

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

**An Instruction Committee of the Whole Board
November 13, 2008**

An Instruction Committee meeting of the Whole Board was held on Thursday, November 13, 2008 in the Board Room. Dr. Millard opened the meeting at 7:32 a.m. Committee members present were John C. Allen, IV, Jacques A. Conway (arrived at 7:39 a.m.), 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; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistance/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors included Kay Foran, OPRFHS Community Relations and Communications Coordinator; James Hunter, Faculty Senate Executive Committee Chair; Dale Craft, OPRFHS Summer School Director and Physical Education Division Head; Marci DiVerde, Yuko Schulteis and Yoko Schmadeke, OPRFHS teachers; and Spencer Strouse, Gabi Hastings, Taylor Kirk, Carl Bernardo, and Gabby Cole, students.

Acceptance of Instruction Committee Minutes of October 15, 2008

It was the consensus of the Instruction Committee members to accept the minutes of the October 15, 2008, Instruction Committee meeting. Dr. Millard complimented Ms. Kalmerton on how well the minutes captured the meeting.

Foreign Exchange Trips

Peru

Student Gabby Cole spoke warmly about the Exchange Trip to Peru and presented a slide show. Some of the places visited included Lima, Machu Picchu, a lama farm, the ruins, a glacier high in the Andes, Lake Titicaca, the Floating Islands of the Uros, and The Royal Tombs of Sipán, etc. She shared a personal experience about the students while waiting for a plane were engaged in a soccer game by children much younger than they and then losing.

Japanese

Japanese teachers Yuko Schulteis and Yoko Schmadeke escorted students on a trip to Japan for four weeks. During that time, the students stayed with Japanese families or in youth hostels. Spencer Strouse gave his entire report spoken in Japanese. Some of the sites they visited and the experiences they had included Kyoto, Hiroshima, a ride on the bullet train through the mountains, and Nagano. The students were very happy about how well the Japanese families treated them; they were made to feel as if they were part of the family. They also helped in the preparation and the cleanup of a high school festival and likened the festival to a Huskiepalooza times 10. In order to attend school

with the daughter of a homestay family, one student had to wake up one and one-half hours earlier than the start of the school because they had to leave by 6:50 a.m. to get to school by 8:40 a.m.; they took a bus and walked a great distance to school. The school day consisted of three classes before lunch and three classes after lunch. The teachers rotate in the school; the students do not. Around 3:30 p.m., all students start their extracurricular activities, e.g., track and field, band, etc., and no one leaves until 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. Vacation time is two weeks in the summer and two weeks for spring break. In Japan, students have to test into their schools.

Discussion ensued. When asked if there were any school visitations in Peru, teacher Marci DiVerde stated that there were not but it would be a consideration for the next trip. One student had a scholarship to go on the Japan trip, two students had full, and seven students had partial scholarships to go on the Peru trip. Students need to be proficient in the language of the country in order to get the most out of the trip.

Mr. Prale thanked the teachers for sponsoring these trips as they take much time to arrange. He also thanked the students for sharing their comments.

Summer School Report

Summer School Director Dale Craft stated that the 2008 summer school session had been successful. Attendance was better and 98 percent of the students who participated passed their classes. He prepared a written report and budget (attached to and made a part of the minutes of this meeting).

Mr. Craft addressed a previous concern regarding the health curriculum, noting that it continues to be upgraded, and that he had observed the teaching to insure that it was consistent with Jeremy Colquhoun's curriculum content. The health class that Mr. Colquhoun teaches during the regular school year is more rigorous because there are more minutes of instruction. The object of the health curriculum in summer school is to focus on the standards. Discussion continues to occur between Mr. Prale, Mr. Grosser, and Dr. Weninger regarding how best to present the curriculum during the summer.

