

**Oak Park and River Forest High School  
201 North Scoville Avenue  
Oak Park, IL 60302**

**POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING  
August 21, 2008**

A Policy Committee meeting was held on Thursday, August 21, 2008, in the Board Room of the Oak Park and River Forest High School. Dr. Lee called the meeting to order at 9:34 a.m. Committee members present were Jacques A. Conway, Valerie J. Fisher, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Sharon Patchak-Layman, and John P. Rigas. Also present were Dr. Attila J. Weninger, Superintendent; Jason Edgecombe, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board.

Visitors included Kay Foran, Community Relations and Communications Coordinator; Becca Bloch, graduate, and Emma Lewis, student; and Terry Dean of the *Wednesday Journal*

**Discussion of Graduation Dress**

Ms. Bloch stated that there was an ideal and appropriate resolution to the proposal to change the graduation dress, which was to adopt the use of caps and gowns. That was the intent of the proposal submitted.

Mr. Rigas referenced her previous comment that students were apathetic on the subject of the graduation dress. Ms. Bloch explained that by the time a student is a senior, the idea of a white dress, etc., is ingrained in a student. On principle, this should not be a decision for the students, but for the Board of Education, because it relates to District policy and rationale. Graduation is not for students; it is for the students, parents and the community. Mr. Rigas concurred that it was the Board of Education's decision to make based on information from the students. The Board of Education received her input and asked if there should not be a broader-based group of people interested in changing the dress. Ms. Bloch stated that the Board of Education was provided with a petition with over 200 signatures on it. The students who are not apathetic agree with her point of view. Students are not opposed to a change. If the Board of Education uses the conventional method of gathering student input, apathy will reign. If the Board of Education wants a dialogue with students that reflect the whole student body, it will not occur because they do not care enough to come to the table.

Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that she has heard comments from parents in support of caps and gowns. In order to make it more distinguished, she suggested that students could help design stoles that would bridge the individuality of the students and the tradition. Even though there have been articles in *Wednesday Journal* and the *Oak Leaves*, the public has yet to respond negatively to this suggestion.

Dr. Weninger asked why the proposal suggested monochromic gowns instead of having one color for boys and one for girls. Ms. Bloch responded that it was a problem for students who do not feel comfortable identifying with one gender. She suggested having both orange and blue,

but not differentiating between boys and girls. The Board of Education should do this to make all students feel comfortable, even those who feel they are the fringe.

Ms. Patchak-Layman suggested that the timing might be difficult as there may not be enough time for the seniors to adjust. She asked Ms. Bloch what timeline would be appropriate. Ms. Bloch had hoped that the switch to caps and gowns would occur this coming year.

Dr. Lee asked Terry Dean if the *Wednesday Journal* ever did opinion polls. Mr. Dean responded that they have been done on the website, but not in the newspaper for at least three years. He did not believe the *Journal* would be opposed to the idea, but it has not been pursued. He will post the question to the editor.

Mr. Rigas reiterated his thoughts that graduation was for the students; it is a milestone for them. This is their first major accomplishment. Ms. Bloch felt the emphasis should be on academic achievement. Mr. Rigas did not believe the parents and the community should outvote the students. In addition, while Ms. Bloch agreed, she stated there was an inconsistency in the goals of the Board of Education, the school, and this policy, i.e., differentiating based on gender. The Board of Education should look at this as a principled issue and not an issue of procedure.

Mr. Rouse reported that he had been advised to have conversations with students about commencement as a whole. He welcomed that opportunity and he agreed to report to the Board of Education. Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that it was about the involvement of how one dresses that day. It is not just a black and white activity; there were shades of grey.

Dr. Lee stated that this discussion is to determine whether the Board of Education should deal with this issue as a formal policy. If these students had not brought the question forward, the Board of Education would not be discussing it. Dr. Lee asked where the Board of Education should be in terms of dress code and involvement.

While Ms. Fisher agreed about gathering input and that many students had presented input, she did not agree with the idea that apathy is defined by students who support the traditional way. She wanted to see meetings with various cross sections of students attending, and a student-wide vote at some point. Anyone who would participate would be equally meaningful. Graduation is for the students. Dr. Lee concurred; he was concerned about the message it conveyed to the student body that it had no valid opinion.

Mr. Rigas recommended that Mr. Rouse work with a cross section of student groups on the subject of commencement. Mr. Rigas said that apathy is the person who does not vote. Ms. Bloch explained her use of the word apathy. To her, when a student says he/she does not feel like discussing this subject, it is apathy. Ms. Fisher observed that they might just not want to have a conversation about the subject; it does not mean they do not care about it; they may just support the traditional dress.

The Policy Committee directed the administration to put together the mechanisms for input from the various sources and to come back with a proposal in November.

Ms. Patchak-Layman stated that what has been presented – is the inconsistencies of the school and the values that the community has. That is the question the students need to discuss. Will there be consistency? Will the school be held accountable with its actions? This is an example of what needs to be addressed. Ms. Bloch stated that it was feasible but it was difficult because students did not want to talk about the issue. Ms. Patchak-Layman suggested using it as a colloquium, bringing it before - English and/or history classes.

The Committee appreciated the students' interest in this.

### **Approval of the Policy Committee Minutes for June and July**

It was the consensus of the Policy Committee members to accept the Policy Committee minutes of June and July 2008.

