

Official Minutes of the  
Oak Park Board of Education District 97  
260 Madison Street, Oak Park  
May 23, 2023 Regular 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 6:05 p.m.

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

ROLL CALL

Absent: None

Also Present: Superintendent Dr. Ushma Shah, Chief Academic and Accountability Officer Dr. Eboney 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, Senior Director of Finance Patrick King, Senior Director of Communications Amanda Siegfried, and Lonya Boose Board Secretary.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

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Kim moved, seconded by Spurlock 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.

OPEN SESSION

OPEN SESSION

President Kearney motioned that the Board move into Open Session at 7:03 p.m. All present members of the Board were in agreement. The Board convened in Open Session at 7:08 p.m.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

PUBLIC COMMENT

Thank you for the opportunity. My name is Brian Dailey and I have a child who is in 2nd grade at Beye elementary and a 3-year-old in preschool. I am a part of a broader group of parents and educators who are concerned about the current way students are being taught how to read in Oak Park. I am here because I have witnessed firsthand the heartache of a child thinking they are not smart. Thinking they are the problem.

Before choosing to stay home full time to manage our household, I was VP of Operations for a top logistics company here in Chicago. In that role, I relied heavily on qualitative and quantitative data to guide operations to achieve successful results. At times, the data would indicate that a program I was passionate about was not working as expected. When that happened, as a leader, I needed to objectively dig in, first by talking to the boots on the ground, to figure out what wasn't working and accelerate change.

I see this need for strategic and significant change regarding poor literacy results here in D97. As school board members, we parents call on you to be the strategic leaders to push this district in a significantly

different direction for the benefit of ALL students, not just some. The data is begging you to take a hard look, set any professional biases aside, and expeditiously make a change.

As you know, D97 uses a balanced literacy framework, and currently educators are teaching using the curriculum developed by Lucy Calkins called Units of Study.

Various reviews conducted on this resource reveal significant opportunities. Opportunities that Lucy Calkins has recently admitted and now scrambled to patch ineffectively. There are gaps in:

- Lack of explicit, systematic and diagnostic foundational skills instruction
- Lack of texts that are appropriately complex for all grade levels
- Lack of opportunities to systematically build knowledge for students

Some districts have opted to sprinkle in the Units of Study phonics patch or use other resources to try and fix gaps. These gaps are too large to be fixed with supplemental materials or additions. It requires systematic change. I would also argue that it is irresponsible for any district to spend taxpayer dollars to purchase a patch sold by a publisher to fix a curriculum that same publisher admitted is not effective.

The solution is structured literacy instruction that emphasizes knowledge building and foundational skills. This is so much more than just phonics.

D97 has a robust equity policy. Literacy is a basic civil right and ultimately a matter of equity. Supporting strong literacy instruction is one of the most actionable steps you can take as a school board member to show your commitment to equity.

To that end, we are asking that the district strongly consider taking the following action steps:

- Move away from this balanced literacy curriculum and move towards an evidence-based structured literacy curriculum.
- Invest in teacher and leader training around evidence-based literacy practices.

Thank you for your time and service. We look forward to hearing your next steps to help all students thrive as readers and writers in D97.

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Munirah Curtis

Thank you for the opportunity, I am going to speak to inclusion, special education and Teachers Aids. I have four children in district 97, one of which has an IEP. Specifically, my son has had an 1-1 Aid since kindergarten. Majority of them have been wonderful and have allowed my son to be included in regular education classrooms. The Aids that are wonderful, take their job seriously and want to be involved in my son's education. The Aid allows my son to work independently, assisting when needed. My sons Aid helps with organization, allows him to be just like the other kids since he processes things a bit slower than others. The Aid provides structure and assistance.

However, this fall, and previously, a couple of the Aids were not so great. This is why I am here. One day after school with a particular Aid, my son came home not himself. This particular Aid, I provided my contact information, emailed the teacher and case worker, before escalating to the administration my concerns. My question is who oversees the Teachers Aids? Who makes sure the Aids have training on the very important work that they do for children. Who makes sure Teacher Aids are educated on the critical work and supports for students daily? Who makes sure there is understanding of where they are with inclusion. I believe their needs to be standards of professional excellence and communication. Teachers Aids spend anywhere from 4-6 hours with students, but seemingly does not report to the classroom

teachers, case managers, or parents. I ask the school board to look critically into the education, training and accountability of our Teacher Aids. Thank You.

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Middle School Students | Carmen, Annie and Theo

Three Middle School students present the results of their community service project, advocating for students' well-being and education by sharing results of their study on the district food services program.

The project goals include, better food which would then result in less food waste. Students will ultimately eat more leading to better test scores. Students being full and able to pay more attention in class leads to less stress for kids during the school day.

The service-learning project revealed that most students believe that the food currently being served needs to be improved, better food benefits performance on tests, and social-emotional health. Students also showed pictures of entrees that are served daily.

Of 48-students polled, 33.3% rated the lunch 1 out of 5, 41.7% rated the lunch 2 out of 5. Pros for changes to the current hot lunch program include, access to better food, less waste and increased nutritional value. Cons include, pricing, communication regarding food services changes and implementation.

Students reached out to Organic life and Quest food companies to learn more, and also provide resources for the information included in the slide deck.

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**4. #D97Joy Culture and Celebration Update**

#D97 JOY

Those Who Excel Awards Banquet

Eight staff members from District 97 were honored by the Illinois State Board of Education recently on May 20, 2023. This recognition is in collaboration with the state's "Teacher of the Year" recognition program. "Those Who Excel" annually honors individuals that make a difference in students' lives and contribute positively to the culture within the school district of which they serve. Congratulation to Kathleen Kelly, Allison Nelson, Lori Pelling, Stephanie Suerth, Lauren Trout, Elizabeth Vietzen, Nicole Clark Braswell and Madonna Weck for your 2023 "Those Who Excel" honor.

