

**OAK PARK AND RIVER FOREST HIGH SCHOOL**  
**201 North Scoville Avenue**  
**Oak Park, IL 60302**

**INSTRUCTION COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**October 13, 2015**

An Instruction Committee meeting was held on October 13, 2015. Dr. Gevinson called the meeting was called to order at 4:37 p.m. in the Board Room. Committee members present were Fred Arkin Dr. Moore, and Dr. Steve Gevinson. Also present were Dr. Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Dr. Gwen Walker-Qualls, Director of Special Services; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; Sheila Hardin, Faculty Senate Executive Committee Chair; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

**Visitors:** Sara Spivy, Board of Education member; Tod Altenburg, Chief School Business Official; David Ruhland, Director of Human Resources; Jessica Stovall, Allison Hennessey, Brandi Ambrose; filmmakers Steven James and others.

**Minutes**

Dr. Gevinson moved to approve the minutes of the September 15, 2015 Instruction Committee meeting, as amended; seconded by Mr. Arkin. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

**Report of Sabbaticals 2014-2015**

The Instruction Committee unanimously recommended that the sabbatical reports of Brandi Ambrose and Jessica Stovall be moved on to the Board of Education as informational items.

Both Jessica Stovall and Brandi Ambrose provided written reports about their sabbatical experiences last year and thanked the BOE for allowing them to have this type of experience, even calling it life changing.

**Jessica Stovall**

Ms. Stovall had worked with Kura Hourua (a New Zealand Partnership School) where she observed and worked, through the use of a Fulbright Professional Development Grant. She was welcomed by this community, a member of the New Zealand parliament, and an expert medicine healer took her to the Northland where they traveled from school to school and from sacred meeting place to sacred meeting place. During her time there, she interviewed the New Zealand Under Secretary of Education, David Seymour, and visited 14 schools. Her sabbatical project tackled eliminating racial predictability academic achievement by focusing on professional development for teachers. She was excited to meet Fulbright alumnus Chris Marshall, the inaugural chair of Restorative Justice. She spoke about doing a final project that would have a collection of best practices and professional development. The Fulbright Organization has also asked to her speak about her experience at various venues and at a recent conference in Philadelphia.

Ms. Stovall conducted focus groups with the students while in New Zealand and with African-American students at OPRFHS as to what it would look like if brown and black cultures were understood. What would the instruction/curriculum look like when the cultures were both supported and unsupported? She noted that while the cultures of Australia and that of the United States are different, interesting parallels exist. She has used the language, words, and stories from those focus groups to write a book titled "Educating Mindsets for Students of Color" that addresses philosophies, engagement, expectations, curriculum, etc.

Ms. Stovall organized a cultural exchange with the students from New Zealand. It was transformative for many of them. Dr. Isoye had attended the reception for these students at the Field Museum, and this event brought the Fulbright Organization to light. She will apply for another Fulbright in 2017 to bring this process full circle. New Zealand schools have used a teacher non-evaluative feedback, data-driven and research-based program, which has had a significant impact. She is working to pilot it on her own with Hawthorne School in Chicago, and she asked how to propose this pilot program at OPRFHS formally. She was encouraged to bring this forward to a Strategic Plan Implementation Team and present it to the BOE herself. Ms. Stovall believes teachers are the change makers, as they set the climate, the tone, and the expectations. She wanted to see teachers in the United States taking ownership of their responsibility and honor to work with these students. Teachers do not have control over parents, culture, socio-economic status, etc., as they have control over classrooms and school spaces. New Zealand teachers are assigned much responsibility for what happens in the classrooms. The program looks at all of the learning conversations and then codes them positively or negatively as a whole group, small groups, and by individuals. Research showed that indigenous conversations are behavioral, and white conversations are academic. When students of color hear behavioral conversations, they internalize it that they are wrong, dumb or that the teachers do not like something which contributes to being unsuccessful in the classroom. Teachers must understand that behavior is a symptom, not who the student is as a person. One member asked to see Ms. Stovall's workbook.

New Zealand teachers understand and prize the culture in the room. The term used for "at-risk" is "priority learners," demonstrating the effort put on addressing the issues. The training is about being open and receptive to one's own experiences of race. If one is not aware of the different cultures, the message can be misunderstood. She felt her responsibility is to learn the cultural differences to make that student as successful as possible.

