

**Official Minutes of the  
Oak Park Board of Education District 97  
260 Madison Street, Oak Park  
January 20, 2021 Special Meeting**

This meeting was held virtually using Zoom during the time of the Coronavirus pandemic. Everyone participated via electronic means.

Vice President Kim called the meeting to order at 3:32 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Broy, Kim, Spurlock, Liebl, and Kearney  
Absent: Moore and Breymaier  
Also Present: Superintendent Dr. Carol Kelley, Director of Communications Amanda Siegfried, Senior Director of Technology Michael Arensdorff, Senior Director of Human Resources Gina Herrmann, Chief Academic and Accountability Office Eboney Lofton, Associate Superintendent of Education Felicia Starks Turner, Senior Director of Equity Carrie Kamm, Consultant Rob Grossi, and Board Secretary Sheryl Marinier.

PUBLIC  
COMMENT

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Vice President Kim explained that public comments will be read for 15 minutes. Those that are not read during that time will be read at the end of the meeting and posted in these minutes. Liebl expressed concern about voting before all of the public comments were read. The majority of the board agreed to read the rest of the public comments at the end of the meeting.

**Susan Raphael**

First of all, thank you for your service- this is not an easy job during these crazy times. So many meetings and issues to ponder-I salute you for the hard work and dedication.

As a District 97 parent of three kids that are thriving during remote learning- two 4<sup>th</sup> graders at Irving and a 7<sup>th</sup> Grader at Julian- I have been reserved in my thoughts on the back to school plan. In my mind, this was not about my kids, but rather for the benefit of the kids that are struggling. I don't think I was alone in this thought as I heard the public comments read about kids and their challenges with remote learning while others fine with remote learning were mostly silent.

However, after learning about the final plan- I cannot be silent anymore. I question why we are attempting to disrupt a remote learning program that is working for so many, why are we placing so much burden on our teachers to learn how to re-teach again-now livestream in and in-person as well as the health risk. However, after learning that so few of our African American families are choosing hybrid- why are we pursuing plans that move us backward on educational equity rather than focusing on continuing to improve the remote learning experience? Instead, why not only continue to serve the highest-need kids in person?

I continue to hear how students are falling behind in reading and math and thus need in-person. I just don't see how in-person school under Covid will improve if teachers can't work with students individually. We need to be honest with families on what to expect and to be reasonable on the outcomes.

However, the most concerning part of the new plan is the loss of live specials for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders and possibly all grades. This plan takes away time with their teacher for art, music, library and Spanish. This is special time for many kids- the opportunity to connect with their teacher, play their harmonica, sing and engage in art. There is such a difference between a live music class and watching a video of what is supposed to be done. So many kids will have no art or music unless it is offered live by the district.

I have also heard that chorus, band and orchestra lessons are in question. We all saw the beautiful video that District 97 kids made for the holidays- this all goes away for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders under this current plan.

I think many of us were silent because we never saw hybrid as a reality in District 97 with the prior metrics too hard to achieve or maybe more of us would have raised our voice of concern and support of the status quo, but now the metrics used by District 97 have changed and hybrid is looking more like a reality than ever before.

I know District 97 staff have put in uncountable number of hours in the new plan, but I ask of you to reconsider this direction or at least find a way to provide our students with live music and art classes. For these 5<sup>th</sup> graders, this is the last year that they have art and music specials since once they enter middle school- they have to choose one. Thus, it's more important than ever to provide these kids with live classes in both art and music.

I hope each Board Member is not silent this afternoon like the last meeting where only one question was asked of the plan, but rather asks the hard questions like you usually do and continues to find creative answers to meet the needs of the District 97 community.

### **Molly Hertel**

First, I wanted to thank you for your continued work to develop a Hybrid plan that is responsive to the community feedback and flexible to the changing environment of this pandemic. I realize this is uncharted territory for all of us.

I did want to express my dismay at the recent shift away from looking at community spread metrics. When we completed the hybrid learning survey for our kids, we were under the impression that the district would be accounting for the level of community spread in its decision to shift to hybrid. It came as quite a surprise last week to see that the district was going to change their metrics (or abandon them completely?) after asking parents to make a decision about hybrid. Since that time, I have reviewed the cited paper. As the district moves away from these metrics of community spread, I sincerely hope there is a commitment to implementing most of the rigorous standards laid out in the paper, including:

- “Achieving 4-6 air changes per hour of 'clean' air through any combination of ventilation and filtration (or outdoor classrooms)” How is the district implementing this aspect of infection control in its buildings?
- “Robust quarantine policies and contact tracing practices.” How will be transparent about what these policies are and who will be impacted if a student or teacher tests positive in the school or classroom? Will the district be implementing the recommended school-level infection control teams? How will district support the schools in this effort?
- “Surveillance testing for educators, paraprofessionals, and other staff is recommended in order to reduce the risk of asymptomatic transmission, once the level of community spread has exceeded 20/100,000 daily new cases.” I believe our community spread (calculated weekly) is nearly double that level. Therefore, is the district implementing this recommendation from the paper? If not, why not?

### **Sarah Boyle**

I am a ten-year resident of Oak Park, a teacher and director at the summer CAST program, and the wife of a teacher at Percy Julian Middle School. First I want to thank each of you for responding to the Herculean task of navigating how to best operate our schools amidst an unprecedented pandemic, and to do so with so much thorough planning, hard work, communication, and grace.

During this pandemic and the decisions we individually and collectively make are literally life-saving. I know the decision to shut our school buildings and to move to virtual learning was a very difficult one, and would have not been done unless you believed there was, in fact, a grave and real danger. I also know that although you plan to open our school buildings to students again on February 1st that you must believe that there are still real dangers to doing so, otherwise why would the district still offer a virtual option for families at all? It is clear that, although there is very important learning that is happening virtually, the best and most equitable environment for learning is obviously still in our classrooms, if it is safe enough to do so.

The question that I have for you is this- how safe is it to open our classrooms? It seems that by giving parents the option for their children to remain remote or to move to a hybrid model we are shifting the burden of this decision on each individual family. Each family must examine the benefits and risks of continuing to learn remotely and the benefits and risks of entering into the hybrid model and decide for themselves what to do.

How much responsibility do you believe that you have to help inform parents before they make this decision? And what information do you plan to share with them beforehand? Do you plan to tell them that although early studies in European countries suggested that it might be relatively safe to open school buildings, more recent studies within the United States have uncovered more risks? That a study from Tulane University and another from the University of Washington and Michigan State University have shown that when case rates and/or hospitalizations for Covid-19 are higher that it seems like schools do play a detectable role in spread? In Michigan 21 new cases per day per 100,000 residents in areas where schools were open lead to increases in community spread. In Washington the threshold where spread was observed was even lower at 5 new cases per 100,000 per day. I could not collect information on Oak Park's case load specifically on the IDPH website, but last week River Forest, our closest neighbor, had 385 cases per 100,000, or an average of 55 cases per day per 100,000, well over the Michigan or Washington thresholds that predict opening school buildings would lead to greater community spread of this deadly disease. Additionally this week in Illinois we have seen our first case of the new variant from the UK, B.1.1.7, and a variant that epidemiologists believe is even more contagious.

Will you ask them to consider the potential trauma they may expose themselves to by possibly increasing the likelihood that those around them may die? Will we tell them that teachers and support staff have not been given an option to work remotely and must all work in-person, even if their age or medical condition puts them at high risk and doctors have advised them to shelter-in-place? That by sending our kids to school, our students may be more likely to experience the death of their teachers? Also because community spread may be greater they may be more likely to experience the death of family members, friends, and neighbors that are still not vaccinated and are also high risk? And if so what support do the schools plan to offer those students who are in grief?

Will you tell them the schools are not planning to do any testing for Covid-19, that the schools will not provide students and staff with tests and will not require testing- even when a student or staff member has tested positive, so you do not plan to track asymptomatic spread?

Will you tell the parents of students in our middle schools that during their 2 mornings of in-person learning every three weeks they will be seated 6 feet apart and working independently, while the lesson is co-taught to remote learners, and that the classroom environment in many ways will still not resemble pre-pandemic teaching in the way that parents might hope or expect? That in the classroom they will work on a project that falls outside of their classroom curriculum, and that they will lose time geared towards core curriculum, so it seems that any benefits of in-person learning are not academically geared but instead seem to be more social in aim and scope?

Will you tell them that in its rollout of this hybrid program last week two teachers have already tested positive for Covid-19 at Irving School? That you are doing what you can to make these in-person school environments as safe as possible, but that “safe as possible,” as evidenced already by the cases in our own schools, is different than “safe?”

I think of my mother-in-law, a 40-year resident of Oak Park. She is living in her home with Alzheimer’s disease. She has never held my 7-month old son. She is not at a nursing home and has not been offered vaccination yet. She has different caregivers coming in and out of her house, and she is always at risk. I think of my husband’s aunt and uncle living in town who are still going into stores because they do not have even an answering machine- let alone internet- at their house, and they have trouble navigating the technology that could help to keep them safe. I think of all of the community members and teachers I know who are high-risk. I know vaccinations are coming to them in the next few months. I think of all of our hard work as a community. We have all put in a year of sacrifice to help keep our community safe, and we are so close to the finish line. I hope that my mother-in-law will survive this pandemic and be able to hold my son.

I feel we need to inform these families so that they can make the most educated decision possible. We owe it to our community. These parents need to ask themselves- do the benefits of going back to- in the case of our middle schoolers- two mornings of hybrid learning every three weeks- for the last few months before these high-risk residents will be vaccinated- do the benefits in fact outweigh the risks? I understand why the board feels that they cannot make this decision, as each family’s hardship in light of this pandemic is unique, and the board is not an expert on each individual family. However, I also do not expect parents to be experts on schools, and I do expect those in charge of our schools to be. And I do expect the board to do all that they can to educate and empower families to make the best decision, especially when the decision is so serious and the consequences are potentially so grave.

**Derek Janu-Chosseck**

I write as a parent of a 4th grader, an 8th grader, and as a spouse of a District 97 employee. I have two issues I'd like to bring forward.

Today, right after lunch, I saw my 4th grader disengage from his work and sink into his chair holding back tears. I asked what the teacher had been discussing. With tears going down his face, he started explaining that specials were moving to asynchronous afternoons. My son began cello lessons this year and the realization that the lessons were likely ending along with Music, Spanish and Art (three of his favorite classes) had a devastating impact.

