

**Official Minutes of the  
Oak Park Board of Education District 97  
260 Madison Street, Oak Park  
January 26, 2021 Meeting**

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

President Broy called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Broy, Spurlock, Liebl, Kearney, Moore, Kim (arrived at 6:10 p.m., and Breymaier (arrived at 6:27 p.m.)

Absent: None

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.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Moore moved, seconded by Kearney that the Board move into executive session for the purpose of Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees 5 ILCS 120/2(C)(1), Closed Minutes Review 5 ILCS 120(c)(16) at 6:03 p.m.

Ayes: Moore, Kearney, Kim, Broy, Spurlock, Breymaier, and Liebl

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed

OPEN SESSION

**OPEN SESSION**

Moore moved that the board move into Open Session at 6:54 p.m. The motion was seconded by Kearney. All members of the Board were in agreement. The Board reconvened in Open Session at 7:02 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Members Kearney and Spurlock read aloud the public comments that were emailed to the board prior to the start of the board meeting.

**David Miller**

I am wondering how you came to the decision that in person classes were safe enough for teachers and students to have in the mornings, virtual afternoon classes while also deciding it is not safe enough for you to meet in person for your board meetings. I feel as though if it is not safe enough for the seven of you to meet in person for a few hours, then it is not safe enough for hundreds of teachers, hundreds of staff, and hundreds of students to meet in person, even for a few hours. Safety for me but not for thee I guess. It really shows how little you value the educators' lives who are meant to enrich and teach our children.

**Karen MicMillin**

I strongly urge you to delay going back to any type of in person learning until all teachers and staff are vaccinated. We are so close, it only makes sense to wait.

**Kim Jackewicz**

I hate to have to keep emailing about this, but I continue to be beyond perplexed as to why we are forcing teachers into a dangerous situation with vaccines being so close.

Teachers were sent back to school this week. There is no PPE, no sanitizer, no nothing. Teachers were promised PPE, but it's Tuesday, and there's still no PPE. Our teachers also have not received any sort of training on how they are supposed to teach kids both in person and remotely. Never mind that we threw away the metrics regarding return and didn't even inform the community properly. We are throwing our teachers to the wolves, and in the process, our kids will suffer. That anybody thinks that this is a solution that works for the community just makes no sense to me. Who would want to work in a district that has so little regard for their employees and thinks nothing of putting them in danger to appease the loud, rich, white parents of our district?

Vaccines are so close. Why can we not wait a few more weeks, get our teachers vaccinated, get them trained, get PPE for our schools, and then go back? It makes so much more sense, and would be safer for everyone.

**Aaron McManus**

Please halt the hybrid plan.

New cases are at 3-4 times more than when the pandemic started, with newer, potentially more lethal strains.

Our ventilation systems are not adequate. The airflow in our schools was already a health hazard and has not been sufficiently upgraded.

It is negligent and potentially a lethal risk to send employees and children into those buildings to work closely together.

Is the district ready to defend against a wrongful death suit?

Do you really want this community outraged over deaths because we couldn't wait a little longer?

Is it worth human life?

Real equity means giving support where it is needed so that the playing field can be level - not trying to give everyone an equal experience.

Please conserve and direct resources towards the kids and families who actually \*need\* support.

Please do not let the voices of community stakeholders who are eager to spread anti-science propaganda drown out the voices of teachers, staff, and the families who support and depend upon them.

Our Beye kid is so excited to come back - but even at 8 she's asking "why are they doing this now?"

We are too close to being vaccinated as a community to put everyone's lives at risk this way.

Please put a stop to this madness.

**Laura Best**

While my sons will continue remote learning, I'm increasingly concerned for the health of teachers, staff, and students going to buildings for Hybrid learning.

I am able to stay home, and it sounds like many other people who \*thought\* that hybrid meant returning <<when safe to do so>> are also not sending their kids.

Teachers are afraid to speak up so parents need to be their voice. I've heard about slow and unreliable WiFi in classrooms, temperature scanners not working, no PPE in buildings yet, no surface cleaners.

I am very disappointed in the way District 97 is handling this. The health and safety of our community and that of teachers and staff is at risk.

**Jennifer Alten**

I am writing that I am gravely concerned about the plan to send teachers – and kids – back to school before teachers are vaccinated. Covid case rates aren't dropping. Plus, this is happening when a new, much more virulent strain of COVID is circulating. Please halt the hybrid plan. Why is it safe now to send teachers and kids to school, when it wasn't before? Nothing has changed except pressure from angry, entitled community members. Our schools' ventilation systems are inadequate and from what I am hearing, teachers are scared and demoralized. How are they going to feel if or when teachers start getting sick? Who is going to teach our kid's classes when teachers fall sick? Even pre-COVID, qualified subs were like unicorns.

I fully support offering in-school learning for those who really need it, those with IEPs and 504s – but that does not apply to the vast majority of students. I am disappointed that District 97 has acquiesced to the loudest, most vocal in our community who want to send their kids back. I hear claims that their children are falling behind and they are so sad about missing school. Ironically, the voices that I've seen the loudest with that message are the families who are white and well-off – and I feel qualified to make that claim because I fall into that group too. But I am not going to claim that my children's needs are greater than the safety and well-being of our teachers, staff and other students. My kids are staying remote and will do so until teachers are vaccinated.

Come on, District 97. We can do better. Keep the schools remote until our teachers and staff are vaccinated.

**Whitney Brooks**

The way the district is handling this transition from remote to hybrid is so incredibly frustrating. It does not seem as though they are truly committed to making the health and safety of the students, faculty, and staff a priority. If they were, there would not be any discussion at all about moving towards in-person learning until all teachers and staff have been vaccinated. I understand that remote learning is not ideal, and has in fact been rough on a lot of families (including my own), but that doesn't mean we should rush this process and send our kids and teachers back to school until it is absolutely safe to do so.

I was informed recently that since there is a shortage of substitute teachers, some of the school specialists and interventionists may be called to sub, meaning that some children with IEPs would experience a disruption in whatever services they're receiving and their IEP minutes will be unmet. This is completely unacceptable. As I'm sure you're aware, children with IEPs have suffered the most during these unprecedented times, and situations like this will not make it any easier on them. Do better, District 97.

**Jennifer Solheim**

I'm the mother of a third grader at Holmes, and wanted to write to express my concern for the safety of our teachers and staff in forcing them to return to in-person work with the hybrid plan. While I recognize and appreciate all of the thought, care, and planning that has gone into this plan, the newest CDC guidelines suggest that in-person learning with appropriate restrictions is safe *if local indoor dining is closed*.

The school district adjusted the metrics in the proposed District 97 plan when the recommended positivity rate shifted in favor of opening sooner, going from 5 percent community positivity rate to 5 percent for children only. I urge you to consider these new CDC guidelines in the other direction now, since the new CDC guidelines suggest that the district is not weighing local guidelines appropriately for the health and safety of all involved.

We had originally selected the hybrid option for our daughter as of February 2; last week, we decided that given the unknown impact of the virus variant and the fact that the metrics shifted without accounting for the virus, we would continue with full remote schooling. I've been very concerned about the teachers and staff, however, who do not have the choices we do.

With these new CDC guidelines, I'm writing to ask you to reconsider the reopening plan until CDC guidelines for safe reopening are met. I do realize how impossible this situation is, and how much work has gone into planning for reopening. There are no good options here; harm reduction strategies, rather than 100 percent safety, are the only way to go.

But these new CDC guidelines suggest that appropriate harm reduction strategies are unfortunately not being met in Cook County for schools to reopen.

Thank you for your care of students, as well as teachers and staff, and your consideration.

**Sarah Boyle**

I introduced myself at the last meeting. I have three requests. Number one, please consider letting parents know that the risk to their students will be about the same as if they were a grocery clerk. "Schools and the Path to Zero," the guide that you are using for reopening, states that school staff will have about that level of risk, so I believe one can assume the level of risk would be the same for students as well. I am a mother of two, trying with my husband to balance work and life during a pandemic without childcare, and I know how little time I have to read and understand case counts and air exchanges per hour, but picturing my kid in a grocery store all morning gives me a clearer picture of the level of risk I would be exposing my family to and anyone we would encounter by sending them to in-person learning.

