



**Oak Park River Forest District 200 Board of Education
January 24, 2008**

Angelika Kuehn, Observer

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. All board members (Allen, Conway (chair), Fisher, Lee, Millard, Patchak-Layman and Rigas) were present. Superintendent Weninger and senior administrators were present. Some ten local residents were present in the visitors' section.

This report describes proceedings on the three significant topics on the lengthy agenda.

Administration and Staff Openings

Applicants are being sought for the positions of principal, assistant principal for human safety, assistant principal for student services, and heads of the Physical Education and Science divisions. Superintendent Weninger and others reported that extensive efforts including non-traditional ones are being made to recruit a large enough pool for each position to allow for adequate minority representation.

Censure of Member Patchak-Layman

Background: In September of 2007 member Patchak-Layman accompanied a parent to a meeting with a school staff member in a special education matter and, after litigation was filed against the school board regarding the matter, participated in closed board sessions about the litigation. The board addressed this conduct in open and closed sessions over the following four months. At the January board meeting, after lengthy discussion, chair Conway stated that action would be taken at the February meeting.

Before the board considered the censure resolution, four members of the public made comments in support of member Patchak-Layman and one read a supporting letter from an absent author.

The written censure resolution refers to the board policy requiring members to avoid conflicts of interest, the appearance of impropriety, and private action that might compromise the board or administration, and to members' oath of office that mirrors the policy. The resolution concludes that member Patchak-Layman's conduct violated both the policy and her oath of office. It rebukes her for the described actions.

Member Allen proposed the resolution and member Fisher seconded. Member Patchak-Layman read a statement saying that she is passionate about empowering citizens, especially those marginalized, in decision-making concerning the school, and will help when asked, as that is advocacy for all and not for one. She does not consider her actions to have been a conflict of interest according to many lawyers she consulted and her reading of the legal cases cited by the board's attorneys. She considers the prohibition against private action to bar indictable offenses, not what she did, and she did not consider herself an advocate for the parent even though the parent did.

Member Lee disagreed with member Patchak-Layman, but considered the board's resolution to be the equivalent of a tantrum about a topic that the public has no interest in. Member Lee moved to table the censure resolution; member Patchak-Layman seconded the motion. It failed, receiving no other support.

Member Millard said she was not troubled by a board member giving advice to a parent or accompanying the parent to a meeting, but the board member should not then be involved in closed sessions concerning the resulting litigation. Member Fisher stated that the described conduct was a very serious matter and that in recounting the event, member Patchak-Layman benefited from the board's oath of confidentiality. Member Allen stated that as an attorney he takes conflicts of interest very seriously, that the conduct created an appearance of impropriety, and that it should not be minimized. Member Rigas said that the minutes of prior meetings on the topic contradict statements that member Patchak-Layman made this evening and that it is hard to trust a person who advocates for someone who takes legal action against the district.

Chair Conway stated that member Patchak-Layman took the parent to the staff member's office for the purpose of confrontation and that the staff member felt handicapped.

Member Lee questioned the purpose of the resolution as it would not change any behavior on member Patchak-Layman's part and believed that it resulted from the board's frustration about member Patchak-Layman's requiring the board to spend enormous amounts of time to deal with matters of lesser importance.

The roll call was taken on the resolution with members Lee, Millard, and Patchak-Layman voting no, the other members voting yes.

No mention was made of what role, if any, the District 200 Local Ethics Commission (whose members' appointments were renewed during the prior regular meeting of the board) played in this matter.

Special Meetings to Discuss Race and Student Achievement

Member Allen stated that the first of the three scheduled meetings had to be canceled because no facilitator could be found in the short time allowed. All persons who had been asked to facilitate had asked what goals the board hoped to achieve with these meetings. Member Allen suggested that the board members should preliminarily identify objectives, and discussion ensued about how that should be done.

[Observer's note. The microphone system performed poorly although all board members but one made an effort to be heard. Chair Conway asked the Assistant Superintendent of Operations to look into purchasing a new system. Three of the residents who had spoken during the public comment period laughed and jeered throughout the consideration of the censure resolution.]