

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Tuesday, February 17, 2015 in the Board Room of the high school.

**Call to Order** President Phelan called the meeting to order at 6:11 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Thomas F. Cofsky, Dr. Steve Gevinson, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Dr. Jackie Moore (arrived at 6:20 p.m.), Sharon Patchak Layman, John Phelan and Jeff Weissglass. Also in attendance was Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; Tod Altenburg, Chief Financial Officer; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction; David Ruhland, Director of Human Resources; Michael Caroscio, Chief Information Officer; Karin Sullivan, Director of Community Relations and Communications; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

**Visitors** Ronald Johnson, OPRFHS Purchasing and Transportation Director; John Condne, OPRFHS faculty member; Steve James, community member; Michael Romain of the *Wednesday Journal*.

**Public Comments** Mr. Phelan asked for a moment of silence to acknowledge the passing of Peter Traczyk.

**Filming OPRFHS** Mr. Phelan introduced the idea of filming at OPRFHS. He was approached by OPRFHS Faculty Member John Condne and documentarian filmmaker, Steven James about filming a documentary or miniseries at OPRFHS concerning the efforts of a well-meaning, affluent and caring district to address the achievement gap that plagues the country as well as the District. He spoke to the Superintendent about this idea. Mr. James most recent film, the documentary "Life Itself," which profiles the life and last days of film critic Roger Ebert, was shortlisted for an Academy Award this year. Mr. Phelan had learned that the methodology for a project like this starts with the approval of a contract. Using the contract, an effort is made to obtain funding. In order to obtain funding, a written agreement must be in effect. The Board of Education needs something to discuss and digest before it is time for action, which may be at the February or March Board of Education meeting. Mr. Condne and Mr. James then provided an outline of the project they envisioned.

Steve James, moved to Oak Park in 1985 and his 3 children attended OPRFHS. He, like many residents and parents, has been aware of the achievement gap and the struggles around that issue. Why do this project here? 1) It is his home town and he cares deeply about it; and 2) Oak Park is uniquely placed to address an issue that has a broad reach in terms of the many communities across the country that struggle with this. It is affluent, diverse, liberal, and has an incredible history of race and integration.

He continued that most of the programs that have been done over the years focused mainly on poor public schools in poor communities. While those factors have profound impact on a child's ability to learn, the fact that it happens in a place like this means there is more at work than just economic deprivation and violence. Oak Park schools and the community cares about this issue and has

struggled to make progress. In talking with teachers and administrators, a great many opinions were heard about what is needed or has happened or could happen. This would be a way to understand it in a deeper way.

Mr. Condne looked at this as an opportunity to explore the other layers from a different perspective. Anytime a documentary is considered, it requires a good deal of bravery and courage. That is what is being asked of the Board of Education. What is hoped that what would come out of this documentary would be understanding and as part of the process, finding solutions to the achievement gap.

Discussion ensued. When asked about student involvement in the process, Mr. James explained that the journey of discovery begins when an agreement is in place. However, the thought was to preliminary follow students in each of the tracks and from Special Education to Honors courses in the school looking at issues of achievement, successes, failures, and parents will need to be involved. He will be looking for parents and students who believe in the film's mission and want to participate in that way. Students not performing as they or their families had hoped would be highlighted. The goal would be to understand students, not to condemn or judge them. His oldest son was in SPED courses, had A.D.D., and while the school worked well and hard for him, he was failing despite all of the help, and it was not a question of intelligence. Students would never be portrayed as being dumb or not able to succeed. they could not succeed.

One concern that was raised had to do with the onus that has been put on black students, making them feel that what they have been doing was wrong. Two questions were asked: 1) How this would be handled at every level with every race? 2) How will all of the nuances of the community, faculty, staff, etc., be handled, those people who try to help the students? Mr. James stated that the hope was to follow teachers and administrators as well. The film or miniseries would include observations that would be elucidated and illuminated in the film, i.e., the pressure of what a black student feels, how early in life does that become something has an effect. Students are the heart of the film, but not all of the film. He has met teachers and/or administrators that would make great subjects in the film over the course of the school year. If at the end of the year, more needed to be understood, it could go longer and turn into a miniseries.

