

Oak Park River Forest League of Women Voters Eyewitness Report

Observed by Mary Haley

Date: August 22, 2017

Meeting Length: 2hr. 30 min

Meeting Name: District 200 School Board

Headline: Board and Community Discuss Equity for Transgender Students

The board and more than 20 community members spoke about what OPRFHS should do to make the school a safer and more welcoming environment for its transgender students. Owen Daniel McCarter, an OPRF alum and executive director of the Illinois Safe School Alliance, described his experiences as a student in Oak Park and offered the Alliance as resource in helping the district develop policy and procedures. McCarter emphasized the importance of policies and procedures to prevent people from bending and breaking the rules.

Current students and parents shared their diverse experiences at OPRFHS. Some praised their teachers and councilors, while others spoke of being treated disrespectfully and being harassed.

One common theme of the public comments was that when students use their energy worrying about how to stay safe at school, they have less ability to focus and learn. Suicide, depression, self-harm, dropping out and lower GPAs are common dangers prevalent among transgender students.

Some improvements suggested by the speakers were: continuity of policy and procedures throughout the three school districts, improved teacher training and more inclusive materials, especially in the literature selections.

Dr. Pruitt-Adams, District 200 superintendent, explained that while the district does have policy on transgender students, it is not robust enough and needs to be addressed. Changes in curriculum and locker room facilities need to be made. Changes to the physical plant can be part of IMAGINE OPRF.

All the board members supported Dr. Pruitt-Adams and offered their own insights about what needs to be done. Mr. Iseli suggested implementing changes as they are developed rather than waiting until the process is complete. Ms. Cassell proposed developing individual gender plans similar to IEPs. Dr. Moore pointed out that District 200 can use the expertise of districts that have already worked on this issue. She also urged the district to be sensitive to students who do not have family support.

