

**Official Minutes of the
Oak Park Board of Education District 97
260 Madison Street, Oak Park, Cook County, Illinois
May 26, 2020 Meeting**

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

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

ROLL CALL

Present: Broy, Kim, Spurlock, Breymaier, Liebl, Moore, and Kearney
Absent: None
Also Present: Superintendent Dr. Carol Kelley, Associate Superintendent of Education Felicia Starks Turner, Director of Communications Amanda Siegfried, Chief Academic and Accountability Officer Ebony Lofton, Senior Director of Buildings and Grounds Jeanne Keane, Senior Director of Equity Carrie Kamm, Senior Director of Technology Michael Arensdorff, Interim CFO Mark Sheahan, Consultant Rob Grossi, and Board Secretary Sheryl Marinier.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

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Kearney moved, seconded by Kim that the Board move into executive session for the purpose of Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees or Legal Counsel for the District 5 ILCS 120/2(C)(1), at 6:02 p.m.

Ayes: Kearney, Kim, Breymaier, Liebl, and Broy
Nays: None
Absent: Spurlock (arrived at 6:03), and Moore (arrived at 6:05)
Motion passed

OPEN SESSION

OPEN SESSION

Kearney moved, seconded by Spurlock that the Board move into Open Session at 6:52 p.m. All members of the Board were in agreement. The Board reconvened in Open Session at 7:03 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

PUBLIC COMMENT

Due to the nature of a virtual Board meeting, the public was asked to email their comment to the Board. All comments that were received prior to 7:00 p.m. were read aloud. The Board made it clear that any comments that were received after this portion of the meeting would be included in the minutes, but not read aloud. Vice President Kim read the following statements.

Sinead Aylward

It was the poet William Butler Yeats who wrote:

“All changed, changed utterly, a terrible beauty is born.”

And so we find ourselves, living in a world that has changed utterly, and in an instant. For some, it’s been an opportunity for self-discovery, for change, for growth. For all of the positives, and there are positives, there is loss – great loss. Loss of connection, loss of education, loss of equity, loss of opportunity.

I thank you all for scrambling to provide. For changing how you provide and for doing what you could to reach. I applaud the many who have gone the extra mile to ensure that the vulnerable had access to food, access to internet, access to mental health support.

Please understand this though – some of our most vulnerable fell through the cracks. The prior world where equity was a driver was replaced by a world where those who most needed equity were left behind. I know it hurts to hear, that despite your best intentions, they were left behind.

I think some of you know it already. Certainly, whoever framed the following comment in tonight’s presentation materials knew it: "Increases in special education due process filings and demands for compensatory education are likely to increase unless relief from some of the provisions in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is authorized." Shame on you! At a point where it is clear that distance learning cannot work for some types of disabilities, your liability is worthy of a bullet point, but your drive to close the equity gap is not.

Let’s make this real. My daughter attended Brooks in Ms. Beauprez’s class. It took a teacher, a 1:1 aide and a peer tutor, exercises from an occupational therapist and a very well managed classroom to keep her in her seat and get her engaged, so that she could give attention to learning. Her internal distractors are tremendous. They impact activities of daily living and require constant attention to combat. She thrived at Brooks. She enjoyed adaptive PE and Special Olympics with Mr. Tim. She qualified for state with the rhythmic gymnastics team. She rocked out to new songs with Mr. Blackman and thrived in Speech Drama and Debate with Perros. She lived for Bravo and loved singing and dancing in the theatre. For a minimally verbal, medically complex student, she was living her best life. When the shelter in place started, she lost her community, her teachers, her peer tutors, her activities, her friends, her playgrounds, her playing fields and her pools. She lost a lot socially, emotionally and educationally. Everyone did what they could to reach her but distance could not provide for her what the close knit community and great in-person teaching staff could provide.

We all pivoted, but that doesn’t mean that her world and her journey is equitable to those of a non-disabled peer. To distill that experience into a risk statement that the district may see an increase in due process filings is reprehensible because WE SHOULD NOT HAVE TO FILE. You should be presenting to us your solutions to all of the minutes missed and all of the accommodations that went unprovided.