Mr. Craft continued that core academic classes and elective courses such as Art Foundations continue to maintain a strong curriculum. Fifty-two (52) people staff summer school, including those for special needs. Out of that number, eleven (11) to twelve (12) are out-of-District teachers. Health, Consumer Education, and Keyboarding teachers pose the most challenge to find.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked if summer school would allow the District to experiment with instructional methods or methods of intervention for students, e.g., RtI, pilot activities, Mastery Manager, etc. Mr. Prale stated that the school has experimented with the core final exams and in Consumer Education, as it is an opportunity to pilot materials; however, the District has not piloted an instructional strategy because the strategy used in summer school would be different from the one used during the regular school year, because of the time limitation. In terms of intervention programs, each year the District changes what it does with the 8 to 9 Connection Program looking to improve that

program for the students targeted by that program. Mr. Prale continued that summer administrative interns are usually connected with the 8 to 9 Program because of the amount of testing of reading with those students. Mr. Craft has had an intern shadow him for the last two years. Most universities will not give students credit for teaching summer school teaching, as it is too short a time.

Regarding students coming to the high school and taking online courses during the summer, Mr. Prale stated that OPRFHS does not offer online classes and is not connected with the online Illinois Virtual High School. For OPRFHS students, the most common and most popular online or correspondence programs for Health and Consumer Education. The classes are offered through a variety of universities; many OPRFHS student use the program offered by Brigham Young University. The efficacy of accepting online courses may be a worthy conversation, however. OPRFHS limits students to taking four online or correspondence courses to meet graduation requirements. Any discussion of offering online courses would have to include the cost and what effect it would have on classes during the year.

Mr. Prale attested to the excellent job Mr. Craft was doing with the summer school program.

Textbook Review

It was the consensus of the majority of the Instruction Committee members to recommend that the Board of Education approve the textbook, *The Crying Lot of 49*, at its regular Board of Education meeting for the English Division.

There was a question as to whether this novel could be used in classes other than AP classes, as it has a reading grade level of 6.4 and highly recommended. It was explained that reading ability level is a factor of word, choice, and sentence length. This novel was chosen was for its theme, plot and character, rather than word, choice, and sentence length. This is a difficult novel and would be difficult for all students to read.

A Learning Team is looking at the idea of having one book for the entire school to read, much like they do in the City of Chicago. Mr. Prale suggested waiting to have a more in-depth discussion of this until after the report from the Learning Team was submitted.

Additional Information or Matters for Committee Deliberation

Discussion ensued regarding the request that was fulfilled for histograms made at the last Instruction Committee meeting, which showed a breakout relative to different standardized test scores. Mr. Prale stated that these histograms showed a distribution in a category and should not be used for comparison, as each test uses a difference scale. While learning that ACT does not provide a reading grade level but one could find similar distributions in the histograms, Dr. Weninger asked if the EPAS system would allow the school to know whether there was any growth in reading from one point in time to another. Mr. Prale replied that EPAS scores better showing how the District performs more than they show well the students perform. Dr. Weninger stated that EPAS predicts how students should do a certain on EXPLORE vs. PLAN or the ACT. He also knew

that some high school districts were using a software program called Cognos to help them and their associate schools track grades 2 to 12, including the ISAT, ACT, and PSAE data, in order to track students over their entire school career. OPRFHS is also having these conversations with its associate schools. This may be more valuable information to the Committee than trying to compare cohort and cohort.

Mr. Prale did not believe growth models would change the high school's overall analysis much. He affirmed Dr. Weninger's statement that students may meet and exceed on the ISAT, but may not be positioned properly to meet or exceed on the EXPLORE Test. Students can meet or exceed on ISAT and get a score of 12 on the EXPLORE test, which does not necessarily signify college readiness. The rate of growth for those students as they progress through the high school may then be within an acceptable range as suggested by the ACT Corporation, but it is not such that it accelerates student learning such that students meet or exceed college-readiness benchmarks. Therefore, even if growth were steady, those students would need one to two years of growth each year in order to meet or exceed as juniors and meet college readiness.

Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that the way to be able to look at an individual student is to have a system in place that allows an adult to know the student and help he/she move forward. She asked if the implementation of smaller study halls was an effort for teachers to establish stronger relationships with students and help them move forward. An article was written about how a high school had structured its day, including study halls, to make sure someone was paying attention to the students individually. She asked if District 200 was having conversations about increasing teacher contact with the students in order to build on the relationships. Mr. Prale responded that Glenbrook South High School has a good screening system so that students receive proper attention. OPRFHS study halls provide general academic support and a more studious environment.

