

## Holistic Community Education Meeting April 8, 2013

### Minutes

Present: Joyce Gajda, Kris Johnson, Kathy Kern, Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Tina Steketee, Karin Sullivan

The group convened at the home of Carollina Song, 238 Forest Avenue in Oak Park at 7:00 pm. It was noted that a number of committee members were absent but the group agreed per the discussion and agreement at a brief meeting on April 4 to hold its meeting and to complete the agreed upon agenda. This agenda included:

1. Identifying key buckets of work to focus on, based on the survey data, focus group data and sticky note summaries
2. Identifying key transition points for children as they progress through their educational career.

On April 4 the group had agreed it would break into smaller workgroups based on the main themes/work areas.

The discussion was energetic, open and conveyed a sense of commitment to improving the high school's relationship to the broader community of Oak Park and River Forest as well as with its key educational partners and social service providers. At the close of the meeting, the following themes/work areas were identified. Some notes from the conversation on these areas are also included.

1. *The 8<sup>th</sup> grade to 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition or middle to high school transition* emerged as a major concern through all data sets. The group that the work needed to include opportunities for improved communication and work between the various school communities' constituencies including building principals, superintendents and district level administrators, faculty, boards and parent groups.

A number of examples were provided:

- A joint faculty in-service between D97, D200 and D90 held 4-5 years earlier was seen as very successful and led to a lot of positive conversation between departments. More of this type of interaction that promotes engaged dialogue, increased understanding, and joint planning and problem solving is needed.
- The recent parent information session put on by the D97 middle school PTOs while successful, was carried off without formal cooperation from D200; the PTOs invited a parent and faculty member who was able to provide accurate information. However, the need to formally ensure strong communication and cooperation was seen as essential to making sure that accurate information is shared.
- All agreed that the relationships between the high school and its feeder schools/districts needed to be placed on a solid footing of equal partnership

and respect for the work that all of them do. (They all do things well – they all have warts and everyone can learn from each other.)

2. *Transition from high school to post secondary education/training and career.* It was noted that the faculty and community both saw this as an area for improvement. The group discussed how it was difficult to ascertain if the concern was around the quality of academic preparation, an almost exclusive focus on college preparation rather than also providing opportunities for students to explore trades, and/or if the concern was with the support the high school provides its students in the college application/selection process.

The group agreed that the work group would need to unpack this work area.

3. The group identified the need to have *a continuum of coordinated effort and solid transitions from early childhood to post secondary education.* The Collaboration for early childhood and elementary schools were seen as the anchors for the younger children. The work of the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation was also identified as an important component of this work.
4. *Fostering strong partnerships between social service agencies, public jurisdiction service providers and the high school.* This work area is seen as an opportunity to improve the supports available to students, ensure that they see the high school and themselves as part of a well-woven community fabric that supports them and their success. (Concern about lack of social work and other services available at the high school was expressed.) Ideas included:
  - Co locating social services or touch points in the tutoring center or other spaces at the high school??. Staff at the meeting stated that the center is becoming a vibrant resource for students and has the potential to be more fully developed.
  - Creating an online resource or hub of all services and activities available to youth (Locating this in a web space supported by all public bodies in Oak park and River Forest a la the concept of one-stop shopping for citizens and being able to access all the information needed through one portal.)
  - Ensuring that the school resource officer, Oak Park and River Forest police departments, Youth Township Services and high school work well with troubled youth, have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, solid communication protocols and so on.
  - Establishing an ongoing forum for all engaged with youth to share their work, identify emerging issues and problem-solve. There was a question about whether the Youth Network Council was still functioning and was effective.
5. *Seize opportunities to leverage resources to best meet the needs of students and where it makes sense – the broader community.* Ideas for this area included:
  - The Board advocating for and working to improve intergovernmental cooperation and trust.

- Exploring ways for community groups benefitting youth and children to use space at low cost or no cost.
  - Integrating and or leveraging programs to expand capacity and improve service delivery to support youth success.
  - Cooperating with other jurisdictions to create a single portal for information that includes information about programs, resources and opportunities for high school students. (Same as above in #4.)
6. *Communication (internal and external)* was a theme that emerged as a top concern in all the data sources. The group had limited opportunity to discuss this work area but it was seen as vital to the success of the school. Some areas of focus that emerged included:
- When and how (including rationale) faculty and staff are informed about program changes –new, modified and discontinued.
  - Need for ongoing constructive forum to raise concerns faculty and staff may have, and clearly articulate ways for faculty and staff to participate in shared decision making and so on.
  - ID best vehicles for communicating to different constituencies/ frequency and so on. The different interests of the broader community and the parent community were noted.
  - Communicating to the broader public and parent community about the equity work that has been happening at the high school and how it is informing the strategic planning effort will be crucial for its success and possibly the success of the plan.

#### Concerns Next Steps

The group is concerned that some key players in the community and the high school are not engaged in the strategic planning process and in this committee. The District 97 representative has not been able to attend the first 3 meetings. While the representative had good reasons for missing the meetings, the group is concerned that D97 may need more than one representative to ensure adequate representation on the committee. At its April 4 meeting the group identified representatives from the following groups as important participants for this committee: high school parent groups, key social service agencies and the jurisdictions like Township Youth Services, Village (including police), Park District and Library. The group is also concerned that it lacks racial diversity. While not all of these groups need be represented there is a sense that the group needs broader participation in order to develop a plan that will be embraced by those called on to be actively engaged in implementing it.

The minutes will be circulated to committee members and they will be asked to sign on for a work area. The administration of D200 will be asked about additional committee members especially where there are important holes.

Everyone appreciated JP Coughlin setting up our Bog Spot.

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday April 15 at 5:30 pm in the staff lunchroom at the high school.