

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

Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee
February 2, 2017

A Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee (CCB) meeting was held on February 2, 2017. Chair Dixon Spivy called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. in the Board Room. Committee members present were: Jennifer Cassell, Warden Cormac, Dr. Steve Gevinson, Sheila Hardin, Naomi Hildner, Kayla York, Lincoln Chandler, Lindsay Moore-Fields, Mary Blankemeier, Melanie McQueen, Dr. Joylynn Pruitt-Adams, Nathaniel Rouse, Sara Dixon Spivy, Andrea Riles, Jonathan Weintraub, Wendy Daniels, Lee Williams, Qiana Carswell, and Ralph Martire.

Visitors John Duffy, Burcey Hines, Dr. Carl Spight, Karin Grimes, Christian Chiakulas, and Deana Herrman, community members

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Hildner moved to approve the minutes of January 19, 2017; seconded by Ms. Hildner. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

Visitor Comments

Dr. Spight asked what does a culture, climate and behavior committee do. He felt that the widely diverse committee seemed agonizingly stalled in vision and unable to articulate its own vision. Is this a failure of courage or leadership or is it a failure of will to assume the hard work of identifying, understanding and engaging the status quo of the racialized educational terrain that constitutes the lived experience of all too many minority students at the high school. The current mission statement draft speaks to aspirations about providing recommendations for improvement without articulating the critical predicates to that aspiration. The committee should ask, acquire, appraise, aggregate, analyze, and assess the contributions to continuous improvements in the culture and climate of OPRFHS made by TCTs and learning strands, PSST's, SIDs, PBIS Programming, MENTA off site and the many touted expressions of restorative practices. He repeated his question: What is it that CCB does? How does it do it? And, for whom? If he had more time, he would give a case in point as to how the committee might respond to the discipline report. He did reference the dramatic reduction in school reductions with failures to serve. Why did that happen? Is it because the climate has changed dramatically and Failures-to-Serve had gone down? He felt the District should be asking many more questions.

Mr. Duffy had asked the members of the Transformational Teaching and Learning Task Force to provide direction to as to how it can implement and plan for practices and programs, i.e., PBIS, social-emotional training and what has its impact been on classroom training, race, how people see each other, has it had an impact on improving the culture. Behavior and culture and climate are large. What are students doing in the larger school is determined by how they feel in the classroom, how they relate to each other. How does one feed this work into the equity committee of the Strategic Plan?

Reflections from the Last Meeting were:
What did you learn?

- Clarity
- Specific PBIS approaches
- How some improvements may have come about
- Need for formal review of all initiatives in place, with focus on culture, climate, race matters, discipline

Surprises?

- Positive impact on Leadership and Launch.
- Courageous Conversations.
- Restorative training
- Regarding recommendations, how much more work

More about:

- PBIS...
- How will we address institutional barriers to change
- Lack of coordination
- Accountability
- What would a strong model look like

The key themes from the January 17 meet as to defining the work of the CCB were:

Accountability:

- 1) Understanding individual roles in improving OPRF culture, climate, and behavior and holding each other accountable to effecting positive change

Rigorous Evaluation:

- 1) Assess current (and proposed) practices, both on outcomes, and the ability to properly implement.

Safe Spaces:

- 1) Cultivate opportunities for engaging every member of the OPRF community in a supportive, responsive manner

Communication/Awareness:

- 1) Promote and utilize available supports, through easy access and intentional outreach.

Cultural sensitivity: Lack of racial equity is a long-standing concern for the OPRF community, and the pursuit of equity in OPRF culture, climate, and behavior is an explicit goal of this committee's efforts.

Added to that list was coordination as that was mentioned at the last meeting. Because multiple initiatives are happening at once, people are unaware of everything.

Draft recommendations for defining the work:

Accountability:

- 1) Joint review (with D90, D97) of equity initiatives and accountability models
- 2) Support of Equal Opportunity Schools

Rigorous Evaluation:

- 1) School-wide culture and climate survey in the spring semester of the 2017 and 2020 school years.

- 2) Quantitative and qualitative review of current OPRF intervention practices and outcomes welcoming greeters.
- 3) Focus Groups linked to 5Essentials

Safe Spaces:

- 1) Schedule of administrators and volunteer faculty and staff members to act as school-day
- 2) Ombud?
- 3) Consideration of an impartial advocate position to mediate campus

Communication/Awareness:

- 1) Redesigned discipline report, reflecting referral data and time-of-day analysis of tardies
- 2) Listening tour

