

Official Minutes of the
Oak Park Board of Education District 97
260 Madison Street, Oak Park
May 13, 2022 Emergency Meeting

This meeting was held in-person and virtually using Zoom during the time of the Coronavirus pandemic. All members of the board were virtual while administration was onsite for the emergency meeting.

President Kim called the meeting to order at 4:33 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Kim, Kearney, Ross Dribin, Hurd Johnson, Kinhal, Spurlock, Moore

Absent: None

Also Present: Interim Superintendent Dr. Griff Powell, Incoming Superintendent Dr. Ushma Shah, Associate Superintendent of Education Dr. Felicia Starks Turner, Senior Director of Technology Michael Arensdorff, Senior Director of Communications Amanda Siegfried, Chief Academic and Accountability Officer Dr. Eboney Lofton, Senior Director of Equity Dr. Carrie Kamm, Senior Director of Special Education Donna Middleton, Senior Director of Buildings & Grounds Jeanne Keane, Security and School Safety Manager Jim Hackett, Caroline Roselli Robbins Schwartz, Hilary Winkelhake School Nurse and Lonya Boose Board Secretary.

OPEN SESSION

OPEN
SESSION

President Kim motioned that the Board move into Open Session at 5:08 p.m. All present members of the Board were in agreement. The Board convened in Open Session at 5:09 p.m.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

PUBLIC
COMMENT

To: District 97 Superintendents
District 97 School Board
Dr. Theresa Chapple-McGruder

I am the mother of two District 97 students (Brooks and Hatch). I have been in touch several times since February to request a proactive and longer-term plan to address the day-to-day management of COVID-19 in our schools. I understand the complexity of this request in the face of changing guidelines and conflicting perspectives.

As I watch from the sidelines, I am increasingly concerned about the 2022/2023 school year (and far beyond, honestly). The current guidelines place more people at risk for repeated covid infections, particularly during periods of higher transmission (however one defines it). With every infection, there is an impact on the person, their family and networks, and our community. The weight of that impact may vary by wave, person, and resources, but we need to acknowledge the long-term nature of the problem and work to prevent harm.

Questions are below:

1. The accessible rollout of vaccines for District 97 students was a great example of partnership and collaboration with the local health department. In this positive light, I still wonder about whether there are disparities in who received or is up to date on their vaccinations, particularly

since this is a moving target. Higher community spread will place a disproportionate burden on the students and families who are not up to date on their vaccinations. The reasons people are not vaccinated or boosted can vary. Back in February, I asked a question about whether we knew the racial/ethnic breakdown of students by vaccination status. I sent this question to Dr. Theresa Chapple-McGruder as well as District 97 (via Let's Talk). Dr. Chapple-McGruder replied to indicate that there was some complexity in the data on her end; information related to race can be missing and she has no way to know what school a vaccinated child may attend. Amanda Siegfried replied to say that she would pass along my inquiry to the administrative team. I was curious if District 97 has worked with the health department to better understand this and any other important factors that might guide our community's vaccination outreach and health equity efforts?

2. Have you done any district level outreach to better understand the needs of students, families, teachers, and staff who are at higher risk of covid related complications? If so, what did that outreach/assessment look like and what were the findings? How did they inform your next steps?

3. What does the collaboration between District 97 and our health department look like? I want to better understand (in a concrete way) how you come together to problem solve and plan. This current wave is indicative of what we may face again in the upcoming year if we do not have a plan to fluctuate in our use of mitigation layers. Periods of calm are important opportunities to anticipate and proactively plan. What is the structure for this planning in District 97? I am also interested in the processes related to the real-time management of exposures and outbreaks. How are we using the information we have about the outbreaks to inform our actions, moving forward? How quickly can we pivot to address these things? These are the questions I had in mind each time I made broader requests for closer collaboration with the health department and transparency around planning. I hope to hear more about this in future updates.

I understand that everyone is working very hard right now and that you are all probably feeling exhausted at the end of a long year. I truly appreciate your time and dedication.

Jennifer Gorski, District 97 parent

Dear District 97 Board of Education:

We write as Mann parents to express our support for the current, reduced mitigations in effect at D97 schools. The schools are safe.

We strongly oppose any effort to increase mitigations for the balance of the school year. This would be driven by unfounded fear, and a lack of reason.

Most importantly, we insist that Dr. Chapple-McGruder's May 10 COVID-19 Public Health GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS not be allowed to serve as a pretext for eliminating the normal conclusion to the school year that our kids deserve. They should not be forced to wear masks, and they should be allowed to have the field trips and end-of-year celebrations that are already planned without interruption or change. Our kids should not be excluded from the classroom for a minute longer than absolutely necessary, and discussion in the Guidance of remote learning is provocative and inflammatory. How much longer are we supposed to put our kids' lives on hold?

The Public Health Director's Guidance focuses on contact tracing and case counts. Both are misguided. Contact tracing should not be the job of our dedicated and over-burdened school nurses. Case counts are no longer relevant at this waning stage of the pandemic. They are hardly more

relevant than case counts of the common cold. Serious illness and hospitalizations do matter, but are not addressed in the Guidance.

In the early days of this pandemic, you, the Board, and the teachers and staff operated with little information and did an excellent job of dealing with an unprecedented emergency in our community. Now, however, the emergency is over, and we know a lot more than we did back then. We urge you to reject the fear-mongering and allow our kids to finish the year with smiles on their faces that we can see.