Blast Off to Kindergarten

On Sunday May 21, 2023 the Collaboration for Early Childhood hosted its first "Blast Off to Kindergarten" event at Rehm Park. The event celebrated our soon-to-be kindergarteners, and helped parents and caregivers connect with schools and community organizations. Thank you to our elementary school staff, administrators and PTO's who attended the event and helped support a smooth transition to kindergarten.

2023 District 97 Retirees

District 97 celebrates the 2023 retirees for their impact on the lives of students, families and colleagues. Congratulations, we thank you for your hard work and dedication on behalf of District 97. We appreciate your service and wish you all the best in retirement.

Many thanks to the following 2023 District Retirees:

- Michael Claire – Maintenance Specialist
- LouAnne Johannesson – Student Services Administrative Assistant
- Susan Kemper – Kindergarten Teacher
- Ann LaHucik – Enrichment Specialist
- Jean L’Heureux – Kindergarten Teacher
- Susan Madsen – Fifth Grade Teacher
- Sarah Moore – Second Grade Teacher
- Lisa Pearson – Eighth Grade Language & Literature Teacher
- Katherine Quickery – Fourth Grade Teacher
- Curtis Stewart – Custodian
- Stephanie Thomas – Special Education Teacher
- Sue Vercnocke – Student Services Administrative Assistant
- Jeanne Witz – First Grade Teacher

The district is also planning a casual reception to honor each of the retirees in the coming days.

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## 5. ACTION ITEMS

ACTION ITEMS

### 5.1 Consent Agenda

Spurlock moved, seconded by Moore that the Board of Education of Oak Park Elementary School District 97 moves to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

- 5.1.1 Approval of Minutes from the May 9, 2023 Board Meeting
- 5.1.2 Bill List
- 5.1.3 Personnel
- 5.1.4 Approval : Press Plus Policy Update | Adoption Date Compliance
- 5.1.5 Approval : Special Circumstances Leave Committee Recommendation

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

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### 5.2 Action

#### 5.2.1 Approval: FY23 Auditing Services Contract (5.9.23)

Spurlock moved, seconded by Moore that the Board of Education, of Oak Park Elementary School District 97, engages Baker Tilly Virchow Krause, LLP to perform auditing services for the 2023 fiscal year at the rate of \$63,000, as well as the agreed-upon procedures related to payroll for the School Employee Loss Fund (SELF) at a rate of \$750 for fiscal year 2023.

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

**5.2.2 Approval: Paper Bid (5.9.23)**

Kim moved, seconded by Spurlock that the Board of Education of Oak Park Elementary School District 97 moves to approve the Paper Bid that was presented on May 9, 2023 in the amount of \$105,955.00.

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

ADMINISTRATIVE  
ITEMS

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**6. ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS**

**6.1 Hephzibah | Renewal of Intergovernmental Agreement (action 6.13.23)**

Summary

Oak Park Elementary School District 97 and Hephzibah Children’s Association have partnered since 1974 to provide after school and summer care programs for district families. The annual contract extension is expiring on August 31, 2023. We believe it is in the best interest of the students and families in the district to renew the child care agreement as attached. The only change to the annual agreement is to add the option to extend the term of the annual agreement with three (3) one (1) year extensions as opposed to two (2) one (1) year extensions.

Administration will be seeking board approval for the renewal of this agreement at the June 13, 2023 meeting.

**6.2 Technology Plan (action 6.13.23)**

Michael Arensdorff presented the Board of Education with an update on the three-year technology plan, a preview for the new three-year technology plan was also previewed and budgetary impact on proposed plans, grants and other funding sources were discussed. This plan includes details for years 2021-2024. Administration is seeking a motion for approval at its next regular meeting of the board on June 13, 2023.

\*Details of this plan can be viewed by accessing the livestream of the district 97 board of education meeting on the district’s YouTube channel.

**7. BOARD ASSIGNMENTS**

- FAC is scheduled to meet on June 5, 2023
- FORC is scheduled to meet in Summer of 2023
- OPEF had a successful Bingo Bash, it was exciting to see Dr. Shah and her son attend this event. Many teachers were present, and supportive of Nichelle Stigger and her OPEF award honor.
- PTOC recently had its last meeting of the year.
- OPEF Community Counsel presented data at its last meeting on freshman curriculum. Data is showing upward trends and a positive impact on student performance.

BOARD  
ASSIGNMENTS

**8. CONCLUDING ITEMS**

**8.1 Board Remarks**

CONCLUDING  
ITEMS

- Board President Kearney ask board members to check their schedules and let him know if they are able to attend the July regular meeting of the Board. Kearney also notes that both he and Vice President Ross Dribin will be meeting to discuss potentially having a retreat on June 28, 2023. Additional information, and a portion of this meeting may possibly happen in Open Session.
- Board member Spurlock, do we know when administration plans to discuss curriculum? From an agenda setting perspective, wanted to know when this information will be discussed. Annual cycle?
- Board member Spurlock provided the Board an update on the recent Washington DC 8<sup>th</sup> grade field trip. Over 300 kids took part in this amazing experience. Thank you Dr. Kamm and Dr. Shah for supporting this event. Spurlock further explains inclusion of students with special needs on this out-of-town field trip. Very impressive, that students were well behaved, supportive of their peers and eager to engage the activities of the field trip including the many museums visited. This year the trip pivoted from a tourism approach, to a more interactive learning approach empowering students to take ownership of their learning and be more involved in the experience.

ADJOURNMENT

**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 8:12p.m.

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Board President

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Board Secretary