

May 04, 2011

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Wednesday, May 04, 2011, in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order

President Millard called the meeting to order at 7:36 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: Jacques A. Conway (arrived at 7:47 p.m.), Terry Finnegan, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy Leafe McCormack, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, John Phelan, and Sharon Patchak-Layman. Also present was Dr. Steven T. Isoye, Superintendent; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board of Education and FOIA Officer.

Visitors

Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; Amy Hill, Director of Assessment and Research, Lauren M. Smith, Director of Human Resources; Kay Foran, Communications and Community relations Coordinator; Division Heads Claudia Sahagun, Julie Frey, Bill Grosser, Dale Craft, Sara Roodhouse, and Richard Mertz; Janel Bishop, Jeremiah Wiencek, and Cindy Milojevic, Assistant Principals; Jim Hunter, FSEC Chair; of the Oak Leaves, Jean Lotus of the Wednesday Journal, Debra Kadin of Patch.com, and community members Marge AbuTaleb, Monica Badsby, Catherine Bauman, Al Berggren, David Biggus, John B. Bokum Jr., Mena & David Boulanger, Margaret Brown, Jana Burke, Patricia Rann Cheney, Helen O Chukuru, Kristin Coe, Connie Coleman, Lori Coplan, Elinor Crane, Karn Daniel, Michelle Darang-Coleman, Tim Dixon, Danielle Dobias, Beverly Duckett, Edwards, Diane Fascione, Mary Therese Foley, Sue Foran, Sam Frigo, Robert Fromberg, Emily Hendrix, Emily Hendrix, Jack Hendrix, Patty Henek, Burcy Hines, Dorothy F. Houlihan, Kevin Houlihan, Wyanetta Johnson, Carolyn Kalina, Sibel Kusimba, Sibel Kusimba, Larry Landfair, Ruth Lazarus, Jonah Lazarus, Mike Lennox, Sharon Lennox, Jean Lotus, Lisa Lowry, David Lupo, Karen Marcus, John McIlwain, Katherine Metz, Eric Miller, Jerome Mrowca, Katie Murray, OJO Osaicbovo, Joie Pierce, Steven Piper, Margo Pizzo, Kristine Raino-Ogden, Meryl Robinson, Callum Roes, Jack Sheehan, Monica Sheehan, Steve Skapek, Kielely Smith, Maisie Sparks, Roma Steinke, Donna Stephens, Rashami, Swain Mary Ann Thorne, Katharine Thurman, Patricia Vanboskule, Leah Walters, Peggy Wedoff, Erich Wepbe, Jonathan Wilder, Cheryl Wilkes, and Heather Zurawski

Public Hearing Dr. Millard provide some context and history about why this meeting was being held.
On Closing the Campus

- Over the last year, there has been much parent, community and school discussion about the costs and benefits of our current practice of allowing sophomores, juniors, and seniors to leave campus during their lunch periods.
- From 1971 through the 1997-98 school year, all students were able to leave campus for their lunch periods, without restrictions.
- 13 years ago, to enhance the academic focus and engagement of freshmen, OPRFHS adopted its current practice of requiring freshmen to stay on campus for lunch and eat separately in the North Café.
- In the 2007-08 school year, we changed from a 10-period day with three half-hour split lunch periods to a schedule with eight, 48-minute-long periods, including the three designated lunch periods. Sophomores, juniors, and seniors are allowed to leave campus during their assigned lunch period.

Within the last year, growing concerns about our open campus practice have emerged from a variety of perspectives:

- Many parents and community members are seeking deterrents to student drug and alcohol use and have discussed closed campus as one way of addressing student access to and use of alcohol and drugs at least during the school day;
- Neighbors have asked for more effective and lasting solutions to lunchtime littering, loitering, noise and illegal behaviors;
- In addition, these concerns have prompted broader conversations about the school's responsibility and liability for students' overall safety and health during the scheduled school day.

Other perspectives have raised questions about:

- the impact on the majority of students who use open lunch responsibly;
- the feasibility of – and added cost in time, focus, dollars and energy in -- implementing and enforcing closed campus;
- the challenges that closing the campus poses to existing schedules and facilities at the cost of other programs beneficial to students.

