

April 16, 2012

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Monday, April 16, 2012 in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order

President Millard called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Terry Finnegan, Valerie J. Fisher, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy Leafe McCormack, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, Sharon Patchak-Layman, and John Phelan. Also present were Dr. Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; Lauren M. Smith, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Cheryl Witham, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board of Education and FOIA

Closed Session

At 6:36 p.m., Dr. Millard moved to enter closed session for the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees of the District or legal counsel for the District, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee or against legal counsel for the District to determine its validity. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1), as amended by PA.93—57; seconded by Mr. Finnegan. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

At 9:15 p.m., the Board of Education resumed its open session.

Visitors

the Board of Education welcomed the following visitors Maria Lombardo Nitsche and Ed Nitsche and their two children; students Jacob Meeks, Jonathan Gilmore, Monica Reynolds, Mason Astill; Eman Saran, Christina Duffy, community members, Brian Slodysko of the *Chicago Tribune*; and Terry Dean of the *Wednesday Journal*.

Public Comments

Maria Lombardo Nitsche, resident of 146 N. Harvey, Oak Park, an OPRFHS faculty member, addressed the Board of Education regarding the Reduction-in-Force of Teachers and instruction in AP/Honors classes and in College Prep classes, noting that more teachers were need not fewer in order to affect achievement. She was concerned that teachers with more than a Masters +5 were being dismissed.

Ed Nitsche, resident of 146 N. Harvey, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education regarding the Reduction in Force of Teachers and the affect that RIFing had on the teachers and the families. This was not the way to go in these communities.

Jacob Meeks, resident of 813 N. Forest, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education regarding the Reduction-in-Force of Teachers. He supported those that were RIF'd to be called back.

Jonathan Gilmore, resident of 633 N. Grove, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education regarding the Reduction-in-Force of Teachers. He supported those that were RIF'd to be called back, quoting from *The School Code of Illinois* as to the responsibilities of the Board of Education in this regard.

Monica Reynolds, resident of 924 Wenonah, Oak Park, addressed the Board of Education regarding the Reduction-in-Force of Teachers.

Mason Astill, resident of 1124 S. Harvey, addressed the Board of Education regarding the Reduction-in-Force of Teachers, the posting and announcement of Board of Education meetings, and receipt of notices.

**Personnel
Recommendations**

Dr. Lee moved to approve the Personnel Recommendations including the addendum, as presented; seconded by Mr. Finnegan.

Ms. Patchak-Layman moved to amend the motion so that the personnel recommendations would be split into two sections. The first recommendation would include items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8. The second recommendation would include item 4; seconded by Ms. McCormack. A roll call vote resulted in three ayes and four nays. Ms. Patchak-Layman, Dr. Lee, and Ms. McCormack voted aye. Mr. Phelan, Ms. Fisher, Mr. Finnegan, and Dr. Millard voted nay. Motion failed.

Ms. McCormack reported that while she supported the people brought forward, she would vote no because of the extraordinary teachers who were missing from the list. When the District has the good fortune to have teachers who have affected and engaged students, the District needs to do everything possible to keep them. She did not believe all had been done in this instance.

Mr. Finnegan thanked the students for their comments. While 16 teachers will return next year, some have rights that will supersede others and they will return. This complicated process happens every year. The Board of Education must make its decisions based on policy, not personalities. Personnel issues at all schools are a combination of extremely personal and profoundly public matters. The Board of Education will need to have a community-wide discussion about offering of smaller class sizes and hiring more FTE versus its role as fiscal stewards now and in the future. The strategic planning process will be a guide for the long term. He felt that a teacher evaluation system was needed that would allow districts to replace the bottom 2 to 5 percent of the teachers, as opposed to those who do not have tenure. Statistics for the last six years showed that 17 teachers were RIF'd and 12 were recalled (a 70% ratio). The current recommendation will recall 16 out of 21 teachers RIF'd (a 75% ratio). Who else might be coming back is an unknown. The Board of Education hopes that the decisions become tougher in the future, as only the best teachers are wanted, just like any great company that wants only excellent employees. He appreciated the students taking an interest in this issue. He was proud of them.

Ms. Fisher agreed with Mr. Finnegan that the Board of Education listened closely to the comments made on April 11. She would vote yes on this motion because it recalled 16 out of 21 teachers RIF'd. Many of the names stated April 11 were on the list, but she recognized that some were not. This is a difficult thing for the school to go through every year. It is moving to hear from students in the classes who are truly affected by these teachers. The Board of Education wished it were not subject to the requirements of enrollment, etc. She was glad that the students spoke out and the Board of Education found that some people not on the list would continue an association with OPRFHS as further needs arise. She supported a recall on the majority of these people and she was glad for the opportunity to recall them.

