

Official Minutes of the  
Oak Park Board of Education District 97  
260 Madison Street, Oak Park  
January 30, 2024 Committee of the Whole Meeting

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

President Kearney called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

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

Absent: None

Also Present: Superintendent Dr. Ushma Shah, Assistant Superintendents Dr. Luis De Leon & Patrick Robinson, Assistant Superintendent of Finance & Operations Dr. Sheila Johnson, Chief Learning Innovation Officer Dr. Eboney Lofton, Chief Technology Officer Michael Arensdorff, Senior Director of Communications Amanda Siegfried, Interim Senior Director Human Resources Dr. Christine Zelaya, and Lonya Boose Director/Board Secretary.

ROLL CALL

### OPEN SESSION

President Kearney motioned that the Board move into Open Session at 7:00 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

Rebecca Kaegi

My Name is Rebecca Kaegi, and I'm currently a Brooks mom. I'm here tonight to voice my support for an amazing Brooks teacher, and to express my hope for his return. Lary Grimaldi is a legend; he has taught science at Brooks for 25 years. Two of my children had him for science in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. One of them, Will, is here with me to speak about the impact that year had on him.

It's safe to say, that if everyone who was similarly inspired by Mr. Grimaldi's teaching were here tonight, the line would be down the block.

Mr. Grimaldi has also been the volleyball coach for 25 years, and has built a competitive, well-run and fun program. My youngest child is a volleyball player, and she was looking forward to having Mr. Grimaldi as a coach this year. We waited and hoped for work that he'd be returning, even as tryouts were postponed repeatedly. The season has now begun and although I'm grateful to the coaches who jumped in at the last minute, the program is struggling and the team desperately needs the leadership and experience of their longtime coach. In fact, I'm missing a game right now, but Anna and I agreed that this was the more important place to be on behalf of the team.

Every day without Mr. Grimaldi is a loss to his 6<sup>th</sup> grade science students, his volleyball players and the subtends whose day he brightened with words of encouragement in the lunchroom or hallway. One hundred days without him is devastating and unfortunately, that is where we are. I want our leadership to

PUBLIC  
COMMENT

know how much he is valued and missed and to express my hope that I will see him back in the classroom and on the volleyball sideline very soon.

### William Kaegi

My Name is William Kaegi. I am a junior at OPRF, and as my mom said, I'm here to talk about what it was like to be a 6<sup>th</sup> grader in Mr. Grimaldi's science class.

Prior to 6<sup>th</sup> grade, my experience with science hadn't been terribly exciting, it mostly amounted to measuring how tall a plant was during the first five minutes of the period and then forgetting all about it for the rest of the day. As a sixth-grade boy who loved lightsabers and plants vs. zombies, action and dueling, I didn't really see the point.

That's probably why I remember so distinctly walking into Mr. Grimaldi's classroom on my first day and watching him light various things, a paper, a desk, himself on fire. It was a total departure from everything I assumed science to be.

That class taught me more than facts about science, it taught me for the first-time what science really was. Science stopped ending when the bell rang. I looked at Luke's lightsaber during a movie and I thought about science. I looked at my peashooter in plants vs. zombies and I thought about science.

Skip to today, and I still feel that influence about half a decade later. This semester, I am enrolled in 2-AP science classes, 1- for the requirement and 1-for fun and I am in the OPRF Biology Research Club and Science Olympiad. That's Mr. Grimaldi's influence, and this year's 6<sup>th</sup> graders deserve the same. I hope he will be back soon.

### Katharin Thurman

Hi I am Katharin Thurman, my daughters went through Mann, Julian and OPRF. I am an educator here in Oak Park. Between all of those things and a Girl Scouts Leader, in leadership actions for various things we often get fired up about something getting done but then there is no system that keeps up this action. Things get forgotten and then when something happens, people say, oh yeah, we use to do that thing.

