

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on December 6, 2014 in the Veterans' Room of the Oak Park Public Library.

**Call to Order**

President Phelan called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Thomas F. Cofsky, Dr. Steve Gevinson, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Dr. Jackie Moore, Sharon Patchak Layman, John Phelan, and Jeff Weissglass. Also in attendance was Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction; Michael Carioscio; Chief Information Officer; Tod Altenburg, Chief School Business Official; David Ruhland, Director of Human Resources; Gwen Walker-Qualls, Interim Director of Special Education; Amy Hill Director of Assessment and Learning; Karin Sullivan, Director of Communications and Community Relations; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/ Clerk of the Board.

**Visitors**

George Bailey, Mary Bird, Wendy Daniels, Amy Felton, Barbara P. Fernandez, Mark Fields, Leroy & Denise Fletcher, Karin Grimes, Amy Felton, Gail Hibbler, Stephen Jackson, Wyanetta Johnson, Larry Landfair, Cyndee Landrum, Jim Madigan, Michelle Mbekeani; Beth Phillip, Pamela Purdie, Elsworth Rockefeller, Stephen Shuler, Carrollina Song, Bob Spatz, Michele Uhler, Padma Venkatesan, and Roberta Raymond, community; Frances Kraft, District 97; OPRFHS Faculty and staff members Brian Beyers, Janel Bishop, Anthony Clark, Manuel Gonzalez, Sheila Hardin, Latonia Jackson, Victoria Seaman, Jonathan Silver, Alisa Walton, Students Anthony Brooks, Student, Brandon Grayer, Jaylen Styles, Tony A. White, Linda Francis, Success of All Youth, Nina Allen of Thrive; Gregory Hodge and Richard Gray, facilitators.

**Welcome & Meeting Context**

Mr. Phelan welcomed all of the participants and visitors and noted the purpose for the meeting was to discuss the recommendations of the Parent Teacher Advisory Committee (PTAC) and the Board of Education's philosophy regarding student discipline.

Dr. Isoye too welcomed the participants and thanked the Board of Education members, administrators and parents for taking the time to attend this meeting. He thanked Dr. Moore for her work in putting this meeting together and gathering the facilitators.

Dr. Moore was appreciative of attending the meeting and showing their commitment to the students and the school community. She hoped to listen to their shared vision and humanity for relationship building. She thanked Ms. Patchak-Layman and Mr. Cofsky who helped her craft this meeting. She also thanked Michele Mbanieki for helping with the coordination and running of the different focus groups. She then introduced the facilitators, Richard Gray of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and Greg Hodge of KHEPERA Consulting.

**Presentation of Themes, Ideas, and**

Mr. Gray reported that this is a conversation that is occurring across the country. Annenberg is engaged in restorative justice in Chicago, Nashville, etc.

**Questions from Stakeholder Interviews And Conversations** as to how to shift discipline from being punitive to instructional. How is that done? This is the beginning of that process.

Nineteen people were interviewed in 11 meetings. The interviewees were the Board of Education, school staff, and community members. The key themes that emerged are as follows:

1. Culture and Environment Change
  - More than technical or programmatic changes are needed. There must be a shift in mindset and change in the school culture.
  - An essential task for this process is to identify what the new culture should be and the process for change.
2. Routinely Collect and Use Data to Inform an Analysis
  - Attention to Quantitative data will support identifying measures for success which supports accountability.
  - Qualitative Data from Students, Educators and Community will give us insight into the numbers
  - Participatory Action Research (student and staff) on the high percentages of discipline referral for tardiness and for failure to serve detentions.

It was said that the Board of Education looks at the data but takes no additional action. The root causes needed to be explored. The disparities are known, but not the why. It was suggested that the school develop a model that addresses the students' needs and supports, perhaps hiring a staff person to work with the students.

