

May 18, 2015

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Monday, May 18, 2015 in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order President Weissglass called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Fred Arkin, Jennifer Cassell, Thomas F. Cofsky, Dr. Steve Gevinson, Dr. Jackie Moore, Sara Dixon Spivy, and Jeff Weissglass. Also in attendance was Dr. Steve T. Isoye, Superintendent; Tod Altenburg, Chief School Business Official; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors Camille Kuthrell and Tom McMullen (telephonically) of the Hay Group

Closed Session At 6:33 p.m., Mr. Weissglass moved to enter closed session for the purpose of discussing 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; seconded by Dr. Moore. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

At 7:25 p.m., the Board of Education resumed its open session.

Joining the meeting were Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction; Amy Hill, Director of Assessment and Learning; Gwen Walker-Qualls, Interim Director of Pupil Support Services; and Sheila Hardin, Faculty Senate Representative.

Visitors Dr. Judith Hackett and Dr. Timothy Thomas, educational consultants; OPRFHS staff Therese Brennock, Daphne LeCesne, Nikki Paplaczyk, Paul Collins, JP Coughlin, Dr. Avi Lessing, and Andrea Neuman.

Special Education Report Dr. Hackett and Dr. Thomas reviewed their report on the Special Education Department, included in the packet. Their presentation focused on the recommendations in the summary. They acknowledged the strengths of the Special Education Department, i.e., dedicated, knowledgeable and experienced staff, a variety of classes, programs options and extracurricular activities, the participation and assessment results are above average for high school districts, the school and the educational community are supportive, and the District is committed to advancing practices through a review process. The recommendations were as follows:

1) Data based decision making. Define, train and implement a systemic data-driven decision-making process regarding individualized student's plans (IEPs) which include the goals, interventions and measures to assess growth in the identified areas. and that means including other measures. In Illinois, with regard to PARCC, Types 2 and 3 assessments, further development of assessing student growth is needed.

2) Co-teaching. Review the understanding and application of the co-teaching model to reflect a more integrated instructional design that challenges students academically and includes evaluative progress measures that reflect curriculum goals and individualized needs through a more systemic approach.

Both staff and parents had split perspectives on this. While the commentary was not about co-teaching per se nor does research say that co-teaching is needed to have obvious success, it is apparent that many people in the school believe it is a good experience. A shift overtime has occurred in how it has been accomplished and it is now thought of as being for students in the lower track, causing much concern by many people. OPRFHS has been using a methodology that has been successful and the District should reexamine its purpose and revise it somewhat.

3) Program redefining. Redefine programs and services offered by OPRF to ensure that there is an extensive continuum of services that support students with diverse needs. A need exists for an additional expansion of continuum of services, in general. While this statement could be made for every high school in Illinois, it is an important consideration.

4) ED/BD program expansion. Enhance and expand the program design and components for students with emotional/behavioral needs, ensuring that the continuum of services reflects a comprehensive, non-biased and effective approach to meeting student needs. This was stated by staff and parents. The example given was that many students identified as black where characterized or labeled as students who act out more, are more aggressive, or are contrary to the norms of the classroom or the building. Data may support that example. The contrast is that when some white students display similar behaviors, that are interpreted differently and interventions may be different. A suggestion was to engage students in their own problem solving with regard to disruptions. The idea is to understand the learner and recognize that different learners have different needs, both with instructional methodology and the environment. This is a substantial issue that was reinforced by many individuals. More time should be focused on this portion of the continuum and services should be expanded.

5) Professional Development. Expand professional development with an outcome-based measure to generalize staff skills and focus on greater alignment between data and interventions, coaching supports and integrating district/department needs focuses on student outcomes, integrating district/department needs aligned to roles and responsibilities.

6) Transition. Advance a more comprehensive transition process to include intensified efforts in job development, expanded vocational experiences, assessment measures of work performance and stronger alignment and self-advocacy for determining and expanding efforts to support students to achieve post-secondary outcomes. Every high school in Illinois is looking at this. The earlier students work at the high school, the more likely they will be successful. A number of assessments could be integrated into the process.

7) Organizational design. Consider restructuring the special education organizational design to best align department priorities (what needs to be accomplished) with roles and responsibilities. A suggestion was made to focus on what should be accomplished and then determine who should accomplish it. The department has a long history of roles and the changes have angst in the department. Recently the current leadership has emphasized greater cooperation and a redesign of several new positions.

8) Priorities. Identify the department priorities based upon this review, determine the short and long-term associated steps necessary to address them and establish realistic timelines to accomplish these important recommendations.

Summary: The OPRF educational community cares deeply about students with disabilities. The Staff, administration and Board of Education are committed to advancing and enhancing practices to support students achieve and exceed in their post-secondary goals. The process reiterated the extensive talent, dedication and interest in having practices evolve to reflect the changing needs of students. The OPRF leadership and staff needs to establish long and short-term areas of focus in line with the broader context and alignment with district priorities.

In the comprehensive report, a host of opportunities were identified. The District will have to decide upon its priorities as it would unrealistic to think one could do all of the 20 opportunities presented. While the District does not stand out either statewide or nationally as to the number of off campus placements, the trend is increasing at OPRFHS. Is it a blip? Is it a pattern? If it is projected to continue, the District needs to ask why and then talk about continuum.

The Special Education Department will receive this report on May 19, 2015. A summer curriculum project will be to prioritize what can be started next year, considering what things will work better than those things already in place.

Adjournment

At 8:00 p.m., Mr. Weissglass moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Ms. Dixon Spivy. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

John Weissglass
President

Sara Dixon Spivy
Secretary