

Official Minutes of the  
Oak Park Board of Education District 97  
260 Madison Street, Oak Park  
January 24, 2023 Regular Meeting

This meeting was held in-person and virtually using Livestream. Board members met in person along with Administration.

President Kim called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Present: Kim, Moore, Ross Dribin, Kearney, Kinhal (arrived at 6:08pm), Hurd Johnson (arrived at 6:14pm), Spurlock (left meeting 6:25pm)

Absent: Spurlock (Open Session)

Also Present: Superintendent Dr. Ushma Shah, Associate Superintendent of Education Dr. Felicia Starks Turner, Chief Academic and Accountability Officer Dr. Ebony Lofton, Director of Human Resources Dr. Margo Schmitt, Senior Director of Technology Michael Arensdorff, Senior Director of Equity Dr. Carrie Kamm, Senior Director of Buildings & Grounds Jeanne Keane, Julian Middle School Principal Jeremy Christian, Communications Coordinator Rebecca Bald, and Sue Vercnocke for Board Recording.

ROLL CALL

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Spurlock moved, seconded by Ross Dribin that the Board move into executive session for the purpose of Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees, Collective Negotiating and Litigation.5 ILCS 120/2(C)(1)(2)(11) at 6:05 p.m.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

**OPEN SESSION**

President Kim motioned that the Board move into Open Session at 7:07 p.m. All present members of the Board were in agreement. The Board convened in Open Session at 7:07 p.m.

OPEN SESSION

**3. PUBLIC COMMENT**

From: Alicia Chastain

In 2020, District 97 removed police officers from its buildings after hundreds of parents and community members expressed concerns about the effect of having armed police officers in our schools. This decision coincided with local community organizers publishing research showing racial disparities in Oak Park's policing. At the Village's request, highly compensated consultants from Berry Dunn validated this research last year. I want to share some of those independently verified findings with you.

In the five and a half years that the researchers studied, Oak Park Police recorded 102 stops of children in Oak Park. Of all those stops, only one child was white. He was a sixteen-year-old boy who police stopped for a reason marked as "other". All other stops were of children of color and almost all were of Black children. Of the 96 Black children stopped by police, three of those stops were of 10-Year-old boys. Police stopped these boys for a reason listed as "suspicious person."

PUBLIC COMMENT

To state these findings another way, Oak Park police stopped more 10-year-old Black boys, than they did white children of any age.

These racial disparities in youth policing were some of the reasons the District ended its previous IGA with the Village. They were some of the reasons I opposed the current IGA. They are also some of the reasons why my non-white son took a mental health day for his school's annual lockdown drill, which included an armed police officer on campus.

In a public comment to the Village last November, I asked that the IGA process be paused. I requested that the Village and District take time to consult with parents, youth-focused attorneys, civil rights and disability rights experts. In your own vote, District 97 Board Members asked for policies and training that would regulate when and why armed police officers would be allowed in schools. But that pause was not taken and those policies have not been implemented.

This history shaped the way that I saw an armed police officer arrive on campus at Holmes last Thursday.

If you are unfamiliar with the campus, Kenilworth runs along the school and dead ends at a cul-de-sac right in front of Holmes Elementary. This cul-de-sac is between the school's main entrance and the black top where children are picked up after school. The street is primary crossing area for students who are picked up, going to buses, or heading for the playground. For this reason, there is always a traffic barrier placed in the street at the edge of the school's property. Any vehicle crossing that barrier poses a safety risk, especially in the rush of people that is school dismissal.

I was surprised to see the police car on the other side of that barrier as students poured out of the building. The patrol vehicle approached the cul-de-sac with its lights flashing. A teacher had to enter the street and redirect students, who were flowing out of the building, back onto the sidewalk, so that the vehicle could round the bend and then park in a handicap space at the school's entrance. The sight seemed urgent and was a cause for concern.

The District does not have any policies that should have prevented this incident. Or, if they do exist, school administrators are unaware of that guidance. As a result, the entire Holmes community experienced an armed police officer arriving at school, at the height of dismissal, for a casual meeting with the Principal about a program that would bring an armed police officer into the school on a weekly basis.

When it comes to police, there are no casual interactions and the mere presence of a police officer, in what should be a safe space, causes harm.