Mr. Phelan stated that the Board of Education had kept in mind the human element. While only being on the school board for less than a year, he had learned that boards are about principles, not personalities. If the Board of Education were asked to evaluate the personalities, it would be the equivalent of going to the hardware store for milk. It is the Board of Education's job to give the principles to the administration as to how to conduct business. The administration's job is to execute the principles given it. There are boundaries that the administration has to exercise its judgment to match personnel needs to enrollment. The Board of Education's analysis can only be to determine whether the administration had gone so far beyond the bounds of irrational decisions. The Board of Education, because of the comments, challenged the administration to explain its decisions. Because of that analysis, many of the teachers on the list are returning based on the administration's recommendation. It is not entirely a budgetary issue but having the right number of students who have signed up for classes is important, not just to save money this year, but so that the District does not have to RIF more excellent teachers in five, six, seven years from now and that the resources dwindled because they were handled irresponsibly. The public's comments were heard and the process worked. Unfortunately, the Board of Education's role in the process, once the administration has exercised its rationale judgment, is to make the hard decision to support that judgment. He believed the administration had stayed within its bounds and, therefore, he supported the motion.

Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that Board of Education members are instructed to look from the balcony at everything happening at the school—students, parents, teachers, and administration. One of the things that helped her to look at this from the balcony was the involvement of students, parents, and teachers over the issue of RIFing. She wanted to consider bigger questions about class size, i.e., what is the Board of Education's priority? Does that show up in what the Board of Education does? What teachers and parents are looking for differs from that of the administration. She felt the District should go back to the drawing board because the questions raised were not just specifically about teachers, although they were highlighted, but were the broader questions of what it wanted the students to get from the school, where they should go, what kind of participation is desired for the students, the teachers, and the parents. She felt the District should stop and only use the kinds of policy it desires and information and ideas in order to make a decision. She would not vote in favor of the motion because she did not believe the District had done the kind of creativity needed to make sure the class sizes, in particular, have a rhyme and reason to them. She felt a full airing of the following was necessary and that the administration's actions matched the District's philosophy and policies.

- 1) Lowering the registrations in the freshman classes, so that they might have a better connection to the school.
- 2) Adding performing arts and drama as part of the freshman study hall alternative, much like instrumental and choral is part of that.
- 3) Hiring permanent substitutes so that there are qualified teachers available to cover classes when teachers are sick, have professional development, and/or personal leave.

She did not believe this is where the Board of Education wanted to go.

Dr. Lee intended to vote for the motion and he will put his comments in writing for the Board of Education.

Dr. Millard reflected that every year the Board of Education has to make this hard decision. Something this year had made this stormier, and it was hard for her to understand. The Board of Education had met until after 1:00 a.m. last week and again that evening before the open session to continue the discussion with the administration about the hiring and staffing for the coming year. There are many moving pieces in making these decisions and it is impossible to know where everything is going, as it includes leaves of absences, sabbaticals, the number of classes in various subjects, attention to class size, seniority of the faculty members, whether they are full or part time, shifting of assets, etc. It is a very difficult and complex process. The ISBE does give direction as to who has priorities. There is some leeway for determining that criteria and this is a discussion for the future for better definition. Ideally, the Board of Education wants the best teacher for each class and activity. Many personnel decisions involve confidentiality and some of the decisions cannot be discussed publicly. Some staffing discussions will continue. The Board of Education is mindful of everything that was told to them from the students, faculty, parent voices, etc. The decisions will be made as quickly as possible. Therefore, the Board of Education is voting on the hiring, callback, resignations, and retirements. During her tenure as a Board of Education member, there have always been callbacks even up to days before school starts in August. The Board of Education thanked everyone for his/her communication. The Board of Education is aware of how this vote affects everyone, not just at OPRFHS, but beyond what happens after high school. She re-emphasized the Board of Education remain firmly committed to making sure that the programs they are engaged in are the best that can be offered with the best people involved to make them, not just the best students, but the best citizens they can be in the future. She thanked them for their involvement, focused interest, and urged them to sustain their involvement. She observed that some would be very good at sitting in her place at a time in the future.

A roll call vote on the original motion to approve the recommendations, as presented, resulted in five ayes and two nays. Ms. McCormack and Ms. Patchak-Layman voted nay. Motion carried.

Discussion of Strategic Plan

The Board of Education members weighed the pros and cons of the strategic planning firms that had presented at the April 12 meeting: Cambrian Group, ECRA, and SPC Consulting. The Board of Education reviewed the reasons for implementing a strategic plan.

