

LEAGUE of WOMEN VOTERS™ OAK PARK / RIVER FOREST



**Oak Park District 97 Board of Education
October 13, 2009**

Kathleen Sheehan, Observer

Board Members present: Barber, Clauser, Gates, Harton, Reddy, Spatz, and Traczyk
Also Present: Superintendent Collins, Secretary Marinier

The meeting began ten minutes late, at 7:40. Two individuals made public comment, both of whom, for different reasons, placed FOIA requests with the district. The first resident was from the Illinois Vaccine Awareness Coalition and had requested information from the district last July and had only received partial answers. The second resident had filed a FOIA request seeking specific information on the district's hiring process. In general, he was seeking practical examples of transparency in the hiring process.

A presentation from the Agreement with Early Childhood Collaboration and a presentation from Special Services on Disproportionality were the two major reports of the evening.

Early Childhood Collaboration

Former District 97 board member Carolyn Newberry-Schwartz and chair of the Early Childhood Collaboration on Care and Education, Joan White, presented this report on the past year's accomplishments and plans for 2010. In the past year the Collaboration has adopted a strategic plan, hired an executive director, and perhaps most significantly, hired a coordinator for the Publicly Funded Preschool Collaboration. Newberry-Schwartz's comments highlighted the benefits of a variety of referral mechanisms to ensure that the organization is reaching the most at-risk kids, including the "Physicians Network" which provides developmental screenings. The Collaboration also conducts vision and hearing screenings for 3 and 4 year olds. Additionally, the Collaboration is focusing on professional development in child care centers. They would like to see the state standards for preschool teachers raised while they provide on-site center based training as well as plan to address the need to have teachers conference with/be able to talk to parents. Ideally they would like to have leaders work with each staff person around a professional development plan. Both Newberry-Schwartz and White stressed that District 97, with the funding of the preschool coordinator position, has an outstanding program and is developing a nice cohort of professionals. Lastly, the Collaboration launched a major donor campaign and secured \$43,000 in major gifts for FY 2010.

Dispoportionality

Michael Padavic of Special Services introduced consultant Sue Gamm, and the two delivered a presentation on disproportionality in special education in Oak Park. Ms. Gamm's research presents the issue through the lenses of race and ethnicity. It is important to understand the two types of disabilities: obvious and judgmental. Equally important but far more difficult to manage is being able to discern whether the child's traits are internal or due to limited opportunity and support. In assessing whether or not a child has been appropriately identified one needs to know what is going on in general education before a child is referred. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has found that disproportionate representation in Oak Park is not due to inappropriate identification. Additionally,

Oak Park appears to be doing things to “dodge the storm” as Gamm put it, by conducting universal screenings of every child, every year, at all elementary grade levels, providing a three tiered intervention, progress monitoring and differentiation, with an emphasis on the latter two. Ultimately, the district is using test results to impact instruction. Mr. Padavic pointed out that “classroom teachers understand that decisions can be made with data.” At some schools, data teams are used to be sure that what is supposed to be happening is really happening, that the needed interventions (what is used to access the curriculum) are implemented “with fidelity.”

The meeting had not yet adjourned when this observer left at 10:15.

(www.op97.org)