

**Oak Park and River Forest High School
201 N. Scoville
Oak Park, IL 60302**

**An Instruction Committee of the Whole Board
August 19, 2008**

An Instruction Committee meeting of the Whole Board was held on Thursday, June 19, 2008 in the Board Room. Dr. Millard opened the meeting at 8:31 a.m. Committee members present were John C. Allen, Jacques A. Conway, Valerie J. Fisher, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, and Sharon Patchak Layman. Also present were: Dr. Attila J. Weninger, Superintendent; Philip M. Prale, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Amy Hill, Director of Research and Assessment; Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistance/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors included: Kay Foran, O.P.R.F.H.S. Community Relations and Communications Coordinator; Janel Bishop, Assistant Principal for Student Health and Safety.

Acceptance of Instruction Committee Minutes of June 19, 2008

It was the consensus of the Instruction Committee members to accept the minutes of the June Instruction Committee meeting, as presented.

Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) Conference

Dr. Weninger and Mr. Prale prepared the following written report:

“The Minority Student Achievement Network held its 10th Annual Conference, “Designing an Equitable Future: Transforming Innovation Into Practice” in Madison, Wisconsin from Tuesday, June 24 to Thursday, June 26. The Madison Metropolitan School District hosted the conference attended by the following representatives from OPRFHS – D200: Dr. Attila J. Weninger, Sharon Patchak-Layman, Nathaniel Rouse, Linda Cada, Amy Hill, Janel Bishop, Mark Wilson, Bill Grosser, Richard Mertz, Phil Prale, Devon Alexander, and Suze Ferrier. The conference began on Tuesday, June 24 with two pre-conferences that ran concurrently. The first was titled *Focusing on Closing the Achievement Gap for Latino/a Students* which featured a keynote presentation from Dr. Aída Walqui, Teacher Professional Development Program Director for WestEd. The second focused on pre-conference on inclusive, collaborative, and culturally responsive schools and featured a keynote address from Dr. Colleen Capper from UW – Madison on school leadership that creates integrated and socially just schools.

“Also on Tuesday, the MSAN Governing Board held one of its quarterly, all day meetings. Reports included a RPC Report, 2008-2009 schedule of meetings, budget update, data warehouse project, pre-college programs data collection, new MSAN Member Handbook, and membership update including criteria and application for membership. Finally and as a result of comments and discussion throughout this past

year, the primary work of this meeting was to develop a strategic plan for MSAN, moving forward. The group addressed the roles of the Governing Board, the Executive Committee, the RPC, and the Executive Director. A framework for annual conferences was developed, and decisions formed regarding job alike conversations, research, and district mapping/benchmark data collection/cataloguing (a goal but not primary). A sense of direction and clarity about these topics was fostered at the day's end, and in October, the intent is to have these decisions codified and ready for review.

“On Wednesday, June 25, Dr. Madeline Hafner, MSAN Executive Director, and Art Rainwater, Superintendent of Madison Metropolitan School District and MSAN Governing Board President, welcomed participants to the main conference. The first keynote speaker was Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings who addressed ways for the conference attendees to move beyond a discussion of the achievement gap to a broader understanding of an education debt owed to students, families, and communities. On the second day of the conference, Dr. Ron Ferguson discussed elements worth addressing, including youth culture, parenting, and school quality, as schools push for excellence and equity.

“Over that day and the next, keynote speakers and concurrent sessions focused on specific issues in literacy and math education, equity and access issues, and inclusion and disproportionality matters. Our own OPRFHS English teacher, Devon Alexander, presented a session titled, Idealized vs. Racial Experience of Life. The session was very well attended and received as Mr. Alexander worked to develop and raise the awareness of those in attendance to help them build authentic teacher-student relationships that reached across racial boundaries. Other sessions focused on promising initiatives from MSAN member districts including a project developed in collaboration with the Strategic Education Research Partnership (SERP) Institute on improving the quality of homework assignments in algebra courses. Dr. John Diamond, current Harvard Associate Professor and former Research Director for MSAN, presented his research on how students perceive and encounter racial inequality outside and inside of suburban schools similar to our own. On Thursday and Friday, June 26-27, the MSAN Research Practitioner's Council met to discuss a number of current and future projects in network schools.

“Upcoming MSAN events include the annual Student Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, September 25-27; RPC and Governing Board meetings on October 24-25. The 11th Annual MSAN Conference will be held in June, 2009, hosted by the Ann Arbor and Farmington, Michigan school districts.”