3. Need for Concrete Action on Racial Equity and Capacity & Specific Interventions for Black Students
  - Cannot address this without having an explicit race-informed analysis and approach
  - Need for intervention specific to Black children – it's an unspoken truth, hidden in plain view.
  - Develop a model which addresses needs and supports Academic Success
  - "Black Student Success" point person needed – one person in the building in an administrative role who's full-time job would be the success for African-American students
  - Make "targeted universalism" actionable. Focus on the students who will be impacted the most. When ADA was introduced, it required sidewalk cutouts. Not only those with disabilities benefited from them, but it was also travelers, mothers, bikers, etc.
  - The visual stimuli give the idea that it is a white school, the orientation, the way it is run, all on the a white middle class premise.
  - There are not significant black teachers on staff that kids can talk to. There are some others who students can talk to...its transactional, not systemic. They are encouraged to talk, but...

4. Robust Student Voice, Engagement and Ownership

- Many named the discipline (and the racial disparity) being related to students not feeling a sense of belonging in the school.
- Many students do not feel as if they are a part of the school and its culture, and consequently, reject many of the rules connected to the school almost as an act of defiance.
- Young people can and should take a leadership role in meeting their own need. This is a capacity the school should be teaching to students and creating opportunities for students to practice.
- Policy Development and Implementation: It is essential that students be connected to the ongoing work emerging from this meeting.
- Develop a Youth Participatory Action Research project related to the issue of discipline as a way to gather data from students by students on this issue and create a sense of ownership by young people in the outcomes.
- Peer mediation and mentoring.

Tardies is a big issues here for both students and adults—75% of the infractions. Young people do not have enough positions of leadership with their peers and facilitation. Discipline is in the context of a relationship. Use why someone is late instruct people. Building strong relationships will require resources to pay for training in the community to make something systemic. All adults in the school should have a connection with students, even administrators. This aligns with work going on in the strategic plan. A shift from the mindset is needed as to how discipline is viewed. What consequences encourages the support the school wants. It is a matter of consequence in context.

#### 5. Culture of Building Stronger, Positive Relationships

- Build better connection and relationships between students, educators, the school and the broader community to improve student’s achievement
- A number of student do not feel a sense of belonging or connection with the school. Consequently, they reject/resist many of the rules connected to the school almost as an act of defiance
- Relationship is the context for discipline
- There are a number of current efforts at the school that have made those connections. Recognize them, learn from them, expand on them and provide resources.
- Need for training to develop teacher capacity in building relationship with students, particularly black students
- All adults in the school should have some connection with students...including administrators
- More programs and activities where there are opportunities for students to build relationships with adults and with each other and be staffed by high school personnel who collaborate with others from the community and city.
- Aligns with the work of Supportive Learning Environment Strategic Plan Implementation Committee.

#### 6. School Discipline as an Educational Interaction: Less Emphasis on Punitive Measures and More on Education

- School discipline practices should be viewed as part of the curriculum that teaches students valuable lessons about appropriate choices, positive behavior and consistent consequences.
  - School discipline needs to be about teachers instructing students rather than just enforcing rules.
  - Expand the Concept of Consequences: Encourage, Acknowledge and Support Positive Choices and Behavior.
  - While there are a number of people in the school who operate within this framework, but there is not a comprehensive and consistent support structure to have this concept impact the school's culture.
  - Shift to a "Code of Respect and Conduct"
  - "Every interaction, no matter how small, impacts the culture. In fact, it's many, many small interactions that often matter the most." (i.e.-how we greet students and each other in the morning).
  - "Discipline is an interaction, not an action."
  - "We have to figure out our proactive approach to discipline and how to support students that are having trouble with the implementation of a pro-social approach."
  - "Finding the right balance on accountability and actions that encourage students to want to learn and stay in class is where the struggle is."
7. Robust Parent & Community engagement, Voice and Ownership
- Parents are clearly identified as stakeholders in the overall process of education
  - Interestingly, no specific initiatives aimed at parent engagement were heard.
  - Parents are often involved only when a discipline problem has been identified
8. The Role of the School Board
- Changes in policy dramatically impact the people who have to implement and are subject to the policy
  - Policy change should allow for space and time for input and inclusion of youth, staff, parent and community, collective research, analysis and deliberation. This kind of process helps create ownership and support for the policy change. (This meeting is an example of such a space and time)
  - Example: Draft a Board position on school discipline that shifts the focus of school discipline policy and practice from an emphasis on being penal towards being a curriculum focused on teaching, learning and supporting successful behavior, choices and consequence informed by restorative justice principles.
9. Consistency and Clarity in the Application and Enforcement of Rules, Practices and Policies
- Current rules and policies are not applied consistently in the context of a comprehensive framework - all of the players need to know and understand their roles (SIDs, SROs, Police, Teachers, Deans, Principal...)
  - Inconsistency in rule enforcement reinforces a culture that rules don't really matter (both students and staff). Difficult for the students to respect them and for the staff trying to enforce them.
  - Frequent changes in the code and practice also make it difficult - agree on an approach and stick to it longer...