The elimination of specials (which is the net result of specials becoming asynchronous) is unnecessary. We've gone through almost a full year of remote learning and have found a way to accommodate this important part of our children's lives. Focusing the face to face learning time and limiting it to Reading, Writing, and Math, isn't in the best interest of the kids. It's in the best interest of those that are evaluated based on standardized test performance. While I'm not naive and aware that this new schedule exposes a truth that's been there all along, our schools have always maintained a balance that is missing from this plan and accepting it will take Oak Park down a slippery slope for future prioritization questions. I would encourage everyone to reconsider this portion of the plan.

Secondly, my wife, as a school social worker, was qualified to be vaccinated in group 1a. We'll likely celebrate January 13th annually as "Vaccination Day". This has greatly reduced our family's anxiety about her return to work. With teachers being included in 1b, and Governor's Pritzkers announcement that 1b will begin on January 25th, I'd encourage the board and administration to consider putting every effort into helping facilitate the vaccination process for teachers (to date, the administration has been hands off on the topic) and to think about pushing the date back for the return to school until everyone has

a chance to at least get their first dose. While there will never be a perfect time to return until kids can get vaccinated, pausing for as little as 4 weeks will unquestionably save lives, reduce the risk for teachers and their families, and likely increase the number of teachers who decide to return to the classroom.

### **Dan and Jenn George**

We have been trying to write this email for too long. We are very close to seeing the rollout of the hybrid plan. My hope was that the health and safety of our children and teachers would be at the top of the priority list amongst the many needs that our community has to weigh in order to maintain the educational standards we expect within the current situation.

Is our current model good? NO! Nothing that is happening or not happening due to Covid-19 has been good. This is the fact of our current time. Life for many has come to a slow crawl and it is frustrating, we want to change it, we want to return to normal life. As we hit the one year mark of this global pandemic. We need to come to terms that life may never go back to "normal" certainly not in the near future. We must and will continue to adapt to whatever our new reality is.

As a parent, my number 1 responsibility is to keep my children safe. Which as a community member extends to all our children. Then how does this district in good conscience send our children back to classrooms with teachers who are being bullied into returning to an environment where it is impossible to eliminate the risk of death or debilitating illness due to Covid? So many of us moved to Oak Park for the schools. The schools are only as good (in our cases excellent) because of our teachers. We have seen our teachers work tiring hours to create and adjust and recreate a workable educational experience for our children. What they have and continue to create has far surpassed anything I would have thought possible of remote learning.

Is it perfect? NO. Are our children falling behind? Perhaps, but ask yourself, to whom are they falling behind? We are all in this together. Our children are all doing the best they can to be resilient in a time of trauma. Our teachers recognize this and they know how important it is to this community and its families that their children continue to learn. They have already sacrificed so much more of their personal time and personal space than their contracts would require if they were working under one, and all to provide for our children.

Our teachers deserve our support. They deserve to be safe and to stay healthy. How do our teachers create a "safe learning environment" for our children when they themselves don't feel safe?

### **Patrick Bracco**

I will soon be a father of a child that will be a student within District 97. I submitted a public comment at the last board meeting in opposition to a Hybrid in Person/Remote learning plan. I am writing again to express my disappointment in our School Board for not asking any questions associated with the plan that was presented.

I have friends who have students in the District as well as Teachers and it is apparent from your actions as a board that you do not have the safety and wellbeing of both groups in mind with your plan. We recently saw the Chicago Public School system go back in person and they already have many cases at many schools.... It has only been 1 week that they have had in person learning. What is our rush for putting students and teachers back in buildings when the vaccine is right around the corner? Infection rates are higher now in Oak Park than they were when our schools went to full remote. What has changed that makes you feel comfortable now to send our students and teachers back in person? Why are students being given the option to stay remote but not teachers? How is that fair?

I grew up in Oak Park, married a woman from Oak Park and have chosen to start a family in Oak Park. I am deeply disappointed that our school district and school board are making decisions that I believe go against what Oak Park stands for.

The reality of the situation is we are exposing our children and teachers to a virus that is killing our residents. If we wait until the vaccine has been released we are protecting these important groups. Why have weekly saliva tests not been addressed? Many businesses are requiring this to be done to return to work. Why are we not considering this? This is further proof that the district and the board have not thought through the logistics carefully enough.

Large corporations are generally seen to be "profits over people"... why are these same corporations making accommodations for their most valuable resources to continue to work remotely until a vaccine is rolled out successfully?

Schools are institutions that are generally seen to have "people's development" at their core... what does it say about our school district if large corporations who are seen as evil (by many who live in this district) are acting in a better interest of people than the school system?

Does the board realize that President Trump wanted schools to go back in person prior to any vaccines being made available? Are we going to follow the recommendation of President Trump?

What will the board and district do if a single child or teacher contracts and dies from COVID due to being in person at our schools?

Again I ask the following:

What will the board and district do if a single child or teacher contracts and dies from COVID due to being in person at our schools?

What will the board and district do if a pregnant teacher contracts COVID and that results in a loss of the child or premature birth that results in undue complications to that child?

Again I ask the following:

What will the board and district do if a pregnant teacher contracts COVID and that results in a loss of the child or premature birth that results in undue complications to that child?

Again, I ask... what is the rush?

The new strain of the virus is already here in Chicago and that strain has been proven to spread at a much faster rate and the infection rate in children specifically, has increased. Why are we putting them at risk?

Are families who plan to go back in person making a commitment to their community that they will not put others at risk? Will students continue to go to birthday parties and see others outside their immediate family? Will families continue to go on trips or vacations? Now in no way am I saying that the District has the right to restrict students or teachers from living their lives but shouldn't there be an understanding and commitment to keep others safe?

In looking at the documentation that the District has made available it states that students will be taking snack breaks outside... are we really telling our students that they need to stand outside to eat a snack? February in Chicago makes a lot of sense for that... what if students don't have hats and gloves? Is that equitable if a student comes from a family that can't afford proper clothing? If snacks then are to be eaten

inside due to weather... will the students eat in phases or at the same time? If at the same time will they all have their masks off?

I think my point is simple... the logistics of sending students back in person cannot be guaranteed to be safe. Students who are learning remotely currently are not being placed at risk...

A wise person once said... "If it isn't broke... don't fix it"

We are in a pandemic and an unprecedented time... why are we trying to do something new when the ramifications of the decision can lead to students or teachers dying? What will the District do if a single child or teacher gets sick from COVID and dies? How will you live with yourselves?

Is it true that we are telling teachers who are pregnant or have cancer that they have no remote options? What does this say about our community if we don't care about those at risk? Is it true that we are telling teachers who are pregnant or have cancer that their options are to resign, or take unpaid leave? If the teachers take an unpaid leave they would lose their benefits. Wouldn't this be detrimental to their health? Again what does this say about our community if we are telling this to our teachers. Many of our teachers are residents of Oak Park as well and we are turning our backs on our own. What does this say about our community?

How is this equitable?

It is the right of every student to have an excellent and equitable educational experience. Oak Park Elementary School District 97 Board of Education (District 97) is committed to racial equity, the success of every student, and to achieving our mission of creating a positive learning environment for all students that is equitable, inclusive and focused on the whole child. We seek to nurture the potential in each student. We are committed to creating and sustaining great schools where every student learns at a high level and experiences a sense of belonging with the expectation of excellence. To accomplish this, District 97 will provide an equitable and inclusive educational environment for all students. District 97 acknowledges that inclusion is not effective if it consists of merely inviting students and families into spaces that already exist, but rather requires us to create new spaces that are intentionally founded through the lens of this Policy. The concept of educational equity goes beyond simple equality where all students are treated the same to fostering a barrier-free environment in which all students, regardless of their background or personal attributes, are extended opportunities and resources required for success. Equity is attained when there is sufficient evidence that each student has a high-quality educational experience, and outcomes are not predicted by race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, national origin, foster status, involvement with the juvenile justice system, IEP status, disability, learning difference, immigration status, or language. As a school district committed to equity, District 97 seeks to disrupt societal and historical inequities arising from institutional racism and white supremacy in our schools and eliminate disparities based on student status so that all our students will benefit and reach their potential. Opportunity gaps between student groups are unacceptable and contradict our belief that all students can learn and achieve their full potential. The policies, practices, procedures, programs, climate, and culture in our District, at each building, and in each and every classroom and extracurricular activity must be specifically designed and intentionally operated to ensure equity. Educational equity benefits all students and our entire community. Equity provides all students with what they need to thrive, achieve at the highest possible level, and graduate prepared for college, career, and community success. Equity is the systematic fair treatment and full inclusion of all students, especially those who have historically been underserved in public education settings. In order to realize equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone, equity must be applied across race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, national origin, foster status, involvement with the juvenile justice system, IEP status, disability, learning

difference, immigration status, or language. Excellence and equity are both essential to achieving our mission. Thus, equity must be elevated and integrated system-wide as a core mission priority in all planning, decision-making, and resource allocation, and reinforced every time our students, staff, families and community interact with the District. District 97 seeks to understand, interrupt and eliminate conscious and unconscious sources of inequity patterns of institutional bias at all levels of the organization. Eliminating individual and institutional biases will increase achievement and graduation rates for all students, eliminate the opportunity gaps between the highest and lowest performing students, and ensure the culture and climate welcomes and instills in each student and family a sense of belonging.

January 19, 2021 Document [https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak\\_park\\_97&s=589483](https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak_park_97&s=589483) February 7 our data consistently reveals that race is the most persistent predictor of student performance in District 97. This has resulted in racial disproportionality in discipline and the underrepresentation of students of color identified as advanced learners. In addition, our data demonstrates that learning differences, disabilities, IEP status, and socioeconomic status are predictors of student performance. Students may also experience our District inconsistently depending on their ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, and foster status, involvement with the juvenile justice system, immigration status, or language. District 97 is committed to explicitly identifying and addressing all disparities in educational outcomes for the purpose of targeting areas for action, intervention and investment. Race shall be addressed explicitly, not exclusively. Racial disparities are often intertwined with, and compounded by, disparities based on other factors. An intersectional analysis provides a more holistic and complete view. While race is a significant factor in most disparities, it may not always be the most salient factor. Thus, an inclusive analysis of all relevant factors, not limited to race, will be considered if it is determined that such an analysis is needed. District 97 has made efforts to address the inequities in our District. One example is the successful integration of our schools based upon the children and families within the school's boundaries. We do not see what some neighborhoods experience with a concerted effort of our white families seeking out schools that are less diverse than their home school. Also, our 2016 Vision process resulted in a vision statement that challenges us to provide an equitable education for all of our students, and we have been adopting programs and practices consistent with an equitable education since its adoption. In 2017, we added the cabinet level position of Senior Director of Equity. That said, even with the integration of our schools, the community's stated desire for equity, and a senior district leader focused on equity, our efforts to eliminate inequities have been unsuccessful. Eliminating the opportunity gap while raising achievement for all students is the top priority of the Board, the Superintendent, and all district staff. Race, disability, and other characteristics must cease to be reliable predictors of student achievement and success.