Number two- Please strongly consider surveillance testing for educators, paraprofessionals, and other staff. Path to Zero recommends this at a rate of 20/100,000 daily new cases, and we are still over that threshold. If you do not plan to test in this way please also tell parents that you are not doing this as so that they can further understand their level of risk.

Number three- please work with the board of health to include school cases, transmissions and outbreaks in their weekly bulletins and please do so as transparently as possible while protecting identities so to help us all gain trust in this plan.

**Arti Walker-Peddakotla**

I'd like to express my concern as a District 97 parent and former microbiologist for the already approved hybrid learning plan that forces teachers to go back into school. As a parent, I understand the struggle that our kids and parents have trying to balance work, take care of our kids, and manage everything else right

now. Yes, our kids are struggling with their mental health - mine are too. Yes, we have kids that absolutely need and would benefit from in-person support. And yes, we should try and give in-person support to those kids that absolutely need it. But as a former microbiologist, I cannot help but think about how much risk we are introducing by reopening schools to those who opt-in to it right now. Here are my concerns:

1. CPS schools have been reopened for a little over two weeks for some students, and already we're seeing COVID cases in their schools <https://blockclubchicago.org/2021/01/13/2nd-staffer-at-mccutcheon-school-tests-positive-for-coronavirus-8-in-quarantine-during-first-week-of-reopened-classrooms/>
2. The new strain of COVID - the UK variant recently identified in Illinois is troubling. Illinois's top doctor said on Friday about the UK COVID-19 variant that "it just means it's now more important than ever before to adhere to them [mitigations]". <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/with-new-variant-now-more-important-than-ever-to-follow-mitigations-illinois-top-doctor/2420859/>
3. The long term health impacts of COVID are still unknown. But early data suggests that there are significant physiological changes that doctors are still trying to understand. In one recent study of 1733 adult patients who survived a COVID-19 infection, 6 months after onset of illness, 76 percent of the patients reported at least one symptom that persisted, with fatigue or muscle weakness being the most frequently reported symptom, and more than 50 percent of these patients presented with residual chest imaging abnormalities. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)00039-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)00039-8/fulltext)

With all of these concerns, why are we sending our teachers back into schools when they haven't even received the vaccine? As a Village Trustee, I know that the Village's Public Health Department has just started Group 1b Vaccinations this week - the same group that includes teachers. Although I understand that the time it will take to vaccinate all of our teachers is unknown, it seems like a better idea to wait to get all of our teachers vaccinated and protected before we send them back into schools. I want to see our kids back in school as much as any other parent. But I first want to see our teachers protected and kept safe. And I do not think this is happening with the current back-to-school plan. No one should have to choose between putting food on the table and protecting their lives. Workers who we once said were essential are now treated as if they are expendable. And in this case, we have a choice to put our teachers and staff's safety first.

I ask this board to reconsider the decision to approve the hybrid learning plan and protect the teachers and staff who work tirelessly to educate our children.

### **Jonathan Campbell**

I am the parent of a 3rd grader in Beye Elementary school. I am writing because I am quite concerned about the process of initiating the hybrid plan and the educational ramifications of the plan itself. My family considered the hybrid model but have since opted to stay remote. We do not feel that the district has been transparent in terms of metrics, and we are afraid for teachers at the schools who still do not have PPE, sanitizer, and other essentials as of the time of this writing.

However, as the school embarks on its hybrid plan, we would like to make sure physical health and wellbeing of our students, teachers, and staff is the foremost priority. We also want to help create the best possible learning environment in these challenging times and to support our teachers, who are a valuable part of our community. Is it my understanding that the schools will be opened even though the identified metrics have not been met?

In order to ensure the safety of all students, teachers, and staff, and to disrupt my child's education as little as possible I ask that you delay the hybrid plan until all teachers and staff in the building have been vaccinated, a plan is in place to accommodate the needs of each teacher who is unable to return to the building, and the identified metrics have been met.

**James and Stacy Pfluecke**

We are the parents of a third grader at Beye School and a 6th grader at Julian Middle School. We have been amazed at the hard and brilliant work of the teachers, staff, and administrators to implement the remote learning plan. We are writing about the process of initiating the hybrid plan, the educational ramifications of the plan itself, and the safety of the students and teachers.

As District 97 embarks on its hybrid plan, we would like to make sure physical health and wellbeing of our students, teachers, and staff is the foremost priority. We also want to help create the best possible learning environment in these challenging times and to support our teachers, who are also a valuable part of our community. It is our understanding that the schools will be opened even though the identified metrics have not been met.

In order to ensure the safety of all students, teachers, and staff, and to disrupt my child's education as little as possible, I ask that you delay the hybrid plan until:

- All teachers and staff in the building have been fully vaccinated;
- A plan is in place to accommodate the needs of each teacher who is unable to return to the building even after being vaccinated;
- And the identified metrics have been met.

We understand that going hybrid will result in some disruption of our children's routine. We understand that there are many children for whom remote learning simply does not work. I hope that the Board and Administration can implement a plan that focuses on the needs of these children and their families and the health needs of teachers. We were one of the families that said we did not want our kids to have to change teachers (in the fall survey) but recognize that keeping the same teachers may not be possible in a plan that truly respects the safety of teachers and their families.

The vaccine is here. Please wait to reopen until the teachers and staff have been vaccinated and a plan is in place to protect the safety of teachers and their families.

**Katie Zapata**

I have written before about our three children, ages five, seven and nine, and the mental health crisis our family has found ourselves in this year. I wanted to express my gratitude for your efforts developing our back to school / hybrid plan. I realize that with our community's opinions on back to school split 54/46 that it must feel like you are damned if you do, damned if you don't. I have heard the roller coaster of public comments - where one group asks for something with a flood of comments, and then when you make a decision, you receive a flood of comments against that decision. It is not your job to make people "happy", but to make the best evidence-based decisions possible that can have a positive impact on our kids. I know many communities have been more heavily weighted in terms of public support for a return to in person and have likely not felt the same roller coaster effect.

What I appreciate is that you have consulted the science, you have thought carefully through scenarios, and you have always made our children's and teachers' safety a priority. I appreciate that when the science and guiding recommendations regarding metrics changed, that you consulted with your healthcare experts and then followed suit. This year has required everyone to be flexible and to adapt based on evolving science. I appreciate your willingness to adapt.

This issue of returning to school has become so divisive for our community. For some, remote learning has worked well and children are thriving. For others, like my family, remote learning has not worked and we have children in crisis. Those pushing for their children to return have immediately been labeled as anti-teacher. It saddens me that we have not been able to offer one another grace.

Tomorrow morning I will bring my second grade son, who is on the autism spectrum, back to school with his one on one aide. We have a long road ahead to reverse the regression that has occurred with him as a result of the past year. However, we know that being back in person is the first step. I am grateful to each of you for the hours and hours you have spent over the past 10 months to get us to this place.

**Lauren Pero**

I just want to send my sincere gratitude to the Board and all the teachers in the district for your efforts in putting together the plan for kids to have the option to go back next week. I know I'm not alone in wanting to support the staff in any way I can and would urge the principals and PTO boards to reach out to parents if there's any way we can be of assistance. We want to make this as safe and smooth as possible. Thank you again for your hard work and dedication to our kids.

**Rachel Fobes**

I am a parent of a second grader in District 97. My daughter is thrilled to return to in-person learning next week. As a parent, I am finally exhaling. Your decision to implement a hybrid model will make a meaningful impact on her.

I am also very grateful for the 5-day model. I truly believe this model will result in the students and teachers developing a rhythm - both in person and remotely - that couldn't be established with the other model. I am appreciative that you've found a way to make this work and hopeful that once everyone gets going, things won't feel as stressful for everyone.