Sincerely,

Peter and Jennifer Preston

Dear board,

As the parent of a d97 4th grader and someone whose mother is currently in the ICU with covid, I am utterly flabbergasted by what is going on in this town. Why is the district not in contact with the health department over what is going on with covid? How do people think end of year events are going to continue if too many staff and students are out with covid? Why are people surprised that this is the outcome with most mitigations eliminated from our schools? Besides my own personal experience with not being able to see my mother while she fights for her life, what's happening in Oak Park is the strongest evidence yet that this pandemic is not over. I hope the district will do the right thing even if it is hard and unpopular.

Kim Jackewicz

Dear D97 board,

Thank you for convening this emergency meeting to respond to the climbing COVID infections. I want our family to end the school year healthy and with in-person learning. My children have loved the school year. We're so grateful for your efforts to keep things running smoothly. We're also grateful for the mitigation and isolation protections to limit spread, I wish we could do more and fast. Weather is getting nice; can we move events outdoors? Can we require masks on field trip buses? Let's do what it takes to keep people healthy and get through this together.

Maggie McMahon

As a parent of a d97 fourth and seventh grader I am concerned about the high number of covid cases in our schools. While most in our family recently had covid it's concerning that we continue to bring students to school with a lack of substitutes. My seventh grader had to spend much of his day a few weeks ago with several classes in the auditorium due to the substitute shortage. We know what mitigations work and putting all these students together without requiring masks as cases at Julian surged only made things worse. We need to support our teachers and staff and implement some strategies that worked previously, such as masks, so that students can attend graduations and teachers can work safely. It's scary to have a school with over 900 students and a staff shortage. This isn't working and we should be doing a better job supporting our principals. They're doing an amazing job with the resources they have.

Stacy Frattinger

Dear Board,

I am writing to you today as a microbiologist currently engaged in COVID-19 research in my laboratory, a D97 parent, and a current COVID statistic. After managing to avoid COVID for over two years, my children and I were hit this week when my second grader brought it home from school. I am angry and disappointed because it did not need to be this way. I watched cases climb and urged my second grader and kindergartener to mask at school, but they'd report that no one else was masking. Several months ago, a D97 email went out that said, "Our primary focus continues to be the well-being of our students and staff. Our layered mitigations have proven successful in keeping our buildings and community safe, and we are committed to taking a thoughtful, science-based approach as we consider any changes to our protocols moving forward." Somehow, this sentiment seems to have been forgotten, as cases climb in the schools and there's seemingly no action. We are all exhausted and want things to be "normal" but the virus is spreading quickly through our community, this time without the practices that kept us safe in the past. An email the other week attributing the spread to the BA.2 variant was misleading; the spread is because we've abandoned the mitigations that kept us safe earlier. It just happens to be BA.2 and its sub lineages now, but the dominant variant changes regularly as the virus spreads and mutates. In a research project I lead, we sequence SARS-CoV-2 in hundreds of samples each week. I assure you; the variant is not to blame. It is human behavior. It is, in part, D97. In the days before my second grader tested positive, I received daily emails about infected students on her bus and in her class- one kid on Wednesday, two on Thursday, three on Friday. D97 has assured us in the past that you will seek guidance to determine appropriate mitigations for our schools. Please listen to these recommendations. As I can say from experience now, even "mild" cases can be absolutely miserable and result in missed school, missed work, and possibly even unknown, long-term effects. This was preventable. Surges are likely going to continue every few months for the foreseeable future and we need to be prepared to take action before the surge happens. We missed our chance to act early this time, but I hope, for the sake of all of us, we do better next time. In the meantime, I urge you to act now, better late than never. It's past time to reimplement mitigations to get us through this surge.

Sincerely,
Dr. Rachel Poretsky

Good Afternoon

I would first like to say happy nurses' week to all of the school nurses especially Nurse Turner at Mann school who has done a wonderful job navigating COVID related health issues these past months especially during this difficult school year.

I would like to ask for clarification on how an outbreak status of a classroom affects those children who receive special education services. If classrooms who are designated as an outbreak are not able to intermingle with other classes it would impossible for students to receive their resource minutes and thus children would not receive FAPE and would directly break their law binding IEP.

Kind Regards
Katie Diamond

Dear Board of Education,

I am writing to express opposition to the May 10, 2022 Guidance for Schools released by the Oak Park Department of Public Health. In particular, I urge the board not to adopt the recommendation that classrooms in "outbreak" status not mix with other classes for instruction or activities and potentially transition to remote learning if additional cases are detected.

By now, data on the effects of remote learning on children’s learning and mental health compels the conclusion that remote learning was a failure for children. The New York Times “Morning” newsletter from May 5, 2022, cites a Harvard study showing that children who were consigned to remote learning for the 2020-2021 school year, as District 97 children were, on average “lost the equivalent of about 50 percent of a typical school year’s math learning during the study’s two-year window.”

District 97 board members should be particularly alarmed by the finding that “Low-income students, as well as Black and Latino students, fell further behind over the past two years, relative to students who are high-income, white or Asian.” Far from reducing the achievement gap, remote learning has widened it.

Furthermore, school closures have actually done little to curb the spread of Covid-19. “In places where schools reopened [in 2020] summer and fall, the spread of Covid was not noticeably worse than in places where schools remained closed. Schools also reopened in parts of Europe without seeming to spark outbreaks.”

Isolating students does enormous harm to their mental health, while doing nothing to benefit their physical health. On April 26, 2022, the Washington Post reported that 3 out of 4 American children have already been infected with Covid. By now, most of us have experienced Covid infections in our own households. The vast majority of children recover quickly, with few or no symptoms.