**PURPOSE** The Board has adopted this policy to: (1) eliminate racial inequities and systemic disparities; (2) create and ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students, especially those who have historically been underserved in District 97 and public education settings; and, (3) support families in effectively navigating the services that are available to them so that they feel a sense of belonging in the District, and know that the District will meet their student's and family's particular needs. This policy establishes a systematic, proactive, and preventative framework for the elimination of racism and cultural bias as factors affecting student achievement and learning experiences, and promotes environments that intentionally welcome, respect and value diversity and inclusion. The purpose of this policy is to establish actions that District 97 shall take to address disparities in educational opportunity and achievement. We resolve to eliminate opportunity gaps at every level of our organization, through policy, procedure and practice.

**SCOPE** This policy is comprehensive and system-wide in scope--addressing all functions, activities and operations of District 97 and its outside providers, to the extent that the work occurs in our buildings and is facilitated by us. We also acknowledge that high-quality early childhood experiences are critical to preparing children to take full advantage of equitable educational opportunities in elementary and middle school, and we are committed to advocating for and supporting the expansion of high-quality early childhood experiences from birth to five throughout the community. This comprehensive approach to creating equity reaches beyond simply addressing individual and interpersonal bias; it includes change efforts at institutional, structural, and systems levels to ensure equitable policies, practices, procedures, and

programs. The process shall include student, family, staff, and community voice, with an explicit focus on the students and families most impacted by historical inequities both within District 97 and throughout society. January 19, 2021 document [https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak\\_park\\_97&s=589483](https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak_park_97&s=589483) 3/7 this policy requires an inclusive and intersectional framework for addressing equity. While the primary focus of this equity policy is on race and ethnicity, District 97 also acknowledges that learning differences, disabilities, IEP status, and socioeconomic status represent other forms of social inequities and oppression, as do gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, national origin, foster status, involvement with the juvenile justice system, IEP status, disability, learning difference, immigration status, or language. Understanding how these different forms of oppression intersect, and considering the personal characteristics of our students as our student demographics and societal biases change over time, will be key for creating equity across the District.

**IMPLEMENTATION** To achieve equity for our students, District 97 shall take appropriate action in the following areas:

**A. Equitable Access:** District 97 shall provide every student with equitable access to high-quality instruction, culturally relevant curriculum, grade appropriate assignments, high expectations, facilities, and other educational resources necessary for them to succeed. Where necessary to effectuate this policy, this shall include differentiated resource allocation and/or targeted strategies to address inequities and achieve equity. Practices, procedures and programs that result in over- or under-representation of any group of students compared to peers shall be subject to close review to assure that such results are due to meeting students' legitimate educational, social or emotional needs. In the event that a practice or program is not equitably accessible, the practice will either be modified to meet the requirements of this Policy, or eliminated if no modifications can be made or agreed upon. In addition to access to instruction, the District will review physical and logistical limitations to student access such as transportation, access to technology, needs for academic support outside of school hours, and other supports for families needed to ensure equitable access.

**B. Racial Equity Analysis:** District 97 shall review existing policies, programs, professional development, and procedures to ensure the promotion of racial equity and elimination of inequity and its contributors. Where existing policies, practices, procedures, and programs are found to contribute to inequities, the District shall eliminate or reform them, in a transparent and timely manner, so that they are consistent with this Policy. All new policies, practices, procedures and programs will be developed through the use of a racial equity review tool that is informed by effective equity tools from other school districts and the equity field. The racial equity review tool utilized by District 97 shall be developed by the Administration as part of the implementation planning process referenced in this Policy, and recommended to the Board for adoption. The tool shall establish a clear process and set of questions to guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, practices, procedures, and programs to address the impacts on racial equity. The tool will help decision makers center racial equity in their thinking, choose options that best advance racial equity and remedy inequity, and avoid implicit bias and unintended consequences that can result by ignoring equity. The tool should be developed with meaningful stakeholder support, and shall be applied with stakeholder engagement and effective collection, analysis and use of disaggregated data. The District is committed to ongoing training to ensure that the tool is used with fidelity and supports teachers and staff in their adoption of it.

**C. Eliminating Discipline Disproportionality:** District 97 will eliminate disproportionality in discipline, especially by race/ethnicity and gender, and support students' social, emotional, and cultural needs. The District shall achieve this through measures such as a district-wide emphasis on social-emotional learning and supports; restorative practices that center on student voices; staff and teacher professional development on topics related to equitable discipline practices (including, but not limited to, implicit bias, staff recruitment and induction processes that emphasize the District's commitment to restorative justice); and, culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. Restorative practices shall be included in professional development for staff and will also be part of the curriculum so our students have a voice in our restorative practices and understand the expectations surrounding such practices. Restorative justice will be a priority and the first course of action in response to behavior issues that arise. The goal is to keep our students in the classroom, ensure that they have equal access to instruction, and ensure behavior management does not negatively impact a student's self-image or how other students and people

in the school community see that student. 1/19/2021

Document [https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak\\_park\\_97&s=589483](https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak_park_97&s=589483) 4/7 D. Stakeholder and Community Engagement: District 97 cannot achieve equity without effective, robust stakeholder engagement. Student and family voice, along with teachers, staff, and other community stakeholders, shall play a prominent role in implementing this policy. District 97 shall welcome and empower families, including underrepresented families of color, those whose first language may not be English, and parents and guardians of students with disabilities and different learning needs as essential partners in students' education, school planning, and District decision-making. In addition, District 97 will include other partners who have demonstrated culturally-specific expertise in meeting its educational outcomes. District 97 will work with community partners and families to provide intentional, targeted outreach that ensures families and students feel welcome and understand the services available to them and how to access information as well as provide opportunities for engagement with teachers and staff at times and places that are consistent with needs of all families. E. Workforce Equity: District 97 shall recruit, employ, support, and retain racially and linguistically diverse and culturally competent administrative, instructional and support personnel. District 97 shall provide professional development to strengthen employees' knowledge and skills for eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in achievement. District 97 shall develop a concrete plan to develop a teacher and administrator workforce reflective of the diversity of our student body to provide children of all races, cultures, genders, and backgrounds with familiar role models in schools, with an emphasis on teachers of color and male teachers. All children benefit from seeing teachers and leaders of color in their school. In addition to recruiting talent that reflects the student body, the District will develop retention plans so that we are able to retain talent in the District. The District will foster good relationships between and among our teachers and staff so that the workforce is supportive of one another and works together as a community, embracing the benefits of peer review. F. Professional Development: District 97 shall provide ongoing professional development to strengthen employees' knowledge of strategies and skills for eliminating bias, and to understand the cause in disparities in achievement, including specific training on the use of the tools that are used to review practices through a racial equity lens, cultural responsiveness and the historical roots of structural racism. Professional development shall also include training on trauma informed care. The District 97 workforce shall be informed on and committed to equitable, inclusive and anti-oppressive methods for advancing the District's Vision. Our staff will also undergo training on the importance and value of a curriculum that is culturally relevant and not based on euro-centric traditions that have historically permeated all of our curricula. Teachers will continue to undergo training on effective in-class learning differentiation. This training shall not be limited to institute days, but shall be ongoing in our buildings and will include resources for our teachers and staff to engage with as questions arise. In addition to professional development for our teachers and staff, the Board, Committees, and organizations that work with our students will also undertake training consistent with this policy at a minimum of every other year. G. Welcoming School Environments: District 97 shall ensure that each school creates a welcoming culture and inclusive environment that reflects and supports the diversity of each school and District 97's student population, their families, our teachers and staff, and our community. The culture and climate will be intentionally designed and implemented to value all members of our school communities and require respectful interactions between our students and each other, as well as between and among teachers, staff members and community members before, during, and after school so that every student, family and staff member feels a sense of belonging in each classroom and building. Our staff shall also be supported and provided the resources and training necessary to foster a culture of belonging in our schools. H. Recognizing and Valuing Diversity: District 97 recognizes the value of a culturally relevant education and diverse student body and workforce. An education in a diverse and inclusive environment is critical to succeeding in developing the skills necessary for our students to be global citizens. The District shall incorporate teaching and learning materials and assessments that are intentionally designed to reduce bias and are geared toward the understanding and appreciation of culture, class, language, ethnicity, and other differences that contribute to the uniqueness of each student and staff member. I. Equity Leadership and Infrastructure: The Superintendent shall develop and recommend to the Board both a viable long-term

plan for funding, staffing, and implementing activities and initiatives to achieve the equity objectives as well as annual updates. This plan shall include a leadership team and infrastructure as well as regular reporting that coincides with the budget cycle. The recommendation shall include an ongoing process that includes opportunities for teachers and staff, students, parents and guardians, 1/19/2021