Mr. Martire reflected that one needs to know where one has been in order to know where one is going. The OPRFHS Board of Education requested that the administration provides an audit of everything it had done to improve the culture of all students, particularly around race. That summary needs an explicit explanation as to why a program was selected, how the outcomes were monitored, and if appropriate why the initiative was not continued. OPRFHS needs to know what is and is not working. OPRFHS does not need a committee that makes a recommendation and then fades away. The Board of Education might consider making CCB a standing committee and including a monitoring the function of equity-related initiatives, i.e., ensuring that minority children are not being excluded from AP classes, and anything relative to culture, etc., including reports on whether CCB has made progress. An assessment to assess is needed. A number of national programs have enhanced culture and climate and have reduced race-based practices. CCB could report to the Board of Education as to which would have the most meaningful impact and help CCB make recommendations. The Board could decide if it wanted a student advisory group on culture and climate that could be used as a resource for the CCB, confidentiality. What adults may know, students do know. Mr. Martire envisioned the CCB or a derivation of it, composed of differing viewpoints. OPRFHS has had well-intended efforts, but oversight of those efforts has been lacking in institutionalizing, quantifying, and reducing those efforts. A standing committee is needed. District 90 just did this; it formed an advisory committee on equity with the recommendation that it hold the administration, faculty, and board accountable. Everyone supported it. Mr. Martire stated that culture change is system change and that is very difficult to accomplish, takes time, and intuitiveness. Racial inequity should be the focus. When the subject is difficult, it is important to have all factors that play into that discussion housed in that place. A formal vehicle to regularly get the concerns of students heard would be a positive. Ms. Blankemeier stated that currently a student club focuses on equity (SAFE). She will request permission to make a presentation as to what SAFE is recommending and perhaps they can be incorporated into the recommendations of CCB. It would be helpful to have a few of the students on the CCB explain the message to the club. It would be good to understand the background and baseline for this. Students have tried to understand the policies when talking about the recommendations. She felt the recommendations needed to be broad as being too specific is too difficult. Mr. Rouse stated that student's voice is heard through SAFE which may present to CCB in March, students advocating for graduation dress and how they can make changes, and through the Student Council Board of Education Liaison representative. PTAC, now CCB, is required to meet annually. Discussion ensued about how often the

committee would need to meet in the future. Mr. Martire stated that the changes have to be institutionalized and made a part of what OPRFHS does regularly.

Ms. McQueen observed that of the 3300 students enrolled in the school, only 2 were at this meeting. It is important not to silo the students' thoughts and ideas. It is not just the leaders of groups or the heads of a sports' team that need to be heard.

Mr. Warden also felt it was a good idea to collaborate with student groups. They are being productive and are trying to bring things to the Board of Education. A survey is being created for students to be administered during class time, similar to the one they just completed. Student leadership should be talking to each other and to this committee. If a student were president of a club, it should be mandatory that he/she meet with all student leadership once per quarter, etc. Students need to talk about feeling welcome. Ms. McQueen stated that everyone should be held accountable as that is the optimal way to hear all voices. A group effort is needed to make this change.

Ms. Blankemeier agreed with the idea of leadership and student voice and feeling welcome, but her hesitation of bringing clubs and teams is that those students are already here. The system has worked for her and she understood that teachers are here to work with her. The perspective of those students not engaged is needed; it is the missing perspective. Ms. Hildner stated that a complete report from all of the groups, an insurmountable task in itself, will then identify who is not involved with regard to grade level, race, gender, who is contributing to the school climate and culture, and who is left out. Ms. Daniels wanted the parent voice added, as it continues to be left out. If a parent is not involved on a committee(s) or part of a parent group or is sports-minded, his/her voice, generally, will not be heard: That is for the majority of parents. A regular opportunity for parents to be heard should be scheduled. Blacks do come out for the NAPPID Dinner; it is possible to get parents and guardians here. The parents need to say what has and has not worked for their children and what they would like to see in the future. The listening tour works for a certain group of people and it works for the community at large, but it does not necessarily work for the parents. Ms. Daniels also felt there should be an opportunity to give feedback on the parent visitation day. During her visit, she had seen and learned much by going to class with her children. The mechanism for feedback on parent visitation day could be a comment card, a questionnaire, etc., and could be dropped off in the office, rather than with the teacher.

Ms. Daniels continued that to get the students who are not already involved, a regular opportunity should be scheduled. Fudge Ripple meetings were held at a church to talk about things that had to do with race. Some type of interaction vehicle is needed. Her children thought the Black Lives Matter assembly was great and that students generally felt good about it. Something should be scheduled for all students wanting to attend. Students could submit their questions on paper.

Ms. Riles cautioned that the District should be mindful about including the total family. She talks to many of the grandparents rather than the parents, etc., and the word "parent" may be off-putting.

Discussion ensued about holding a town hall where representatives from the teachers, the administration, the staff, the principal, and the Board of Education would participate. Another suggestion included

providing easy access to posting anonymous questions and answers on the OPRFHS website. Mr. Rouse pointed out that a question mark on the website has now been added and people can ask questions via it.