Dr. Weninger spent the majority of his time at the Conference with the governing board. There has been a big turnover in the last twelve to fourteen months; approximately one-half of the total group is now new to MSAN. The question continually asked was, what is MSAN supposed to do for the districts? It was decided that its work is now to find a direction for MSAN. MSAN will be more active in providing services to districts at their requests. He also noted that a researcher would like to adopt a high school in order to do research on student achievement.

One of the conference's focus areas was Latino students. A committee member asked if there were substantive difference to what is heard more commonly. Ms. Patchak-Layman attended that particular session and she was unsure there was much difference except for the language barrier involving Latino students and a set of stereotypes that go along with language acquisition in being part of the school community, as well as the cultural and family situation in terms of generational issues. She broadened it to English as a second language. Students of Latino, Vietnamese, and Polish decent were part of a discussion. Mostly they discussed the principal of quality teaching for English learners would be the quality of teaching for any student. When students are learning a second language, much time is spent on rote activities and language acquisition, instead of rigorous discussions. Dr. Millard noted that in her job, she finds Asian students are far afield from other cultures. Mr. Prale noted that one recommendation that came out of the Researcher Practitioner Council's meetings was that some Latino families prefer to have parent/teacher conferences in groups; that is counterintuitive to how the high school does business. Latino parents are less likely to come to a one-on-one parent/teacher conference; they prefer a group meeting of three or four families at a time. Ms. Fisher suggested that they might feel more supported in that type of venue. Dr. Weninger noted that Lyons Township High School had a 10 percent Latino population and school personnel went into their homes, in group settings, in the evenings to stress how important it was for the students to graduate. The Latino family value is to work and not to go to school. Dr. Millard noted that Korean students work with the parents and still pull off great grades. She asked how the information demonstrated could be translated and utilized to the benefit of the students. It is the movement from discussion to utilization and then to action that is the hard part.

Ms. Patchak-Layman continued that the student workshop focused on those students going on to college and the challenges that proposed. The Madison School District was highlighted. Most of the students said it was difficult to make the transition to college; it was only because of one or two high school staff people taking them through the steps of the process that they were successful. Everyone comes in at different points in terms of moving on to college and the steps that may be taken as second nature to some are very difficult for others. More guidance and support is necessary for students in that regard.

Mr. Prale stated that Dr. Weninger had asked the number of OPRFHS participants be raised to up to 12 persons so that many perspectives from the high school could be at the table. The advantage of having the conference in Madison was that it kept the travel expenses low and it was reasonable to send a big team. Dr. Weninger stated that African-American student achievement has to be addressed, recognizing the challenges of this community. The District needs to understand what its first point of action should be. The benefit of having a larger number of people attending the MSAN Conference is to be able to talk about what they heard. Another important part of the conference was Devon Alexander's presentation on student achievement and race. Dr. Lee noted that he had an article from a Los Angeles newspaper about the achievement gap in a school in which most of the students were of Latino or Asian heritage. It was an interesting discussion of that achievement gap, its ramifications, and what attempts were made to deal with it. While it had nothing to do directly with anything in Oak Park, it was interesting. Dr.

Millard added that the Los Angeles school district has spent significant time dealing with achievement issues.

Getting back to the MSAN conference, another speaker, Suzanne Donovan of the SERP Institute, provided an update about a research project that looked at specific homework assignments to see which ones improved a student's skill in algebra. This may be beneficial to OPRFHS. What are useful homework examples that lead to higher outcomes? This would be a second example of what may come out of membership in MSAN.

Ms. Fisher asked if the District could experiment with parent/teacher conferences, i.e., inviting certain parents to a conference and speak generically as to what skills are necessary without violating confidentiality. Mr. Prale noted that two years ago, they enlisted case managers of Special Education students and the parental feedback was good. They liked the idea of clustering taking a 15-minute conference, instead of a six-minute conference. Ms. Fisher liked the fact that the District was acting on information garnered from other sites.

Discussion of Board Role in Grant Applications

Dr. Weninger asked the question, "What role does the Board of Education have in the writing, reviewing, and submission of grants?" The District administration felt its job was to find and apply for grants. He saw the administration's role as informing the Board of Education and affirming its support of the administration's efforts in student achievement. The Board of Education's role is to put in place a process by which it would encourage the administration in its work. He asked if hiring a grant writer would be appropriate. He asked if the Board of Education wanted to approve the grants first.