Document [https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak\\_park\\_97&s=589483](https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak_park_97&s=589483) 5/7 community members and Board members to provide input on the implementation of this Policy on at least a quarterly basis and assist the Board in monitoring outcomes and communicating implementation and results with the community, which shall be informed by the implementation planning process that shall occur from the effective date to the implementation date of August 2019. The position of Senior Director of Equity shall continue to be part of the senior management team and report directly to the Superintendent. Reporting and Accountability The Board will hold the Superintendent accountable for establishing annual goals that prioritize the requirements of this Policy and making measurable progress in meeting those goals. All District employees will be informed of their responsibility for the success and achievement of all students. The Superintendent will establish administrative regulations and procedures to implement this policy, including annual reporting on student disparities with disaggregated data for all key equity and outcome indicators (e.g. graduation rates, discipline rates, drop-out rates; composition of advanced learning classes/programs), and identification of inequitable impacts and outcomes that need attention and remediation that will be available to the public in a central, easily accessible and user-friendly online space. The Superintendent will publicly report on progress toward District goals at least twice a year, and will provide the Board with updated action plans each year. The action plans will highlight discrepancies between the targets set and actual performance when applicable, and will provide specific solutions for identifying the root cause of such discrepancies and remedying them. The report will also address the level of usage, the effectiveness of equity tools and practices, and resource allocation recommendations. In addition, all special reports to the Board and other communications regarding new initiatives or status updates of ongoing initiatives will include a section on Equity and how the particular topic of the report is consistent with this Policy and our annual equity goals. The Superintendent will include accountability standards for measuring implementation of this Policy in each school, department, and office, as well as an ongoing plan for continuous improvement informed by best practices. This Policy must inform School Improvement Plans and reporting required under those plans. Coordination with District 200 and District 90 the Board recognizes that our community broadly includes District 200 and District 90. The Board directs the Superintendent to work with the other districts and encourage collaboration and alignment with action plans, wherever possible, that will result in measurable results for all of the students in the community. In conjunction with the administrations' work with District 200 and District 90, the Board is also committed to working with the other boards, including using best efforts to coordinate an annual joint report to the community. Engagement of Outside Equity Consultants As a part of this accountability and transparency framework, as well as a commitment to a dedication of resources, the Board may retain a reputable person/firm with significant expertise with educational equity to conduct an evaluation to comprehensively identify policies and practices, at the district and individual school levels, that are contributing to inequity and identify specific policies and practices that can and will advance equity. The Board's expectation is that the Superintendent and our other equity leaders will play a critical role in reviewing all of our practices, procedures and programs. The Board acknowledges that having independent researchers outside the district's chain of command may be an essential step in getting comprehensive, candid feedback from stakeholders, including teachers, administrators and other district staff, to advance equity; and that an independent evaluator is more likely to make necessary critiques and recommendations that challenge District stakeholders in ways that might be uncomfortable, but are ultimately important. OUTCOMES January 19, 2021 document [https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak\\_park\\_97&s=589483](https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak_park_97&s=589483) 6/7 With these actions in mind, and in committing to provide equitable and inclusive educational opportunities for all students in all of its schools, District 97 establishes the following objectives: Create new learning environments that intentionally acknowledge the strengths and needs of all of our students rather than merely attempting to bring students who have not historically experienced District 97 in a positive manner into environments

that were not created with all students' strengths and needs in mind. Eliminate the racial/ethnic predictability and disproportionality in all aspects of education and its administration (e.g., the disproportionate over-application of discipline to students of color, their inappropriate identification as special needs learners, and their under-representation in various Advanced Learning programs). Ensure all students regardless of race/ethnic, class, or other factors graduate ready to succeed in a career or continued learning within a racially and culturally diverse local, national and global community. Establish annual goals for student achievement that include, at a minimum, raising the achievement of all students and ensuring that students performing below grade level accelerate learning to grade level or at least 1.5 years of growth, while eliminating the gaps between the lowest and highest performing students. Increase overall academic rigor at all levels to ensure that all students have access to an excellent education. Reporting that clearly communicates student performance metrics and programming and initiatives designed to ensure compliance with this Policy to students, parents and guardians, staff, and the community. Allocate resources to meet the aforementioned equity goals, including increased professional development and possibly an independent evaluator. Provide culturally responsive education to students and professional development and learning to staff. Create and maintain a data page on the District website to report publicly and transparently to the community our compliance with the requirements set forth in this Policy. EFFECTIVE DATE this policy shall become effective immediately upon enactment. The Board acknowledges that in order to achieve the objectives contained herein and implement this policy, resources that include, but are not limited to, additional teaching and support staff, professional development, and data analysis professionals may be required. Accordingly, implementation shall begin on August 2019 for the 2019-2020 school year following a comprehensive, transparent planning process with the community that will result in an implementation plan. The implementation plan, which shall establish priorities, milestones, and where and how the District shall engage with stakeholders on an ongoing basis, will be premised on the need to rethink all aspects of policies, practices, procedures and programs in order to meet the requirements of the Policy, and will inform the long-term plans created and presented by the Superintendent pursuant to Section I of this Policy. DEFINITIONS Bias means prejudice toward a group and its members relative to another group. Demographic group generally refers to any group of students who share similar characteristics, such as gender identification, racial or ethnic identification, socioeconomic status, physical or learning disabilities, language abilities, or school-assigned classifications. Disaggregated data results from examining system-wide data through the lens of student demographic groups to uncover patterns and trends that may be true for some student groups, but not all students in the system. Disproportionality means that there are more (or fewer) children from a particular group who are experiencing a given situation than we would expect, based on the group's representation in the general population. January 19, 2021 document [https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak\\_park\\_97&s=589483](https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=oak_park_97&s=589483) 7/7 Diversity means variety; different types of people. Equity means a system of fairness in both opportunities and outcomes. Equitable systems provide access, opportunities, and resources required for students to learn at high levels. Whereas equality tends to center on similarity of input, equity centers on how those inputs impact outcomes. With a focus on how our inputs are increasing opportunities for all students to achieve at high levels, with particular and prioritized attention to meeting the needs of those most disenfranchised. Implicit Bias means the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control. Inclusion means full access, authentic representation, empowered participation, with a true sense of belonging and agency. Institutional Bias refers to the treatment or consideration of, or making a distinction in favor of or against, a person or thing based on the group, class, or category to which that person or thing belongs rather than on individual merit. Institutional Racism means policies, practices, procedures, and programs that work better for white people than for people of color, often unintentionally. Intersectionality means the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Racial Equity means the systematic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and

outcomes for everyone. Racial inequities and disparities are eliminated, race is no longer a predictor of outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved. Racism refers to a complex system of beliefs and behaviors, grounded in a presumed superiority of the white race. These beliefs and behaviors are conscious and unconscious; personal and institutional; and result in the oppression of people of color and benefit the dominant group, whites. White Supremacy refers to the system of racial hierarchy and inequality, based on the ideology of White superiority, which has been historically, institutionally, economically, and culturally embedded in our society, resulting in cumulative advantage and privileges to White people and cumulative disadvantages to people of color.

These words come from District 97's own Vision Statement. Are we living that vision if we are putting our children and teachers in harm's way when it can be avoided?

If we are telling teachers who we may hire the following:

The School District shall provide equal employment opportunities to all persons regardless of their race; color; creed; religion; national origin; sex; sexual orientation; age; ancestry; marital status; arrest record; military status; order of protection status; unfavorable military discharge; citizenship status provided the individual is authorized to work in the United States; use of lawful products while not at work; being a victim of domestic violence, sexual violence, or gender violence; genetic information; physical or mental handicap or disability, if otherwise able to perform the essential functions of the job with reasonable accommodation; pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions; credit history, unless a satisfactory credit history is an established bona fide occupational requirement of a particular position; or other legally protected categories. No one will be penalized solely for his or her status as a registered qualifying patient or a registered designated caregiver for purposes of the Compassionate Use of Medical Cannabis Program Act, 410 ILCS 130/. Persons who believe they have not received equal employment opportunities should report their claims to the Nondiscrimination Coordinator and/or a Complaint Manager for the Uniform Grievance Procedure. These individuals are listed below. No employee or applicant will be discriminated or retaliated against because he or she: (1) requested, attempted to request, used, or attempted to use a reasonable accommodation as allowed by the Illinois Human Rights Act, or (2) initiated a complaint, was a witness, supplied information, or otherwise participated in an investigation or proceeding involving an alleged violation of this policy or State or federal laws, rules or regulations, provided the employee or applicant did not make a knowingly false accusation nor provide knowingly false information.

Why are we not providing that for current teachers?

I hope that our leaders will vote to remain on the current remote learning plan until a time when it is safe to return to school and vaccines have been made widely available.

The remaining public comments were read at the end of the meeting.

SPECIAL REPORTS

### **SPECIAL REPORTS**

#### **District 97 RETURN TO SCHOOL PLAN UPDATE**

Jim Hackett explained that the district is using new guidance from a multi-disciplinary group of experts that are recommending that schools can reopen even at a very high level of the virus. He reported that the Village of Oak Park currently sends out a status report on Monday, Tuesday and Friday, which provides a snapshot of the virus situation and includes the case incidence rates for Oak Park and Cook County. The report also includes the incidence rate for the youth population in Cook County, and the IDPH region 10 positivity rate.

Hackett explained that consideration for school opening will need to evaluate the level of incidence of COVID transmission within the specific school, and an example of the level of school impact was shared.

He reminded the board that the most important elements of infection control includes universal masking, hand and bathroom hygiene, indoor air ventilation and filtration, social distancing, quarantine policies, contact tracing and surveillance or screening testing (where feasible).

Jeanne Keane reported that all students and staff will be given a washable mask, and disposable ones will also be available. She reported that touchless hand sanitizer dispensers have been installed at all buildings. She explained that it is being recommended that the air change within each building four to six times per hour. She noted that the District 97 buildings are designed to changed three time an hour, but they have been increased to five. The systems are also running at a higher air flow before and after school for two hours and throughout the day. She reported that all HVAC equipment has been maintained and inspected for proper air flow.

Keane reported that it is now being recommended that children maintain three feet of social distancing, but the district will continue to use the six foot guidelines. She reported that videos have been created to demonstrate proper hand washing and mask wearing, and how temperature checks will be done upon arrival each day.

It was noted that the district will follow the interim exclusion guidance provided by the IDPH and contact tracing will be directed by the Oak Park Department of Public Health (OPDPH). District 97 nurses are attending weekly meetings with the OPPH to ensure that everyone is operating with timely information. The schools will be asked to keep accurate attendance records of students and staff members, and ensure that student schedules are up to date. They will keep a log of any visitors, that includes date, time and where in the building they visited.

Hackett reported that screening or surveillance testing can make infection control significantly easier and more effective. The district is considering two different surveillance companies that would be able to offer onsite COVID testing with a quick turnaround.

Michael Arensdorff and Eboney Lofton shared some minor scheduling changes. Lofton reported that based on concerns raised by special teachers, principals are working to provide synchronous learning opportunities for students in all grades.

Next steps were identified as;

- Adaptive pause is scheduled to end on January 22 for student groups who were onsite before the adaptive pause
- Staff will return on January 25, 2021
- Planning for transition to hybrid learning for students will continue
- February 1 - grades 4-5 will return
- February 2 - grades 2-3 will return
- February 3 - grades K-1 will return
- Beginning Thursday, February 4 - K-5 grades will all be in place
- Middle school will return according to the established schedule
- A dashboard will be added to the website to be transparent about the district's internal metrics

Board comments included interest in having student arrival at 7:50 a.m. Interest was expressed in hearing more about snack time and what will be available for students who do not bring a snack. Interest was expressed in making it clear that no Chicago area schools have evidence of outbreaks. Interest was expressed in knowing when the teachers would be vaccinated. Once board member acknowledged that the February 1 reopen date was based on the metric that the district had shared publically. Concern was expressed that this is a major shift and needs to be addressed. Interest was expressed in knowing why

District 97 does not plan on using saliva tests like District 200. Concern was expressed that the testing would be voluntary and not a complete surveillance system which would offer more information.