I recognize that there is no answer right now that makes our community happy, but want you to know I appreciate the steps you've taken. We also plan to take steps in our family to keep our schools safe - just as we have been doing since August with our son's preschool class. I firmly believe if everyone puts in the effort, we can get District 97 back on track.

**Katie Diamond**

My family has submitted several public comments over the past months in regards to our son who receives special Ed services. He will be returning to school tomorrow with his 1:1 aide as he starts the long battle to combat the regression that has occurred with him as a result of the past year. He is excited to see staff, teachers and his classmates in person. However, we know that being back in person is just the first step. We are grateful to each of you for the hours upon hours you have spent over the past 10 months to get him, our two other children and the entire school district to this place.

As an advanced practice nurse who has worked these past 10 months taking care of COVID pts during and after their lengthy battle I appreciate that the board and administration has consulted with the health care professionals in our own school district. The board has thought carefully through scenarios, and you have always made our children's, teachers' and staff's safety a priority. And when the science including increasing scientific and medical based data showed that there is minimal transmission in schools the district listened to the recommendations by expert health professionals and made appropriate changes to District 97s metrics. This year has required everyone to be flexible and to adapt based on evolving science.

Your efforts developing our hybrid plan was vitally important for so many children who are not able to access their education via remote learning.

**Jenny Austin**

Thank you for providing an in-person option in addition to the remote option. We are very excited to have a hybrid option and are excited to be back at Hatch next week. We recognize that our community remains divided, but having a hybrid option helps meet the needs for those of us who desperately want our kids back in school in person.

**Lauren Smallwood**

As the parent of a Kindergartner in District 97 I am writing in only to say THANK YOU for all of your efforts. We are grateful for the hybrid plan and look forward to supporting students and teachers as we all continue to navigate the new normal.

**Margaret Nekrosius**

I want to thank you for pushing forward with the hybrid plan to reopen our schools. Thank you to all teachers who have worked so hard to meet each new challenge as it comes. Our students and Oak Park families thank you for your dedication and perseverance in such a hard time. Just this afternoon the CDC released further analysis of the data and have concluded that with appropriate masking and social distancing school should be in person. As a town of more secondary degrees than any other in our nation I hope we can follow the science and the data which continues to support in person education with risk mitigation. I look forward to my daughter who has struggled through remote learning having the opportunity to see her teacher in person and also see other children.

**Jana and John McMahon**

We thank you for listening to families, students and providing a hybrid option for our kindergartner and second grader. We thank our principal and their wonderful teachers who also helped make this a possibility. I know many teachers and families may be fearful of this transition. We have worked as essential workers since March and understand the challenges. We are all in this together. Remote learning has been a major struggle for our family and are really looking forward to getting them back in the classroom!

**Emily Dagostino**

My neighbor to the north and my neighbor to the east and my neighbor to the south—all clinicians—have selflessly shown up for the people they serve since this pandemic started. Our childcare workers have shown up. Our grocery store workers. The environmental services workers and meal prep teams in our hospitals and nursing homes. They've all shown up.

Were they scared? Yes. Was it always safe for them? No. Did they show up anyway? Yes, because the people their jobs exist to serve needed them.

When the hospitals I work for needed help last spring, a construction company and longtime partner responded immediately. Their workers went into hospitals to help make them safer. No one knew much about the virus at that point. It didn't stop them. They put themselves at risk to do the work that needed to be done. What's more: They donated tens of thousands of dollars' worth of money and PPE to protect and support hospital workers.

“You all can get your vaccines now, right?” I recently asked the construction company's CEO.

“No, we’re 1c,” he said. Apparently, his workers—who showed up when called to help—are essential; they’re just not essential enough.

Our teachers are essential enough. Now here in Oak Park they are being called back to schools to serve all the students their jobs exist to serve. Thank you to each of our teachers and staff members for joining the ranks of the essential workers who have responded to the call this past year, and thank you for doing the work that needs to be done right now.

I understand your apprehension and fear. I urge you to please try to take comfort in the facts:

The data—the science—shows that with the right safety precautions in place, there’s a way to protect teachers and students in schools. Schools all over the world, nation and Illinois have been safely open. Childcare programs and private schools right here in Oak Park have effectively reopened to serve their communities. The vaccines are highly effective. Also among the facts: Many children—mine included—are suffering without the option of in-person instruction. They need you.

Here are a few facts about me: I am a woman who trusts the data and science and who believes what I have seen firsthand as a working mother who has had to put my kids into childcare this year because I have not had the luxury of help at home. I am a woman who is deeply grateful for the many, many people who have made real, painful sacrifices in service of others this year. I am a woman who has chosen, as my professional calling, to tell the stories of dozens of heroes.

A pharmacist I talked to yesterday is one of those heroes. She told me a story about a young couple she’d recently seen. One lost their job because of COVID. Then they were diagnosed with stage IV cancer. They lost their home. Medication would cost thousands of dollars a month. The pharmacist heard about their plight and because of her—and the donors behind her—the couple’s medication was covered entirely through philanthropy.

“We all think our problems are big,” the pharmacist said, “then we ask each other to share our problems and we see our problems aren’t so big.”

I am grateful, hopeful, encouraged and excited to finally have an opportunity this year to tell stories like this one about the public educators in this community—a story about heroes who, even when it asked a lot of them, showed up to do the job that’s theirs to do in service of others who in most cases are even more vulnerable than they are. In case it’s not obvious, I’m speaking specifically in this case of our kids, who are vulnerable and whose vulnerability and needs urgently matter.

As I keep hearing my son’s teacher say, they—her students, our kids—are the future. Thank you all for giving them models of service in their lives, so they know it’s possible for them to someday be that same kind of selfless, service-oriented hero. Our future depends on it.

### **Jenny Austin**

The CDC published a new report in the Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) today stating that reopening schools can be safe if the school and the community take precautions to reduce transmission. Oak Park has had these precautions in place as evidenced by our ability to have private schools and the PDOP and Hephzibah programs open safely for staff and students without outbreaks since August/September. Similarly, the District 97 plan also has similar precautions in place in the hybrid model.

Here’s a link to the JAMA article and to the NYT summary.

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2775875>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/26/world/cdc-schools-reopening.html>

My family is very excited to have an in-person five-day a week hybrid option beginning next week. We've been waiting since August for this day and sent our daughter to the PDOP program for the most school like experience we could provide her without enrolling in one of the many open private schools. We will continue to do everything to keep our family and our extended community safe, just like we have been doing.

**Rhetta Gibbs**

I am a parent of a first grader and I wanted to express my sincere appreciation for all of the hard work and effort that has gone into making the hybrid option a reality for District 97. I recognize you've been navigating completely uncharted territory and have had to make difficult decisions along the way. While there is no easy or perfect solution for everyone involved, I am confident in our district's ability to safely bring students and teachers back in person.

**Eric Friedman**

I have been impressed with District 97's recent plans to implement in-person instruction. The change in metrics is based on the latest science, and the safety protocols in place are consistent with best practice. I know some parents and teachers are concerned about safety, as am I, but everything I'm seeing is that District 97's plans are reasonably safe.

Research has shown that pre-schools, daycares, private schools, and public schools that have been doing in-person instruction with similar safety protocols have not increased risk for COVID.

The benefits to our students will be incredible—better education, social development, and mental health. For this, I say: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you times two. Thank you squared. Thank you googolplex.

**Kerri Joy**

Thank you for all of your hard work to produce a hybrid plan that supports the needs of families who want to be in person and those that want to remain remote. I understand along with many in this community how difficult it was to pull all the plans together and also that not everyone can be happy or pleased with this outcome. I think it is important that we all recognize that this is only a first step and it's important that this community take it. Getting those that need and want to be back in person is vital to ensuring we as a community maintain our reputation of being one with best in class education.