Closed campus is just an array of issues that have been raised to address school climate and student behavior. However, from the school's standpoint, closed campus is highly time-sensitive. If any change is to be implemented by next school year, a decision must be made by June at the latest.

The Board invited formal input in anticipation of acting upon recommendations for next school year. Essentially the three options to consider are:

- To keep things as they are – with freshmen required to eat lunch on campus and sophomores, juniors and seniors free to leave;
- To close the campus and require all students to eat lunch on campus;
- To implement a modified closure, for example, allowing juniors and seniors to earn the privilege of going off campus for lunch, contingent upon continuing adherence to certain criteria.

The Board of Education listened to the participants' perspectives and beliefs.

Rob Fromberg, resident of 709 N. Belleforte, Oak Park, has a freshman son at OPRFHS who left campus every day as a freshman. He is a recovering addict and has been sober since December. Mr. Fromberg advocated for closing the campus, as it is difficult for teenagers to make good choices because of the developmental stage at which they are. Things that can be done is providing education, setting clear rules with enforceable consequences and make access to drugs and alcohol less easy. Closing the campus would be part of a comprehensive strategy that would limit access and help control drug use.

Diane Fascione, resident of 528 Woodbine, Oak Park, was a substitute teacher at OPRFHS 5 or 6 years ago. She now substitutes in Elmwood Park, a closed campus, as are most other high schools. It too has crowded a lunchroom and a diverse student body that could 'cause friction,' as quoted by Principal Rouse in the local paper. Yet, they do not, because the behavior expectations are higher. When a student at Elmwood Park High School heard her say that her son did not drink or do drugs and went to OPRF, the student said, "Wow. He must be good. That's crack city over there." This school has a reputation.

While closing the campus will solve the drinking and drug usage problem, it will reduce 1) opportunities for usage, 2) purchasing drugs during the school day, 3) engage in other activities that their parents might not want them to do, such as going to an empty house for sexual relations, and 4) cutting their afternoon classes. She knows where her children are after school and on the weekends. If the school allows them to leave during lunch, she and school personnel will not know where they are or with whom. Should there be a lockdown, evacuation or family emergency, she expected the school to know where her children are and able to summon her child upon her request.

OPRFHS' students are their children. They are minors, not adults, in the eyes of the law and they are far from fully developed adult humans. Their brains' frontal lobes, which govern executive function, are still developing and they cannot make rational decisions as well as someone in their twenties. That is why loco parentis is not an archaic concept. If something happens to her child while he/she is off campus during the school day, the shame and the blame will be on the high school. Close the campus.

Wyannetta Johnson, an Oak Park resident of 38 years, raised six kids and has 11 grandchildren. She disagreed with closing the campus. She did not believe that the school could stop students from using drugs and alcohol during the school day as they bring alcohol in pop or water bottles and taking parents' medications. The school is not responsible for her children. The community needs to work together harder to find a better way to handle children.

Heather Zurawski, resident of 139 Keystone Avenue, River Forest and student and member of Student Council, said that the students who are leaving getting into trouble do not represent the entire school. She did not believe that closing the campus would be good because it would not stop the kids from doing what they wanted to do.

Mary Therese Foley, resident of 179 N. Elmwood, Oak Park, a neighbor to the high school for 10 years, was concerned for the safety and long-term health of the children. She has witnessed and is part of drug busts that happen right on her corner. She invited all to sit in her house and witness the drug deals. Officer Murphy had spent time in her house and he has said that the police go in circles trying to chase these kids down. This area is the most vulnerable because it is on the west side of the city and yet students are allowed to go out for lunch for 45 minutes. Thus, it makes the time between 11 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. an open market for drug dealers. She worried most about the students who are not involved in any bad activities yet they can walk by and may be shot by a drug deal that has gone awry. She was offended that the Board of Education and the District felt the problem was loitering, littering, and lighting up. When she bought her house she knew there would be issues but she and her husband love kids and they did not consider that a problem. Her house has a reputation as to where kids can go to buy drugs. She worries for her younger children's safety and the other neighbors that a drug deal will go awry. This is about protecting her kids. She hoped the Board of Education would close the campus. She appreciated their time.

