of an ad to be placed in *Education Week*. Discussion ensued about these items. In the letter was a paragraph regarding confidentiality. She asked that the District's legal counsel give the Board of Education an opinion on holding a confidential search in light of the new FOIA regulations effective January 1, 2010.

There was consensus to advertise in *Education Week* three times in January. Dr. Hansen stated that there was no value in having print ads in the New York Times, as suggested, as candidates will not look at that venue. School Exec Connect will also post on the AASA website and contact both the Minority Student Achievement Network and the Gates Foundation.

Dr. Hanson sought clarification as to what the Board of Education meant by a nontraditional candidate. It was suggested that it might be someone who started at a school but went on to do policy or research work. Dr. Hanson stated that while these candidates have been brought forward, they do not have the knowledge base to stand up to other candidates and there would be certification issues, but the firm will make a point to reach out to them. Mr. Finnegan suggested looking where the District would get the best methodologies on its single biggest issue—the achievement gap.

Dr. Hanson asked that all candidates be told to contact the search firm. She cautioned about telling others to apply. If one of them had a candidate to recommend, she suggested referring the name to the School Exec Connect and it will follow up with those who have the experience necessary for this District. The search firm only wants to bring forward successful candidates.

The Board of Education reviewed a calendar for the search process. After discussing the calendar, a decision was made to move the April Board of Education meeting back one week to April 29, 2009.

Dr. Hanson offered to do background checks on three finalists at a cost of approximately \$150 per candidate. Background checks could take up to a week to complete depending on the questions asked.

Discussion ensued as to who should be invited to participate in the focus groups. The groups to be invited will include OPRFHS affiliated groups, students, faculty, staff, union representatives, local governmental officials, associate schools, community members, SEA, etc. A suggestion was made to have a minority-only focus group but it was suggested that the District's outreach coordinator could encourage attendance at one of the parent focus groups.

Discussion ensued regarding confidentiality. While the majority of the Board of Education members strongly preferred confidentiality, Ms. Patchak-Layman felt that the finalist should be vetted by the community.

Dr. Hanson stated that an open or closed search would not matter to good assistant principals, nontraditional candidates, etc. Sitting superintendents, however, would object because it would become disruptive to their communities, e.g., teachers, parent, etc., and they

would have to share the information with their boards. Not to have a confidential search was too much to ask of sitting superintendents who would risk their professional relationships.

The Board of Education decided upon the intermediate option of having a committee to give outside input with each member signing a statement of confidentiality. This committee would consist of ten to twelve community members and/or administrators. Dr. Hanson did not feel this committee would affect who applied and stated that a confidentiality form is actionable.

There was a consensus of the majority of the Board of Education members to conduct a confidential search. The Board of Education will select a confidential committee composed of parents, faculty and community members to assist with this process and asked for Dr. Hanson's help in this process.

The Board of Education then participated in its own mini focus group, just as the one in which stakeholders would participate, and responded accordingly.

Q: What are the District's three greatest strengths & attributes?

A: Academics, co-curricular, community, athletics, administrators, teachers; ability to face problems; the community values education; the community nurtures educators and students; the community regards the District as an important asset; the District has financial stability; and the District has the unique position of being one of the few districts to have a strong capability of doing something about the achievement gap because of its resources, i.e., its citizen base and money.

Q: What are the District's greatest challenges and barriers?

A: The need for more parents, students, etc. to feel this is their institution, elusive dollars pulled by other taxing bodies as these communities do not have a broad tax base; the connections between taxation and what people need to protect, e.g., educational policy; the academic gap and the importance of moving forward; opinioned and vocal stakeholder groups; no strategic plan in many areas, e.g., technology, training to which students have exposure, etc.; opportunities to work in smaller settings; inclusion; small minority faculty; retention and recruitment of minority staff; the relationship between the superintendent and the staff is challenging.

School Exec Connect will structure its interviews with the candidates around the goals and the characteristics, e.g., achievement, and will ask them in advance, how they would handle certain issues. School Exec Connect will evaluate their

answers against the needs of OPRFHS, e.g., maintaining high standards, fiscally responsibility, etc. A critical part of the success of this journey will be the Board of Education’s support and high standards for the superintendent.

Q: What are the three most important goals?

A: The Board of Education’s goals, especially number 1: “Eliminating the racial inequity OPRFHS will provide an inclusive education for all students by reducing racial predictability and disproportionality in student achievement and reducing systemic inhibitors to success for students and staff of color;” implementing Baldrige, as a tool to see what the District is doing and how effective it is.

Q: What are the most important characteristics/skills the Board of Education wanted in a new superintendent?

A: Creative problem-solver, highly intelligent, a listener, a visionary and excellent communicator, well organized, and a change agent.

Dr. Hanson added that all candidates would ask about the composition of the Board of Education as they will be concerned about their ability to work with it and that the Board of Education should show them its best. It was important for the Board of Education to know its style and to know how it will work with the superintendent. Dr. Sawyer added that the Board of Education should be looking to partner with someone for the next six to ten years, albeit that is not the norm.

Closed Session

At 6:49 p.m. on Wednesday, December 23, 2009, Ms. Patchak-Layman moved to go into closed session for the purpose of seconded by Ms. McCormack. A roll call vote resulted in six ayes. Motion carried. Dr. Lee voted nay.

The Board of Education reconvened its open session at 7:22 p.m.

Adjournment

At 7:23 p.m. on Wednesday, December 23, 2009, Mr. Finnegan moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Ms. McCormack. A roll call vote resulted in six ayes. Mr. Allen had departed.

Dr. Ralph H. Lee
President Protempore and Vice President

John C. Allen, IV
Secretary