This will not be without trial and error over the next several weeks and months but we need to begin the steps to be in person and we need to do so as soon as possible. I know that many are scared but we must continue to have science, studies, and schools that are open be our guide to success. The schools that are open in the Oak Park area have been doing so successfully for months and not jeopardizing anyone's safety. We must continue to let that be the loudest voice we hear.

I ask that we stay focused and committed to the plan that has rolled out. For the teachers listening, we hear your concerns for returning. I simply ask that you recognize that teachers like medical professionals are essential and we need you just like we need our nurses and doctors. Because we have waited this long to make the steps to be back in person we cannot afford to wait for the vaccine to roll out.

Our future depends on this moment and our kids are literally starving for the opportunity to be back. We understand it will not feel like it used to and that there is a lot that will be different but we also know that

allowing a child to even see a friend in person lifts their spirits and right now our kids need that so very much. We need to find a way to bring back a little bit of the joy of school and this is the first best way to do so.

Thank you once again to everyone in this district working to ensure we have options for all in this community!

### **Emily Gage**

I fail to understand the urgency around getting our students and teachers and staff back to in-person school by February 1st. The vaccine is clearly in reach, and only logistical barriers—which should and can be addressed by District 97—are keeping us from having all our teachers and staff vaccinated. They should be able to be vaccinated before they are required to go back to work in the school setting. I understand that the vast majority—if not all—of requests from teachers and staff to work remotely based on health conditions have been categorically denied. Certainly ensuring the start of school until AFTER all teachers and staff have a chance to be vaccinated would be a much safer, wiser, and more humane decision for all.

### **Kate Odom**

I want to commend and thank you for developing a safe and concrete plan for students to access education in-person. It is clear that you were following the most current and accurate data to make the best, although complicated, decisions to meet the needs of our whole community. I understand that there continue to be worries, unknowns, fears, and insecurities. However, with the comprehensive plan to return that is following best practices as guided by local and national medical and public health experts, we can see how this plan goes above and beyond to ensure safety for the students, teachers, and staff re-entering the buildings.

My District 97 student is so excited to see what her teacher looks like in "real life" and we've all playfully made guesses on how tall she is. My District 97 student has been jealous as she's watched her Pre-K sister attend school, five day/week, and 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. since May. She didn't understand how she could (safely) attend Hephzibah, housed in Holmes, five days/week from 7:45 a.m. – 6 p.m., yet she was not allowed to just "go to real school". She said to me last night that she's so excited to actually learn again.

Thank you, sincerely, for providing a safe way for my student to receive access to the type of educational setting that best meets her developmental needs.

### **Mara Maas**

I am a pediatrician and mom of four District 97 students. I am writing today to thank you for your continued efforts to bring our kids back to school and your focus on safety.

I can tell the community from my experience on the superintendent's advisory panel as well as conversations with Dr. Kelley herself that the district is taking safety incredibly seriously and personally. Science supports the district's decision to offer an in person option for our children. Numerous organizations and public health experts have stated that schools should be the last places in the community to close and the first to reopen when implementing mitigation measures. This includes the CDC, the European CDC, the WHO, UNICEF, the American Academy of Pediatrics, among many others. The CDC just today released a report stating that COVID spread within schools both in the US and abroad has been scant and does not appear to contribute significantly to community spread. This week's Journal of the Medical Association Pediatrics includes an editorial from a well-respected infectious disease physician advocating for a return to in person learning. The district has had medical experts including adult and pediatric infectious disease specialists and epidemiologists advising them.

As a pediatrician, I have seen up close the toll this is taking on our children. I have had more suicide attempts and psychiatric hospitalizations in my patients since stay at home started than I did in the previous ten years. I have seen autistic children regress. Some have developed new self-injuring behaviors. I have seen children paralyzed with anxiety and overwhelmed by social isolation. I have had kids sobbing because they think they are stupid or bad because they cannot focus and learn well over Zoom.

I have a tremendous amount of empathy for what our district teachers and staff are feeling right now. I spent much of the spring exhausted, implementing new safety procedures, and adjusting to limitations in the ways I can interact with patients. What we are asking our teachers to do is hard work, but it is desperately needed and it can absolutely be done in a way that keeps risk to everyone in the building and the families they go home to low.

As a parent in this district I pledge to do my part to follow safety procedures to minimize my children's risk and the risk of those they come in contact with. I am here to support our schools in any way I can as a parent, as a physician, as a community member. Emotions are high right now, but I respect the district's decision to follow the science and get this difficult job done.

I again thank the board, Dr. Kelley, and all the district staff involved in this tremendous effort.

**Alyssa Arata**

I would like to voice my support for the board's decision to return back to school. In-person school is crucial for young children's learning and retention, as well as their social-emotional well-being.

Just today, the CDC published guidance in the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#) (JAMA), stating, "Accumulating data now suggest a path forward to maintain or return primarily or fully to in-person instructional delivery."

The CDC data show that the mitigation measures that District 97 are taking, including mask use, increasing physical distance, using hybrid models, increasing room air ventilation, and screening testing, have been working to reduce transmission in schools.

As a mother of a District 97 student and a biologist, I applaud your efforts to support children's learning while following the guidance of experts who have learned critical information about SARS-CoV-2 over the past year.

**Shayla Bell**

I have a younger child who has been in an in-person learning environment since August.

I just attended a virtual presentation to review some of the specifics on the return to school that's taking place next week.

I learned that if someone who has been in a classroom tests positive for COVID-19, only their 'close contacts' will be informed and the full class will not be required to quarantine.

I understand that these guidelines are per the Oak Park Health Department recommendations. However, many local schools are going above and beyond these suggestions in an effort to prioritize safety and be transparent with families.

If someone in a classroom tests positive, I strongly believe the entire class should be notified (while protecting privacy) and the classroom should be closed while everyone quarantines - stopping transmission in its tracks.

This approach provides full transparency which builds trust. It also prioritizes the safety of all - our teachers who are scrambling to make vaccination appoints, our children who rarely show symptoms but can absolutely transmit the virus, and all of families/households now connected through this in-person learning experience. Further, it allows parents to continue to make an informed decision on what plan they think is best for their students and their family needs.

I urge the administration to reconsider this approach to informing families/classroom closures. We are at the beginning of a very delicate road of in-person learning together. The more information you can give parents, the better this process will be.

### **Patrick Bracco**

I am reminded by the story of Mr. Rogers convincing Senator John Pastore and the Senate Committee (who had already made up their mind) to save Public Media with one public comment. By not allowing all public comments to be read you potentially influenced the vote of the board. We have recently seen vote influencing go on in our country and we have followed suit in our community. This is not the Oak Park I know and love.

Why did board members push to move past public comments? Why did certain board members mention that they needed to leave to go teach a class? Was that board member going to teach that class in person or remote? It is my belief that the board members owe the board member who was scoffed and dismissed for raising a valid objection an apology and I also believe that since the vote was held under protest and false pretenses that the vote should be redone and allow all public comments to be read in their entirety prior to the vote. The fact that a board member said "the comments don't matter and we should move on" shows the lack of respect for the public who took time out of their day to express their comments. Why does the board act with hypocrisy by meeting remotely to keep board members safe but vote to send others into harm's way? I wish that our elected officials practiced what they preached.

Why did the board pull the fleece over the eyes of the community? Why are you changing metrics that decisions were made upon to fit your agenda? You have sold us a bill of goods and are acting like used car salespeople. You have moved the goalposts. You are the child on the playground who changes the rules to the game when they don't get an outcome that they want. How can our school board who are elected to safeguard our school district act like children themselves?

I ask that the board act in good faith of the community and make a motion to reconsider the sham of a vote that was pushed through.

If you as board members have better things to do with your time other than safeguard the health and well-being of our community's students and teachers; you should step down from the board and make way for those who care enough to listen.

I ask that the board members respond to my comments during the board meeting as it is stated in the board protocols.

### **Christina & Craig Putz**

We would like to share our support for the board's decision to return back to school. In-person school is crucial for young children's learning and retention, as well as their social-emotional well-being.