Lori Coplan, resident of 229 Ashland, River Forest, has an eighth-grade daughter and has a masters' degree in social work. She has worked with middle and high school children. She asked the Board of Education to use balance and reasoning

and to implement a partially closed campus. Her viewpoint is that 1) kids will come to the school high and leave high and 2) many students are not using drugs. The District is doing a disservice opening the doors. Often students might not intend to use drugs or alcohol, but they find it difficult to resist peer pressure. The ability to leave the campus should be an earned privilege. The teenage brain is not developed. She knows of only two schools that have wide-open campuses. OPRFHS should take the time to see how to do it. She suggested extending a closed campus environment for freshman to sophomores as well. She strongly wanted to protect the at-risk kids. She asked: 1) What is the educational benefit of an open campus? 2) Are they learning when they leave the campus? 3) Is it safe for all kids not to know who is going in and out of the building?

Catherine Baumann, resident of 178 N. Scoville, Oak Park, is a parent of freshman and sophomore students and she is a college teacher and also wanted to clarify that this was not about littering or loitering or the events at the school, but about the safety of all of the children. She has witnessed students leave the school at any time all day long. She has seen kids using drugs, smoking cigarettes, buying drugs, etc. Freshman students leave campus. Kids have different ways of making decisions. An open campus creates an environment where kids can make poor, life-altering decisions. She asked the Board of Education to close the campus in order to create a safe environment so that they are not faced with making a wrong decision. Many parents might not think their students are leaving the building, but they do and they come back high, are disruptive, and are late for class.

Dave Biggus resident of 332 S. Harvey, Oak Park, parent of two high schools students, congratulated the elected school board members. While he was impressed by the discussions held prior to the elections, he was disappointed that the top three topics discussed were not drugs and alcohol. However, it is being talked about now. He did not believe that OPRFHS was a good school in the area of students using drugs, as its average is twice the national average. OPRFHS is located five blocks away from the west side of Chicago and its doors are open. He suggested shortening the lunch periods from 48 to 27 minutes, and shortening the passing periods. He continued that April 20 was "Drug Day." His freshman told him that six students in his class were stoned and nothing was done about that. The more he finds out, the more disappointed he is. The Board of Education is in a position to do something about this. He also suggested implementing drug testing as it was a way to them to say no to drugs.

Erin Lundendorff, a freshman student and resident of 1157 Clinton Avenue, Oak Park, stated that there were two sides to the issue: 1) personal freedom and 2) security. Students should be allowed to use their 45-minute lunch to go outside for fresh air versus being locked them in a room with students they do not want to be with. During his time at OPRFHS, he has not seen a drug deal. Students are unsupervised before and after school. He suggested that if the parents wanted security, there should be a 24-hour school day. He also suggested that the focus be on discussing the issue of substance abuse, as the school had not talked with him about this and he felt left out. He has two classes in rooms without windows and it is depressing. Students want to go outside. It is a matter of 1) personal freedom or 2) security.

John B. Bokum Jr., resident of 629 S. Home, Oak Park, reported that he ran for the School Board and lost. He thought the school should close the campus and

institute a prevention program whereby the high school hires someone to prevent children from falling into the trap of making poor choices. His four children attended OPRFHS. His first child was an AP student and he had a friend who died of heroin in the 1997-98 school year. The school brought in a speaker to talk with the students about that. Closing the campus will not solve the problem; it is those students who fall into the trap that need to be addressed. While some kids are not aware of what is going on, it is, it has been, and it has been discussed previously. He and his wife sat across from the soccer field in 1995 and watched drug deals being made in the middle of the day. This needs to be addressed. Citizens' Council has done its due diligence. OPRFHS is double the national average in drug and alcohol abuse and it is time to make hard choices.

Sue Foran, resident of 925 Bonnie Brae, River Forest and parent, spoke as a parent of a student who because of poor choices made on a student-sponsored trip, was suspended and experienced all of the social, athletic and academic consequences associated with these actions. Because he was caught, he has recovered, and he is better than ever. She thanked the school administration, the athletic department, and the Board of Education for the kindness, compassion and mercy applied towards her son and commended the school for the appropriate measure of punitive and restorative policies in place here at OPRFHS. From her first meeting with Jason Dennis and Janel Bishop to the subsequent meetings with Coach Wright, John Stelzer, Coach Daly, and Cindy Milojevic all was handled with professionalism and genuine care and concern. Her son reached out to them and they reached back. Her son would be the first to acknowledge how critical it was for him to be caught and for there to be appropriate consequences and accountability in place. He owned the problem and subsequently owned his restoration, yet he could not have done it without the school's support. The school has some very special people and her family will be forever grateful to them