Dr. Millard was concerned that four administrators had spent an hour with Ms. Patchak-Layman regarding the SIP Grant. Dr. Millard questioned whether that was the best use of the administrator's time. Ms. Patchak-Layman had originally asked only to read the grant, noting that it had already been submitted to the ISBE as she finds the reading of grants to be very helpful in crystallizing the school's focus... This grant was based on the School Improvement Plan, which the Board of Education had accepted. Dr. Millard acknowledged that many Board of Education members have been in the role of writing grants and for them to see the grant for informational purposes could be helpful. She was concerned about how much time and energy was being spent by the administration on requests from Board of Education members.

Dr. Weninger noted that the meeting the administration had with Ms. Patchak-Layman was a good exchange of ideas and an explanation of other things within the grant. Ms. Patchak-Layman expressed concern to Ms. Witham about the position of the African-American Outreach Coordinator being included in both the grant and the budget. It had been due diligence on the administration's part in case there was a question raised at a board meeting. Ms. Patchak-Layman reiterated that she had only wanted a copy of the grant and had not wanted to meet initially.

Ms. Patchak-Layman had questioned something not already approved, the African-American Outreach Coordinator, as also being part of the high school's budget; she had only wanted to read the document. Dr. Lee felt nothing wrong with a Board of Education member reading a grant proposal and nothing that pointed to a Board of Education member's desire to approve it. He felt there was the interpretation that Ms. Sharon Patchak-Layman wanted to approve it. Her request to read the document did not sound improper or interfering to Dr. Lee.

Ms. Fisher was concerned about Ms. Patchak-Layman, when she was a District 97 Board of Education member, contacting the State of Illinois regarding the grant District 97 had been given to bailout the cost overrun of construction at the two junior highs; some members of District 97's Board of Education had been distraught at her action. Ms. Fisher was concerned that her purpose in reading the OPRFHS grant was related to some type of action. Ms. Fisher was confused as to why Ms. Patchak-Layman had not spoken with the other members of the District 97 board before contacting the State of Illinois. Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that the grant application that she questioned for school improvement funds was dated March 28, 1998. Following up with that, she spoke with the school construction team and the state group that certified whether District 97 would be on the list for the school construction money. There were two conversations in March regarding that grant. At the time, she was not on the Board of Education. When the additional money was approved, she did not believe there was any further contact with the State of Illinois. Ms. Fisher was under the impression that what Ms. Patchak-Layman had conveyed to the state was that disapproval should be forthcoming. Ms. Fisher could not speak to Ms. Patchak-Layman's comments, but noted that she had a track record of doing more than just seeking information. Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that she spoke with the legislature and the ISBE as one would talk about the job as a Board of Education member. She had not believed the incorporating of middle schools was a good move for District 97. The \$17 million bailout came before the first shovel went into the ground. Ms. Patchak-Layman continued that grant applications should show the amount of money and what is a good use of time. Is it a one-time event? Will it be expanded in the future?

Dr. Millard asked if it were the Board of Education's job to oversee and manage grants. Dr. Weninger stated that this grant is a highly competitive grant and the administration did not want to risk the grant not being approved because of the potential of someone contacting the ISBE without having adequate information. It was the administrative due diligence to protect the work. In hindsight, the administration was right to address Ms. Patchak Layman's concerns.

Mr. Allen did not object to the administrators spending an hour of their time to address a Board of Education concern. He, himself, has spent a full day with Jack Lanenga touring the building. He did object to the BOE spending 45-minutes on this discussion. Dr. Lee concurred. He called this an overreaction based on a pessimistic view of what could go wrong because of Ms. Patchak-Layman's reading of the grant. That was a prejudgment that might have had some validity based on things that might have happened in the past, but a risk that must be taken. He believed the discussion should not be on how to prevent problems with Board of Education members but to deal with them as they arise. He did

not believe that Ms. Patchak-Layman had caused a problem and was being judged unfairly based on what they thought she might have done as opposed to what she actually had done. She had asked to read a grant.

Dr. Weninger summarized the conversation:

- 1) The administration will continue to seek grants.
- 2) If an individual Board of Education member has questions, the administration will provide the answers.
- 3) If an individual Board of Education member requests to read a grant, it will be provided to him/her.

