

January 09, 2012

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Monday, January 09, 2012, in the Board Room of the high school.

**Call to Order**

President Millard called the meeting to order at 5:11 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Valerie J. Fisher, Terry Finnegan (arrived at 5:14 p.m.), Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy Leafe McCormack, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, John Phelan, and Sharon Patchak-Layman (arrived at 5:15 p.m.). Also present were Dr. Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; Amy Hill, Director of Research and Assessment; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; Lauren M. Smith, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Cheryl L. Witham, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board of Education and FOIA Officer.

**Visitors**

Dr. Allan Alson, Educational Consultant

**Check Distribution List**

Dr. Millard moved to approve the check distribution list dated January 9, 2011, as presented; seconded by Dr. Lee. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

**Norms & Agenda Review**

The Board of Education reviewed its norms agreed to at its previous retreats and the agenda. In September, the Board of Education looked at OPRFHS freshmen in terms of academic performance (EXPLORE scores, course recommendations, enrollment patterns), as well as the academic performance of seniors. The theme for this meeting was to learn more about the Board of Education's role in driving policy making regarding achievement disparities, why and how that is exercised, and what it would do about that.

**Scenario**

The Board of Education reviewed a scenario, which described a real circumstance about enrollment data related to Honors and AP classes and the differences between White and Black students. Two charts were provided: 1) the numbers of students enrolled in both AP and Honors classes, and 2) the number of students in just AP classes.

The achievement disparity scenario used the ethnic breakdown at OPRFHS. It examined the two largest racial groups (White and Black students) and their enrollment patterns by subject area for grades 9-12 in Honors and AP classes for the current school year. While it had been the intent for the Board of Education to discuss the reasons why the disparities might exist and what kinds of policies might diminish/eliminate those disparities in order to address the Board of Education's goal of racial equity, a discussion ensued about why this scenario was chosen over another, as the District's issues might not have to do with

Honors and AP courses. Dr. Alson explained that the purpose of this exercise was to focus on one problem within a larger problem and the process for which the Board of Education would address it. Would it want to place all students in Honors and AP courses, eliminating the need for developmental courses? Is it satisfactory that the students taking these courses now are not reflective of racial proportions of the student body? If not, what could the Board of Education do about it? Is it the desire of the administration and the Board of Education to have the number of students taking these courses reflect the racial diversity of the general student population? Alternatively, in the graduating class, should the top 100 be reflective of your racial composition. If the Board of Education believes there is a problem, then what can it do to make it better? How would the Board of Education determine if things were getting better?

Dr. Lee was unsure that knowing the cause of the disparities had anything to do with what the Board of Education intended to do about it. He used the extreme example of if one were to prove that Black people had poorer eyesight than White people did and that the problem could be fixed by buying them eyeglasses, would the Board of Education do that. Much research shows that reading and communication skills correlate to what happens between the ages of zero and five. Yet, the Board of Education will not address what happens within that age group because of legal prohibitions, etc., no taxing body will. He wanted to concentrate on finding out the problems of each student and then doing something about it, regardless of the cause. Mr. Finnegan concurred with Dr. Lee that this discussion was about what the Board of Education could do for high school students to help them build their development of self-esteem, confidence, skill sets, etc. Dr. Lee pointed out that the most desirable goal is to get students in AP and Honors classes, but other goals may affect this. The existence of Honors classes has, as its primary goal, the separation of the least academically-talented students from the most academically-talented students so that parents can say their children are in Honors classes. Everyone accepts that being in Honors classes is better. If everyone were in Honors classes, it would demolish stratification. He believed that if there were a referendum to abolish the three-track system, it would fail because taxpayers want to be able to say their students are in Honors classes.

Ms. Fisher responded to Dr. Lee's statement about having everyone in Honors classes saying that there would need to be a definition that every student in Honors and AP classes were prepared for them and could benefit by having that coursework. She would want all students in that situation with no limit as to how many classes could be Honors and AP classes or how many students would be in the classes. It is not the system or the stratification that needs discussing; it is the younger children. The District does not have the ability to affect the younger students as much as it would if this were a unit district. She would set the goal of having all Honors and AP level classes, with the stipulation that all students would be prepared and able to benefit from that level of coursework.

Dr. Alson suggested that if he had picked a different data set, it would not have mattered on some level which scenario had been chosen. Part of the reason for choosing this scenario was that it is a big social issue in all school districts. How does one make it small enough to attack? How does one make data a friend to determine where one is currently and develop a path to make it better?

Dr. Lee stated that if the Board of Education moves away from the most symbolic things (AP and Honors classes) and gets closer to the things that can measure individual student achievement, e.g., 1) how well a student reads, 2) what scores on math tests should be seen for a given level, and 3) where are the students bunched with the lowest scores, it might be able to do something about the problems. While the Board of Education cannot do anything about the number of students in AP and Honors classes, it can address the types of resources in the curriculum to help students achieve. Dr. Millard suggested having three out of four freshman students in AP or Honors classes with or without the skill sets. It would be the school's responsibility for the students then to receive a grade of C or better.