Unfortunately, there are many stories of other students, each with different influencers, triggers, and remedies. Various prevention and intervention tools must be in place as some will work for some and not for others. If she were to prioritize, what she felt would be most effective, she would vote for random drug testing of any student who is in an extracurricular activity. Her son also endorsed drug testing as a way to affect change. For parents, it would end the speculation and denial and it would go a long way to relay trust in the family. It would provide the boundaries and mechanisms that do not exist now. Closing the campus would be the second choice but she would like it if both were done concurrently. She thanked the Board of Education for its due diligence and its efforts with this issue. She respectfully urged the Board of Education to act, not only to have a preventative impact on kids' behavior, which is ultimately the goal of everyone, but also to send a message to the community/parents and all the people, the Board of Education included, who are working so hard to change this culture. She encouraged them to seek unity with urgency as each of our students only goes through high school once. Helping even one student is a success in her book.

Karen Daniel, resident of 605 S. Grove Avenue, in Oak Park, has a sophomore at OPRFHS and three students in college. She thanked the Board of Education for the meeting and she was happy for the many parents who attended. She, personally, supported continuing the open campus policy. Only a compelling reason should affect a change in policy. She stated that the benefits of an open campus were:

- 1) Her sophomore will not eat in lunchrooms because he wanted a break from the stresses of school noise, etc., and thus she goes to friends' houses to relax, Scoville Park, or just walking around. The athletic fields are off limits. She is comfortable with her child going to friends, to downtown business, etc. and that her child is learning how to make choices before going off to college or work.
- 2) Closing the campus will not stem flow of drugs in Oak Park. She is a concerned about the issues. She did not believe the problem could be solved without one-on-one contact with the students and addressing the issues as a group.

Kristine Raine-Ogden, resident of 559 Edgewood Place, River Forest, is a member of Impact (the renamed subcommittee of Citizens' Council). She attended this meeting on behalf of her three children, one of them being a senior. She applauded the Board of Education for the opportunity for people to talk and offer their opinions. She believed a forum such as this would make a difference. She felt that all of them were smart enough and active enough to be able to solve or curb this problem. Part of the solution was to close the campus: it is one-step in a community-wide effort that will help to reduce drinking and drugs. IMPACT regularly meets with police officers, teachers, school administrators, students, parents, religious leaders, etc. in Oak Park. They have held educational forums for parents who are looking for solutions. Parents want their children in an environment where these are not common issues. Harmless experimentation took root in the 1970's and has flourished in the past four years. The culture needs to change: status quo is not an option. Students need a safe haven and she rejected the idea that keeping them in school was like being in a prison. Closing the campus will not be popular. The limits she set for own children have not been popular either, but that his her job as a parent. Drug and alcohol use are not defined with behavior problems, as all kids are vulnerable because they all take risks. She knew that each Board of Education member was there to provide the best possible education for the children. This is an opportunity to help succeed in school and life.

Katherine Metz, 15-year resident of 404 N. East Avenue, Oak Park, too spoke about this not being an inconvenience to the neighbors. Many neighbors are also parents; parents who care about the safety and education of the children and are talking about a way to impact safety, public health, and education. The decision to close the school grounds, unless parents sign their students out or if the student is 18, is reversible. If it is found later that there is not some measureable impact in academic performance, tardies, attendance, feedback from teachers, the Oak Park Township Youth Services, and the police, or a potential drop in the liability insurance rates, the decision can be reversed. She presented a bag that contained items she had found within the last thirty days (in addition to one new graffiti marking) within one block of OPRFHS. She recently found one of three pipes she has recovered in the 15 years on her property. She also presented a bag filled with little baggies that she had recovered. In her professional experience of working in an emergency room, she is seeing kids using a substance called K2, because they know they cannot be tested for that. She encouraged the neighbors to notify the police whenever they find paraphernalia, not just graffiti.