Dr. Lee asked what the Board of Education member's responsibility is if he/she reads a proposal and feels the administration is doing something inappropriate or illegal. In his opinion, the Board of Education should bring the concerns to the school board itself. If a problem is seen, it should be dealt with here at the table versus the agency to which the application is being submitted. The Board of Education member has a legal right to do anything it wants, but the Board of Education member also has an ethical obligation. Mr. Allen stated that the Board of Education does not have the right to develop a Board of Education member's concern before bringing it to the whole Board of Education. In this situation, Ms. Patchak-Layman had a concern and she should not have been impeded. Ms. Fisher concurred, a Board of Education member has an ethical obligation to bring his/her concern to the District before going to an outside agency and that is the critical piece that should be taken seriously. Ms. Patchak Layman concurred, minus the ISBE and the Attorney General's Office, as it deals with the Freedom of Information Act and the Open Meetings Act, which she uses as resources.

Framework for Discipline reports

Ms. Bishop provided the following written report:

“At the June 2008 Board of Education meeting, it requested an annual discipline report that is consistent from year to year and more meaningful; one that connect discipline and achievement more clearly. The Board of Education requested a new framework such that the report would disaggregate discipline data differently and more completely than what had been provided previously.

“Ms. Bishop included sample data tables disaggregated per the following:

- Number of In-School Suspensions and Out-of-School Suspensions for each class infractions;
- Comparison statistics for suspensions for current and previous semester/year;
- Statistics for detentions and ASD's with current and previous semester/year comparison
- Expulsion statistics with previous semester/year comparison;
- Number of students referred to PSS Team

- Discipline statistics of those students referred to PSS before referral and after interventions implemented by PSS Teams;
- Number of students who are referred to other intervention programs such as FREE and MUREE, resource manager referrals, substance abuse counselor referrals, group counseling, etc., and their discipline statistics before these interventions and afterward;
- Discipline statistics for transfer students, and
- Recidivism

She asked the Instruction Committee members for their input.

Dr. Lee felt that sixteen (16) categories was too much information; he did not want information as to whether it was illegal or controlled. Mr. Conway disagreed. He felt that information was necessary, because without that breakdown there would be too many unanswered questions. This information is not complicated and is necessary for a full understanding of what is happening within the building. Dr. Lee then suggested having a report with two sections, one that breaks things down into one category, and one section that breaks down the information into 16 categories.

Dr. Weninger suggested that Ms. Bishop and her office would prepare annual discipline reports in a consistent manner year to year in front of this detailed data, and that an executive summary of that data in terms of trends, increases, and decreases from the previous year, and what will be done in the future. Dr. Lee stated that would be helpful.

Ms. Patchak-Layman wanted the following:

- 1) Breakdown of Class II infractions, as well as three and four.
- 2) Amount of time spent outside of class in the process, from referral to completion of consequence.
- 3) Are they Special Education students? This information will help to determine the future program.
- 4) The number of days attached to ISS and OSS because that is class and what the school does for those students along with the number of students being referred to Ombudsman and HARBOR. Were they being recommended for those placements before they get to expulsion? Is the reason for fewer expulsions because the District found those eight students before they got to that point and gave them the services of Harbor and Ombudsman? Ms. Bishop responded that some are, but it is a case-by-case. Mr. Prale noted that students also choose to remain at Harbor because they have had success there. Dr. Lee disagreed with having information on an individual student.

It was the consensus of the Committee members to put the first nine weeks of statistics into the report and present it to the Board of Education for review in order for them to be able to see a real example. The number of Class II infractions would be separated on a different page.

Concerning behavioral contracts, the administration decided to have a behavior agreement and the District will have to inform parents of the new format and what that means. Mr. Conway asked for a template to be included in the Code of Conduct. He also asked the difference between agreement and contract. The agreement will outline behavior expectations. It is an understanding of what the school is going to do. A contract implies two parties of equal standing voluntarily agreeing to certain situations. The Behavior Contract will list the follow up actions to be taken to help the students be successful.

It will also be possible to distinguish between athletic and co curricular infractions. In addition, while it will be possible to keep track of the PSS Team interventions, Dr. Weninger did not feel it appropriate to look at those stats, as that is an internal function.

Mr. Allen appreciated the work that had been put into this.

Miscellaneous

Committee members were informed that when talking about achievement gap issues, they should be discussed in this Committee setting but if in the discussion of whatever aspect was being discussed, it may roll into another committee setting.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked if for the opportunity to talk further about the goals at a future Instruction Committee meeting. There was consensus to have this discussion at the September Instruction Committee meeting.

Adjournment

The Instruction Committee adjourned at 10:22 a.m.