Dr. Millard observed that while the focus is on African-American students, it seems that the Hispanic group was also slipping, even though it was a very small number of students. While Mr. Prale agreed, he pointed out that the smaller the stats the more quickly the information may be skewed.

Dr. Lee asked what Mr. Prale personally felt was the best way to enable the Board of Education to inform a mass audience of non-educational professionals, accurately and intelligently, how well the high school was doing at closing the achievement gap using specifics. The Board of Education is given the data it asks for on a routine basis, and Dr. Lee had faith that the District was getting closer to something, but he was not sure how close nor when the Board of Education would be able to tell the public just how close it was to meeting its goal in 2008, and then in 2010, and then in 2012 in a credible way. Mr. Prale would, personally, start with a conversation about what is meant by the achievement gap, as can be defined in multiple ways. Some gaps can be addressed and narrowed while others may be addressed and never narrowed. Yet, all of those gaps converge. Mr. Prale would talk about the gaps that appear in the student data. Students are able to meet or exceed on the eighth grade ISAT and yet may not be in a position to meet or exceed on the EXPLORE test in their junior year based on their skill set when

they enter the high school. There are multiple gaps. One teacher did an experiment and asked his first period class 1) how many students got to bed before midnight and 2) how many had breakfast. He asked the same questions of the second period class. Only one student in the first period class had breakfast; many students in the second period class did have breakfast. While the high school can provide all students with breakfast, etc., will that narrow the achievement gap? There are ranges of experiences that will not be addressed by the high school. He would encourage people to think differently about the multiple gaps. One third of the OPRFHS juniors are not college ready, per ACT predictions. While the school graduated 95 percent of its students, only two-thirds meet and exceed state standards. Dr. Lee asked if he envisioned a program in which the Board of Education takes on the job of teaching the public those things Mr. Prale described with the goal of having the public achieve some level of expertise that it does not currently have. Dr. Weninger noted that he had recently contacted Ms. Foran, OPRFHS Communications and Community Relations Coordinator, about putting out a newsletter that discussed the achievement gap, e.g., what the school was doing, the results being experienced, etc. There was validity to explaining to the public that there were areas in which the school could make a difference and that data could be told in an accurate and intelligent manner for the nonprofessional, as well as letting the public know in which areas the school has no control. OPRFHS needs to do this in the interest of being honest and open.

Dr. Millard added that all parents must participate. Mr. Rigas stated that Dr. Millard's comment did not imply that it was the parent's fault, but it is a component. The community needs to know how it can help move these children forward. Mr. Prale added that the idea of educational programs for parents came up several times in discussions the last week. While Dr. Weninger noted that the school had posted the Outreach Coordinator position and was soliciting members for the African-American Leadership Roundtable, he noted it would all take time. He reminded the Committee members of Dr. Lee's statement that the gap would not be closed in the lifetime of the people on this Board of Education.

Mr. Rigas found Mr. Rouse's report on the parent teacher conferences interesting, as a significant number of parents with at-risk students did not come to the conferences. He suggested implementing a type of big brothers'/big sisters' program for parents. Data shows that 70 percent of the school's parents logged on to the Skyward system to review grades, but that left a portion who either did not take the time or do not have computers. He felt someone should be analyzing the students and determining whether they struggled and if so, the school should be contacting the parents and helping them. The District will not solve this problem internally. People are waiting to be told what to do.

Ms. Patchak-Layman referenced a letter from high school student who would like to start at 10:00 a.m. She noted that grade schools often start at 9:00 a.m. She suggested having a staggered day. Mr. Prale noted that while a conversation about this suggestion could occur, the present Collective Bargaining Agreement might not allow for the staggered start times to the day. Ms. Patchak-Layman added that in a universal system, many families would like their students to have a year round schedule.