Ms. Stovall stated that while the topic of Restorative Justice practices was new to her, New Zealand had embraced it. One person asked her if Oak Park wanted to be the first full Restorative Justice City in the United States. Restorative Justice is not just strategies; it is about ways of being and communicating. In conducting peace circles, the stress levels are high, one learns that one must understand that basic needs must be met before students learn. Peace circles build empathy in a way that cannot be accomplished from teaching something from a book. More training is needed, and some teachers want a room to hold Peace Circle at OPRFHS. She held hope that it could be used to transform discipline issues at Oak Park.

Dr. Gevinson noted that he would like to talk with individually about her experience.

### **Brandi Ambrose**

Ms. Ambrose had taught history for 5 years in Ohio, was a history department chair and then went to graduate school to become a counselor. She wanted to reach students that the District might not have been reaching and, thus, she created the College Knowledge Project. It is for sophomores with a GPA of 2.3 to 2.7. If these students have that same GPA when they graduate, they will be at risk for not matriculating to "gentle" selective colleges. These students' standardized test scores show that they are near at or above their college readiness benchmarks. The idea is to help them raise their GPA by the time they make college applications as seniors so that they will have the best college match. Much of the project will be based on soft skills. During the 2014-15 school year, 15.8% sophomores had the target GPA range. Approximately 90 students had college readiness benchmarks in the ranges of "nearly on track," "at/on track," or "above" benchmarks. Giving priority to college and underrepresented populations, the list was narrowed to 50 candidates. Since the beginning of the year, District personnel and 3 interns have worked with them weekly on grades, home life, and attendance. If benchmarks are not being met, interventions such as parental involvement, phone calls, emails, etc., occurs.

Many of the parents who attended the meetings had questions about how to help their students. As such, college visits are planned for the spring, including area universities - Dominican University, Concordia, as well as staging a mock college interview, so students know what questions to ask in the experience. At the end of the year, the plan is for the students to take a 3-day college tour visiting 2 colleges each day, UIC, UIUC, Illinois Western, St. Louis, Southern, Fiske and Tennessee State. The cost of the entire trip will be about \$30,000, and funding has been found for every student, with the help of Kristen Vogen of the Community Foundation. At the end of the sophomore year, these students will be invited to participate in the early bird project during the spring, where they will work with their counselors, talk about financial aid, the core requirements of the school, and the college essay. By the end of junior year, they will be ready, explore writing essays, and make applications by the December 1 deadline.

These students are utilizing many services at the high school, i.e., attending group counseling, using the EF coach, the tutoring center, and an attempt is being made to link them to 2 sports activities if they are not already linked. In a previous experience similar to this program, a student was exposed to a college visit. If that had not happened, he/she would not have been motivated enough to have demonstrated sustained success in order to receive a full-ride at a university.

### **Summer School Report**

The Instruction Committee unanimously recommended bringing forward the Summer School Report for 2015 to the full BOE at its regular meeting in October. Dr. Walker-Qualls reviewed the written report with the Committee members, highlighting the following items.

- Summer School met one of its goals which was to increase the overall enrollment and completion of academic classes: 1,217 students took 1,773 courses.
- Health and Consumer Education were the most popular courses.
- Driver Education maintained its same popularity.
- A lot of resources were spent on Credit Recovery Program, and it was successful. The classes are online classes housed in the building. They are open to all students who had not been successful during the school year. Dr. Walker Qualls thanked the teachers, counselors, tutors, and staff in this endeavor.
- 5 students graduated from the credit recovery program; a larger number graduated from summer school.
- More Special Education teachers were hired in the credit recovery program, and they used Special Education software in that program.
- Concordia University was hired to provide tutors to help in the credit recovery program. Peer tutors also helped.
- The overall number of summer school A and B grades was lower due to the fact that the music program ran as a workshop and not an academic class so that it is a place for all.
- The \$1680 deficit for the overall program was due to the fewer number of musical tickets being sold and unexpected expenses due to construction.
- 14-day, 4.5 hours per day, courses are in demand. Students cannot miss one day in order to get full semester credit.

Next year, the goals will include offering more courses, improving the registration process, and increasing A&B grades for all students. More funds will be included in the budget for contractual services Concordia University tutors and the musical.