Ms. Fisher did not feel it was necessary to set a percentage or number on the racial group or student body as to who can proceed to Honors. Dr. Alson asked what the Board of Education's goal should be. If it does not like the current numbers, its job is to help the administration change that. Discussion ensued as to what the Board of Education members might want but also what was realistic. Dr. Lee believed that would all Board of Education members would agree that it wanted to eliminate racial predictability from measures of student success and eliminate gender predictability from all measures of student success. Would that help? What is it that the Board of Education wants to do beyond that? Mr. Finnegan wanted to see the top 100 reflect the student population. Using coaching as a metaphor for teaching, he stated that one must start with three positives before listing a negative in order to build confidence with the players and develop their skill sets. He felt it was important to build up these students. Honors and AP classes can help in developing all students see themselves as students. That is a positive in getting closer to this ideal world. The job of the school is to help everyone be successful. While Mr. Phelan would want 100% of the students to get A's if not bound by predictability that may not be realistic. What can the Board of Education do?

Dr. Alson stated that the framework is the big picture goal—all students to be high achievers. A scorecard will give to the Board of Education categories about the work. This is a small piece of the larger picture. What information would the Board of Education want in creating its goals?

Dr. Isoye stated that the scenario was meant to be an icebreaker to start the Board of Education to think about what was going in terms of achievement. This discussion has helped.

**Exit Data/  
September Retreat**

As a follow up to the retreat in September, Dr. Isoye reported that the District's only exit data on the students is that which is self-reported. The District is considering collaborating with the National Student Clearing House who has relationships with both public and private universities in forty-eight (48) states. This firm tracks those students who attend 2- or 4-year colleges. The District will provide the names of the students who graduated from OPRFHS for the last eight years. Out of the 6,500 letters sent out thus far, 200 were opt-outs and 200 were returned. When students enroll in these universities, they sign an agreement that allows their information to be shared with the high school. The Board of Education was presented with a sample of what the report to OPRFHS would look like. Reports will be received three times per year—1) students who enroll immediately after high school, 2) students who enroll after the first year, and 3) students who enroll after the second year. For every student who does not opt out, the District will have information about whether he/she achieved a degree. The District will then create a database so that it can look into what pathways these students followed in high school that correlated into career status.

Note: A group of counselors looked at their students on their caseloads who scored in the 13 to 15 range and they found that most of them were being accepted into four-year colleges, even when there had been no growth in this area. The numbers of students who get into college is greater than the numbers who graduate. The District hopes to learn how these scores correlate to the students' educational experiences.

This information will help the District look at trend data. The Clearing House is continuing to broaden its scope, e.g., military service, etc. When asked if this data would help to discover the cohort of students who took chemistry and received a grade of C or better, as an example, the response was that the District would need its own data and then the Clearing House could inform the District as to what happened to them. Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that students could be directed to colleges and universities that have a 98% graduation and retention rate. The Board of Education could adopt policy that says the District will only recommend colleges that will get students out in four years.

Recessed at 6:50 and resumed at 7:20 p.m.

**Scorecard &  
Policy Implications**

Dr. Alson reminded the Board of Education that it had wanted categories to track regularly in order to check progress. Discussion had ensued about setting targets and developing a scorecard. He asked the Board of Education to consider how it might translate data into targets and what kinds of policies would be needed to get to point x.

Ms. Hill and other administrators constructed a design for a scoreboard that would allow the Board of Education to measure how various categories and subcategories were performing in the school. The Board of Education was asked for its feedback on its design. Some examples of other districts' scorecards were displayed. Most districts' scorecards, sometimes called dashboards, align themselves to the districts' goals and to how well the goals were being achieved. Most districts do not disaggregate. Evanston Township High School's sole area is on student achievement. The displays are "live" and by clicking on them, one can see disaggregation by subgroups as to how much progress is being against the targets.

Ms. Hill noted that the OPRFHS's starting point would be internal at first. Mr. Carioscio felt it was the Board of Education and the administration decision as to what data was important, what should be the goals, how should they be measured, and how can this data be used to motivate the students. A select list of possible data was provided to the Board of Education, and was asked for its input on what other data to include.