Michele Durang-Coleman, resident of 937 N. Taylor, Oak Park, a nurse practitioner, and an 18-year resident of Oak Park. When she went to register her

first child in the 1990's, she was advised by others to send him to Fenwick rather than OPRFHS because of its drug problems. The children follow their parents' footsteps; they practice what they see. She asked the Board of Education to make a fair decision for all the children and stop putting a Band-Aid on the problem. She did not believe that closing the school during lunch was the solution. She suggested:

- 1) Conducting a pilot study for one year and installing a hotline to anonymously report about substance abuse, as many times students will not tell on the teachers, other students, etc.
- 2) Hold sessions for students to talk about drugs/addiction problems during lunch. Use the resources of the school and community (psychologists, social workers, etc.)

The principals, parents, Board of Education members, and the community can work on this for one year. She has had four children in the high school and her youngest is now a senior. She was speaking as a professional as this was for all children, not just hers.

Sibel Kusimba, resident of 228 N. Scoville, Oak Park, wanted to bring up new points. She is a professional at Northern Illinois University and was in the building in which a shooter came in and shot people just two hours after her departure. She was concerned about the large number of open and unmonitored doors. Her son is a freshman. Only once was she asked for an ID when she entered the building. All visitors to District 97 must stop and register before they are allowed to enter the building.

The achievement gap is also an issue. She finds OPRFHS to be a very permissible environment and her son needs a more academic environment. One day he told her that during study hall they were watching Sports Center. Open campus is pervasive problem and it needs to be addressed.

Sam Frigo, senior and resident of 600 S. Humphrey Avenue, Oak Park, felt the school was safe and he has never seen anyone "crack up." He is the youngest of four children. His oldest sister attended OPRFHS ten years ago and she was a good student until her sophomore year at which point she was running with the wrong crowd, doing weed, ditching classes, and then progressed to doing heavier stuff, heroin, etc. She has been clean for years and is now going to Triton, Roosevelt, etc. He did not believe that closing the campus would not stop anyone from going with the wrong crowd or doing heroin. He feels it is the parents' responsibility. The high school instituted a new tardy system, Plasotrack that marks tardies. He believed that the campus should be closed to freshman and sophomores. Teachers and parents should come together to see what the problem is.

Connie Coleman, 212 North Scoville, Oak Park, a neighbor and grandparent, thanked the Board of Education for hearing the input from everyone about the issue and she hoped that its discussions would not look at just closing the campus but at the overall community. She did not believe that closing the campus would end substance abuse but it would limit some dealers' access to the students. Citizen's Council has stated that closing the campus is a strategy to reduce drug and alcohol abuse.

The school should also have a major prevention program. Substance Abuse counselor Margo Bristow has said that 200 students are referred to her during a semester. Ms. Coleman stated that there is a new program in Oak Park to help parents deal with drug use and to help those who are addicted get adequate treatment.

There are other concerns as well. Both her sons are graduates of the high school; one was an AP student and one that was not serious about education. She has a freshman grandson. The high school has been proactive and she supports the Board of Education tackling this issue.

Since her retirement, she has observed suspicious behavior that looks like people buying or selling drugs. She sometimes sees kids that are high; certainly, the topic of conversation is about getting high. There are disciplinary problems because some students take their issues outside the school, e.g., fighting, bullying, verbal abuse, etc. Both the high school's security and the police respond. What she sees also every day is extensive cigarette smoking and this is a substance abuse problem. While cigarette smoking is prohibited in public institutions, students can cross the street and smoke. In turn, they introduce other kids to tobacco problems and little kids are exposed to second hand smoke. She asked the Board of Education to close the campus so that students do not become addicted to tobacco.

Burcy Hines, resident of 1221 Fair Oaks, Oak Park, is a member of APPLE, an educator, a social worker, and she has worked in both open and closed campuses. A closed campus could bring about other behavior issues. The community cannot blame the west side of Chicago for the students getting drugs. It is a parental responsibility. Closing the campus will bring many problems. Those who are blaming the school and the drug dealers on the west side need to get involved. She suggested creating a parent-, retiree- patrol and getting a mandate for some of these corners. Drug dealers will not come if they see people in the community. The Board of Education is doing a fine job and the best they can. The campus needs to be open or more problems will be created.