As parents of a District 97 1st grader who has struggled given he has yet to experience a traditional in-person learning environment given the disruption to his kindergarten year last year we feel blessed efforts are being made to support this return to school. Is it perfect? of course not - it is a step though and with commitment and flexibility we have high confidence our award-winning public school community can

once again regain the in-person experience while simultaneously maintaining the 100 percent remote offering for those that need it.

Just today, the CDC published guidance in the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#) (JAMA), stating, "Accumulating data now suggest a path forward to maintain or return primarily or fully to in-person instructional delivery."

The CDC data show that the mitigation measures that District 97 is taking, including mask use, increasing physical distance, using hybrid models, increasing room air ventilation, and screening testing, have been working to reduce transmission in schools.

We have experienced this success first-hand with our Concordia ECEC preschooler who has benefited from in-person learning since September.

Again, thank you for your continued partnership with the talented health professionals, teachers, and parents we are lucky to have supporting this critical endeavor for District 97.

**Molly Dula-Weber and Alex Weber**

We are the parents of a 3rd and 4th grader at Hatch and a 6th grader at Brooks Middle School. We have been very impressed at the hard work and dedication of the teachers to pivot to online learning during this pandemic. Their adaptability has taught our kids valuable lessons that will be with them for their lifetimes. Adaptability is the name of the game as we navigate through this year.

We are writing because we have questions and concerns about the process of initiating the hybrid plan and the educational ramifications of the plan itself. My family has chosen to stay remote and we are deeply concerned about the educational disruption caused by the change in schedule, reduction in specials, and increase in asynchronous time. These concerns are there either way we go hybrid or remote. Our kids have done ok with the remote model but it's not perfect. We are all anxious to get back to our routines and people that we miss but not at any cost. We have established a routine as a family and are wary to see this disrupted for an educational model that does not allow teachers to incorporate all that they have learned during this period of remote learning. We are especially worried about the impact of the loss of one on one time with the teacher when needed.

We worry that our children's educational needs will not be met like they have been during remote learning. Is it worth the risk to pivot everyone now and then again in March when likely more parents will opt in to the hybrid model?

Please ensure that all teachers and staff are fully vaccinated before filling up the school buildings. Skokie seems to be doing this as noted by NPR and there is no reason Oak Park should not be able to as well. Let's make sure people are safe and that the buildings are safe (i.e.: ensuring proper ventilation in EVERY room and the addition of air purifiers as well) BEFORE bringing everyone back. Also I do not see why community spread especially with news of the new strains are not taken into consideration.

In order to ensure the safety of all students, teachers, and staff, and to disrupt our child's education as little as possible, we ask that you delay the hybrid plan until:

- All teachers and staff in the building have been vaccinated;
- A plan is in place to accommodate the needs of each teacher who is unable to return to the building;
- And the identified metrics have been met.

## **Tina Harle**

I chose hybrid because I trusted that the district was looking at community spread metrics and would only send the students back and make the staff report in person when it was safe to do so. I believed this because that is what the district said when we were required to make a choice.

I also saw hybrid as the only way to make a choice because the way the form was written if we chose remote we couldn't change to hybrid but if we chose hybrid we could change back to remote at any time. When we filled out the form we were told it would be for T2 only but to me that didn't make sense as it was only a month and a half left so I worried that I was making the choice for the rest of the school year and would be locked into remote.

Are we really expecting students and teachers to adjust to hybrid and then six weeks later switch the schedule again? What happens if too many pick hybrid for T3, are we going to have another schedule switch, go to an A/B schedule instead, or will you deny the option to switch from remote to hybrid in March?

Why the rush to go back on February 1st? Teachers are very close to being vaccinated and most should be vaccinated by the start of the third trimester on March 15, which is only 6 weeks away from the expected hybrid start date of February 1. It seems that this board is listening only to the loud voices of a few.

Teachers are worried and anxious. The district is not listening to them and those that have real concerns about returning are not given options and the district is not being honest about that with the community.

I chose hybrid because I wanted my child back in school, like so many she needs to be back, but not like this. I will not be sending my second grader in person on February 1st for the following reasons: the district plan is not ready there are still too many unanswered questions and no clear policies in place, the district was not honest about the metrics when we filled out the form and it is different than what they are using now and most importantly teachers should and can be vaccinated soon.

I am urging the board to reconsider the start date. Now that the district is no longer using community spread numbers, which according to data provided by Oak Park Health Department still appears to be two to four times as many cases now then there were at the start of the school year or at last spring. I am enclosing the chart with the seven day and 14 day rolling averages from OPHD so you can clearly see these numbers. I feel that the best course of action for the community is to take the 6 weeks left in trimester 2 and prepare for the students and staff to safely return with a well thought out and communicated hybrid plan on March 15th.

The additional six weeks would give time to work with the Oak Park Health Department and your staff to vaccinate all the most vulnerable staff members and as many of the entire staff as possible before the start of the third trimester. It would also give time to better communicate with parents, teachers, and staff and ensure that there is trust between the district and community, which is one of the components of Path to Zero. This time can also be used to write clear policies and procedures about things like what happens if a child doesn't keep their masks on or have problems maintaining distances. In my personal experience with the district in the past, policies and procedures need to be clearly written or issues can arise and students can get hurt. This time will also be for making sure everything is in place and there are no delays, for example where there temperature checks and other measures in place yet when the teachers returned this week?

I look forward to sending our student back to in-person school soon, we greatly miss it and love our teachers and staff. However, despite choosing hybrid we will not be sending her in on February 1. In talking with many parents online and offline I have found that I am one of many who feel this way. I urge

the board to listen to our voices and the voices of your wonderful teachers and staff and delay the start of hybrid until March 15th.

**Jenae Shanley**

Thank you so much to all the teachers, administrators, board, medical professionals, parent volunteers and anyone who was involved in the planning and implementation of the hybrid plan. This plan is truly a beacon of hope in our household. My early elementary IEP children have been struggling tremendously with remote learning. We are so very grateful for this opportunity. We know being live in the classroom will not only Enhance and improve their learning but it will also improve their spirit and anxieties. Sending gratefulness and respect to all of our teachers who have tried so very hard with my kids throughout this remote learning process. Big accolades to Hatch school for their preparedness and communication in the return. I was blown away by EVERYTHING they thought of for a safe return. I feel confident in all our Hatch leaders.

**Kim Luckey and Jay Patel**

We would like to express our support and appreciation for the efforts made to return back to the classroom. In-person learning is critical for our children and as the CDC reported today, can be done safely with the proper precautions.

As parents of a District 97 1st grader, we are grateful for the plans that you have put forth and eager for our young learner to be in the same room as his teacher. Having a preschool student who has been in school full days, Monday through Friday since June, gives me great confidence in the ability for a successful return for District 97 students as well.

Teachers - you are amazing and so important to the lives of our children. Thank you for all that you do and we look forward to working together with you and supporting you for a safe and productive return!

**Ann Kreiter**

Thank you so much for making the courageous decision to implement hybrid learning in our district, beginning next Monday. The daunting challenges of this pandemic are testing us all as parents, neighbors, and community members. But you, **the board**, have had to shoulder added responsibility. Thank you for giving us the option of hybrid learning, a decision that I believe will move our students forward academically and socially.

Thank you to the teachers and staff who will be in the buildings trying their best to make hybrid learning a success. And thank you to the teachers and staff who will continue to do their jobs remotely. It will be the collective effort of **all** of you that can help make the second half of the school year a productive and positive experience for all District 97 students.

I'm hopeful that our District 97 community will move forward with determination, with purpose, and with respect for one another because we share a common goal: to unlock our students' potential.

**Adrienne Court, Sabrina Maggio, Kara Sakellaris, and Stephanie Suerth on behalf of the OPTA Executive Board**

Good evening, this letter is submitted by the OPTA executive board on behalf of our membership.

We would like to start by thanking the community for a beautiful welcome back yesterday. Parents, students, and administrators made signs, delivered flowers and treats to our schools to welcome us back. Despite all of these wonderful displays of support, there are some major concerns.