**ACTION ITEMS**

ACTION ITEMS

**3.1.1 APPROVAL OF THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR HYBRID LEARNING**

Spurlock moved, seconded by Kearney, that the Board of Education, District 97, approve the Memorandum of Understanding with the Oak Park Teachers’ Association that addresses teachers’ return to work in a hybrid learning environment.

Interest was expressed in hearing more about the teacher accommodation process. Gina Herrmann explained that teachers who have medical documentation that requires them to remain at home and quarantine are being approved. She explained that the Human Resources department is reviewing each request on an individual basis. They look at the job and job function. She told the board that these requests will be ongoing, and are very time consuming.

It was noted that teachers will be allowed to leave the buildings 10 minutes after the students leave each day.

Member Liebl explained that she was in full support of the memorandum of understanding with the assumption that the district was still following the same guidance, and vaccines were on the horizon. She understands that the metrics are changing, and because of that, she is changing the way she is viewing this request. She told the board that she needs the process to be flexible or offer better surveillance at the building level,

Ayes: Spurlock, Kearney, Broy, and Kim  
Nays: Liebl  
Absent: Moore and Breymaier  
Abstain: None  
Motion passed.

**3.1.2 ARRPOVAL OF THE RETURN TO SCHOOL PLAN**

Spurlock moved, seconded by Kearney, that the Board of Education, District 97, approve the Return to School Plan during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ayes: Spurlock, Kearney, Kim, Broy  
Nays: Liebl  
Absent: Moore and Breymaier  
Abstain: None  
Motion passed.

**3.1.3 APPROVAL TO AUTHORIZE THE ADMINISTRATION TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT WITH A FIRM TO PROVIDE CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANTS TO THE DISTRICT FOR COVID RELATED PURPOSES**

Spurlock moved, seconded by Kim, that the Board of Education, District 97, approve the Administrative Request to enter into a contract for Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) at a cost of approximately \$60,000.

Ayes: Broy, Kearney, Spurlock, Kim, and Liebl  
Nays: None  
Absent: Moore and Breymaier  
Motion passed.

**3.1.4 APPROVAL OF THE 2020-2021 CALENDAR CHANGES**

Spurlock moved, seconded by Kearney, that the Board of Education, District 97, approve the 2020-2021 calendar to reflect Remote Learning Planning Days on January 25 and January 26 and student school days to be held on February 4 and February 5. The Parent/Teacher Conference dates will be moved to a later date in February. The changes are being made due to the transition from Remote Learning to Hybrid Learning.

Ayes: Spurlock, Kearney, Broy, Kim, and Liebl  
Nays: None  
Absent: Moore and Breymaier  
Motion passed.

Vice President Kim left the meeting at 4:55 p.m.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

PUBLIC COMMENT

Member Kearney read aloud the remaining public comments that were emailed to the board prior to the start of the board meeting.

**Ericka Shannon**

Good Evening. I am speaking tonight as a member of the Oak Park Teachers’ Association. Following tonight I hope that all members of the District 97 BOE, School Board, and governing members of the District 97 administration who conduct these meetings will commit to holding these meetings in person while wearing masks and safely distancing from one another in solidarity to the school-based staff who have been ordered to report to the school buildings on Monday, January 25, and the students who will do the same on Monday, February 1.

I would like to ask that in-person teaching and learning under the hybrid model be delayed just a little while longer until which time as all District 97 employees who want it have received doses 1 and 2 of the Covid-19 vaccine and have waited the appropriate 1 or 2 weeks following the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose required in order for the vaccine to reach its full potential beneficial effect.

I also ask that before any return to in-person learning, regular weekly Covid-19 testing for all school staff and students be put into place as has been implemented in many other suburban school districts, including Oak Park’s very own District 200.

Last, during this worldwide deadly pandemic, I beg that District 97 continue to work with immune-compromised staff, and staff with chronic health conditions to find creative solutions that would allow them to continue to safely teach remotely from home at least until they have received all components of the Covid-19 vaccine, or after that until their health care professionals advise them that it is safe for them to return to the building. This would allow these teachers to continue to teach and build relationships with the students that they love without having to resort to taking leave and necessitating hiring of long-term substitutes.

**Matt Downs**

As a member of the OPTA, I thank you for taking the time to read your own statement regarding this special meeting as you consider to set staff and students back into buildings.

**MEETING WILL BE HELD VIRTUALLY**

In order to protect the health and safety of our board of education, staff, and community members, District 97 has decided to hold this meeting virtually, using Zoom.

## **Definition of *hypocrisy***

**1:** behavior that contradicts what one claims to believe or feel

### **Savannah Heidloff**

Good afternoon. I am speaking today as a member of the Oak Park Teachers' Association. I am writing to you today to ask for the transition from remote to hybrid learning to be paused until all District 97 staff who want it can receive their first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. It is my hope that District 97 will provide a centralized location and specific date for this vaccine to be administered to staff, and that the revised hybrid plan and calendar will allow for the vaccine to have maximum effectiveness in protecting staff, students, and their families.

The shift to hybrid learning from remote learning disrupts not only the connections and access that teachers have to their students, but the connections that students have with each other. Teaching to hybrid students and remote students simultaneously will be chaotic and confusing for all, and especially isolating for remote learners. With remote learning, students move fluidly from whole group instruction to small groups, partner work, jigsaw activities, and collaborative projects. With the current hybrid plan, much of this collaboration will not be feasible.

Equity is one of the core tenets of District 97. I see my colleagues working so hard every day to provide enriching, targeted instruction to their students. When I saw the breakdown of my remote and hybrid students, I realized that all but one of my BIPOC students chose remote. COVID-19 has devastated BIPOC families over the last 10 months, so this isn't surprising that many families chose to stick with remote learning to keep their children and loved ones safe. My fear is that our remote learners will be isolated socially, emotionally, and academically because the hybrid plan of teaching to two groups simultaneously is problematic and does not embody best teaching practices. I know that my 4<sup>th</sup> graders will notice this disparity, and will rightly question why some students are in the classroom and others aren't. Was the decision to move to the hybrid model based on 54% of all District 97 families, or 54% of respondents? Will the racial breakdown and percentages of families who selected remote versus hybrid be available to the public?

I hope that the board and all stakeholders will consider the negative effects of shifting to the hybrid learning model right now. We are already 10 months into a pandemic, so why not take the time to do this right and ensure that staff and students are safe and receive the best instruction that we are able to provide. Thank you for your time.

### **Max and Lesley Weiss**

I am writing to you to reconsider moving into our hybrid model right now. I would like you to think back to August when you decided to move our schools to remote. Are you meeting your goals by moving into hybrid? What were those goals? As an educator in our district (and a parent) goals drive my instruction.

Why now?

Are you creating an equitable environment by returning to hybrid? How many low income and free reduced students are coming to school? How equitable will our classes be in terms of race? Have you looked at the statistics?

Why now?

Is it safer for our adults to be in the building? Does our staff feel safe? Our staff is so close to being fully vaccinated. 1B opens in Illinois next week. Staff will then need to receive two shots and wait a few weeks

to be fully vaccinated. If we were coming back after spring break our staff would be vaccinated and it would be safer for everyone.

Why now?

Have you been honest with parents about the metrics before they signed up for hybrid? Why are you changing the metrics now when you have already promised one thing? There is a new variant in Chicago. Have you considered how this will affect our students and staff?

Why now?

Some of our students will be back in the building and everyone's schedule will change. Our middle school students will lose at least 4 weeks of curriculum instruction with this plan. The weeks they are in the building will be projects and not curriculum. Now they will cover less than in previous years because we are going back. Our 4th and 5th graders are losing their special area instruction completely and possibly our 3rd grade students too. All students will lose some special areas instruction. Did we not pass a referendum valuing this instruction? Many of our elementary teachers run small groups. Now with the hybrid model that will become impossible.

What goals are you achieving by moving into our Hybrid model? How are we meeting our original goals? I implore you to reconsider going back into the building now.

**Caroline Nikolakakis**

I am the mom of 2 District 97 students and a District 97 teacher. As information about the February 1 hybrid school plan is released, there are many questions that have arisen. I hope all stakeholders will get direct, honest answers to the questions below and others raised by community members.

1. Why are community members not allowed to read their own public comments when technology allows for that? The tone and pace is lost when someone else reads your words.
2. Why are we meeting virtually to discuss schools returning in person? Surely a hybrid plan to have the BOE, Admin, and select community members on site using mitigation protocols while the rest of those wishing to attend can do so virtually at the same time is possible since we are asking schools to do that 5 days a week.
3. Speaking of 5 days a week, if this plan is safe and successful – and for the record I truly hope it is- it's safe to assume many or even most families who have opted to stay home will want to join the hybrid option in the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester. Would we then switch back to the A/B plan? Has there been thoughtful consideration of how disruptive that will be for staff, families, and most of all the kids?
4. How are the new “metrics” being used being justified? What is the reasoning behind using real village and suburban Cook County metrics as our guideline and then suddenly changing that when those metrics currently say we should not yet return to in-person learning?
5. Why are we not waiting until all teachers and school staff can be fully vaccinated to return? We have been told teachers are in the next group (1B) and shots will be available soon. Why would we not wait to protect the teachers and the people they can spread it too which still does include children and the community as a whole?
6. When will the safety guidelines be available to staff, families, and the community so we know how many Covid cases will trigger classroom and school wide quarantines or return to remote scenarios? What testing and contact tracing teams and protocols will be in place?

7. Are teachers being allowed reasonable accommodations to continue to work remotely if they have underlying conditions or special circumstances as they are in District 200/OPRF? Is every effort being made to ensure all our dedicated, expert staff, especially the most vulnerable, can work in safe conditions so we don't lose them?

8. If staff become ill and unable to work or have to take a leave to care for family members, how will we find time to vet and hire quality replacements?

9. Why has there not been any kind of town hall or public sharing time from our school nurses, teachers, and staff? Not only those who have no questions or concerns, but a truly representative group of those being told to return despite valid and myriad concerns about this hybrid plan. Why are they not given a seat at this table in a district whose driving motivation is equity?