However, the damage to children’s psyche caused by forced isolation has been extreme. The American Psychological Association reported on January 1, 2022, that “Children’s mental health is in crisis” and “as pandemic stressors continue, kids’ mental health needs to be addressed in schools.” The article indicates that “From March 2020 to October 2020, mental health–related emergency department visits increased 24% for children ages 5 to 11 and 31% for those ages 12 to 17 compared with 2019 emergency department visits, according to CDC data.” Furthermore, “The pandemic has also exacerbated existing disparities in mental health services. A 2020 [technical report](#) from the University of Massachusetts Boston and University of Massachusetts Amherst found that students who needed access to school-based services the most, particularly those with lower socioeconomic backgrounds, had lower rates of counselors and school psychologists in their districts.” The article recommends that schools take a greater role in caring for the mental health of their students.

The empirical evidence leaves no question that schools should be doing more, not less, to help children recover from the collateral damage of Covid-19. Continued classroom closures will only create more trauma for vulnerable children, while doing nothing to halt the spread of the virus. Closing classrooms or restricting the socialization of students only creates stigma that will further ostracize struggling students from their peers.

Board members, your focus should be on the students that District 97 purports to educate and protect. Please do not force Oak Park families into continued isolation. Consider what is really in the best interest of the students, and make the decision not to adopt this short-sighted and reactionary policy from the Department of Public Health.

Elizabeth Cook
District 97 Parent

Dear members of the board,

I write to you, again, cognizant of the fact that the public health situation D97 faces is unprecedented and requires extraordinary time and effort beyond what is usually required of school's board members, administrators, and personnel. I appreciate your careful attention to this matter.

First, I would like to share a personal story.

In the past few months, my 6-year-old kindergartner shared her sadness that she cannot hug staff at school. She is a hugger and it brings her joy to express her admiration and love for people that way.

Aerosols - the mode of Covid-19 infection according to the overwhelming body of evidence - are not prevented from traveling by banning hugs.

Though I appreciate the origin of such a policy, evidence, reason, and common sense suggest its futility.

Kids have had a hard couple year and they need us to do what we can to bring back normalcy. Our parent community in Spanish immersion was ecstatic to watch the Gran Fandango presentation in person this week and you can see the response to having parents in the room in the faces of the children.

With that introduction, I hope you will consistently apply a cost benefit analysis as you you consider Covid-19 policies tonight and throughout the next year.

Preventing the spread of the current crop of variants of Covid-19 is not a feasible strategy and mitigating spread no longer seems to be the goal of the Center for Disease Control as new guidance focuses on hospitalizations over case incidents. Tellingly, in China, the most authoritative country in the world, a weeks-long complete lockdown in several major cities has been unable to stop the spread of the current crop of Covid-19 variants.

We are in a completely different place when it comes to health and safety than we were at various points in the pandemic.

Our community is extraordinarily protected. We are over 95% staff vaccinated, 81% student vaccinated, and we very likely have experienced significant exposure to Covid-19. At the end of February 2022, CDC seroprevalence studies show 57.7% of all US adults and 75% of Americans age 0-17 have antibodies present in their blood signifying infection of Covid-19. It is no doubt higher by now.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-26/more-than-half-of-americans-show-signs-of-prior-covid-infection>

New treatments - such as the oral medication Paxlovid - are present today to treat severe cases of Covid-19 that were not present even just a few months ago.

We also have to recognize the overwhelming evidence of this disease presenting limited risk to young children. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports - as of 5/5/2022 - that 0.1%-1.5% of all their child COVID-19 cases resulted in hospitalization.

<https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/children-and-covid-19-state-level-data-report/>

It would be inconsistent to create standards in school ignorant of the fact that bars, restaurants, public transportation, places of worship, offices, and any other congregate settings have no mitigations in place.

Akin, one could say, to trying to manage aerosol spread by prohibiting hugs.

I appreciate the difficulty of this topic, the passionate entreaties of parents throughout this community, and the compassion they have to protect the most vulnerable among us. But your approach should be consistent with policies that have governed these exact same choices informed by decades of public health recommendations for all manner of diseases that affect schools.

Equal consideration should be given to those who want to have extra protection and who want to get back to normal. To those who are concerned about vulnerable members of our community and to those who are concerned about learning disruption to the most vulnerable learners in our community.

Interrupting school has profound effects we are just beginning to understand and it is the households with the least amount of support who will have the most difficulty catching back up.

I will quote just one line from the following piece which I hope you'll read in its entirety.

"One of the most alarming findings is that school closures widened both economic and racial inequality in learning."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/05/briefing/school-closures-covid-learning-loss.html>

You are all members of the D97 school board and our children depend on you for one of the most important periods of learning in their entire lives. Again, I hope you will weigh the costs as well as the benefits of your decisions.

Thank you for your consideration,

Tom Bowen
Oak Park Ave

Do not comply with the Oak Park Health Department's recent orders and demands.

Dr. Chapple has become unhinged and unreasonable. She must be fired or resign. Contact tracing is a thing of the past, nor should it be your burden to bear.

Remote learning has proven to be ineffective, harmful on children, and widely unpopular for these reasons.

Covid is now a pandemic of testing, reporting, and contact tracing.

Whichever D97 school has not been reporting to the OPHD should be commended. They are the real leaders, and I urge you to follow what they are doing.

Dr. Chapple admittedly does not base her orders on any studies of cause-and-effect. She is now holding the District hostage to comply with unreasonable, unscientific, unhelpful demands of which are not your responsibility, and are harmful to our children's overall well-being.

Leave the children alone. Let them be. Stop testing. Children are not dying here. Children are not being hospitalized here. Children are not getting very sick, if at all. The large majority have antibodies already. The large majority show little to no symptoms if Covid-positive.

Let parents make their own decisions. Let parents make their own risk assessments. We do not need you for this. We certainly do not need the Oak Park Health Department for this either.

Thank you.
Rich Fobes

What's best for our children...or...what's best for Dr. Chapple?