Throughout the months of negotiating, we were assured that safety is our top priority. We negotiated in good faith, transparency, and honesty. We remained optimistic, however upon returning to buildings our teachers reported:

- 60 percent of our schools were not set up with desks appropriately spaced
- 60 percent of our schools, particularly those who hosted child care, were not cleaned.
- 50 percent of our schools had some windows that were not operational.
- 30 percent of staff were NOT provided a cloth mask.
- 30 percent had not been surveyed to find out if they were in need of additional PPE.
- Of those surveyed, 10 percent had still not received their requested PPE.
- 60 percent did NOT have working hand sanitizer dispensers in classrooms.
- 30 percent did NOT have automated thermometers in place at entrances and those that did reported unrealistic temperature readings.
- 30 percent of our schools did NOT share a hand washing or bathroom schedule with staff.

Additionally, our special area and related service providers were blindsided on their first day back in buildings. These educators have been assigned up to three classrooms for daily duties including temperature checker, hall monitor, and snack supervisor. Some have been assigned to sub for multiple grade levels, in up to 8 different classrooms. Traveling special area teachers have been reassigned to new classes for the afternoon, which does not uphold the promise of the integrity of the cohorts. This type of reassignment is disrespectful to our highly qualified and professional special area teachers. These educators bring a unique gift to the students in our district every single day in ways that we cannot begin to explain. For some students, these are the classes they go to school for. OPTA would like to formally request a meeting with district level administrators, principals, members of the board, and all special area teachers to find a path forward that is in the best interest of these staff and their students.

How is it that we can say all safety procedures are in place and ready? How can we say that we will be ready for students on Monday, when classrooms with additional staff have not accounted for support staff, co teachers, or student teachers, negating social distancing guidelines? Your teachers' working conditions are our students learning conditions. We have been told safety is our top priority, but our buildings are not ready.

Furthermore, technology training was a checklist made available for teachers to work through alone. Teachers spent much of their days in tears, seeking support to locate and troubleshoot technology that is necessary for hybrid learning success. Staff provided personal devices to ensure they are fully equipped to support all learners and therefore had to seek assistance to connect them. No live training was available for CrisisGo and staff will be learning how to navigate the self-certification program as our students wait outside.

In closing, as we consider our commitment to our students, we would be remiss if we did not ask if the hybrid survey results were reviewed to determine the percentages of BIPOC students continuing remotely. Many teachers shared that a majority of their BIPOC students did not opt into hybrid in person learning. We ask that we continue to let our equity imperative drive our reopening plan and truly analyze who we are reopening for. If we reopen February 1 and a disproportionate number of our BIPOC or marginalized students remain remote, we are abandoning our commitment to equity.

We must prioritize safety, special teacher's roles, and the disparity for our marginalized students in order to ensure a teaching environment that is safe, equitable, and focused on the whole child.

## **Sabrina Maggio**

As one of the Minority Caucus representatives of the OPTA and a teacher of Black and Brown students, I would like to comment on the number of Black Indigenous and People Of Color (BIPOC) students returning for in-person learning. Have the results of the hybrid survey been reviewed to determine the percentages of BIPOC students who have opted to remain remote?

Many of our teachers have shared that a majority of their BIPOC students did not opt into hybrid in-person learning. We should follow up with families to see *why* they chose to opt out and to find out what supports they need given the disproportionalities of this pandemic. It has been said that all families were provided this “choice” of how to continue the school year. However, given recent racial unrest and that COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted our Black and Brown communities, it seems these families do not have a choice. A similar train of thought can be applied when talking about our black and brown teachers.

We as District 97 pride ourselves on our commitment to equity and the whole child. "Equal" and "equitable" are not synonymous and cannot be used interchangeably. The district's commitment to equity implies that all of our students are given the same access to education, and should be given what each student needs. It is our obligation as educators to ask ourselves whether we are truly making education accessible to all. Bearing in mind the district's commitment to equity, this plan does not appear to fulfill the District 97 vision.

## **SPECIAL REPORTS**

### **RETURN TO SCHOOL PLAN UPDATE**

Dr. Kelley acknowledged the many team members who participated in the planning of the return to school plan.

Gina Herrmann, Senior Director of Human Resources explained that addressing staff accommodations has been an ongoing need since last July. She told the board that it involves an interactive discussion with each employee and a discussion of their medical accommodation needs. She explained that 31 teachers submitted paperwork and followed through with their requests. 93 percent of them will receive an accommodation higher than what is required by ADA, and she reported that there are currently a handful of requests that need to be completed. Herrmann told the board that administration values the staff and will continue to work with them.

Jeanne Keane, Senior Director of Buildings and Grounds told the board that the maintenance team is fully invested in providing a safe environment for everyone. She reported that on January 6, 2021 each school was given 150 adult and student masks, and the district has a supply in storage to be used as needed. Additionally, the district has purchased face shields for those who requested them, and isolation gowns are also available. Keane reported that hand sanitizer dispensers have been installed in every classroom and the maintenance staff is working to fill them. She noted that bottles of hand sanitizer will also be available.

Keane reported that the air filtration system has been maintained and inspected for proper air flow. Filters will be tested and changed monthly. She explained that the systems are normally set to recycle air three times an hour, but have been increased to five times an hour to comply with the recommendation from the CDC, and the systems will also recycle before and after school.

Keane reported that the district is waiting on parts for some windows, but she confirmed that every room has windows that can be opened. She told the board that although the current social distancing guidelines for children is three feet, the district set up the classrooms using the six foot guidelines. Six foot

markings have been placed within the schools, and markings will be place outdoors when the ground is dry.

Dr. Kelley reported that parent/teacher conferences will be moved to February 25 and 26. She acknowledged that the first date conflicts with a Jewish holiday, so teachers will have the ability to be flexible with scheduling on that day.

Carrie Kamm, Senior Director of Equity reported that a team worked together to create protocols that align to the District 97 Effective Student Behavior Handbook that will help staff proactively teach mask wearing expectations.

It was reported that the Special Education students will return to their home schools tomorrow, and Pre-Kindergarten (PKP) will return to school on February 8, 2021.

Amanda Siegfried, Director of Communications thanked parents for their patience. She reported that the district is working on a COVID-19 metrics dashboard that will be emailed to families tomorrow and posted on the district's website. She explained that the district's nurses will track the metrics and the dashboard will be updated daily. Siegfried explained that separate emails will not be send to families every time a positive case of COVID-19 has been identified, but it will be recorded on the dashboard. People who have been identified as being in close contact with a positive case will be notified personally. Public outbreaks (five infections within the same classroom over a period of 15 days) will be reported publically.

Siegfried reported that the Back to School Toolkit has been posted on the website, and return-to-school safety videos have been created. Additionally, Siegfried is working on a fact checker to distil inaccurate information that has been posted on social media. It was suggested that bathroom protocols be added to the fact checker, as some people heard that students will not be allowed to use the facilities, which is not correct.

It was reported that the district is working with the Village to coordinate the vaccination process which will move into category 1B. There are 12,000 people in Oak Park who are eligible for the vaccination within that category. Through January 20, 2021, the Village has been receiving on average 900 doses or less each week, so it could take months to vaccinate everyone in the 1B category. As it stands right now, it looks like educators will begin receiving vaccinations during the week of February 15, 2021.

Dr. Kelley reported that two testing solutions are being considered, Northshore Clinical Labs and Safeguard Screening, LLC. She shared that Northshore has a high capacity that could provide a diagnostic PCR COVID-19 test at no cost to the district, and the results would be shared directly with the tested subject. Safeguard can process 2,000 samples per week. Safeguard is only available on Sunday, at a cost of \$11 per test. They recommend weekly testing under the proposed attendance models. The cost to the district to test staff and in-person students for a six week period (remainder of Trimester 2), would be approximately \$84,000. This cost is assuming that only staff and middle school students would be tested. Dr. Kelley told the board that additional staff would be needed in order to complete the testing in a timely manner.