- Need for accountability and consistency
10. Restorative Practice and Principles
- Facilitate student and school staff learning to address the impact of their actions and restore and repair relationships through approaches that hold individuals and groups accountable
  - Create spaces and conversations necessary for building mutual understanding, and build the skills of students and school staff to manage behavior, and reduce, prevent and improve harmful behavior.
  - Schools utilize different positive discipline strategies across a continuum of restorative practices that build trust and a supportive environment for all students and school based staff.
  - Not a Model Program, but Philosophy, Principles and Practices that you adapt

**Public Comments**

Brandon Grayor, OPRFHS sophomore, stated that many things were going on regarding attendance, black and white people.

Anthony Brooks, OPRFHS sophomore, stated that lots of discrimination was occurring.

Jaylen Styles, OPRFHS sophomore, stated that there was a lot of discrimination and there should be more black teachers at the school so that they can understand and build a better relationship.

Anthony Clark, OPRFHS graduate and teacher since 2011. He stated that the issue at the high school is a sense of inherence bias and disparity in the way discipline is handled: it seemed more punitive for African-American students with whites being given more conversation about why they are tardy.

Steve Jackson, resident of River Forest and 1994 graduate, was emotional about this moment of trying to change things that are evident and have been occurring since he was a student. He appreciated the students being at the meeting. Both negative and positive things are occurring. The community needs to do something.

Mary Bird, resident of Oak Park, thanked the students, Anthony Clark and Steven Jackson, the Board of Education, especially Dr. Moore, Ms. Patchak-Layman, Mr. Cofsky, the administrators and the teachers who are part of the beginning of this process. She is the parent of an adoptive African-American student with special needs. Someone said that white people have looks of work to do in recognizing their white process. White people have benefited in this country throughout history. At one time Blacks could not buy property. She returned to an interactive issue of The Atlantic which showed how black people had been hurt in Chicago. She felt that if history was not studied, a big part was missing. She referenced material that were not included in the Strategic Plan and people who have been instrumental in OPRFHS history, i.e., Wyanetta Johnson, Richard Rothstein, Carl Spight, George Bailey, Denise Rose, etc. OPRFHS is not at the beginning of the process because people who worked through APPLE, the data the high school collects. She urged to look at historical concepts.

Leroy Fletcher, resident of 511 S. Humphrey, Oak Park, parent of 2 children, one is a senior. His comments were about discipline, not race. Until the youth can work out a way to have a responsibility with parents, this is just a conversation. His child has been the object of bullying. Parents need to make their children responsible for who they are and what they represent. OPRFHS is a great school, a great institution. His son loves going to school, but the lack of discipline and the culture has changed and it is killing his interest in it. He had been on the Dean's list since 9<sup>th</sup> grade and he is losing interest fast. OPRFHS goes after the best teachers and he wanted that remembered rather than the racial disparity. Zero tolerance means zero tolerance. His son had a racial incident with another Black student. He was shocked at what was said and his son said that cursing occurs all of the time, which means it is an accepted activity and he wanted to take the "acceptance" out of it. If that happens it should be reported to the deans, the counselors. The high school needs to improve zero tolerance. With regard to parents, they need to demonstrate residency, know that this is a technology laced environment and should have to take a seminar on that.

Linda Francis, resident of Oak Park, parent of 8<sup>th</sup> grader, and Director of Success of All Youth (SAY), formed by the leadership of Oak Park and River Forest to work collectively on those things that will help all people be successful reflected that the day's presentation encompassed the methodology and framework of SAY. It involves family and the community, what they want to do, etc. It is important to model the things that the adults want the students to do.