10. Is the community aware of what "school" is going to look and feel like? Have they adequately been able to prepare the kids? This a NOT a return to school as it was. Beyond the mask wearing, the millions of little things that make a classroom a community and a home away from home will not be safe or possible. No movement, no hands-on materials, no decorations, no talking when you have your snack (yes that is an actual directive we are supposed to enact with children). The list goes on and on. Teaching to kids who have been away from their routines for 10 months and are being asked to follow strict safety protocols while simultaneously teaching kids on Zoom is going to be tough on everyone. Even allowing for adjustment time, it is a big ask of everyone most of all the students.

11. What is happening with specials in the hybrid schedule?

12. Has there been discussion about how kids going to mixed pod after school care will negate the efforts of our locked down in class efforts each day?

Many people have deep and valid fears for the kids, ourselves, and the community based on the scientific facts of how this real, global pandemic that has killed over 400,000 people in the US alone so far is spread. Being comfortable with the risk does nothing at all to reduce it. I hope that all who are allowed to make decisions reconsider and wait until staff vaccination is complete to attempt this hybrid program or at the very least take some more time to work on making the plan truly safe.

Thank you to everyone who has done their best in this incredibly difficult situation. Be safe and be well.

### **Jen Stringfield**

I urge the board to consider a way to ensure teachers who are not comfortable returning in person to be able to continue to teach, they have not yet been vaccinated and neither have their families regardless of their risk factors. At the board meeting on October 13th I heard parents begging to not lose their teachers and one name was mentioned over and over again- Mrs. Walsh-Kallay. In spring last year my second grader gave up on school. He essentially became agoraphobic and refused to engage with his teacher or classmates in any way. He agreed to give third grade a try and Mrs. Walsh-Kallay ensured he has THRIVED. Please don't take away the teacher that brought back my child's love of learning. I opted to continue him in remote learning so he could stay with Mrs. Walsh-Kallay.

To be clear, I am in favor of returning to school. Two of my boys will be returning in person but we cannot force teachers to risk their and their family's lives with no say in the matter. We can get back to in person learning with their input and safely. Please. Our teachers mean the world to our community and kids, please let them have a say.

**Jennifer Costanzo and Jeffery Roberts**

We are saddened to learn that the flexibility afforded to students for in-person learning vs. remote has not been provided to our devoted and hardworking teachers. As with students' families, there are no doubt teachers of high-risk, or with family members that are high risk. We have just learned that, after all of the re-work of the hybrid model to maintain current teachers, our children may still lose their teacher due to family circumstances. This is unlikely a unique case within the district.

It seems that, in order to retain an excellent teacher (and likely teachers), flexibility should be exercised for this temporary pandemic situation. Using our case as an example, the class has a teaching assistant. If circumstances allow, the teaching assistant could be the in-person instructor/proctor as the teacher continues to teach safely from home using all of the technology available in the classrooms, as demonstrated by District 97, and systems currently being utilized on a daily basis.

We are of the mindset that, until it is safe for us all to go back in-person, we should continue to all stay remote. Consideration and metrics should take into account the more contagious variant strain expected to take hold in the very near future. It would be incredibly short-sighted to force teachers into a decision to leave the district or retire early only to have school return to remote-learning due to an increase in community spread or outbreaks within the district.

District 97 has fantastic teachers! Instruction is happening and it is consistent. The focus should be finding a way to address those students whose families cannot be remote with them, and to maintain consistency for all students in the teaching schedule and model.

If nothing else, the past year has taught us to be flexible in all aspects of our lives. The year has also required us to learn respect for others' personal situations, as well as trust that others are making decisions that won't harm us. Losing a teacher at this time of the year would undoubtedly harm multiple students without an acceptable reason. The lack of flexibility, respect, and trust is not a reason our students should be told for losing their teachers.

**Emily Dagostino**

The hallmark of a healthy community is the extent to which everyone is willing to share some of the sacrifice for the benefit of the whole.

This year that sacrifice has been borne by many; it has not been borne by all. Your plans and decision to move forward with giving children an option to safely return to their schools have felt, for the first time, like more of a shared sacrifice. It has offered a glimmer of hope for my family. Thank you.

My children, who have stayed home or gone to childcare settings to do their e-learning—where childcare workers are taking risks to care for them to help protect educators who continue to work remotely—thrilled to learn that they may finally be able to return to the school they love and to meet their teachers in person. They are bored and totally disengaged with e-learning. They complain every day of headaches. They cannot remain on task without full-time support from an in-person adult. They are socially and mentally depleted. It is impossible for them to stay focused. I don't blame them.

They have been forced to do something no kids have done before—and it's terrific that they're learning resilience and how to get through hard times and profound loss. That doesn't make what we're asking them to do right or appropriate. It is neither. Enough is enough is enough. I won't continue to ask them to e-learn for a full school day, regardless of what decision is made today and how you all decide to move forward.

Last week in remote learning, my child learned about Martin Luther King Jr. They learned about spreading love, not hate. They learned about how, when things get hard, love keeps going.

Now one of my kids' teachers is communicating that they may not return to in-person teaching because the risk is too high for them and their family. I understand their fear and I empathize with how hard this must be. I don't want anyone to get sick.

Especially on the heels of the lesson about Dr. King, it will be interesting to find a way to talk with my kids about the decision some teachers are making to quit because things got harder for them—even as vaccines will be available to teachers in a matter of days and even as science shows that there is a safe way to protect both kids and their teachers in the classroom.

When did self-interest overtake the values we claim to have as a liberal, loving, democratic community? What are we teaching our kids when we choose our individual good over the collective good?

My heart breaks for my kids, who have lost so much this year and who have sacrificed so much. I take comfort knowing that we—as their parents—will provide them consistency and continuity and certainty and stability and unconditional love and support. And still I mourn that so many other adults in their lives—adults whom we are asked to put our trust in as their educators—will not provide those things.

Soon the first friends our family made in Oak Park will be moving out of state. Several neighbors have pulled their kids from our local public school and have sent them to private schools. The first friend my child made at her school is leaving for a private school next year. All because the public schools here in Oak Park have failed them.

Our community remains far from healthy. I do believe that offering the option of in-person learning for kids like mine, who need it, is a step in the right direction. A step toward a more shared sacrifice and a stronger community. And I do believe it can be done safely for all, or I would never support it.

Thank you for moving forward with a plan that gives our kids the option to return to their schools. Here's to more hope to come, and less loss—especially for our kids—in 2021.

### **Amy Vogt**

I am speaking to you as a member of the OPTA. Please wait until staff members are vaccinated before asking us to return to the buildings. Please. Please. Please. That is all.

### **Joshua Tatro**

As a spouse of an OPTA member, I bore witness to many problematic sound bites during January 12th's board meeting, but perhaps the most disheartening and disappointing moments were actually the seconds of sobering silence at the conclusion of our district leadership's presentation — the time theoretically allotted for board feedback and questions.

Am I to understand that, after District 97 leadership presented their plan, the entire board had *absolutely zero thoughts* to express?

As the husband of an OPTA educator (and a former teacher myself), the number of questions that immediately surfaced in my own mind were virtually unending. For instance, how will building leadership address students who routinely refuse to wear masks the entire day and/or engage in other behavior that endangers their peers? What of district leadership's assertion that up to 10 additional staff must be hired in order to provide the specials/enrichment instruction needed to achieve in-person classes district-wide? And if district leadership no longer views community spread as an end-all-be-all indicator

for re-opening schools, then at what level of community and/or intra-school spread do they plan to set as a hard limit for discontinuing in-person instruction?

Sadly, the response from our board members — the stewards and gatekeepers of district policy and resources writ large — in the face of all these unknowns: *nothing*. Not a single word, question, or concern about the presumably hundreds of new procedures that will be required to ensure the health and safety of students, teachers, and staff.

And this is to say nothing of district leadership’s touting of the [New Schools Guidance](#) document provided by the Brown School of Public Health as some sort of silver bullet for addressing community concerns over the dangers of returning to in-person instruction.

Indeed, having now examined said document myself, there are as many questions as answers at play, but more importantly I have serious concerns about the district’s ability to implement some of the most basic tenets of the Brown School of Public Health’s plan for “pandemic resilience in the face of high community spread.”

To start, the authors of this document begin by emphasizing that **trust** is one of the most essential components of any in-person instructional arrangement during the current pandemic, stating:

*Trust is ... a question of how school leaders make decisions, how well they do at incorporating educators, paraprofessionals and other staff in decision-making processes, how well they do at communicating around decision-making, and how well their decisions include an aligned focus on the health and safety of everyone in the building, students but also educators, paraprofessionals and other staff.*

— Schools and the Path to Zero: Strategies for Pandemic Resilience in the Face of High Community Spread

Leaving aside the demonstrable fact that district leadership has yet to communicate what all of the daily routines and procedures for in-person learning will actually entail *to its own educators* as well as the community at large, there has also as yet been **zero** definitive disclosure regarding how the district will both specifically monitor and communicate levels of intra-school COVID-19 spread and transmission to its staff and the public.

If trust is this fundamental to the successful implementation of the Brown School of Public Health’s re-opening framework, then I cannot help but think that District 97’s current proposition for in-person instruction is seriously flawed, if only due to district leadership refusing to engage in truly transparent, detail-oriented discussions with both their teachers and the larger Oak Park community.

A related stumbling block to this issue of transparency is the Brown plan’s stipulation of “robust quarantine policies and contact tracing practices” in addition to “surveillance/screening testing.” If this is a requirement for District 97’s re-opening plan, who is responsible for this burden both logistically and financially? Considering that District 200 recently inked a \$400,000+ contract with a vendor just for surveillance testing among students alone, what assurance do we have that District 97 is prepared to undertake these kind of testing, screening, and contact-tracing policies as well as the associated costs needed to ensure safe levels of infection control per the Brown plan? Indeed, *what are the costs of the district’s plan*, and furthermore what are the specifics explaining how the district will provide these services and oversight?

Regardless, the Brown plan also requires that “testing programs must be carried out with transparency in the reporting of results, or they risk engendering distrust,” which would necessitate consistent updates

(i.e. daily or at the very least weekly) from district and/or public health officials regarding the state of testing and positivity rates as well as open access to school-specific COVID-19 data. Given that the district presented no concrete plans or commitments for their collecting and sharing of such data at the previous meeting, this remains yet another hurdle for district leadership to clear, and a question to which I am anxiously awaiting an answer.

