

August 18, 2008

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Monday, August 18, 2008, in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order

President Conway called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: John C. Allen, IV; Jacques A. Conway (departed at 10:00 a.m.), Valerie J. Fisher, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, Sharon Patchak-Layman (arrived at 8:09 a.m.), and John P. Rigas (departed at 10:00 a.m.). Also present were Dr. Attila J. Weninger, Superintendent, Jason Edgecombe, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources (departed at 9:42 a.m.); Nathaniel L. Rouse, Principal; Cheryl L. Witham, Chief Financial Officer (arrived at 9:46 a.m.); and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/ Clerk of the Board of Education.

Visitors

Kay Foran, Communications/Community Relations Coordinator

Visitor Comments

No comments were received.

Discussion of District Goals

Mr. Conway invited comments from the Board of Education regarding the goals. Dr. Lee felt it critical that each Board of Education member talk about his/her expectations of the meeting. There was consensus of the Board of Education that the meeting would end by 10:00 a.m. Dr. Lee began the discussion of expectations.

Dr. Lee proposed the following goal for next year.

Quantitative Mass Achievement Measures

The school district will 1) describe, as precisely as possible, what we mean by “student academic achievement”, 2) describe, as precisely as possible, what we mean by “racial academic achievement gap”, 3) define quantitative mass indicators of both of the foregoing, 4) describe the specific limitations of these indicators regarding the validity of their use, and 5) describe the specific formal processes by which we will improve both the definitions and the use of those definitions over time.

Dr. Lee felt a discussion of the specific indicators of accomplishment of this goal and its sub-parts would be necessary only after the Board of Education had agreed on the goal.

Dr. Weninger distributed a copy of suggested goals from DLT. One suggestion expanded on Dr. Lee's proposed goal by including Districts 90 and 97 in the defining of student achievement.

Dr. Lee did not believe the Board of Education should reaffirm last year's goals and add new ones. He noted that Goals 1 and 2 from last year could not be evaluated and they were too vague. It was also unreasonable to evaluate goals with data that is not available until the first week of June and then for the Board of Education to have to make decisions on it by June 30 for the following year. He suggested devising a mechanism that would allow the Board of Education to extend the evaluation of those items into the July/August timeframe. Mr. Conway concurred that it was important to see what is useable and measurable.

Dr. Millard agreed with Dr. Lee's point as the achievement of African-Americans has been an OPRFHS goal for a long time, yet the definition and measures have not been described. She wanted to focus on community-wide goals versus global goals; she wanted them defined and given descriptors as to how they would be measured. She also wanted the Board of Education to think about how OPRFHS is seen beyond its boundaries.

Ms. Patchak-Layman felt that there were two sets of goals, e.g., 1) Board goals that encompass the school and community or the District goals, and 2) the Board of Education goals that affect the Board of Education itself now. The District would always have the goal of student achievement. Yearly goals are for determining the focus for the coming year. The administration provides information regarding discipline, grading, how race plays a part of grading, etc., and the Board of Education looks to see which areas need its focus. While last year she suggested that the Board of Education goal be strategic planning, this year she suggested that OPRFHS apply for the Baldrige National Quality Award, which looks at staffing, leadership, vision, goals, quantifies them, and compares them to other organizations in the nation. It includes baselines by surveying both the staff and leadership, e.g., how are Board-level decisions translated to leadership and then to the staff. The district answers questions and examiners with the US Commerce Standards Division review the answers to see if there is alignment. Ultimately, a systematic look would show areas in need of support in meeting the goals. She used the analogy of the school having to look at putting out fires in various areas constantly, rather than having the correct system to put preventive measures in place.

Mr. Rigas suggested that the Board of Education have fewer goals versus more goals and then prioritize them. The Baldrige

program is a three-to-five year program. He would welcome that discussion at another date. Mr. Allen was familiar with this program and noted that the District would have to hire an additional person to manage it.

Significant discussion was devoted to Dr. Lee's proposed goal. There was consensus not to include the involvement of Districts 90 and 97 in the defining of student achievement so that OPRFHS can move forward in on its own; the Board of Education thought agreement on definitions might be include lengthy discussions with no resolutions because as OPRFHS testing sets are more stringent than the ones at the elementary schools. OPRFHS needs to determine a baseline for incoming freshmen and then it needs to determine where seniors are when they exit the high school. Thus, it was the consensus of the majority of the Board of Education members to support Dr. Lee's proposed goal as written.

Dr. Lee stated that he avoided talking about specific indicators with the understanding that the Board of Education had to specify those indicators; he saw that as a separate process. Ms. Patchak-Layman asked if Dr. Lee's goal were to improve academic achievement of all students. Dr. Lee replied affirmatively; it is the development of one tool that would be used in the process of closing the achievement gap. How movement would be evaluated was yet to be determined. Dr. Lee presented this goal for a group rather than individual students; a mass indicator would not allow this to be applied to an individual student.

Ms. Patchak-Layman felt defining student achievement is based on what the community considers the measure of academic achievement. Dr. Lee believed the Board of Education members were the chief representatives of the community. Individual community members are welcome to provide input relative to describing what is meant by academic achievement. This is an open meeting and the public and the media were invited to attend. Mr. Conway, Ms. Fisher, and Dr. Millard concurred with Dr. Lee. This goal does not preclude further community input.