Dr. Edward Campbell from Safeguard Screening, LLC was present to answer questions from board members. He explained that his company is currently working with between 20-25 school districts in the suburban area, and have the capacity to test all of the District 97 students. He explained that there is benefit to testing all students because the district would be able to alert the whole household. He told the board that if Safeguard receives the test by 3 p.m. on Sunday, results could be received as soon as the next day. Jim Hackett, Safety Coordinator explained that the district does not have the capacity to test

everyone, but the 2,000 allotted tests would cover the staff, middle school students, and perhaps fifth grade students.

Board comments included concern about the sample size of the testing per building, that because of the small amount of testing, it might identify individuals. Interest was expressed in understanding how the recess / outside snack will work.

Interest was expressed in notifying classrooms about a positive COVID results in the same manner as when there is a head lice outbreak. Dr. Kelley offered to take that suggestion to the nurses who will be notifying families. Siegfried explained that the positive case notification process will be handled by the nurses. The Village provided a form letter that could be used for this purpose. Dr. Kelley suggested that the IDPH guidelines be sent out to the community again to help them understand the notification process guidelines. An FAQ was suggested in the weekly report to the community to help them understand the process.

Siegfried read the CDC definition of close contact. It is defined as six feet of exposure totaling 15 minutes or more over a 24 hour period.

Dr. Kelley told the board that her colleagues have not seen outbreaks as outlined by the IDPH. She explained that this indicates that the schools are doing their part to provide the necessary safety. She suggested that if a person travels to a state on the advisory list that they should quarantine for 14 days. Additionally, the district needs to ensure that kids coming to school are masked, and take the necessary precautions outside of school too.

Interest was expressed about double masking. Dr. Kelley told the board that double masking is not the current standard, but the district would consider this request if the standards change. She offered to ask the Village Health Department for their recommendation as well.

The board discussed the two COVID-19 testing options, and after a lengthy discussion a couple board members expressed concern about the logistics of Safeguard, and the majority of the board expressed interest in moving forward with Northshore.

Several board members expressed interest in explaining why they voted the way they did during the last meeting regarding the memorandum of understanding with the teachers' union and for the return to school plan. Member Kearney read the following statement;

"I'd like to make some brief remarks about why I voted to approve the MOU with the Oak Park Teachers Association and the District's back to school plan.

Like many others, my thinking on this issue starts from the premise that **in-person learning is better for our students than remote learning**, and that remote learning exacerbates inequities because of families' and students' different needs, different access to resources - including those typically provided by schools, and different options for overcoming the challenges of remote learning.

This is a consistent theme in everything I've read from educational experts and from health experts - remote learning creates social-emotional challenges, mental health challenges, learning gaps, diminished access to important safety nets, and so on. Just to give two examples:

- Path to Zero Report (Harvard, Brown, and Tufts Schools of Public Health): "Despite the best efforts of education districts, there is no doubt that remote instruction generates large learning

gaps and links to higher rates of mental illness, while depriving children of formative social and peer relationship.”

- 18 Pediatric and Infectious disease specialists from the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, Lurie Children’s Hospital, Rush University Children’s Hospital and other institutions recently published an op-ed in the Chicago Sun-Times in which they said: “The educational, psychological and financial hardships of remote learning have had serious consequences for our children and their families, and those children with educational or behavioral challenges have been even more seriously affected. We cannot understate the serious psychological harm that prolonged virtual school has had on many children. We are seeing an epidemic of serious psychological illness that has reached a crisis point.

Furthermore, lack of daytime structure and lack of access to school amenities such as hot lunches, especially for younger students from disadvantaged communities, has had significant health consequences.”

And we know this is true in District 97 including because of the many, many messages we’ve received from parents over the last several months whose children are struggling under remote learning in significant ways. These are serious issues with significant equity implications.

This is a function of circumstance and in no way a criticism of our district or our teachers. As a parent of two kids in District 97, and a school board member, I’m proud of and grateful for the ways in which the amazing people in our district have risen to the challenges of remote learning.

**Because in-person learning is better for our students, I have believed since the start that we need to offer it if and when we can do it in a way that is safe for our students and safe for our teachers and other school personnel.** This is a fundamental consideration and it is our responsibility as a board and a district to ground our approach in the best science and advice from health and medical professionals. And our current plan is grounded in that way. It has been developed through consultation and guidance from the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Oak Park Department of Public Health, and others with specific, relevant expertise.

Our plan is also consistent with the latest research and expert guidance. The Path to Zero report recommends that “schools be open even at the very high levels of spread we are now, provided that they strictly implement strategies of infection control.”

The authors’ recommendation is based on a number of things including:

- “A growing body of evidence that students are not at heightened risk from school re-openings.”
- The fact that there is no evidence of outbreaks caused by in-school transmission where effective infection controls are in place, and this is true for students and adults.
- The authors also cite a Yale study of over 57,000 child care providers in the U.S. that found that where effective infection control measures are in place child care providers have not been at elevated risk of COVID.

The pediatric and infectious disease specialists who submitted the Sun-Times editorial reached a similar conclusion:

- “There is an abundance of data showing that schools are not a significant source of spread of COVID-19, either in the community or to the teachers themselves.”

Similar findings and recommendations exist in numerous other reports and guidance documents and this is why the plan we approved focuses so squarely on control measures. And yes, this guidance has changed since the fall based on an improved understanding of COVID, and our plans have changed accordingly. And if this guidance and expert advice changes again, including in a more restrictive way, I'm certain we will adapt our plans to ensure that we continue to provide a safe learning environment for students and staff.

There are two additional points I'd like to make quickly:

- One is that a lot of people have asked why we wouldn't wait for District 97 teachers to be vaccinated before moving forward with the hybrid plan. Some are under the impression that this will be happening shortly or even that the vaccines are already here in Oak Park and the District just needs to do a better job of advocating for or administering them. According to the Oak Park Public Health Department, there are 12,000 1(b) individuals in the village requiring 24,000 doses, doses that would be administered 3-4 weeks apart. And the Village's current vaccine allocation is "900 doses or fewer per week." Unless vaccine availability dramatically changes, and I'm not aware of any indication that this will happen imminently, full vaccination of District 97 teachers and staff is not right around the corner. Given this, I think we need to pursue safe in-person learning options, as our plan does.
- The last thing I want to note is that trust is a significant factor in our success and undoubtedly a significant factor for families that have chosen remote learning for their kids, and this has equity implications. I would like for us as a District to take a hard look at who has opted in and out, and who may not have responded at all, and to ensure that we have robust strategies for ensuring that families are reached, that their concerns are understood and addressed, and that they are in position to make a well-informed choice for the 3rd trimester."

Vice President Kim acknowledged that the last meeting was high pressure since the return to school date was scheduled for February 1 and a decision needed to be made. She apologized for coming across as a bit insensitive while running the meeting, and explained that there is a lot that takes place behind the scenes and does not get referenced during the public meetings. She explained that she spent over 10 hours in the last couple of days working on board related items. She reminded everyone that we are in a pandemic and shared that she went into a class of 21 teachers this week and most of them were in person. She suggested that it is not novel for the district to be thinking about returning to in classroom instruction, but we need to roll with a very dynamic situation and adjust as needed. She noted that every one of the board members have children and they are doing the best that they can, and expressed hope that everyone shows the others a little grace. She noted that all the public comments are being read, and they are being acknowledged. She told the community that the board cares about their opinion.

Member Moore shared that she was not in attendance during the last meeting. She noted that the board supports the teachers, and want to do what is best for everyone. She told the community that the board takes their job very seriously, and considers it a privilege to be in this position. Moore thanked the other board members, noting that her participation on the board has helped her grow, to be a better parent, and to think more thoughtfully.