Dr. Weninger noted that having parents waiting to help was part of getting the information. OPRFHS and six other high schools participated in a workshop on parental involvement hosted at Harvard University by Dr. Ronald Ferguson. Those other six high schools had positive parental involvement. Dr. Ferguson said parents and schools must take greater responsibility. When asked how one begins to change the mantra that the school is not doing enough to reduce the gap, the response was that the people in the community need to work in concert with the school, not against it. Mr. Rigas noted that there were people in the community who would help if told what to do. With regard to the other communities, one of the problems that this Board of Education has had is that a small number of people with specific complaints took a great number of hours from this Board of Education. Those people are no longer here and not one person has since come to complain to the Board of Education about the Special Education Department or discipline since they left. That distraction was detrimental to the Board of Education and the administration moving students forward. Criticisms need to be balanced and all must come together. A plan is needed.

Ms. Fisher asked if Dr. Weninger was given the history of the programs at the other high schools at the grass roots level. He responded that it was usually begun by just one individual. One was a very successful businessperson who engaged a group of fathers, another was a second grade teacher met with a group of parents, and two others who worked in a school and decided they needed to do something. Their philosophies were not about blaming the school; they were about working with the school. At this point, it is too early to see if these programs have made a difference. Dr. Weninger had been impressed with the positiveness and the take-charge attitude of these people. Dr. Millard asked if this was a direction/opportunity for the parent groups to have one focus and to get one person to take the lead and learn from examples. Mr. Prale stated that the parent representatives on the School Improvement Team (SIP) offered to bring six families to a meeting in an effort to help. Dr. Millard supported tapping into the resources, e.g., sustaining parent involvement by supporting appropriate parental ideas. Mr. Rigas asked for examples. Ms. Patchak-Layman responded that a group of parents once wanted to help and had requested the telephone numbers of families to talk about tutoring programs. The parent group was denied that information. Recently, she learned that the PTO was going to receive the telephone numbers of parents who were not accessing Skyward. Dr. Weninger suggested that the school look at what it might do to ignite a positive viewpoint and then support that, but that would not necessarily mean monetary support.

Dr. Lee noted that there were first two issues: 1) data and 2) educating the public, which evolved to educating the parents. Educating the public and educating the parents are not the same issue. He wanted to focus on a specific goal and lay out plans for developing a roadmap toward specifically reaching that goal. He asked how the Board of Education could maintain focus for developing a plan/roadmap to achieve the goals. He wanted to see meetings devoted to a smaller amount of topics at one time. While brainstorming is valuable, he sees the same pattern every meeting. The Committee is not focusing on one target at a time and modifying those as necessary. Ms. Patchak-Layman suggested taking

one of the established goals, determining what data was related to it, and then deciding if the school should expand the indicators/activities for the following year.

Dr. Millard felt that looking at one goal at a time was too limiting. The original question was how can the school move students forward? These discussions are valuable and sometimes there are things that come out of these grassroots discussions. She would not like a roadmap because she did not want to lose what happened along the way. Mr. Rigas agreed with both Dr. Millard and Dr. Lee. The open discussions make the Committee members think, but in the end, it has to prioritize and put a plan in place. He suggested working on the following: 1) ways to educate the community, and 2) ways to involve the community. While these discussions are great academic experiences, nothing has been accomplished. Dr. Lee reiterated his desire for a roadmap. Ms. Patchak-Layman felt having a roadmap was a reason to look at the Baldrige method as it could provide an overarching framework that would allow for discussion of focus for future planning, the activities, and the reasons.

Dr. Weninger agreed about the focus of the conversation and noted that the school was engaged in 56 initiatives; he had explored how they overlapped and how they were connected. Part of the roadmap is the six proposals/initiatives that the Board of Education approved. The school knows that there is an achievement gap. The school is identifying the at-risk students. Everyone should be mindful not to engage in critical comments, as they do not help find a solution.

Dr. Weninger was asked how the school identifies the programs/initiatives that should be dropped and he responded that the review and evaluation of programs was an initiative; it takes time to look at the cost benefit versus the impact benefit of a program. Ms. Patchak-Layman reminded him that was also the initiative last year. One part of setting the indicators with goals is looking at the six of them this year and determining what number should be used to assess whether the program was working within a specific timeframe, so that information is ongoing. Next year the school would look at another set of indicators that are included in broader indicators.

Dr. Millard stated that the school should not be too focused on the numbers but rather focus on the individual students to see if they are succeeding. That will be a focus for the future and the Board of Education will look for action in those minutes.

Adjournment

The Instruction Committee adjourned at 9:21 a.m.