The District must not go back to a time where armed police officers are casually or programmatically allowed in schools. This incident exposes several serious policy gaps that could lead to that backsliding and, if not remedied, will inflict further harm on our community. I request that the District please address these issues with the urgency and seriousness they demand, so that additional adverse outcomes can be prevented.

Thank you for your consideration and service.

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#### **4. SPECIAL REPORTS**

##### **4.1 #D97Joy Culture and Celebration Update**

###### Student Celebrations

**Brooks Junior Varsity Boys Basketball Team Earns Runner-Up**

Congratulations Brooks Middle School Junior Varsity Basketball Team who was runners-up at the conference tournament and undefeated during their regular season. Thank you, Brooks Student Athletes, Managers, as well as their Families and Coach Tanya Thigpen for all of your support. What a great season!

From Coach Thigpen:

*“What a joy it is to coach the Junior Varsity Boys' Basketball Team at GBMS. This year was special. We may not have been the most talented team but the boys came together and got better every game. The dedication and commitment shown was remarkable. Being part of such a force is motivational, and inspirational. It makes you want to be a better coach and mentor.*

*We played Julian in the championship and lost. Both teams played exceptionally well, I can say that that was one of the best games I've seen played on our level in years. We had beaten them earlier in the season so the loss was bittersweet. Sweet, because the trophy stays in Oak Park! I am so thankful to have been part of such a great experience.”*

**Julian Junior Varsity Boys Basketball Team Captures Conference Title**

Congratulations to the Julian Middle School Junior Varsity Basketball Team on winning the conference championship tournament! A very competitive game and season! Thank you, Julian Student Athletes, Managers and Families, for your continued support as well as Coach Fuller. What a great season!

From Coach Fuller:

*“I always tell the kids be grateful for being a part of a team. The success you want is behind the work you have to put in. Not just in sports, but in life. I always want them to know that success is on the other side of failure and hard work. My kids were very receptive and they took on the challenge of being held accountable and it spread throughout the team. It was a great season, and I'll always remember this group.”*

We are so proud when our student athletes demonstrate the many dimensions in which they excel, including sports successes. Congratulations again for demonstrating #D97 Joy.

Student Athlete celebrations can be found by viewing the recording of this meeting on the D97 YouTube Channel.

**5. ACTION ITEMS**

**5.1 APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA**

\*Initial motion was read, board member brought forward request to revise personnel report, present board members were in agreement with introducing revised personnel report.

**Revised Consent Motion**

Kinhal moved, seconded by Ross Dribin that the Board of Education of Oak Park Elementary School District 97 moves to approve the revised consent agenda as presented.

- 5.1.1 Approval of Minutes from the January 10, 2023 Board Meeting
- 5.1.2 Bill List
- 5.1.3 Personnel(revised)

ACTION  
ITEMS

Ayes: Kim, Kearney, Ross Dribin, Moore, Hurd Johnson, Kinhal  
Nays: None  
Absent: Spurlock  
Motion passed.

**6. BOARD ASSIGNMENTS**

BOARD  
ASSIGNMENTS

- PTOC met on January 23, 2023. There was discussion around sustainability efforts. Board members Ross Dribin and Kearney are meeting with others locally as work gets underway to adopt a sustainability policy.
- OPEF met last week. Base Camp is up and running, offering over 190 classes. Classes will be held at Beye Elementary and Julian Middle School. Looking forward, Vex Robotics is sponsoring a competition and received a grant. Bingo Bash will be held at the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Club.
- OPRF Community Council Boosters is offering \$20,000. Looking for auction items. Communications audit and focus groups are forming. Presentation on mental health and Wellness days.

**7. CONCLUDING ITEMS**

CONCLUDING  
ITEMS

7.1 Board Remarks

- Board member Ross Dribin: I recently attended the Legislative Dinner that was held on January 23, 2023.
- Board member Moore: Tea Party for girls ages (8-12) 64 slots available. Event scheduled for February 19, 2-5PM at the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Club. Now accepting donations, contact Juanita Griffin at Oak Park Public Library for more information.
- Candidates’ forum is looking into how information is presented to interested candidates. Plans to hold forum in May 2023. Many board members are running uncontested.

**8. ADJOURNMENT**

ADJOURNMENT

All six 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 by voice vote at 7:36 p.m.

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Board President

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Board Secretary