Member Liebl suggested that everyone take an opportunity to drill down and communicate out the transparency around decisions like returning to school. She felt like the district did a disservice to ask them to make a decision on specific criteria and then have the criteria change. Liebl said that she hopes that future boards can do better than this board did with this decision. She expressed appreciation for the willingness to work together. She said that she has grown a lot as a person and felt disrespected at the last meeting.

Member Breymaier was not in attendance at the last meeting, but said that he would have voted in support of the back to school plan. He explained that he has seen and read all of the amazing work that went into the plan and trusts that the district is sending the students and staff to a safe environment.

President Broy expressed pride for the district. She said that it would have been easy to retreat from the decision. She acknowledged administration for the time they put into the plan, and for presenting a solution before the board even knew there was a problem. She acknowledged the board members for all of their work. She noted that it is difficult to hear name calling and suggestions that the board wants people to be hurt, but through it all, the board kept moving forward and tried to ignore the distractions. Broy suggested that the community is not a monolith, that people of color have motivations for making the decisions that they make, and suggested that the board has more work to do to get to know the parents of color.

Member Spurlock shared that she is supportive of the decision to return to in-person learning and hopes that everyone has a good first week back in the classroom.

**ACTION ITEMS**

ACTION ITEMS

**3.1.1 APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR THE JANUARY 12, 2021 BOARD MEETING**

Kim moved, seconded by Kearney that the Board of Education, District 97, approve the minutes from the January 12, 2021 board meeting as presented.

Ayes: Kim, Kearney, Spurlock, Moore, Broy, Breymaier, and Liebl

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed.

**3.1.2 APPROVAL OF THE CLOSED MEETING MINUTES FROM JANUARY 12, 2019 –JUNE 11, 2019**

Kim moved, seconded by Breymaier, that the Board of Education, District 97, that the Board of Education, approve the closed meeting minutes from January 12, 2019 through June 11, 2019 as identified below.

January 12, 2019	April 9, 2019
January 15, 2019	April 23, 2019
January 29, 2019	May 14, 2019
February 12, 2019	May 17, 2019
February 26, 2019	May 28, 2019
March 12, 2019	June 11, 2019

Ayes: Kim, Breymaier, Spurlock, Moore, Broy, Kearney, and Liebl

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed.

**3.1.3 REVIEW/RELEASE OF CLOSED MEETING MINUTES FROM JANUARY 12, 2019 – JUNE 11, 2019**

Kim moved, seconded by Moore, that the Board of Education, District 97, that the Board of Education, District 97, release/keep confidential the executive session minutes for the following dates:

January 12, 2019                      April 9, 2019 (items 1, 2, 3, and 5)  
January 15, 2019 (item 6)            May 14, 2019 (items 1 and 4)  
January 29, 2019 (item 5)            May 17, 2019  
February 12, 2019 (item 2)            May 28, 2019 (items 3 and 4)  
March 12, 2019 (item 4)                June 11, 2019 (item 2)

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

**3.2.1 APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA**

Spurlock moved, seconded by Breymaier, that the Board of Education, District 97, accept the consent agenda as presented.

3.2.1 Bill List  
3.2.2 Personnel

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

**3.3.1 APPROVAL OF ASBESTOS ABATEMENT**

Kim moved, seconded by Spurlock, that the Board of Education of Oak Park District 97 approve the Asbestos Abatement Summer 2021 Work Bids that were presented on January 12, 2021 in the amount of \$353,115.00.

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

**ADMINISTRATIVE ITEM**

**BOND ABATEMENT DISCUSSION**

Rob Grossi reminded the board that in February 2021, they will be asked to consider whether to abate a portion of the District’s outstanding debt service tax levy for the 2020 levy year. The issue was presented at the time the budget was adopted in December. Per the recommendation of the Board, Grossi met with the Finance Oversight and Review Committee (FORC) on January 21, 2021 to present the issue to them, and to obtain a formal recommendation. During that meeting, the committee agreed to support the abatement. Grossi shared that he supports their recommendation.

Grossi reminded the board that this is the last decision point to abating this levy, and if the board decides to abate, the documents must be filed with the county by the end of February. He suggested that the board consider the long-term effect on staffing and facilities.

Grossi expressed concerns about the condition of the state, and reminded the board that they already approved two extraordinary measures to support families by waiving fees and paying for childcare this year. He noted that those costs were significantly less than anticipated. Additionally, the district budgeted for extra cleaning, transportation and PPE expense that were not needed.

Grossi reported that the district has had a surplus for the last few years, and he anticipates a structural surplus over the next five years. He suggested that some of that money will be needed for capital projects, beyond what was addressed with the capital bonds. He indicated that the projections show that the district will be in a position to address most of the capital projects and end up with two to three months of reserves.

#### **POLICY REVIEW**

Member Kearney introduced the recent policy updates from PRESS noting that the changes are mostly to footnotes and are all straight forward. He noted one policy change that references academic criteria in order for students to participate in extracurricular activities. He asked the board members to consider if struggling students might benefit from participation in activities outside of the classroom. He explained that the committee has sent a request to legal to see if this is possible. These items will return to the board for action on February 9.

#### **WHITTIER AND BEYE TECHNOLOGY BIDS**

Michael Arensdorff explained that this is the fourth summer that the district will be working with STR and Bulley and Andrews on work tied to the media center renovations. Arensdorff received three bids on the work. Midwest Computer Projects came in as the lowest bid. Arensdorff reported that the district has worked with this vendor in the past and recommended that the board approve this request during the February 9 board meeting.

#### **BOARD ASSIGNMENTS**

BOARD ASSIGNMENTS

**STANDING BOARD COMMITTEE LIAISON REPORT FOLLOW UP (as needed – FAC, FORC, CCE and CLAIM)**

#### **COMMITTEE FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION, INTERVENTION AND MONITORING (CLAIM)**

The CLAIM committee is scheduled to meet this coming Thursday. The committee is excited about movement related to a data sharing bill that the committee has been working on since 2013. The bill would allow Districts 97 and 90 to share student data with District 200 in a way that is similar to unified districts. Senator Harmon will be sponsoring the bill. Member Kearney will write a letter of support for the bill on behalf of the Board of Education.

#### **COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION (CCE)**

It was suggested that CCE might be able to assist with the back to school communications.

#### **FINANCE OVERSIGHT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE (FORC)**

FORC met recently. The committee has new members and new officers. Michelle Mangan was elected as Chairperson and Jeff Mathes was elected as Vice Chairperson.

#### **FACILITIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FAC)**

FAC will be meeting in the near future. Three of their members had expired terms of office, but two of them decided to stay on the committee. Appreciation was expressed to Paul May who rolled off after two terms. The next meeting is scheduled on February 22 where the team will discuss upcoming work in the buildings.

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL LIAISON REPORT FOLLOW UP (as needed – IGOV, PTO council, CEC, OPEF, and Self-Evaluation)**

#### **IGOV**

IGOV successfully hosted their forum for people running for office.

**OAK PARK EDUCATION FOUNDATIONS (OPEF)**

At a recent meeting of the Foundation, they discussed strategizing on ways to be more creative about fund raising. The organization expressed interest in not changing the name of the Foundation, and continues to define the purpose of the organization. Those in attendance express interest in offering the same value of programs to the schools. They are planning on at least four weeks of Base Camp this year, and talked about the success of the Spoken Word program. The group is planning to hold a spring fund raiser.

**COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS**

With the upcoming school board election, it was suggested that the board give some consideration to the committee assignments and make sure that all committees have someone in place who is familiar with the committee. Board members were invited to substitute on a committee to see what it is like. It was suggested that the PTOC only needs one board member in attendance since Dr. Kelley and Amanda Siegfried are always in attendance at those meetings.

**CLOSING ITEMS**

CLOSING ITEMS

**AGENDA MAINTENANCE**

The draft agendas for the February 9, 2021 meeting was reviewed.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Liebl moved, seconded by Moore that the meeting be adjourned. There being no further business to conduct, President Broy declared the meeting adjourned at 10:36 p.m.

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

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

ADJOURNMENT