Al Berggren, resident of 155 N. Elmwood, Oak Park sees students in the alley. The 2010 Illinois Youth Survey reported that 41% of the OPRFHS seniors admitted to drug use in the previous 30 days; that is approximately 1300 students. This is not limited to a few students. The numbers were similar in the 2006 and 2008 Survey. While this is a compelling reason to act, yet nothing is being done about it. Everyone in the alley is smoking something; it is not a neighborhood issue. A closed campus will put a dent in the drug problem; the open campus is not working. An easy way to address this problem is to have shortened lunch periods—to 25 minutes—as do Lyons, Glenbard West, Elmwood Park, etc. It would eliminate 33 minutes of time for each student to get in trouble and prime selling time from the drug peddlers. He also suggested additional security before and after school. Open campus should be a right and seniors should have to earn that right. He suggested closing the campus for next four years and then measuring the effect. Doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting different results is silly. Something new might work and it will not hurt.

Ojo Osaicbovo, resident of 1112 S. Taylor, Oak Park, has three children who graduated from OPRFHS. One is a doctor, one is a lawyer, and one is an

accountant. Parents need to be aware of the problems and face them. They must be responsible and they must care. Parents should have forums on how to raise their parents.

Eric Miller, resident of 1446 William Street, River Forest, is a parent and felt that the more important issues for the schools were the achievement gap and nutrition. He stated that the biggest issue was nutrition and they need to get healthy. He spoke about a friend's child who died of a heart attack at 16. He opposed closing the campus.

Steve Skapek, resident of 210 N. Elmwood, Oak Park, a neighbor, thanked the Board of Education for taking the time out of their personal and professional lives to shoulder the responsibility of helping to guide the school. It seems that while there is a significant problem, the solution is not clear. Yet, the campus needs to be closed and there are ramifications to doing so. While his children may not want their personal freedoms taken away, they have other personal freedoms. The major issue is the security and safety of the children they are in school. It had nothing to do with his children's ability to make decisions or his opinion of his ability to parent his children, but with the safety and security of the school. Unless the school invests in a security system, it cannot monitor who comes and goes in the school. Closing the campus would prevent people who do not belong here from walking into the school. He leaves for work before the kids go to school. He entrusts his children to the school and it is important for him to know they are coming to a safe environment. He is amazed that the discussion has lasted as long as it has because of the school's and the Board's liability. He asked the Board of Education to consider the following in its deliberation:

- 1) How many people come into the school each day or try to when they do not belong?
- 2) What would you tell the parents of a child who went to school if something tragic happened to them during the school day because people were allowed to come and go so freely?

Ruth Lazarus, resident of 617 N. Lombard, Oak Park, and a parent, stated that the things said were upsetting to her. She has an OPRFHS sophomore, one student in college and a seventh grader. She was upset to hear this framed as me versus them. One thing that was missing from the discussion was why there are so many who want to do drugs. She asked the Board of Education to consider the statistics that showed that 20% of students experience suicidal feelings and 30% have driven with a DUI adult in the past year. The community needs to look at itself. The community must show children that it cares about them by talking and listening more to them.

Lisa Lowry, resident of 741 Woodbine, Oak Park, and a member of IMPACT, is also a therapist in the community. In last year of activity, 64 new families received services. Pediatricians have said that there is a huge uptick in getting free labs. The police departments of Oak Park and River Forest have been urged to merge ordinances so that they are consistent. In addition, Parent Cafes have been held. There is a swell of community support to do so something. IMPACT was asking the school to do its part.

New drivers are leaving the campus and racing back before lunch periods. The reason for this meeting was not that there had not yet been a tragedy. Her voice is to close the campus.

Mike Lennox, resident of 202 N. Ridgeland, Oak Park, supported a closed campus, recognizing that it is only part of the solution. A number of things have to be brought to the parents and students. When he went to school 40 years ago, he was part of the problem at OPRFHS and the reason he was now involved. This is a recurring discussion. He asked the Board of Education to act so that a decision is made and not delay for another year. His son is in the special forces of the Coast Guard and works in Central America to help stop drugs from coming to America. Drugs taken today are not the same as they were in years past. He asked the Board to 1) act, and 2) use tax dollars to get results from security, drugs, education, parents, and community. Everyone has to be engaged!