To date, Dr. Chapple-McGruder's perspective has been our guidebook and - clearly - she stands firmly in her corner. Have her recommendations kept pace with reality?

No, they haven't...not by a long shot. In reality, the virus has already passed through our population. Who can disagree? Are we to continue with mitigation protocols that have proven to be ineffective? Nothing worked, not even the darling injection. Dr. Chapple is out of step. Science, as long as it's one singular controlled message, cannot claim to be science. The CDC has acknowledged the durable protection of naturally acquired immunity and yet...even that message hasn't broken the trance. It is certainly not on her dashboard. Immunity, however acquired, is widespread. The most vulnerable people need to be the focus of our special care-taking accommodations now.

School, where kids gather each day with each other and with their brilliant teachers, is where they require - and deserve - optimal learning conditions. This is what's best for our children. This is the fertile soil where education can happen. More than a mere delivery system for information, education is a collaborative child-focused, experiential, beautiful thing.

Now is the time to let go of the fear and release the hostages. Let's reset, and allow the rising tide of reason to flow to the level of our hearts.

KAREN THOMAS, parent

Dear Board of Education,

I am writing to express opposition to the May 10, 2022 Guidance for Schools released by the Oak Park Department of Public Health. In particular, I urge the board not to adopt the recommendation that classrooms in “outbreak” status not mix with other classes for instruction or activities and potentially transition to remote learning if additional cases are detected.

By now, data on the effects of remote learning on children’s learning and mental health compels the conclusion that remote learning was a failure for children. The New York Times “Morning” newsletter from May 5, 2022, cites a Harvard study showing that children who were consigned to remote learning for the 2020-2021 school year, as District 97 children were, on average “lost the equivalent of about 50 percent of a typical school year’s math learning during the study’s two-year window.”

District 97 board members should be particularly alarmed by the finding that “Low-income students, as well as Black and Latino students, fell further behind over the past two years, relative to students who are high-income, white or Asian.” Far from reducing the achievement gap, remote learning has widened it.

Furthermore, school closures have actually done little to curb the spread of Covid-19. “In places where schools reopened [in 2020] summer and fall, the spread of Covid was not noticeably worse than in places

where schools remained closed. Schools also reopened in parts of Europe without seeming to spark outbreaks.”

Isolating students does enormous harm to their mental health, while doing nothing to benefit their physical health. On April 26, 2022, the Washington Post reported that 3 out of 4 American children have already been infected with Covid. By now, most of us have experienced Covid infections in our own households. The vast majority of children recover quickly, with few or no symptoms.

However, the damage to children’s psyche caused by forced isolation has been extreme. The American Psychological Association reported on January 1, 2022, that “Children’s mental health is in crisis” and “as pandemic stressors continue, kids’ mental health needs to be addressed in schools.” The article indicates that “From March 2020 to October 2020, mental health–related emergency department visits increased 24% for children ages 5 to 11 and 31% for those ages 12 to 17 compared with 2019 emergency department visits, according to CDC data.” Furthermore, “The pandemic has also exacerbated existing disparities in mental health services. A 2020 [technical report](#) from the University of Massachusetts Boston and University of Massachusetts Amherst found that students who needed access to school-based services the most, particularly those with lower socioeconomic backgrounds, had lower rates of counselors and school psychologists in their districts.” The article recommends that schools take a greater role in caring for the mental health of their students.

The empirical evidence leaves no question that schools should be doing more, not less, to help children recover from the collateral damage of Covid-19. Continued classroom closures will only create more trauma for vulnerable children, while doing nothing to halt the spread of the virus. Closing classrooms or restricting the socialization of students only creates stigma that will further ostracize struggling students from their peers.

Board members, your focus should be on the students that District 97 purports to educate and protect. Please do not force Oak Park families into continued isolation. Consider what is really in the best interest of the students, and make the decision not to adopt this short-sighted and reactionary policy from the Department of Public Health.

Steve Nickas
District 97 Parent

Dear D97 board members and administration:

Please allow our kids to stay in school for the remaining 3 weeks of this school year. While covid cases are rising, it is also true that the majority of kids are vaccinated or have already had covid. Because most kids are already vaccinated, if and when they contract covid, the cases have been mild and kids are able to return to class within a few days. And our K-5 classes are about 20 kids which means only 2 positive cases trigger an outbreak status.

Our children are still dealing with learning loss and social emotional issues as a result of the past two years. The high vaccination rate of our community and mitigation strategies have kept our kids safe. Please keep them in school to finish the year in person with their peers and teachers. We only have 3 weeks left. Please do what’s right for our kids and let them finish in person. They have worked hard to get where they are, they deserve a “normal” end to their year.

Signed,

Dani Sher

Dear D97 board members and administration:

I was surprised to see the email and memo from the Oak Park department of health, and stunned to see that there was even consideration of certain classes going remote.

How will students who receive special ed services be served if these classes go remote? Remote education did not work for this most vulnerable population of kids and we cannot let them down with these last few weeks.

Our 5th graders are at the goal line and finally have some events to look forward to at the conclusion of their elementary years. These kids who have experienced anxiety and depression over the last two years are joyful and excited about their end of year concert, 5th grade send off, and other events. Please, on behalf of my 5th grader and others with mental health challenges, I am begging you to leave these events as scheduled.

Please allow our kids to stay in school for the remaining 3 weeks of this school year. While covid cases are rising, it is also true that the majority of kids are vaccinated or have already had covid. Because most kids are already vaccinated, if and when they contract covid, the cases have been mild and kids are able to return to class within a few days. And our K-5 classes are about 20 kids which means only 2 positive cases trigger an outbreak status.