Dr. Millard reflected that discussion of a strategic plan have occurred for many years. When looking for a superintendent they were asked if the District had a long-term educational plan. The Board of Education did not have an action plan with activities. It does as far as finances, however. She saw a strategic plan as having a historical piece, a current piece, and trying to help the District organize and have an educational plan. Ms. Patchak-Layman felt it would be helpful to read strategic plans of others to get an idea of what they come up with and how they go about doing it. Most plans are done with an outside facilitator. Ms. Patchak-Layman liked a particular facilitator who worked with ECRA but had not presented at the last meeting. Dr. Isoye felt a strategic plan was critical for the District with widespread input from the community, as it was future

focused and long-term thinking. The most important part of it would be its length. Currently the Board of Education and administration talk annually about things. If several goals came forward, they might have varying start times. Some goals may be more challenging and thus require implementation later. Once the strategic plan is accepted, it is up to the administration to determine how to implement it over time. Of the five goals that the Board of Education presently has, little attention may be given to them depending on the focus.

Areas of interest by the Board of Education members about the presentations they heard included:

- 1) The amount of involvement the community had;
- 2) The way community input would be sought;
- 3) The timeline;
- 4) The District's involvement in the work that needs to be done;
- 5) Prioritization of the communities' desires;
- 6) The cost, as it was equivalent to a teachers' salary;
- 7) Board of Education member involvement;
- 8) What product would actually be received by the District;
- 9) How many goals could/should be brought forward before the plan would be too cumbersome to be effective;
- 10) How many recommendations would be brought forward;
- 11) Could out-of-the box ideas be presented, if they were only looking at the numbers?

Ms. Patchak-Layman reflected on the work that Cambrian had done at District 97, as she had been part of that process. A five-year plan was delivered and it had been completed. District 97 reported quarterly on its progress. Forty people had been on a steering committee and the meetings were held in open session. Action teams did their work based on the goals and activities that were set. The superintendent was the point person and the communications staff person became the internal facilitator in terms of putting focus groups together. She continued that the District 97 Board of Education had a number of discussions about strategic planning prior to going into the process. Having looked at RFPs for strategic planning, she found that the more specific a district was in its RFP, e.g., how extensive should community involvement be, etc., the more helpful it was to the firms presenting to know if this were the place for them. She suggested that additional input to the firms might be that Board of Education wanted an analysis of its data and/or that the Board of Education's big concern was how to expand its goals. How would a strategic plan help to do this?

Dr. Lee, while believing in strategic plans, was skeptical as to whether it would be worth the time and money spent on it. He was skeptical because he felt the expectations would be too high. He felt that the impetus came from the school and the plan had to be limited in-scope in order for the school to be able to do something with it. Dr. Lee wanted the Board of Education to work on a concise list of expectations and then pick one of the three firms that had presented and inform them of what was wanted to see if they could live within those parameters.

Ms. McCormack noted that the Board of Education had deferred conversations until it had a strategic plan and going forward was important.

Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that graduation rates are often discussed in the process of developing a strategic plan. What does the community want and how does that match up with the school's data. How far does the community want to go to actualize the high school's mission statement? If the community says 100% of the students will go to a four-year college, then the school knows what it should do. Dr. Isoye noted that schools often review their mission statements in this process. He noted that IMSA has always had a strategic plan and the best ones are the ones with the most community input.

Dr. Lee felt that the primary thing that determined property values in Oak Park and River Forest was the educational system. He asked if the Board of Education wanted to discuss this. He was concerned that students were going to college, doing well, getting their degrees and yet relatively few companies cared about hiring them because what was being taught, no longer had the value it once had. This was the status of education nationwide. Many people would say the national educational system is not cutting it. Should the Board of Education be concerned about it or should it be left for the colleges and the universities to determine? Determining whether the high school should be preparing students for college or for the future was important.

Discussion ensued about whether schools had to use a strategic plan-consulting firm or could they could use a good facilitator to accomplish this task. Another suggestion was to obtain copies of plans from the school districts at which these firms worked. Because District 97's strategic plan had been completed, Ms. Patchak-Layman suggested exploring the idea of having a combined educational strategic plan with District 97.

It was the consensus of the Board of Education members that Dr. Millard and one other Board member would meet with the administration to talk about this further. The firms will be informed that no decision had been made and that clarifying questions may be asked of them.

Adjournment

At 10:46 p.m. on Monday, April 16, 2012, Dr. Millard moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Mr. Phelan. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

Dr. Dietra D. Millard
President

Amy McCormack
Secretary