Ellie Hendricks, resident of 1201 Rossell, Oak Park, and a student, said OPRFHS is known as Smoke Park and Reefer Forest. To punish 3300 kids for the small part of the student body is wrong. Helping those students should be the number one concern. Open campus does have positives: it allows students to have a break and they appreciate the ability to go home for lunch. Closing the campus just ignores the problems. Students must learn to say no. The campus should remain open.

Margaret Brown, resident of 179 N. Ridgeland, Oak Park, is a neighbor and a parent of two juniors. She concurred that the issue is not just from west side and she wanted to address the inferences made that AP students were not part of the drug problem. From personal experience, she knew that AP and athletic students struggle with this issue as well. She suggested putting the onus on the parents and asking them if they wanted their junior or senior to leave campus. If so, add something to the ID, along with progressive discipline. She suggested enlisting the support and help from the parents and the community to teach them about the good and bad choices that they make.

Maisie Sparks, resident of 1111 N. Oak Park, Oak Park, is a parent of one child who graduated and a current student. She preferred an open campus. Her oldest son participated in Snowball all four years at OPRFHS and he realized that drug abuse, alcohol abuse and the other not-so-wise choices that students often make are not the problem. When he went to that program for a weekend, he realized how much war, death, transitioning to the high school, etc., affected students. Parents are unaware of this, and it leads to situations that are not healthy. This program allowed ways in which the students could talk about these issues with their peers; it was a transformative weekend. She encouraged looking at safe places and spaces for children to talk about what is going on with them. Many teachers and coaches keep students on the right track and help them to make wiser and better choices.

Karen Marcus, resident of 232 N. Lombard, Oak Park and a resident of Oak Park for 16 years. Her background is in social work, she was a substitute teacher in District 97, has three children; one is a freshman and two younger. What is the motivation behind an open or closed campus? A cost-benefit analysis has to be conducted. She has worked with families and drugs have been a focus in her work. The home and the services in the community have to be considered. A collaborative effort and internal systems in the school need to be in place. What happens to a first offender? What happens to repeat offenders? She agreed that

there would be an increase in behavior problems if students cannot experience fresh air. They need to feel they can remove themselves during the day. She did not want the exceptions to create the rule in this situation. Her interest is for all children. She chose to be a stay-at-home mom in order to build a foundation, to work with her children on making the best decisions as they moved developed. Peer pressure is a daily occurrence. Drugs are a part of the culture and OP is not the exception. Some students will find drugs no matter what is done and everyone needs to work with them in a certain way so that they do not fall into a trap. She wanted the campus kept open.

Margi Abu Taleb, resident of 812 S. Kenilworth, Oak Park, spoke one year ago to the Board of Education about her son who was considered a “bad” student at OPRFHS. The family removed him from Oak Park two years ago and he attended a resident therapeutic school; he will graduate next week. Her “good” son graduated with honors but she later found that he also used drugs during the day. Drugs are a persuasive problem but the data on attendance needs to be looked at as well as it is a clear problem. It is not just first period. Attendance is especially poor after lunch periods. Kids need adults to give them direction and an open campus for many teenagers is a challenge. She asked that the Board of Education to close the campus.

Joie Pierce, resident of 203 Washington, Oak Park, works with volunteer groups, and she has been coming to school with children and grandchildren for over 40 years. She believed in an open campus because it helps students realize that they are included and not excluded. Some feel excluded and those who feel that way come back and try to pull the present students out because they are angry at the system. While she felt there should be no restrictions, she did believe there should be more discipline, rules and regulations, coming from parents and the school. Keeping the campus closed makes freshman students feel neglected and seniors feel like they have too much power. All students should be honored, respected, and loved in their homes, schools, etc. OPRFHS should be an inclusive atmosphere. Discipline should be given with love. She suggested a curriculum on motivation and ethics. She thanked the Board of Education for its consideration.

That concluded the speakers. The Board of Education thanked the participants for their time and effort in attending the meeting. Their perspectives and insights will be of great help to the administration and Board in developing the right response for Oak Park and River Forest High School. This will be discussed at the 7:30 a.m. Policy, Evaluation, and Goals Committee Meeting on Thursday, May 19. Additional comments may be sent to Gail Kalmerton at gkalmerton@oprfs.org.

Adjournment

At 9:38 p.m. on Wednesday, May 4, 2011, Dr. Lee moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Mr. Finnegan. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Dr. Dietra D. Millard
President

Amy McCormack
Secretary