Our children are still dealing with learning loss and social emotional issues as a result of the past two years. The high vaccination rate of our community and mitigation strategies have kept our kids safe. Please keep them in school to finish the year in person with their peers and teachers. We only have 3 weeks left. Please do what's right for our kids and let them finish in person. Thank you for your continued service to our children and our community.

Signed, Katie and David Zapata, parents of 1st, 3rd, and 5th grade students.

Dear Board of Education

We are writing to express opposition to the May 10, 2022 Guidance for Schools released by the OP Dept. of Public Health. In particular, we urge the board not to adopt the recommendation that classrooms in outbreak status transition to remote learning. Remote learning has widened the achievement gap while doing little to halt the spread of the virus.

Brad & Laura Magnus
D97 Parents

As a D97 mom and an infectious disease epidemiologist, I was greatly concerned to learn that D97 is not reporting cases to the health department. We are in the midst of rapidly rising cases, in both community and in schools. Sick kids can't learn, sick teachers can't teach. Unfortunately, this disease is not going away but we can and should reduce the number of kids infected. Masking and increased testing can help stop outbreaks from spreading. The board should work with the Health Department to determine if lunches and field trips are sources of outbreaks & identify ways to mitigate these risks. And for those advocating that we wait to do anything until the CDC community level status reaches "high", we are already in the highest case category possible - our status will only change to "high" when a few more of us fill up the hospitals. Can't we start protecting each other now? At a start, please cooperate with the Health Department.

Maria Pyra

Good afternoon,

I'm writing in support of covid mitigation efforts. In particular, I support a return of requiring masks in schools for all indoor activities (lunch being the obvious exception) and continued testing. With 17 days of school remaining, my hope is that our kids can finish out the year safely and in good health.

I send my gratitude to the OPHD and D97 for their diligence in keeping our kids and community safe.

Thank you for your time,
Joey Tesch
mom of two D97 students

Dear, D97 board and superintendents,

I am writing to ask that our students be allowed to continue with in person learning, all extracurricular activities, and end of the year events as planned. While I understand COVID cases are on the rise again, I also recognize this is going to happen repeatedly for decades. I was alarmed to see that a relatively small number of cases, perhaps 3 or 4 depending on classroom size, could result in a switch to remote learning based on Oak Park health department guidance. In light of all we have learned about COVID over the last two and a half years and the fact that our community is highly vaccinated providing protection against the worst outcomes of COVID-19, I'd like to see the district continue in its efforts to provide our students with a full and rich end of the school year. They deserve it. Whatever issues there are between the district and the health department, I hope that can be worked out between the two entities without our kids suffering.

Thank you!
Mara Maas
Mom of 2 Hatch tigers and 1 Brooks Eagle

Dear D97 Board, Administration and Community,

First, I wanted to thank D97 for the Covid Dashboard and communications. The D97 dashboard is easy to access and read, especially compared to other districts and even health departments. It also includes multiple types of data that is updated in a regular and timely manner. However, I was shocked to hear that the district isn't reporting all the data properly to the Oak Park Health Department. We have heard communications from D97 repeatedly that made it seem like they were in full corporation and working together with the health department. However, according to section one from the May 11 Oak Park Health Department order, which I have added below to be read for public record, accurate reporting of all cases to the OPHD from D97 is not happening.

Oak Park Elementary School District Number 97 ("District 97") has experienced 214 COVID-19 cases for the school week of May 2, 2022 through May 6, 2022 as reported by District 97 on District 97 COVID-19 dashboard maintained on District 97's website. The Oak Park Health Department ("Health Department") was only made aware of 57 of these cases from three (3) of District 97's ten (10) schools. One District 97 school has not reported its cases to the Health Department since late January 2022.

I am shocked by this news as I was under the impression and based on what I have seen with communications from the district that D97 was being open, honest and great at communicating covid case

data with the community and the health department. I am hoping that the emergency meeting will address why this information was not being shared and hold those accountable so that this does not happen in the future.

I also hope that the board is going to address what actions will be taken to help control the outbreaks at multiple schools. Originally D97 had a thoughtful plan to roll back mitigations slowly to test which ones might increase cases. There was also a plan to put mitigations back in place if cases were to rise. However, with lawsuits and outcries from a loud minority, we have just gone full steam ahead back to normal and ignored the rising case counts by lack of action. We are allowing field trips, which I am grateful for, but we are allowing them without proper mitigations or planning. The lack of mask-wearing and open windows on buses to field trips have led to some field trips becoming superspreaders. I urge the board to make masks mandatory on buses because social distancing and proper ventilation are not possible. We have already seen the consequences of not doing so.

I don't want to see any events being canceled so where there are large gatherings of people like an audience for performances then masks should be required in the audience and other indoor events where applicable. We can't be mixing large groups of people and classes indoors unmasked. For outdoor events, the risk is low and should require no change.

Also, why is the district not requiring masks on days 6-10 for a positive covid case? This is recommended by our health department and the CDC. Students that test positive should either be required (not simply strongly recommended) to mask on day 6-10 OR not be allowed to return to school until day 10.

I know given the political climate and pending lawsuits that the district won't return to a full mask mandate. However, I hope they will mandate masks on buses, indoor events with 50+ people and for staff and students returning on day 6-10 from a positive covid test.

Thank you for your time and attention to this.

Tina Harle

Parent of d97 3rd Grader and a preschooler.

Our daughter is a 3rd grader at Irving and she asked if she could write a letter about masks. She went right to her school-issued iPad and typed the following letter and then edited herself. She asked if I would share it with those in charge of decisions in Oak Park and the schools. So here is her letter as she wrote it.

I think that people should be required to wear their masks in preschool. Here is my story.