Ms. McQueen loves Parent Visitation Day. While this is an important part of the school year, participation is lower than it should be. However, if everyone participated, they would not fit into the building. She also suggested that parents be treated liked students and give them the same work, allow them to raise their hands and ask questions, as well as write feedback on the teaching style. It is important for parents to have that opportunity and perhaps it more than one per year should be scheduled. Parents having this experience are better able to grasp the students' day, what they have to take in mentally, and then offer suggestions to the staff. The next question is what would be done with parent feedback. Recent graduate feedback might be helpful as well.

When talking about having a welcoming brigade at the beginning of the day, Ms. Hardin stated that when she started 22 years ago, the superintendent greeted the students at the Welcome Center. She helps her students from 7:15 to 8 am. It is a balancing issue of providing help. Different staff members would have different responsibilities and, thus, it would be difficult to implement for everyone, depending on his/her schedule. She liked the idea of it and it was at the discipline retreat when it was first mentioned. The recommendation was for the superintendent, board members, the principal, SIDs, volunteer faculty, and parent organizations to be part of the welcoming committee. Ms. Blankemeier noted that she had seen the SID's and other staff members at the beginning school and that it felt nice and that it did make a difference.

Ms. Riles stated that the emotion has to be genuine. Even in the classrooms, some teachers enthusiastic and some are not. At the end of the day, everyone should be welcoming and genuine wherever they are in the school. Mr. McQueen stated that everyone has jobs, whether they are paid or unpaid. Even an infant can feel the vibe of good or bad in the room. One can tell instinctively if it will be a problem. She felt like students got that tenfold. They are humans, too. If the feeling in a classroom is a dark cloud and the student has his/her own issues, no learning is being accomplished and the whole day is bad. But when one person walks up and says "hi" it makes a difference. That is why it is important to be human. The discussion has occurred about depression and when students are home by themselves, one does not know how important that hug or the comment on how great they are doing is. She asked the committee to imagine how students feel as they go through hormonal swings. If something goes wrong; it only gets worse.

The Committee read the draft recommendations and discussion ensued. Dr. Gevinson asked the difference between accountability and rigorous evaluation (potential programs and metrics versus who will be doing the oversight.) Mr. Martire responded that an essential component of how the accountability piece is done is to have a rigorous methodology in place; making institutionalize change and having a specific rationale as to why/evidence a program is continued, changed, or discontinued. A role of the committee in making recommendations to the Board would be to show how policy has changed. The implementation of that is up to the administration which then reports back and the standing committee holds them accountable. Every forest is made up of trees. Every initiative will have problems but they cannot move down a path, allowing the administration to report, and finding ways to resolve the problems.

Dr. Gevinson agreed with Mr. Martire that part of it is accountability, but that another part may be the way to generate specific initiatives or efforts such as safe spaces. A system that is not punitive and one that says education is what is desirable. Programs and specific initiatives to enhance the climate and the culture of the school and the behavior of students is organizational. Mr. Martire stated that a different survey is needed. In District 90, one survey focused on culture and climate to faculty, staff, stakeholders, students with regard to racial inequities and how that is perceived. It will continue to support the focus group to get longitudinal data to see if the culture changes over time. District 90 is embarking on a lot of the same initiatives as is District 200. One of the most surprising responses was that students did not feel they had a trusted adult in the building. District 90 is now trying to find ways to overcome that, so students can have an adult in the building that they can rely on in a trusting way. Surveys must be focused.

Ms. Riles stated that students do not want to take another survey, and an incentive should be given so that when they respond, they are honest. Ms. Daniels said the school needed to be honest. If things do not work, they should end. Often that does not happen in the public school system. Programs need constant monitoring to see if they are working and the ways in which they are working as that is ultimately part of the mission statement--race will no longer be a predictor of achievement. One must understand why or why not something is working and that must be communicated.

Suggestions on the proposed mission statement should be emailed to Ms. Spivy for discussion at the March 2 meeting.

Going back to Dr. Spight's questions as to what CCB is doing and Mr. Duffy's comments about the Strategic Plan, Ms. Hildner stated that what the CCB's recommendations could become reality in Strategic Plan and that requires 1) producing something that is believed, not shelved, will become a reality, and 2) naming who will be accountable and to whom the Board of Education be accountable. So many programs that had been successfully proven to address academics and the closing of the gap and yet they were dissolved by the Board of Education, whenever new administration was put in place. She would like to see a standing oversight committee. If something works, it will make it harder to discontinue it, i.e., the student-run math lab, Project Scholar, learning support of 9 students, i.e., the recruiting of students getting D's and F's and eliminating those grades. It went from 9 students to 20 students and eventually became a study hall. The school has to be committed to not getting rid of something that works. What mechanism would hold the Board of Education and the community accountable? Thoughts? Dr. Gevinson said that the mechanism is the superintendent and that is where the leadership is. Mr. Martire felt it was both the Board of Education and the superintendent. Metrics are necessary.

Exit Tickets

Committee members were asked to fill out the exit tickets.

Adjournment

At 8:34 p.m. Mr. Martire moved to adjourn; seconded by Ms. Hardin. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.