Discussion ensued about the musical, noting that two other summer competitions in the community occur during the same time, and there might be a way to be inclusive of them so as to give many students an opportunity.

### **Review of Course Proposals 2016-2017**

The Instruction Committee unanimously recommended that the Course Proposals for 2016-17 be moved forward to the full BOE for approval under the Consent Agenda at its regular BOE meeting, as discussed at this meeting. Mr. Prale reviewed the courses presented.

### **ACT Composite and GPA: Leading Indicators of Post-Secondary Readiness**

The Instruction Committee unanimously recommended that the ACT Composite and GPA: Leading Indicators of Post-Secondary Readiness Report be brought forward to the Board of Education for discussion at its regular October meeting.

Ms. Hill had started to update the report that had been created in previous years. She also reviewed the data in the Learning Community Performance GAP Report published in 2003 to see how the standardized test scores had changed. She added the graduation rates last year, tried to match the growth and what kind of growth. DLT reviewed this information, but its conversation evolved. DLT asked itself what the BOE would ask that it wanted to know and what the administration wanted from the BOE.

The data shows that the racial discrimination concern in 2003 is unchanged relative to the leading indicators of postsecondary success—ACT, and GPA. DLT wants to have an adaptive conversation. OPRFHS has no shortage of interventions, programs, etc. that were carefully designed to support students in more effective ways. Yet, despite those many and varied interventions, the macros are not changing. Were these programs designed to impact GPA, ACT? Ultimately, when looking at how students leave OPRFHS, one can see the disparities in GPA and ACT. While white students experienced gains of 2.3% over the last 15 years in composite, black students only gained 1.7%. At this rate, it would take 75 years for black students to achieve at the same average assuming the same slope. Yet the same programs are available for all students. This does not reflect different levels from the starting point of the EXPLORE test, which are pretty flat. As the report looks at the intersection, what does the composite represent? What are the knowledge and skills that enable a student to be successful in pursuing secondary institutions/degrees? Among the actionable insights administrators have identified in developing this report is that a number of long-standing practices, procedures, and norms may contribute to the student outcomes described here, and that deserve rethinking. Among them are

- course placement tools and processes and their impact on student course-taking patterns and academic outcomes
- OPRFHS's weighted GPA system--how it functions to reward or discourage students
- expectations associated with honors versus college prep level classes
- grading policies and practices.

Discussion ensued. The Weighted Grade Point Average (WGPA) includes most grades students earn, with the multiplier applied based on the number of honors and AP classes in which A and B grades are earned. One member felt that the goal should be for students in college prep to be prepared to apply at any state university in Illinois. The question was asked which students take honors and AP classes. What are the students in the reading program freshman year doing? Are students in World Studies, AP history, progressing and what is their readiness for college? How can behavior data be infused with academic data?

All committee members concurred that a broad look at how to attack the problem was needed. One member felt that look into something more culturally based, such as Restorative Justice, would be good to do, yet noted that the high school does not have control over many things in a just a 4-year period. But the school cannot say that it produces these outcomes because it does not have total control.

The WGPA started in the 1980's because the valedictorian that year had not taken any honors courses and there was a feeling that the student had cheated. Dr. Gevinson did not agree that the WPGA penalized students. A request was made to see the percentage of minority students (black students) in honors

courses over the year. A suggestion was to focus on increasing that percentage. Helping students with promise sustain their place in honors courses. A question was asked what detracking would look like.

DLT had begun this review and conversation in August and talked about it weekly since then. DLT plans to bring this topic to the BOE regularly, perhaps every other month. As Dr. Isoye looks at the board goals, this is a piece to focus on to help with the bigger picture. The District has begun to undertake the BOE study of equity and equality. Any feedback from the BOE will be important. DLT is expanding this conversation to ADA through the lens of adaptive leadership. No technical fixes work. Ms. Hill will speak with Ms. Hardin about moving this to the faculty, i.e., division heads, staff development time, etc. Student input will be valuable also as to what does it mean to be an honors student versus a college prep student.

### **Adjournment**

At 5:32 p.m., on October 13, 2015, the Instruction Committee adjourned.

Gail Kalmerton  
Clerk of the Board