Me and my family weren't on board with taking our masks off in my school (Washington Irving Elementary School). I don't feel comfortable with it but don't even get me started because I know it's "completely fine, I'm just overreacting" but I just don't feel safe. I want to go back to masks required but nobody will listen to me, you'll probably just say "Oh you're wasting your time" but I want people to listen to me. I want to go back to masks required, but just when I thought things were already bad enough my mom told me that my little sister's school (First United Nursery School) was taking their masks off too. And it's a pre-school, so nobody but maybe the staff is vaccinated and it's just really dumb that everybody is taking their masks off and me and my family are not on board with it.

I hope you enjoyed my story and you now want to make it so I think that this school is a safe learning environment for all. If we each did our part, I know we will get over Covid, but it starts with us, with you, with me, with everyone working together, to make the world a better place, to get over this, together.

Dear D97 board members and administration:

Please allow our kids to stay in in person school. While covid cases are rising, it is also true that the majority of kids are vaccinated and have already had covid. Because most kids are already vaccinated, if and when they contract covid, the cases have been mild and kids are able to return to class within a few days. And our K-5 classes are about 20 kids which means only 2 positive cases trigger an outbreak status.

Our children are still dealing with learning loss and social emotional issues as a result of the past two years. The high vaccination rate of our community and mitigation strategies have kept our kids safe. Please keep them in school with their peers and teachers. Please do what's right for our kids and let them continue in person.

Online learning is not providing a FAPE for kids with special needs and has proven to do more harm for our kids than good. As a community we need to prioritize in person schooling for all of our wellbeing. We are in a mental health crisis for our youth and it seems irresponsible to suggest returning to any remote learning.

Children are our future. Let's continue to do what's best for them and our families.

Signed, Karin and Grant Johnsey parent of 4th grader at Whittier School with a child in an instructional classroom

We just need to get through these last few weeks. But we need to do it while mitigating the in-school COVID transmission that has led to so many outbreaks. I hope that the District will start collaborating with our Public Health Department and enact the mitigations detailed in their latest orders.

Alicia Chastain

I am an 8th grade teacher at Julian. I love attending the 8th grade graduation ceremony and celebrating with my students. I am concerned about it becoming a super-spreader event. I understand that the high school did not want to allow us the outdoor option, but I am hoping the Board might consider what safety precautions we might be able to take, such as mandatory masking. Surely, there are older parents or grandparents as well as students who are immunocompromised for whom this would be a risky event.

Lauren Brown

Dear D97 Board of Education, Oak Park Village Trustees and Dr. Chappelle,

Two years and two months after schools were shut down, the Oak Park community was sent an email yesterday (5/12) about an "emergency meeting" about COVID guidelines.

So now I am writing to ask our publicly elected officials, and the people they appoint to excessively powerful positions, to stop. Please stop traumatizing this community with threatening orders. Please stop with the renewed threats to close classrooms, end group learning, bring back quiet lunches and send kids back home to learn on screens. Please stop the emergency meetings responding to guidance that even the CDC has stopped advising. Please stop halting our community's attempt to resume our lives after two

years of pandemic. Please stop acting with a complete lack of empathy for the more than two years of emotional and mental suffering so many in our community have endured.

Yes, COVID-19 is still around and it's likely that it will always be around. Oak Park — perhaps as much as any community anywhere — has taken this pandemic seriously, and continues to do so, still making the often painful or frustrating sacrifices to minimize the spread. The vast majority of community members — including 95% of D97 teachers and 80% of students — are fully vaccinated. Many continue to mask in public spaces even as the CDC has made it optional. Most D97 families have kept their children enrolled in SHIELD testing. Nearly everyone with a positive test respects the quarantines, and isolates according to the latest guidelines when presented with a positive test.

And yet, here we are, facing yet another emergency meeting of the District 97 school board, at a time when pretty much everyone everywhere, liberal or conservative, has begun moving down the long path to safely reopening and living our lives as safely as possible, given that COVID is and likely will continue to be a part of them. Perhaps this latest salvo is just a power struggle between two handsomely funded taxing bodies. Perhaps it's all just about an unbending belief that our community's number one public health goal is to have zero Covid, everything else be damned. Perhaps it's public officials who don't trust the people they represent. Whatever the reason, it needs to stop.

Post-traumatic stress seems related to the past two years and how they have been handled by publicly elected officials and others appointed to serve the community seems to be part of the community's reaction to this week's news, as clear on social media, and in talking with fellow community members. Our community, insofar as they are choosing to engage in this ongoing seesaw that the school district and the public health department continue to stoke, is reliving the trauma of the impossible decisions we faced two years ago, to resume the unending debates, to once again face the possibility of upheaval to norms that are necessary for a healthy and functioning community — upheaval that has had an immense impact on our children, our community and our lives for more than two years.

Our community and our children have suffered for more than two years, and only now are we starting to pull out of it. Just these past two weeks at Beye School I saw joy upon the long-awaited return of community in-school gathering. I cannot stress enough what it meant to my kids to be back on the auditorium stage for Spring Sing, for the band concert and for the talent show, and to perform that in-person with their friends in front of their families and friends and teachers. I can't tell you what it meant to me to share that moment with the other families and teachers and school employees I had been physically distanced from for two years. I can't tell you what it meant to me to ride a bus on my daughter's first field trip in two years, and share in the joy of singing songs together on the bus.

These activities, these moments, they are not inessential activities. Events being part of a social community is essential to the health of each of us as human beings, and to our entire Oak Park community. We cannot live in isolation, or with perpetual barriers up. What is this existence? We may never have COVID, but we may also never anything else worthwhile in our lives.