Some of our most vulnerable children were left behind in this transition. I implore you to make it right. Don’t look for relief – look to restore equity to our most vulnerable children. Don’t fight, do what is right. History will judge all of us on how we responded to this crisis. But we should be judging ourselves. We should be asking what did I do and what will I do to ensure that everyone is included? As we move forward and start to tease ourselves with thoughts of reopening, understand that our school is not truly open unless everyone is able to access in a meaningful way. We have students with disabilities who cannot tolerate masks. We have students with disabilities who cannot stay six feet away from a support worker. We have students with disabilities who move through multiple spaces throughout the day. We have students with disabilities for whom food in the classroom represents a danger. We have students with disabilities who require a clear routine. If your plan cannot accommodate all that a student with special needs requires to meaningfully access curriculum and the rich social environment in school, then equity in this district is lost. Truly.

“All changed, changed utterly, a terrible beauty is born.”

Katie Diamond

My name is Katie Diamond and I am a parent of three children who currently attend Mann school. One of my kids is eighth years old, and is a rising third grader who is autistic and receives special education services. As like most children during the past 10 weeks he has had a very difficult time adjusting to remote learning while receiving a fraction of his special education minutes every week. My husband and I are both full-time working parents and we must serve as his parent, general education teacher, special

education teacher, occupational therapist and social worker each day. After reading from tonight's District 97 board meeting packet regarding return to school, "Increases in special education due process filings and demands are likely to increase unless relief from some of the provisions in the IDEA is authorized" has me very alarmed and worried that District 97 will not provide him an equitable education in the fall. For students like my son, there is no virtual program that can replace everything they receive at school. Children with disabilities are the most vulnerable and it feels like District 97 with the above statement is thinking of the impact on them rather than proactively brainstorming ideas about how to bridge the gap so that children who receive special ed services don't fall even more behind academically, socially and emotionally when school returns in the fall.

Percy Julian Middle School PTO

We hosted a virtual Percy Julian Middle School PTO meeting on the evening of Monday, May 18, which Dr. Fitzgerald and Ms. Harris attended. It was immensely helpful to have real-time interaction with these school leaders. The next day we learned of Dr. Fitzgerald's resignation. As current and incoming PTO leadership at Julian - and as parents - we have the following questions and concerns to address with you related to planning for the fall and the possibility of continued remote learning:

1. What are the District's plans for involving parents in the current planning, process for next year's scenarios for remote learning? What concrete plans are in place for parents to become engaged in the committee work? Many parents have been on the ground supporting their students' education this spring and have a lot to offer regarding what has/has not worked. We believe real-time (beyond a survey) parent input is very important and urge the administration to involve parents in the discussions who are representative of the District's families. The Julian PTO is prepared to help coordinate engaging a broad parent perspective. Parents and educators alike are charting new territory in all aspects of our lives, and our students will benefit from our working together.
2. How is the District willing to expand its communications approach to include more frequent and less formal updates for parents in this ever-changing environment? What expectations are in place for principals and teachers regarding this regular, more personal communication, including over the summer, as plans are formed? We believe that regular, transparent communications - even if plans are not set - would greatly boost parent/guardian morale and trust in the administration. Examples we have seen that reflect this request are short videos from school leaders as a way to stay engaged and boost morale; direct interaction between teachers and parents about weekly student expectations; more frequent emails that help bring parents along as decisions are being made; etc.
3. What are timelines for the District 97 internal planning committee's meetings and work products? This transparency will help parents better plan for next year. So many families are very concerned about trying to balance their jobs and remote learning, and regular updates will help these families better plan for the fall.
4. What is the District's policy or approach to students who either received no grade or some indication of not having made sufficient progress during remote learning? How will the District address the continuum of student engagement which has occurred during the last few months of the school year and the impact that has on their own progress but also on the resulting range of learning within grades?
5. How will District 97 remote learning plans for next year allow students at every level to continue to advance and excel while being flexible enough to account for different home situations and levels of engagement by students thus far? How will the District navigate the need to engage students where they are while not

holding back students who completed the work and made the necessary progress during remote learning? The PTO is concerned about remote learning for the full continuum of learners - from those with an IEP or 504, to students across the grade levels, to honor roll students and more.