### **Agenda Modifications**

Policy 3610 is up for first reading, not second. Policy 1150 is up for second reading not first.

### **Consideration of Policy 5132, Activity Programs**

Mr. Edgecombe read the comments from parents and community members about Policy 5132, Activity Programs.

Donna Weigel had only one question, where does the boys' hockey team fall in with this policy? I understand they are a club sport but I believe they need to follow the same policy that the other athletes and co-curricular kids are entitled to. What are the ideas of the school and the school board?

It was explained that ice hockey is not a school sport. It is not recognized by the IHSA as a competitive club; thus, the sanctions that apply to IHSA clubs and activities do not apply to the clubs. Basically, it is the community members who volunteer to participate in them. Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that people draw different conclusions because a club such as Ice Hockey is highlighted in the yearbook. Ms. Fisher agreed that it was a complicated situation. Dr. Weninger stated that most high schools now accommodate certain non-school sanctioned clubs and activities by listing them in their yearbooks, their newspapers, etc. However, the athletes would not receive a varsity jacket and they would not be recognized by the athletic department.

Pam Mizen said, "Great idea! All OPRFHS students should act in a responsible manner, *especially* when representing our community. I believe the entire music department should be included, not just the jazz, strings, or marching band. Orchestra, Wind Ensemble, Choir, and other music disciplines travel abroad every year. Their behavior should not be exempt from these rules."

Katherine Metz said, “I’m an OPRF parent & have read proposed changes - here are my questions:

“Why is Ice Hockey not listed? Ping Pong club? Rowing/Crew? Perhaps other club athletics I am not aware of?”

“There are more than just 2 Jazz groups, are there not?”

“Does “Musical Theatre” include all Drama groups? What about Stage Crew?”

“Shouldn’t Wrestling be listed under Girls also? (Or specify that it is open to boys and girls in your communications)”

“Thank you!”

Dr. Weninger responded to a question about whether bands were listed, they were all listed.

Ms. Patchak-Layman asked if parents were notified if a violation were to occur. Page 6 and 9 indicates that parents are notified “upon the offense.” Dr. Weninger suggested making that clearer in the policy, however.

Discussion ensued regarding medical histories. Sponsors will have any necessary information and the students list the medications on their emergency forms. Ms. Patchak-Layman continued that some medications that students take might have no impact. Some parents were concerned about mental illness and not wanting that information known. Dr. Lee stated that the fact that a student might be considered to be in violation of the *Code of Conduct* as a result of not wanting to list those types of medications was a discussion about the *Code of Conduct* and not for the Policy Committee. Dr. Weninger referred to the wording of “should” in the policy.

It was the consensus of the Policy Committee members to recommend to the Board of Education that it amend Policy 5132, Activity Programs, at its regular August Board of Education meeting.

### **Policy 1150, Student Publicity and Media Relations**

It was the consensus of the Policy Committee members to recommend that the Board of Education approve Policy 1150, Student Publicity and Media Relations, at its regular August Board of Education meeting, for first reading

Ms. Patchak-Layman noted that the medical emergency forms this year had a box added to it so that parents could opt out their children from any publicity events. She was concerned that this would make it difficult when having for example, the robotics fair where the press is invited. The fair is press friendly and the reporters should be able to speak with students, as this is a positive profile of the school. It would be cumbersome to have to go back and review all of the publicity forms. Ms. Foran stated that was why the form was changed. The District is trying to honor the Board of Education’s concern and the families’ desires to ensure that they have the ultimate say so on publicity, especially on the website. There had been many incidents where

parents are reluctant to have their children's names or images in a public setting. We have a responsibility to honor the desires of families and students in terms of publicizing the children. Balancing the respect of family wishes with daily public relations opportunities was the reason it was incorporated as part of the emergency form. Teachers can look on Skyward to see if their students are cleared for publicity. If a student does not have that option and it would be a great asset to having him/her speak to the reporter, Ms. Foran makes an appeal directly to the parent. The District has reached a balance on protecting families' privacy, media rights, and community interest. Ms. Foran stated that approximately 100 families opted out last year. Ms. Patchak-Layman reiterated her concern that it delayed opportunities for positive information to get to the press. Ms. Foran assured her that the old system was far more cumbersome.

Legal Counsel advises that if there is no response from the parent, the response is no. Since the procedures have changed, it does not seem to be an issue any more.

Ms. Foran stated that some families are adamant about their sons' or daughters' names or pictures not being shown. In such cases, the classroom or other venue will be arranged differently and the photographers/reporters are asked not to take pictures or speak to these students. Mr. Rigas asked how this was handled with the *Trapeze*, the school's internal newspaper. The response was basically, they have free reign. *Trapeze* has a unique role, is a part of the curriculum, and is not operating with the same ground rules. She has had conversations with the sponsor about this, however.

### **Policy 3610, Automated External Defibrillators**

It was the consensus of the Policy Committee to recommend that the Board of Education approve Policy 3610, Automated External Defibrillators, for first reading at its regular August Board of Education meeting.

The changes to this policy reflect the new locations of the AED's.

### **1140, Gifts to the District**

While discussion began regarding Policy 1140, Gifts to the District, it was the consensus of the Committee to bring this forward at the next meeting.

### **Adjournment**

At 10:42 a.m., the Policy Committee adjourned.