Ms. Fisher asked for an example of a descriptor as noted in Dr. Lee's goal. Dr. Lee reiterated the question of what the District means by student academic achievement. The Board of Education could determine nine indicators that it would consider the most important components of academic achievements. Maybe more would be needed or perhaps less would be needed. However, a list of the most significant descriptors of academic achievement would meet the qualifications of No. 1 "describe, as precisely as possible, what the we mean by 'student academic achievement,'" as long as it was covered by No. 5, "describe the specific formal processes by

which we will improve both the definitions and the use of those definitions over time” indicating when the Board of Education would consider modifying the list of descriptors. It must be fluid in order to be able to modify it. The Board of Education will soon find out if there are too many or too few indicators.

Other goals were considered: 1) the definition of institutional excellence; 2) professional faculty development; and 3) school climate with staff with baselines done by the Baldrige organization or communication.

With regarding to the definition of institutional excellence, Dr. Weninger reported that the Board of Education approved, as part of the proposals in February, defining institutional excellence; a partial update was presented in June and a follow up report will be presented in September or October. Dr. Lee responded that he thought the issue of overall institutional excellence was what Ms. Sharon Patchak-Layman had spoken about, e.g., the Baldrige Award. He thought the Board of Education was talking about how broadly or narrowly these goals should be focused.

Dr. Lee stated that school climate was in the eye of the beholder. Mr. Edgecombe stated that school climate is important and it should be looked at as a thermometer. Taking the temperature of the staff in March would have been different from taking it in April/May. If the Board of Education wants the administration to make decisions for the long term, it may have to make decisions that will affect the temperature at times. Mr. Rouse concurred. Mr. Rigas and Dr. Millard stated that one could not define or measure climate and, thus, should not be a goal. Dr. Lee stated that it was a problem of perspective. Most agreed that school climate was important but not something the Board of Education could define as a goal.

Discussion then turned to having a goal of communication relative to all factions of the community. It was noted that the most staff have unions through which to communicate. Discussion ensued about utilizing a 360 survey, but it was noted that this should be an administrative decision, not a Board of Education decision. Making it a Board of Education goal would have a different connotation than a suggestion from the administration.

Mr. Allen’s daughter had a difficult time with the registration process. He suggested having better communication around that process e.g., doing a random sample phone survey of parents to see how the experience was for them, etc.

It was noted that most people communicate when there is a problem. Complaints help with the problems in the system; they help determine if it is a singular problem or something that has happened frequently. At what point does it become a Board of Education-level discussion. Dr. Lee asked at what point did a complaint rise to the point of generating a District-wide goal. He suggested hearing the complaints over a year or two and then possibly making a decision at a Board of Education level. This is an administrative goal.

While Dr. Millard did not believe indicators, as bullets, should be added to the goals, as they should be determined by the administrators, Ms. Sharon Patchak-Layman disagreed. If the one-hundred repeat students in the discipline system were not doing well academically, she, as a Board of Education member, wanted to be able to diminish the time they spent in the discipline system and assist them in bringing up their academics. If there is no improvement, the Board of Education needs to focus on it and, thus, it becomes a bullet. Mr. Rigas said those were indicators, just as grades and behavior are indicators, as well as students who participate in co-curricular activities.

Dr. Millard asked if the description of Items 1, 2, and 3, of Dr. Lee's goal were not the indicators. She asked if the indicators would then become Board of Education goals and the measures for performance of the organization. Dr. Lee replied negatively. The goals would be the goals and the indicators the indicators. He did not want to mix the two. Indicators could change as the District moves forward.

Dr. Weninger asked what the Board of Education looked at with regard to the goal of student achievement. Mr. Rigas stated that the problem with that goal is that in any one year, the movement is small. What will the school do to keep itself on the path of collapsing gap? Dr. Weninger suggested updating the plan annually and reporting on the initiatives. Dr. Lee concurred.

Dr. Lee understood that those were initial steps while the Board of Education put together a long-range comprehensive plan. What has been adopted is what the District will do starting this year, because it had not committed to a longer-range comprehensive plan. He used the term "stop-gap" measures. He had reviewed prior discussions where the Board of Education had chosen five or six points to develop from the October plan, as it adopted a long-range plan. The Board of Education then moved sideways to incorporate the discussions about race and student achievement rather than the long-range plans. Dr. Weninger did not see identifying indices of achievement, i.e., institutional excellence, as

top gap measures but as laying a foundation for components of a long-term plan. Dr. Lee accepted that explanation.

Dr. Lee asked if the goal of the Board of Education could be to develop a long-range plan for student achievement, which would include refining the plan in place, implementing and evaluating the items agreed to last February, modifying them, adjusting them, etc. In February, the Board of Education would again review the indices.

Using Dr. Weninger's suggestions and Dr. Lee's goal, it was the consensus of the Board of Education that the goals, in order of importance, would be as follows:

- 1) Student Achievement and Participation in Co-curricular Programs.
- 2) The school district will 1) describe, as precisely as possible, what we mean by "student academic achievement", 2) describe, as precisely as possible, what we mean by "racial academic achievement gap", 3) define quantitative mass indicators of both of the foregoing, 4) describe the specific limitations of these indicators regarding the validity of their use, and 5) describe the specific formal processes by which we will improve both the definitions and the use of those definitions over time.
- 3) Recruitment and Employment Program with emphasis on minority hires and retention.
- 4) "Green" School Initiative.

Regarding the "Green" School Initiative, the superintendent will recommend indicators and then modify them as necessary.

The Board of Education instructed Dr. Weninger to draft goal statements and to list indicators of success and measures for goals numbered one, three, and four, for further discussion at the Thursday, August 21, Board of Education meeting.

Adjournment

At 10:03 a.m. on Monday, August 18, 2008, Dr. Millard moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Mr. Allen. A roll call vote resulted in five ayes. Mr. Rigas and Mr. Conway had departed.

Jacques A. Conway
President

Dr. Ralph H. Lee
Secretary