6. What is the plan for synchronous learning within the two possible remote learning scenarios? If we have to start the year with remote learning, how will students be oriented to new middle school teams and new teachers? Many parents feel strongly that there needs to be more synchronous learning and direct interaction with teachers. It is our sincere belief that the real-time engagement with teachers is not just about academics, although that is an important part: students learn important social skills when engaging with adults other than their parents/guardians and when interacting and sharing educational space with their peers.

7. How are students with IEPs and 504s being supported? How will the planning committee focus on these students and prepare families prior to the start of the school year, especially if remote learning continues? If needed are there opportunities for these students to receive support over the summer?

We greatly appreciate your attention to the above concerns which come not only from our discussions as the Julian PTO leadership team but, also, from hearing from parents across the school during this time.

Percy Julian Middle School PTO

This letter has been written on behalf of the Percy Julian Middle School (Julian) PTO. The PTO would like to convey their interest in providing real community input for the hiring of the interim and permanent principal positions recently made available at Julian. We have communicated these desires to Dr. Kelley and Gina Herrmann. Julian has had several new Assistant Principals in the past few years and now trying to fill the Principal position during a major shift in the educational process for our children is a serious concern. During the selection process, our hope is that the parent community will provide meaningful assistance to the District in the selection process including outlining skill sets which we would like to see in a future Principal.

In the meantime, the PTO would like to convey the following. We are seriously concerned with the principal hiring process which District 97 has been implementing for the past few years as shown from the recent high turnover rate of this position at the schools. We are also very concerned with the current Principal and Assistant Principal turnover rate at Julian. We hope that District 97 will re-evaluate their hiring procedures and staff advancement policies to address these concerns raise by the Julian PTO.

We look forward to working with you as partners during this important selection process.

Kevin Fuhr

As a household of two full-time working parents of a soon-to-be second grader and a soon-to-be Kindergartener, we have some serious concerns related to planning for fall 2020 and the 2020-21 school year. As the District has issued correspondence regarding their consideration of three possible learning options regarding the 2020-21 school year, we want to make sure that District 97 leaders and administrators are considering and exhausting all possible options. While health of students, faculty and staff is of chief concern, we want to also insure that the following other concerns are also being considered. These include:

1. How do you plan to expand E-learning, specifically related to more on-line (Zoom Meeting?) instruction and interaction with teachers and other students? The current situation (while it came on quickly and unexpectedly to you and your staff) does not provide for enough on-line instruction and interaction and places a majority of the learning burden on parents/families.

- We believe the current E-learning process is more closely related to Home Schooling than actual E-learning and instruction by District 97 staff.
 - With many parents expected to start transitioning back to full-time work, there should be more focus placed on actual on-line instruction and interaction with their teachers and fellow classmates. This is currently being done at several schools in the area, including several City of Chicago public schools, and should be implemented further in District 97 if E-learning is set to continue.
2. With many parents expected to go back to full-time work, oftentimes back in an office setting, certainly a part-time school schedule or attendance rotation is not possible nor sustainable. In this scenario, parents will be forced to:
 - Find possible part-time child care, which will either not be affordable or quite frankly not available; or
 - Scale back work hours/work schedule to part-time in order to be at home or to account for their children not being in school full-time. Again, for many families this is not sustainable either due to cost and/or possible reduced income.
 3. According to previous correspondence, full instruction/full student attendance will not happen until the State of Illinois allows north east Illinois to proceed in to Phase five, likely meaning that full student attendance will not take place until a COVID-19 vaccine is in place. Being that District 97 property owners pay some of the highest property tax levies in our region in which approximately 75 percent of this levy goes towards our school district, what measures, facility-wise, is District 97 exploring to allow for full-time in-person student attendance and instruction for the 2020-21 school year?
 - Is District 97 looking at use of gymnasiums, cafeterias and other large open areas to facilitate full-time in-person instruction with full-student attendance?
 - Is District 97 looking at use of modular units or trailers to provide extra space and capacity to allow for full-student attendance?
 - Is District 97 looking to make financial cutbacks in other areas or programs to allow for possible expenditures to increase capacity to account for full student attendance in 2020-21?
 - Is District 97 looking to temporarily re-assign non-core subject staff (i.e. art, language, music, teacher aides, etc.) in order to shift available resources to best accommodate full-student body attendance and in-person instruction in 2020-21?