Epidemiology is merely one of a great many elements of "public health." In particular, the mental and emotional health of our community and our children has, for much of the past two years, been placed on the back burner by the people entrusted with making community decisions. The fact that we once again sit here pondering closed classrooms, remote learning, quiet lunch in classrooms, and the end of in-person events—not to mention, apparently, fining the school district and threatening to shut down schools—shows just how little our decision-makers still seem to care about it today.

“Kids are resilient,” we hear time and again. But it shouldn't be a surprise to any of you when you read the latest headline about the record rates of anxiety and depression among youth today. Rates of violence

in our community have spiked in the past two years. Suicide rates are rising faster than they have ever risen, and rising fastest among youths, teens and young adults. Further, we are all hearing stories every day about suicide attempts and fights and violence in our own community's schools. When do we start investing time and energy and resources in these public health needs? When do we start paying attention to this epidemic? When do we get our alarmist orders and emergency meetings about this?

Our kids, our community, have gone through a lot already. We have sacrificed much, and we continue to work hard as a community to keep this virus at bay. It's disrespectful to all of us when the people in charge roll their eyes at anyone with even a thought that there may be suffering and challenges beyond the specter of COVID-19.

It's long past time for our public leaders to recognize this and start taking this into account before they send out their orders and set up their emergency meetings.

Sincerely,
Sean P. Flynn
Oak Park

I wanted to follow up on this given the emergency meeting planned today for D97. Please know that the outbreaks at the schools are affecting the entire community. We know that masks worked to prevent this during previous surges. Given Pritzker's ongoing state of emergency, I hope that the district will consider a return to universal masking for the remainder of the year, or until community transmission levels decrease. I hope that the district will work with the OPPHD on contact tracing and outbreaks so this can be appropriately mitigated. And I hope that longer term solutions will be put in place looking ahead to next year, such as increasing ventilation with HEPA filters in every classroom.

Please know that despite what you may hear to the contrary, there are many in the community who support our health department and support increasing mitigations so that our children, staff, their families and our entire community are not put at risk. Waiting until hospitalizations rise when we already have members of our community with family members who have been hospitalized does not make sense. Illness is affecting our entire community. The current status quo is not working. I realize the choices that have to be made are difficult, but I hope that you will keep the safety of our community in mind as you proceed.

Thank you,
Robin Kalish

I would like to lend my support for mask requirement in all schools until the end of the school year.

Thank you
Irina Calin-Jageman

Hello,

I'm a D97 parent with a 1st Grader in Beye and a four-year-old preschooler. I want to voice my strong support for immediately eliminating COVID contact tracing within D97, given its impracticality. With everything else open and people moving freely, it is impossible to know the origin or spread of a given case and we now live in a reality where we have both vaccines and treatments to protect against serious illness and death. To restrict D97 students in any way is hugely inequitable to both individual students who will miss out on important activities and the student and educator bodies at large if our

schools are using their time and resources for contact tracing versus actual education. I would also assume that voluntarily maintaining contact tracing puts a massive and unnecessary liability onto D97. We have a highly, highly vaccinated student and staff population; it makes no sense to further restrict when individuals are already using at a high rate the most effective tool, we have to prevent serious illness.

I love our school and leaders and want to be an advocate for D97 schools; to be out of step with the broader population puts us at a huge disadvantage. Please sunset any contact tracing immediately and please do not consider any further mitigations. For the same reasons, I would strongly advocate eliminating weekly SHIELD testing and will take this up in the fall if it remains something contemplated by the district; I assume any funds could be much better used to help our students overall and in support of COVID learning loss.

Thank you very much and I'm happy to speak live if helpful;
Sara Pastrovich

Dear Board of Ed and Administration,

I urge you to continue allowing students to participate in a typical school setting. This includes continuing hot lunch, activities, and field trips. Yes, covid cases are rising. That is a reality of the pandemic.

All school age children and adults have the opportunity to be vaccinated. We know that vaccinated people may still get covid but that the impact on their health is significantly less.

Our children are still dealing with the learning loss and social emotional issues that have been caused by pandemic. I have seen this both with my own child and the 150 middle school students I have taught over the last two years. Kids need to be able to be at school and participate in the activities that we have always held to be important for their development.

Thank you,
Lauren Hyde, parent of a 1st grader at Lincoln Elementary

4. Emergency Discussion

Discussion of Mitigations with Possible Action

The Emergency Meeting of the Board of Education was called to address the following topics:

- Public Order – Case Reporting to Local Health Department and Contact Tracing
- Current COVID-19 Transmission
- New School Guidance/Recommendation from Oak Park Department of Public Health
- Discussion of District 97 Mitigations – Possible Options

Important Note:

“School closure should be the absolute last resort to managing an outbreak due to the critical role of in-person learning to students overall wellbeing.” -Illinois Department of Public Health

District 97 wants to emphasize that our priority is to maintain in-person learning through the end of the school year. Our goal today is to review the steps we have taken in recent weeks to respond to the

increase in COVID-19 cases in our community, and to determine if there are additional, less drastic measures that should be considered.

Public Order

On Thursday, May 12, the administration became aware of a public order posted on the village's website May 11 regarding COVID-19 cases in District 97 and reporting to the local health department. The district was notified of a communication gap between the schools and the health department in late April, and immediately began investigating, communicating with our nurses, and working with Dr. Chapple-McGruder to resolve the issues that were identified. For example, our senior director of technology has gone through all documents to ensure that the health department has access to the information.

Case Reporting Background

District 97 Case Reporting Protocols

- Health Department Line Lists
 - Schools are responsible for reporting positive COVID-19 cases to the health department via a line list (Google spreadsheet)
- Classroom/School Letters
- District 97 Dashboard
 - We have always been transparent with the public about COVID-19 cases reported among our students and staff (more than 1,800 cases have been reported since the beginning of 2021-22).