Wyanetta Johnson, 45-year resident of Oak Park, reiterated that it was important for everyone work together and for the school to listen to the taxpayers and for students not to be afraid of what their friends will say.

Pamela Purdie, resident of Oak Park, stated that both white and black students wanted things to change and they are happy this was occurring.

Mark Fields, resident of Oak Park, questioned whether all of the stakeholders were on board with the mission and goals of the school. The stakeholders need to talk about success possibilities. How can the problem be turned into action? He stated that targeted universalism was powerful. He gave an example of a community who had community greeters and the dramatic impact it had on the community. Action is needed.

Rachael Stroller, resident of Oak Park, noted that the culture outside the high school would not allow what she saw inside the high school.

Victoria Seaman, resident of Oak Park, was overwhelmed with sadness as well as being grateful for this meeting. She spoke about her own experiences in a white community that had not prepared her to embrace being a teacher in Dalton and so for the last 13 years she has been designing after school programs for African-American youth. She was sad that society was not further along and again grateful for the conversations.

Denise Fletcher, resident of Oak Park, said that her husband hit the high points in his comments previously. She acknowledged Ms. Bishop and Ms. Kalmerton who helped her at the high school.

Beth Phillips, resident of River Forest, spoke of her experience in coming to the school system. It was not welcoming as it was all about discipline. She suggested being more welcoming and creative with discipline for at-risk students. She did not like the use of Out-of-School Suspensions (OSS), especially for parents of students who were working. The community needs to determine ways to come together.

Whitney Daniels, resident of Oak Park, reported that her boys graduated last year and one of her sons is light-skinned and the other is dark-skinned. She believed that collaboration was needed between District 97 and 200. She began participating in meetings at the District 97 level when her son was in kindergarten, now he is 20 years old. She questioned why the community was not further along in this discussion. She hoped for real change. Both her boys were in college and doing well, so the high school was not bad. But while OPRFHS prepared them for college, they could have had a better experience and gotten better grades.

The visitors were thanked for their comments. Four participant groups were then formed and they were given the following questions for their discussions about the key themes.

1. From your perspective, do the themes and issues identified in the interview summaries cover the areas that need to be addressed? If not, what are the missing issues? Which of these issues do you think must be address first?
2. From your perspective, what are the 2-3 tangible next steps you would like to see come out of the meeting today?
3. Who are the additional key stakeholders in the schools, the district/central office and the broader community who should be included in this process moving forward?

The responses were as follows:

#### Next Steps

1. Data
  - a. Consider missing perspective “positive” data
  - b. Unpack current data
2. Need Student-led forum
  - a. Include graduate (recent) of OPRFHS
3. Communication, from today to stakeholders
  - a. All parent groups, consider how to include parents not in groups
  - b. Students
  - c. Teachers

How can people find out about the great work done today? All parent groups should hear about this, as well as all of the students. What about those parents who do not belong to a parental organization?

Takeaways - Culture of OPRFHS – definition includes consistency and respect

1. Respect
  - a. Need to model/teach it
  - b. Celebrate It

2. Discipline
  - a. PBIS
  - b. Positive Story
3. Relationships
  - a. Social, Emotional, Learning
  - b. Walking in door – do students, parents, staff feel welcome

Socio-Economic – how does it play a role?

- a. Nuanced definition of discipline
- b. Environment/systems

Expectations – Reasonable and equitable

Audit based on student population

Advisory/core teachers (school within a school)

Flexible scheduling of classes

Social work

Peer mediation and more male mentoring

Universal case management

Discipline Parent Advisory Committee

More student voices with varying backgrounds

What's missing? Better data that untangles racial assumptions.

1. Lack of ability to interpret and use the data collected in a productive way
- Concerns:

1. The response nature of adults to react to repetitive delinquent behavior and make assumptions.
2. Why do black youth (males) resist.
3. Equity in discipline actions (oversight and accountability) for staff faculty and students
4. Silencing power of white people
5. Disconnection. Lack of ownership of Black youth to school activities. Rewarding positive behavior.
6. Stakeholder alignment between youth, teachers and administration
7. Lack of willingness to call out injustice without fear of repercussions.
8. Accountability/respect
9. Racial disparity in disciplinary actions.