Discussion ensued about what a scorecard's goal, its audience, how this information could be used to the benefit of the students. What factors will motivate the teachers? Which factors will motivate the students with regard to student achievement and racial equity? Some Board of Education members asked for the public's ability to see the big picture and then to be able to drill down into the information themselves. It was noted that the scorecard's purpose is about measuring the administration's work and in order for teachers to motivate the students, they have to care about the measure. The measurements could include student attendance and grade data by race, departments, periods, and teachers. Ms. McCormack wanted attendance included on the scorecard. The District Leadership Team has talked about producing scorecards for the Board of Education, the administration, and parents. Much work has been done with regard to learning targets and formative assessments. Teachers are learning how to access data, even though the present system is not user friendly

Dr. Lee's concern was mostly about the data available to Board of Education and to administration, not to the public. He wanted information that was specific enough so that the Board of Education could take measurable action, but large enough to be financially feasible. His concern was about meeting the needs of the individual students. Using the example of the overall GPA of the ninth grade population at the end of the first quarter being too big of a group on which to take action, Dr. Alson suggested that the information could be drilled down to smaller layers such as racial groups, Free and Reduced Lunch Program, Special Education, honors and not honors, department, classes, etc. Dr. Lee would find that acceptable if the action taken based on that kind of data was measurable. He wanted to be able to evaluate quickly whether the reading program had been worth starting.

Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that the part that is missing is the data that was present when the Board of Education chose the goal. The scorecard must include why the Board of Education decided to take an action/set a goal. The ACT scores told the Board of Education that it needed to work on academics and, hopefully, ACT scores would improve with the implementation of the projects and programs listed with the Board of Education’s goals. The Board of Education needs an understanding of all the data in order to set the goals, rather than pick the data to match the goals. It was suggested that the Board of Education review an index data from which to choose. Mr. Phelan stated that the numbers could drive behavior that is not wanted as well. It is important to see the big picture in order to understand the policies that are important. Different sets of data are important at the administrative and teacher level and the Board of Education would want to know that so it could affect policy. Dr. Alson concurred with Mr. Phelan saying that the Board of Education should have the big picture data, e.g., GPA, attendance by department, etc. It can always ask to drill deeper into the data, e.g., by division, smaller groups, a period of time, etc. The next time a program is created, the Board of Education could say that it wants 30% of the students having certain criteria in the program and then enact such and such intervention to see if they were effective.

Scorecard



Reviewable data (state and federal law and some you just want to know

Dashboard



Actionable in real time might provide for teachers attendance by grade level by subject every five weeks, progress reports by quarter and then administrators can set expectations and talk with them about what can be done differently in their classes.

Aggregate –what measures would affect academic achievement? How can the Board of Education get more discreet to see the problems, and then ask the administration to provide the diagnosis and to make suggestions for policy decisions?

Dr. Isoye thanked the Board of Education for its feedback. This is a first discussion on this topic and it will evolve. The Board of Education’s work at the policy level makes the journey for the administration.

Additional information requested by the Board of Education:

- 1) What are the scores of the incoming freshman students?
- 2) How does rigor and relevance relate to this data and how is that read into the data. Dr. Alson stated that this is empirical data vs. qualitative data. Districts are administering surveys to teachers, students, parents, etc. to obtain some measurement of those aspects of student life that might deal with their own relationships with each other, teachers, counselors, administrators, etc., i.e., a 360 survey. The rigor of AP and Honors classes has been

symbolic markers for school districts around the country, as well as being accepted at 4-year colleges, etc.

- 3) Professional development. Are there some indicators that can be used to evaluate/compare what is happening in the classrooms and the school? The public reads about things happening at other schools. Why does one school have this accomplishment and one does not?
- 4) Qualitative data from surveys.

### **Next Steps**

The Board of Education suggested the following topics for the next retreat session on March 12, 2012:

- The programs that are or might address the achievement gap;
- The classroom practices that help students of color learn;
- The Blueprint Assessment and its recommendations regarding the achievement gap;
- The parent group issues/ e.g., college readiness benchmarks, achievement, etc.;
- The scorecard as something to be used by both the Board of Education and the community;
- The communication between inside and outside the building and inside the building, e.g., how does a parent advocate for their students, etc.;
- The role of counselors/deans; and
- A decision to have a specific way to determine whether progress is being made on the achievement gap, which means defining what is meant by the achievement gap. Talk about measures to have to build a baseline on measuring racial equity.

Dr. Alson added that emerging research shows that families who advocate for their children help them learn to advocate for themselves very early, as young as six or seven. They learn how to ask questions, how to better connect with the adults, and learn to let people know what they want in acceptable ways. This is a very important set of skills.

### **Closed Session**

At 9:07 p.m., Dr. Millard moved to enter closed session for discussing Collective negotiating matters between the District and its employees or their representatives or deliberations concerning salary schedules for one or more classes of employees. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(2); seconded by Mr. Finnegan. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

At 10:35 p.m., the Board of Education resumed its open session.

**Adjournment**

At 10:36 p.m. on Monday, January 9, 2012, Dr. Millard moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Mr. Phelan. Motion carried.

Amy McCormack  
Secretary

By Gail Kalmerton  
Clerk of the Board