I appreciate what the school district has done as far as forwarding on police and Health Department notifications on safe gun storage. We know you're supportive of safe gun storage, but to truly be effective we need consistency and prioritization. We need policy from the school district that keeps safe gun storage in our priorities every year and we need commitment from the school district spelling out how and when they will notify parents of their part in keeping the community safe. Safety begins in the home when they lock their guns away from the ammunition and inaccessible to children and teens.

Especially as kids get older, with a lot more group projects and visiting of each other's homes, as well as making new friends, it's not too much to ask to keep students safe from risk of gun violence. Most school shooters acquire their guns from within the home. Guns owned by someone who could save lives.

### Nancy B. Schroeder

Hi my name is Nancy B. Schroeder and I have three children in District 97. I am a former educator myself and I am a member of the local Mom's Demand Action for gun violence prevention group. I am here today regarding the drafted memorandum for secure gun storage policy. You may be aware that on January 25<sup>th</sup>, the White House announced a new initiative to promote this very cause in their

announcement they cited that 76% of school shootings are committed with guns from the home. The statement goes on to explain the vital role of schools as trusted credible messengers of best practices in secure gun storage. The statement also outlines how our government will be asking for districts to partner in this initiative. I am proud to be in a community that is on the front end of this and I ask that you please adopt this resolution without delay. Please include messaging upfront ensuring that this is seen by all families during the registration process. Thank you for your continued work now let's cross the finish line and help ensure community safety. Thank you all.

#### **4. DESIGN THINKING**

##### **4.1 Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Standards and Black Excellence Teaching in Oak Park (BETOP)**

Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, Patrick Robinson and Dr. Eboney Lofton, Chief Learning Innovation Officer were joined by members of BETOP to discuss, "Elevating Voices: Creating New Spaces".

The presentation outlines:

1. The Journey
2. Big Ideas for BETOP
3. Why Now
4. Designing New Spaces
5. Celebrations and Next Steps

BETOP believes that District 97 must respond to what our data and our equity policy require. To do so, the committee role will be to:

- Elevate Black students, family and staff voice in schools
- Design circles, townhalls and meetings focused on listening
- Synthesize and share insights with key stakeholders
- Meet with BETOP colleagues across the district to share professional practices
- Support alignment within schools and across schools through collaboration with principals

##### **Why Now**

The Equity Policy, section D, states District 97 cannot achieve equity without effective, robust stakeholder engagement. The committee discussed how BETOP is designing spaces to learn from student within the school community. The committee grounds the work in Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards, along with the books; The Four Pivots & Street Data.

The Board of Education and the BETOP committee engaged in an honest and direct dialog relating to the work, design and implementation.

\*The entire presentation is available on the district website or by watching the live stream of the board meeting on the YouTube channel.

#### **5. School Improvement Logic Models**

##### **5.1 Brooks and Julian Middle School**

Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, Patrick Robinson and Assistant Superintendent of Middle Schools, Dr. Luis DeLeon along with Principal Capuder and Interim Principal Lee discussed Second-Trimester Logic Models, Moving Ideas into Practice.

Middle Schools belief; If we change adult practices to support the success of students in our focal cohort, then we will meet the short, medium and long-term outcomes for all students. Shared leadership is also at the heart of the work. This effort is creating consistency in key areas at both middle schools, while also supporting each middle school to have its own unique culture and traditions.

\*The entire presentation is available on the district website or by watching the live stream of the board meeting on the YouTube channel

**CONCLUDING ITEMS**

Board Remarks

CONCLUDING  
ITEMS

**EXECUTIVE CLOSED SESSION OF THE BOARD**

The Board of Education moved back into Executive Closed Session of the Board after public business.

EXECUTIVE  
CLOSED  
SESSION OF  
THE BOARD

Spurlock moved, seconded by Moore 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 9:56 p.m.

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

All Seven present members of the Board were in agreement that the meeting be adjourned. There being no further business to conduct, President Kearney declared the meeting adjourned by voice vote at 10:49 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

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Board President

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Board Secretary