Task Items

1. Honest individual
2. Self-assessment addressing avoidance and the power of white people to silence behavior.
3. Cultural Training with practical information on how to deal with discipline – Classroom Discipline training.
4. Collect data on individual classroom discipline problems and actions.
5. Teacher mentoring – system of accountability
6. Discipline actions that get to the root cause of the behavior (requires listening)
7. Hire a student advocate trained in classroom management and restorative justice techniques.
8. Hire black role models/mentors
9. Hire more counselors/deans/drug therapists



What is the message?

1. Is it clear? Consistent? Does it reach everyone? How is it communicated?

Stakeholders:

1. The Core: Students, Teachers, Staff, Parents (and a backup mentor/coach)
2. The Community
3. Lots of caring people are in place – How do are they best used? How can they be rewarded?
4. Is there an effective code/policy/infrastructure in place as to where to start or should it be from scratch?
5. Regarding teachers, who is being listened to/supported? Are they being rewarded/supported?
6. Encourage holistic, healthy environment (drug free, etc.)
7. Regarding relationships, where are teachers/administration? To greet? To listen? To be accessible?

Voluntary Drug Testing (Opt in. Parent Partners)

1. Change we/they
2. Implement Philosophy of Discipline (Look at existing)
3. Assemble “Task Force”
4. Take Another look at alcohol/drugs
5. Involve Parents and their students and teachers (how to do this?)
6. Ask experts who are in place, e.g., Interventionists)

The facilitator asked if these comments resonated.

A 2014 graduate stated that much of what was said made sense, but he heard data being used to reward people for what they were to do anyway. The reward should be within oneself. What can one learn from this? What can one do for everyone?

A junior student noted that to her African-American friends, she was a ghetto white girl. With regard to discipline, when an African-American student does the same thing she does, he/she are called on it. She is not. When a white girl wears a bandana, it is cute. If an African American student wears one, it is considered gang-related.

The facilitator summarized some of the comments.

1. How one is greeted matters.
2. How should the school intervention directors be introduced?
3. How does one navigate the school?
4. Students shared wisdom how to engage them.
5. The definition of discipline needs redefining.
6. It is important to have partners.
7. Collect data that shows all of the information good and bad.
8. Bran the work.
9. Hold a student meeting.
10. Identify those people who are doing good things and develop their skills.
11. Invest in people to create relationships.

The facilitators were thankful for the opportunity to be engaged in the process.

Mr. Phelan thanked the facilitators and those who participated. Then the Board members offered their thoughts. Dr. Lee stated that there were more suggestions than what is possible to do and the only way to move forward is to manage it the right way. The discipline report from last semester showed that the number of class 5 offenses was 7—3 for selling weed, 3 for carrying a weapon and 1 for gang-like activity. The community tends to lose sight of the fact that these are pretty-well behaved students.

Dr. Moore was awed by what had been accomplished. Her goal was to bring everyone to the table and have a shared activity. She saw the next concrete step as being a student-led and student-designed discussion and the school would give the students resources and guidance to make it happen.

Mr. Cofsky was energized to spend this quality time talking about the culture of the students. Students need to be included in the process.

Ms. Patchak-Layman thanked those who participated. Historically this has been on the table for a long-time and she was hopeful that this is the core of action. She wanted to reflect on the student reports and consider how that meshes with a traditional comprehensive high school. If history stands in the way from looking at what students are doing, that has to be recognized.

Mr. Weissglass thought it was great to be at this meeting and was grateful for Dr. Moore's leadership. Education in today's arena is about skills. Discipline is a skill.

Mr. Phelan appreciated the level of openness and vulnerableness of the thoughts which leads to being open and honest about the present situation. He appreciated the facilitators for making this conversation feel safe. He agreed a culture change was needed. He was grateful for this opportunity. The Board of Education can only lead by setting policies, etc. He appreciated everyone's time.

## **Adjournment**

At 2:40 p.m., on Saturday, December 6, 2014, Dr. Moore moved to adjourn; seconded by Dr. Lee. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

John Phelan  
President

Dr. Jackie Moore  
Secretary

Submitted by Gail Kalmerton  
Clerk of the Board