The next step will be to approve a contract. This is a question as to whether this Board of Education thinks this is in the best interest of the District. The contract could be on the agenda for February or March, however Mr. James will be out of town for the regular February Board of Education meeting. More discussion can occur when the contract is available for more context.

Dr. Lee's initial reaction was that the film will have things with which he would not agree., but he came to the conclusion that in spite of that, he believed this community, as well as blacks in the United States, are going to benefit from whatever it is because he had confidence that the combination of the film itself, the reaction to the film and the discussions about the reactions cannot help but make people more aware of those things of which they need to be aware. He hoped that the film would cover what happened in the school in the 1950s, the 1960s, etc., when the achievement gap was first recognized and what has

happened between then and now, as these things are significant and important. He ran for the Board of Education because of some aspects of the achievement gap and he was been both disappointed and proud of what has been accomplished. He hope the film would look at where OPRFHS sees itself in the future. He supported it. Mr. James responded that the goal was not to give short shrift to the history and the efforts. One idea is to actively engage students as part of the crew in the school to do filming, as the perspectives they will bring and what they may illicit from other students will benefit the film as well as being a learning opportunity for them.

Mr. Weissglass acknowledged that the achievement gap was one of the major causes of their public lives and the work with OPRFHS students. He also acknowledged that this could have huge potential benefits, but he was also incredibly nervous. The history and complexity is important and taking a snapshot is not sufficient. The time, resources, and commitment be secured to do it all. He wondered how significant constituencies would think about it, i.e., students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, etc. He was unsure how to get their input other than by just asking them, but he did know how much time and energy should be spent on that. Mr. James stated that the intent is to get the history of Oak Park and the history of the school. In order to do that, they might be circumscribed by filming.

Mr. Cofsky noted the risk versus reward. While he felt there were risks, sizeable rewards could be had by expanding the dialogue. While that is exciting, a better understanding is necessary.

It was suggested that if the school has a research protocol that would have some bearing on the review of this in a different way, as other kinds of documentaries have happened at the school, it should be sent to the Board of Education members.

### **Pool Site Update**

Mr. Phelan provided an update on the pursuit of a pool site.

1. Several commercial realtors are being evaluated and one will be asked to take on this piece.
2. Discussions have occurred with Legat Architects about doing some design functions as the team had discussed. Mr. Cofsky will give them some Board-level direction as they move forward with the cost verification process. Mr. Cofsky brings cost conscious leadership to that effort.
3. Discussions are occurring with the Village of Oak Park about maps and spaces and what it could do with on-street parking. The Village has asked for a reasonable period of time to measure things out to bring forward something more significant.

An idea raised by the video-photographer of the Pool Site Committee was to explore parking underneath the Lake Street fields. If a way could be found to create a surface parking lot and recreate the existing field space by elevating it, there would be room to replace all of the parking in the parking structure. As the discussion progressed, the District reached out to the parking consultants that had built a similar field. Exploration was underway to see if it would be cost effective. If the cost were close to the cost to have 118 spaces in the pool building, it would be a worthwhile to bring that idea forward to the Board of Education.

**Closed Session**

At 6:55 p.m., Mr. Phelan moved to enter closed session for the purpose of discussing the Student disciplinary cases 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(10); seconded by Dr. Lee. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

At 7:15 p.m., the Board of Education resumed its open session.

**Student Discipline**

Mr. Phelan moved to expel Student EXP 02-17-15-01 but to hold it in abeyance pending successful completion at an appropriate alternative educational setting through the end of fall semester of 2015. OPRFHS staff will work with the alternative setting staff to provide necessary and recommended educational services, anger management, and other counseling services. The student will have a review in December 2015 with consideration for a change in placement for the start of the spring semester of the 2015-2016 school year; seconded by Dr. Moore. A roll call vote resulted in six ayes and one nay. Ms. Patchak-Layman voted nay. Motion carried.

**Adjournment**

At 7:16 p.m., Mr. Phelan moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Mr. Weissglass. A voice vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

John Phelan  
President

Dr. Jackie Moore  
Secretary

Submitted by Gail Kalmerton  
Clerk of the Board