Even more, the authors from the Brown plan stipulate that “surveillance testing for educators, paraprofessionals, and other staff is recommended in order to reduce the risk of *asymptomatic* transmission, once the level of community spread has exceeded 20/100,000 daily new cases.” Considering that current rates of community infection per 100,000 are well over *10 times this level* in Oak Park right now, this would suggest District 97 is also prepared to provide such surveillance testing for all of its staff immediately upon returning to in-person instruction. With this in mind, what level of resources dedicated to providing this service is the district currently able to commit, and how will they roll out said service to school staff in the coming weeks?

Finally, on the facilities management front, The Brown plan raises yet another troubling concern regarding the need for adequate ventilation/filtration of classroom spaces in terms of the number of “‘clean’ air” exchanges per hour (a term the plan also fails to define in scientific terms). While the Brown plan specifically states that “one of the most important elements of infection control” hinges upon “achieving 4-6 air changes per hour of ‘clean’ air,” to date the District 97 Buildings and Grounds Department has found “[an] average design ventilation rate of 3.0 [outdoor air changes per hour] with an average minimum outdoor air percentage of 36%” among a sample of district classrooms. And while this sub-standard figure *could* be mitigated through the use of extra filtration measures, District 97 Building and Grounds has thus far specifically stated that only MERV 8-rating filters are currently in use in building HVAC systems — filters that provide [only 85% percent efficiency](#) at removing particles between 3 to 10 micrometers in size — vastly larger than the ~0.06 to 1.4 micron-sized particles associated with COVID-19. As such, how does the district plan to improve this currently inadequate filtration/exchange rate to meet the standards of their chosen re-opening framework *vis a vis* the Brown plan cited above? Is there adequate funding to utilize the more expensive MERV 14 or 16 filters used in hospitals that are capable of capturing COVID-19 particles? And if so, are existing HVAC systems powerful enough to even incorporate the use of these more-restrictive filters without upgrades?

Taken together, the challenges inherent in Brown’s rigorous planning and logistical framework for providing a truly “near-zero” transmission environment during in-person instruction could well present a task that our district leadership may not be able to address fully. And, at the very least, they have yet to present a cohesive, thoughtful, and transparent plan to the public that satisfies the concerns raised above, all of which *have come directly from the source of guidance the district itself takes as canon for re-opening our schools*.

And so I ask: if the district cannot — or is simply unwilling — to transparently address the various line-items required by the re-opening framework their own leadership has chosen, how can they justify this as a prudent “plan” for returning to in-person instruction in the coming weeks?

### **Angila Tefara**

Teachers need accommodation too! Now is the time to admit a mistake was made and correct it before it cannot be undone. As we have seen many times in the last year, we have to pivot, change, adjust our plans and expectations including regarding the education of our smallest community members. Yes, a great many parents offered that a number 1 priority was keeping our children with the same teacher, but it is not our only priority. We cannot all expect to get our first priority or that we wouldn’t agree to sacrifice 1 of our priorities for the collective good. IF we only look at the preferences of our students/families and offer no accommodation to our teachers than we have our priorities gravely

wrong. Some of our students' education is desperately dependent on in person interactions, but not students can or will return now. Students are not more important than teachers. Please correct course now and offer those teachers in need accommodation to work from home and teach are students who will also be at home.

Also, please advocate strongly and prioritize getting our teachers who can and will be returning sooner to the classrooms vaccinated promptly.

### **Ruby Dajani**

As a member of OPTA, I am writing to you today to express my concerns regarding the reopening plans. As ever, I am proud to serve the Oak Park community and I am fully committed to ensuring our students' educational well-being. In that spirit, I respectfully request that the Board of education should consider the voices of staff regarding the health risks that our students, faculty, and families will be exposed to if District 97 chooses to return in person.

- 1.) We should wait until employees have been able to receive the first 2 doses of the Covid vaccine and have waited the appropriate time for it to be effective.
- 2.) I also ask that accommodations be met for ALL staff who require it. Having lost my grandmother and close family members to COVID-19 this summer I would hate for even 1 family to have to go through that experience.
- 3.) After learning that across district 97 majority of our BIPOC families have opted for remote learning another concern I have is that the conversations started with the need to return to some type of in-person due to equity concerns and to support our most struggling students; however, are we really creating an equitable environment by returning to hybrid? How equitable will our classes be in terms of race? What will classroom spaces look like? How will our BIPOC students feel? I ask that you take this very seriously and think about the message that is being sent.

### **Rebecca Ward**

I have a Kindergartner and 3rd grader who are signed up for hybrid learning. I am hoping that in returning to school, they will not be on Zoom and iPads for in person learning time. This is not good for them developmentally and would never be used for Kindergartners and sparingly for 3rd graders during a regular school year. I understand that teachers have the challenging task of live streaming classes to virtual students while teaching in person and hope they are given the guidance and support from the district to be able to do mostly non-tech non-screen teaching and learning during the mornings for kids who are physically present in the classroom. Kindergartners should not be doing Seesaw activities instead of paper and pencil and manipulatives if in person. Although I understand that hybrid school will not look like the regular school we know from the past, please explain to parents what the school day will look like (delivery and instruction methods) and how that varies by grade (since technology is much more challenging and provides less valuable instruction for younger ages) so that we can make informed decisions about sending our children to school in person. If our kids are going to be staring at screens for several hours but just from a different location, we need to know that in advance.

### **Erin Jacobson**

As a District 97 elementary school special education teacher and member of the Oak Park Teachers Association, I am writing with hope that you consider stalling the hybrid plan for several very important reasons. Before I begin, I want to thank anyone who has been a part of the difficult and tedious process of creating a hybrid plan. I appreciate your work and efforts and do not want to minimize how difficult and exhausting this must have been. I know there is no ideal hybrid or remote plan that will work for

everyone. However, the health and safety of our students, teachers, and staff should be the most important factor in deciding whether or not we are going to go through with this plan on February 1st.

The current hybrid plan is extremely disruptive to learning. This transition is an overwhelming task for our teachers, staff, and students to accomplish during this winter. Our classroom communities have had several months to create connections and routines despite the challenges of remote learning. Connections and routines are key ingredients that our young learners need in order to be successful. Severely changing our routines in the middle of the school year will cause our classrooms to need to rebuild connections in a new way and create brand new routines. At the start of the school year, it can take months to achieve a sense of community and routine. The hybrid plan is asking students to recreate their sense of community and routine in a way that they have never been asked before. Our students have never experienced having three core subjects stuffed into several hours. Our K-2 students who are exhausted by midday will be attending live remote specials all stuffed into the afternoon. Our 3-5 students will be unable to connect live with their special's teachers and instead will be asked to work independently most of the afternoon. Our co-taught and resource students with Individualized Education Plans will continue to receive their interventions remotely. This is because our small groups have students from multiple classrooms, therefore it would be unsafe and difficult due to social distancing requirements to meet in person. Some hybrid students in the instructional classroom will continue to attend their general education classrooms remotely as well. Our hybrid students will need to eat their snacks silently in a room, 6 feet away from one another. Windows will need to be open at least three inches in each classroom to improve ventilation with temperatures near or below freezing for at least the next month or two. Teachers will continue to use Zoom and Google Meets for both hybrid and remote students so we can continue our small group work. Students' work will continue to be on their iPads because we can't share materials, turn physical assignments in, or move around. In other words, the way that we will be presenting material and asking kids to interact with it is no different than our current remote learning model. Although the above aspects of the hybrid plan are not ideal, our teachers and staff will rise to the occasion and work with what we have been dealt as we always do. However, I ask that the hybrid plan that will disrupt our student's school experience is stalled until it is safer to return.

Asking students, teachers, and staff to be together in an indoor space for four to five hours during this stage of the pandemic is unconscionable. Between Cook County's case counts, updated research on aerosols, updated research on school transmissions, and the new strain of Covid-19, it is unbelievable that this hybrid plan is actually safe. Teachers are beginning to have the opportunity to get vaccinated. Spring and warmer, more comfortable weather are nearing as well. Although it isn't an ideal situation, remote learning is allowing our students' education to continue and, more importantly, has kept us all safe. For now, it is the safest option, and I would hope that the Oak Park community, board of education, and District 97 administration would care enough about their educators' and students' health to stall this plan.

### **Laura Best**

Please reconsider delaying the start of hybrid plan. COVID-19 is still prevalent and our teachers, staff, and children are at risk. Some might think it's time to send them back to in-person learning, but speaking as a mother of a child with an IEP on the Autism Spectrum, who is falling behind on his goals, I prefer to have him and my family healthy over getting him back to school in person.

The hybrid plan could be affecting our neighbors who are teachers and some families will no longer have a choice to keep their children home because now their employer requires them to come in because school is an option again.

I realize that our teachers and staff are not able to have a choice either.

Teachers and staff members have families and are at risk of getting themselves or their loved ones sick. Let's wait until more people are vaccinated please.

### **Stephanie Suerth**

I am a professional educator in District 97 and a member of OPTA speaking as an individual. I was very disheartened and discouraged to learn the Board would be continuing to hold meetings virtually "for the safety of the Board and community" while simultaneously sending educators and students back into the buildings. Anyone who has ever attended a BOE meeting at the administration building knows that that building in particular is MUCH MORE – let me emphasize that – MUCH MORE equipped than MOST if not all of our classrooms to socially distance at 6 feet. The tables and padded chairs are on wheels. The moveable wall could provide extra space. A microphone from the recent purchase could be used. Even half the Board or admin could be remote and half in person to model what the classroom will look like in our proposed hybrid plan. You could show the community what the experience of remote students will be like, and show solidarity with your educators by holding a meeting (like a class) in person while one or more of your monitors a chat for the remote members and community. In addition, there were eight days to make these arrangements for seven members, one secretary, and maybe a handful of administrators this is of course assuming everyone came in. It would be even less if it was hybrid or partially remote. Our educators received ten days' notice to make similar arrangements for themselves, their families and their classes which consist of twenty plus students at the elementary level and over one hundred students for most educators at the middle schools. I can hardly imagine the logistics of making this change to be even the slightest bit insurmountable. I hope you will genuinely consider making the necessary changes to move to in person meetings.

In addition, I would like to ask that you please urge the administration to actually work with our educators to find safe solutions to the needs of those who are immuno-compromised. I have been told, and dearly hope it is inaccurate, that 200+ requests were made and mostly denied. In fact, many are still in the process of review with only five days remaining until we return on site. For example, I was under the impression that ISBE changed language that would allow educators to teach from home while in person students are monitored by a substitute or other supervisor. I would imagine this to be a simple solution, and I personally know educators whose districts made this happen for them. I hope this solution was seriously considered. I still fear that educators being forced to choose between their lives and their livelihoods and I find it to be inhumane. Without doubt, it could have a serious impact on the continuity of instruction from professional educators for our students.