Information Requested via Line Lists

- First and last names
- Date of birth
- Multiple columns for symptoms (nurses have to check off if the student exhibited that symptom, such as fever, cough, etc.)
- Date of symptom onset
- Date of COVID-19 test
- Test result
- Last day in school
- Last day of quarantine/isolation
- Number of close contacts

Challenges with Case Reporting/Contact Tracing

- Line lists currently require a significant amount of data entry. Although we have hired additional support (CNAs), it has been difficult for the nurses to log all of the information requested by the health department within 24 hours, on top of contact tracing, case notifications, and their regular daily responsibilities.
- School nurses have continued to contact trace to the best of their ability. However, contact tracing in schools becomes extremely challenging when students are mixing cohorts and are no longer consistently masked.

District Response/Next Steps

- We are committed to providing the health department with all the information they need in a timely manner. The administration has made recommendations for streamlining case reporting via the line lists, which we hope to implement as soon as possible.

- We are also discussing expectations for contact tracing and whether the local health department is able to provide additional support.

COVID-19 Cases

Week of May 7-13

Positive cases are 3.7% Up 190 during previous week

SHIELD Testing May 9-13

Total Samples - 2,380

Positive tests – 67

*Processed 611 outbreak samples; 21 positive results

New School Guidance from OPDPH

On May 10, the Oak Park Department of Public Health shared new guidance with all public and private schools due to the rising cases of COVID-19 in the community.

1. Cases should be reported to the health department via email within 24 hours. **Nurses are currently logging cases via their line lists (Google spreadsheets). We are working with the village to improve this process.**
2. Schools should immediately begin contact tracing and notify close contacts within 24 hours. **Nurses are contact tracing to the best of their ability. Classroom notifications are sent within 24 hours of a positive case to all students. Instructions are the same for all students: monitor for symptoms and stay home when sick, and we STRONGLY ENCOURAGE masking for 10 days.**
3. Individuals with early release from isolation/quarantine (days 6-10) should continue to wear a mask. **We STRONGLY RECOMMEND masking for these individuals.**
4. All close contacts should participate in bi-weekly SHIELD testing. **We are currently testing more than 3,000 students per week through our regular SHIELD testing. Additionally, classrooms in outbreak status are currently testing twice per week. This week, we also received approximately 5,500 at-home antigen kits (containing 2 tests each) from IDPH, which will be deployed in the coming week.**
5. Classes in outbreak status should not mix with other classes. **In some cases, outbreak classes are temporarily eating lunch in their classrooms. Schools may consider additional steps to limit cohort mixing when feasible.**
6. Classes in outbreak status that have implemented mitigations as recommended by the Oak Park Public Health Department and continue to have cases should transition immediately to remote learning in order to prevent schoolwide COVID-19 spread. **We DO NOT intend to close classrooms or schools (per IDPH, school closure should be the absolute last resort to managing an outbreak). We have taken the following steps in response to classroom outbreaks:**
 - **Twice-per-week COVID-19 testing through SHIELD (either on site or through at-home kits)**
 - **Having impacted students eat lunch in their classrooms**
 - **STRONGLY RECOMMENDING masking for all students**
 - **Maximizing distance between students**

Additional Recommendations from OPDPH

The local health department communicated additional considerations for school-wide outbreaks (based on recommendations in IDPH outbreak guidance):

1. Cancel non-essential activities and meetings.
2. Keep students in stable class groups or classrooms and move teachers
3. between classes.
4. Increasing spacing between students in classes.
5. Shorten the in-person school week.
6. Stagger school start and lunch/break times across year groups or classes.

Discussion/Next Steps

We are currently addressing the two major concerns raised by the Oak Park Department of Public Health:

- Timely reporting of positive cases
- Contact tracing

Based on the information shared, including recommendations from the health department, the board/district may consider implementing additional mitigations for schools in outbreak status.

ACTION:

The Board of Education took into account, information shared by the Administration, Nurse Hilary and public comments received for consideration from the community, to draft at the Board Table, a motion for action. Proposed Motion:

Kearney moved, Seconded by Kim, that the Board of Education, of Oak Park Elementary School District 97 moves to include the following mitigations through the end of the school year:

1. Masks will be required for any portion of field trips spent indoors including on buses, if children are transported to field trips via bus.
2. Masks will be required, unless appropriate school personnel determine that unmasking is necessary, for all attendees and participants at indoor performances and events that include individuals that are not students and staff, such as music and end of year performances and graduation ceremonies.
3. Schools will attempt to move indoor activities outdoors as much as reasonable possible.

The Board of Education then tabled additional motions related to PKP and EC, and noted that there is currently a resolution providing authority to the Interim Superintendents, for purpose of establishing mitigations and or mitigation changes. If these areas based on feedback require any changes, those changes will be requested by the Interim Superintendents.

Ayes: Kim, Kearney, Ross Dribin, Hurd Johnson, Spurlock, Moore, Kinhal,

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed.

5. CONCLUDING ITEMS

CONCLUDING
ITEMS

5.1 BOARD REMARKS

The Board of Education collectively thanked Nurse Hilary and all the Building Nurses, Administrative staff present at the meeting and in our collective buildings, for all their hard work and support in keeping our Schools, Students and Staff safe. The Board realized this is not an easy fix, and hopes the community is supportive in doing their part to help keep our schools as safe as possible leading into the final days of the current school year.

6. ADJOURNMENT

ADJOURNMENT

All Seven Present Members of the Board were in agreement that the meeting be adjourned. There being no further business to conduct, President Kim declared the meeting adjourned at 6:39 p.m.

Board President

Board Secretary