I would like to end by reminding the community and the members of the Board that the experiences of educators are those of our students, the working conditions of our educators are the learning environments of our students, therefore you cannot put students first or forefront or center if educators are continually put last. As long as our educators are feeling micromanaged and untrusted as professionals, there will continue to be disunity and mistrust in District 97. After watching today's inauguration, I hope we can begin looking to find more commonalities and become one united district – united FOR our students, united WITH our educators, and united AS a community.

### **Kristen Keleher**

Thank you for the commitment to safely reopening our schools, its clear there has been a great deal of time and energy put into this thoughtful plan. It's my understanding that the current plan eliminates or significantly reduces the elementary specials and I'm hoping this can be reconsidered. For most of our kids the specials teachers are the only teachers they've ever met in person and I think this continuity is especially important right now. I know art class is a favorite for many students and believe it should be regarded with some priority, as we know art can play an important role in supporting emotional well-being through creative expression. I appreciate the opportunity to share this feedback and all of the hard

work of the board and faculty, thank you.

### **Cate Readling**

Please accept my deep appreciation for serving our community on an elected board that I believe has some of the most difficult and also most important work there is. Navigating the typical school system decisions in our town is tough enough and now, the pandemic too.

I am writing today to ask to change my survey response. I have a 3rd (Beye) and 8th (Julian) grade student in the District and I answered the survey in a way that would allow the most flexibility for my family and not what I believed was in the best interest of our community. It's tough to break those habits for sure.

I had not also considered the ramifications on families with work situations that could be adversely affected by school reopening. Should an employer who accommodated a work schedule or location to allow a family to stay safe, a change in access to school could lead to that employer changing that allowance. Similar to what the District is requiring of teachers and staff now.

I believe that committing to staying fully remote until such time that a majority of our teachers and staff are opting-in should be the starting point of our community decision.

Recognizing that information and conditions are changing day to day (new strains, case numbers, etc.), a fully vaccinated staff and faculty also seems a minimum standard of care. And since we still believe that vaccinated people can possibly still spread Covid, we should be vaccinating their families as well.

### **Johnathan Cambell**

It is simply too early to require teachers to be back in school in-person and also expect children to return. Most teachers are category 1(c), which gives them no priority in immunization. The large majority of teachers cannot access the vaccine for COVID yet, and the same is true for the parents of their students.

I am not opposed to the vaccine for COVID. I plan to get it as soon as it's available. Right now, due to distribution problems we simply do not know when teachers or the families of Oak Park will be vaccinated... It is outrageous to greatly raise the exposure of teachers and the families of Oak Park to this potentially deadly virus when the vaccine is not even available for most people. All we are tired of self-isolation but this decision must be changed.

### **Emily Culbertson**

For the record, I completely share Board member Murray-Liebl's concerns and comments about the testing options presented to District 97.

Thank you for your diligent work in bringing a hybrid model to District 97 with so many factors to balance. I strongly urge the Board to explore and adopt a coronavirus testing system for teachers, staff, and students. Testing is not a substitute for masking, ventilation, and social distancing, but it does add a layer of protection, especially for returning teachers.

**Caroline Delia**

As A Member of the OPTA I wanted to make sure that I expressed my thoughts on this very important matter. Teachers in other districts are being vaccinated as we speak. Teachers in Oak Park will soon receive their vaccines if they wish to. With this amazing opportunity approaching quickly, I am confused as to why we, as a district are rushing to put students back into classrooms.

I have read the literature that has been shared by the district about the structures in place for opening the schools. In the last few days two alarming pieces have also been released. One report, by NBC news stated that the hospitalization rate for children has increased over 800% in recent weeks. Another article stated that teachers are more likely than other professions, outside of healthcare workers, to become infected with Covid. All of this at a time when Europe is closing their schools again due to the new variant that has taken over there.

This variant is on our continent, in our states and cities, 70% more contagious. Our own experts say that this variant will be the dominant variant in the United States by March. Knowing this, would it not be better to wait for the opportunity to fully vaccinate staff to best protect our communities especially our most vulnerable.

**Elizabeth Chu**

As a member of the Oak Park Teachers Association, I ask that you delay the start of hybrid/in-person learning until all teachers and school personnel are vaccinated. If delaying the start date is not possible, then please consider providing remote teaching opportunities for staff members who are considered high risk or have immediate family members who are considered high risk.

Many teachers, including myself, feel that we have to make an impossible decision. We love our students; we want the best for them; we long for the day when we can be together in the classroom. However, teachers and/or those who have immediate family members who are at higher risk for health complications have very real and valid concerns about returning to in-person teaching, especially with the new, more transmissible variant of the virus that federal health officials believe will peak by March if we do not strictly comply to mitigation efforts now.

Dr. Fauci said, “The cavalry is on the way. . . . Now that we see the end in sight, now is the time to double down.” Our district was one of the first ones to transition into remote learning at the start of this pandemic. Dr. Kelley, administrators, and the board followed the most up-to-date information and took the necessary precautionary measures to ensure that our students, staff, and community remained healthy and safe. We ask that you do the same--to “double down” to ensure that our students, staff, and their family members stay safe and healthy.

The following comments were not read aloud during the meeting.

**Canika Gulley**

I am writing to ask you to reconsider switching to the hybrid model now. I do not understand why new metrics are being used nor do I understand what they are. I realize this will be discussed at the board meeting today but am confused as to why the metrics are changing. If those metrics were used to determine when it's safe to return earlier this school year why is that changing now?

At a time when Americans are being told that they should not gather with people that do not live in their household teachers are being asked to gather with 10-15 student from different households. Why?

At a time when it has been stated several times that Americans should stay home including work from home if it is possible to do their jobs from home (It is possible to teach from home! Our teachers are

doing an excellent job of it by the way) teachers are being asked to come back to the buildings. Why?

I also want to point out that there are new variants of COVID-19 that spread faster/more easily. This is new and it seems to me causes an even more unsafe environment for in person learning.

In addition, teachers are so close to being vaccinated! Why not wait until all teachers that want to be vaccinated have the chance to do so before forcing them to return to work?

Please reconsider starting the hybrid plan at a later date.

### **Miriam Tamayo and Domenic Salpietra**

What a historical day we are living, both at the national and at the local levels. We are eager to hear the district's decisions on hybrid learning and a little worried for the outcome that may bring to our third graders at Beye Elementary. We are hopeful the district's decision to resume in-person learning will not force out educators who are at risk and hope those who wish to continue teaching from home are granted that freedom. We wanted to show our support and hope our message can be heard by those making the final decisions. While we are excited for the potential to have our kids back in the classroom, with all health and safety measures in place, we would not want to lose our educators who have made such wonderful strides at creating a true community in this unique and unprecedented year, at the cost of in-person learning. Our educators need the freedom to decide for themselves whether in person teaching is safe for their and their family's health. Thank you for all your continued support in this tumultuous year.

### **Kim Jackewicz**

While I understand that this has been a difficult year and that people want to get kids back in schools, I do not understand why we are rushing to do so before teachers have been vaccinated. We are so close to teachers being able to get the vaccine - are they not worth protecting?

It is absolutely shameful how vulnerable and older citizens of this country have been treated during this pandemic, being treated as expendable. I thought Oak Park was more progressive than that. After asking teachers to pivot many times over the last year, why are we forcing them all into harm's way? Why not wait until the third trimester, when presumably our teachers have been vaccinated? Our teachers have done an **amazing** job at home this year and are worth protecting. I've already heard that many will take leave or quit if forced back, and I do not blame them. How does the district plan to staff classes where we lose teachers? The sub pool is already shallow at best.

This plan is beyond short sighted. Please, consider waiting until we can protect our vulnerable. Oak Park is better than this.

### **Valarie Kohn**

I am writing because I am concerned for our teachers. I don't understand why the district is pushing for a return to school now, especially when teachers are so close to getting vaccinated. By returning to hybrid now, the District is putting all of our teachers and their families at risk of contracting covid-19. Many of our teachers are at high risk for a severe illness. They have all gone above and beyond this year with remote instruction and I feel like it is a slap in their faces to force them to return to in-person learning when they are so close to getting vaccinated. Teachers are in group 1(b) and are now eligible for vaccination. But it takes approximately 5-6 weeks for the vaccine to become effective. And this week, we should see the release of more vaccines to our community. Why can't we just wait a few more weeks so that our teachers are protected? I know and appreciate that there are students struggling with remote learning. And I also know that a very small number of special needs students have returned to in-person instruction already. If we just wait a mere 6-8 weeks to start hybrid, we would allow our teachers to become inoculated. This would send such a strong message of support to our teachers, who have given so

much of themselves to our students this year. Let's honor our teachers by allowing them to protect themselves from the virus before forcing them back to in-person instruction. Let's show them how much they mean to us by respecting their health and safety enough to allow them to become vaccinated before forcing a return to in-person learning. As Principal Mendez said at our PTO meeting last night -- it's not a matter of if there'll be an outbreak in our school, but when... Please reconsider starting hybrid on Feb. 1st. We've come this far. Six to eight weeks isn't that much longer. Please protect our teachers.

**Carrie Coward-Bucher**

I want to first say how much I appreciate all of the hard work this board has done for our scholars this year. That said, the coming months bring with them two new realities: Vaccine availability for 1b workers (including our teachers and school staff) and the likelihood of the new, more infectious, COVID strain entering our community in March. The latter will render all of our current safety precautions insufficient, as this strain is more easily transmitted. The former means that we are sending staff and students into a more dangerous environment when staff are \*this close\* from vaccination and being able to safely and confidently resume in-person work.

Certainly remote learning is not ideal. That said, the enormous upheaval associated with the hybrid model, combined with the enormous risk it presents to staff, students, and families in the OP community is far too great a risk given the projected circumstances.

I appreciate the pressure you are facing from a minority of parents who are adamant we return to school. Those voices are loud and, largely, drown the rest of us out. However, I urge you to reconsider before these decisions have disastrous consequences on the long term health, including long haul COVID and death, of our community members.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Liebl moved, seconded by Moore that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was approved by voice roll call. There being no further business to conduct, President Broy declared the meeting adjourned at 5:33 p.m.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Board President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Board Secretary