We certainly appreciate the measures District 97 leaders, administrators and staff made to adjust to the quickly change landscape of COVID-19 back in March and we appreciate the efforts our teachers made to finish out the year! And while we understand the ever-changing landscape related to the virus and the information received from the State and other agencies, we believe there are some real concerns related to how families transition back to the "new normal" and how working families deal with work, child education, and child care responsibilities.

Finally, with our youngest child entering Kindergarten (and him also having a late-August birthday), we believe this is a big growth and transition year for him and are concerned with the quality of instruction and development he will receive in an either part-time or full-time "E-learning" situation. With these many concerns and questions above, we hope that District 97 leadership is exhausting all resources available in trying to make full-time attendance and in-person instruction possible for the 2020-21 school year.

Rich and Kate Van Zeyl

I will try to be brief and to the point. Please do everything in your power to ensure that school opens in its full capacity this fall. Our children need both the educational and social benefits that in-person school offers.

While the district should be applauded for their quick response to remote learning, the quality of content and interaction is simply insufficient. There is a very large inconsistency between the teachers and classes. We have two children at Mann. Our second grade teacher has been amazing, with multiple Zoom meetings per week, offering to have one-on-one sessions, and really going above and beyond. Contrast that with our kindergarten teachers, who have done the absolute bare minimum and not directly engaged the students, aside from one fifteen minute Zoom meeting last week. There should have been direct interaction and instruction, not just emailed work sheets and prerecorded videos.

We understand these are unprecedented times, but we look to the district and school board to bring our children back to school in the fall.

Sue Harvey

I am a parent of an Irving fourth grader and Julian sixth grader. While my fourth grader has done well with remote learning, my sixth grader that has an IEP has really struggled. His teachers and advisors have been great and very accommodating for his needs, but we have concerns for continued remote learning in the fall. Sixth grade was an adjustment for him with all the new ways to turn things in and making sure he got the right file formatted, etc. It is different in every class. That has been the most difficult part about remote learning for him - The actual work isn't the issue, but how it is presented differently by each teacher and where assignments are found and how they are turned in. Without the in person support of his resource teachers, he gets very frustrated. Honestly, we all do. It's a lot for even my husband and I to keep track of! In order for us to focus more on the actual academics, what supports can you offer for children with IEP's and can teachers streamline how things are presented and turned in, to take the pressure off of the kids as well as parents? Thank you for your time.

Ashima Gupta

Is there the possibility to start the 20-21 school year sooner with smaller classes, such as the end of July or beginning of August? Just wondering especially if we have to shut down again this fall or next winter. Many of us have already lost our summer plans and a lot of work effort due to remote learning with our kids.

If the number of COVID-19 cases and more importantly deaths were to drop suddenly would this be something the district would consider? And if so, have a plan ready to mobilize quickly (teacher contracts, kindergarten registration, communication with community, support staff, safety and health protocols, etc.)?

Susan Raphael

As a parent of a current sixth grade Julian student, I am writing to express my concern with the inconsistencies that have taken place during this time of remote learning. Specifically, my sixth grade son's math class. During this time, my son has been given the same assignment each day from his teacher- do 30 minutes of Kahn, no feedback, no interaction, nothing. I have expressed this concern with the Julian administration and District 97 with no changes to the situation. I have also asked if the \$180.00 tuition could be waved for the summer class since we have received no math instruction during this time period, but I have received no response from District 97. Math is a critical subject and I believe what has happened here for my son and other students is unacceptable and could have been prevented as E-Learning progressed. I have heard other sixth grade math teachers have used other platforms and held calls or provided video. Why did the teachers not work together like they have in the elementary school to

provide more consistent content? I have a child who loves math, but the lack of instruction has resulted in him having no interest in math right now. Luckily, he will have the summer math program to spark his interest again.

We can and should do better for our students, especially for the critical topics. For instance, my son's French, Individuals and Societies and Language Arts Teachers have been creative, have had live calls and have continued to teach. For instance, one teacher worked with another teacher to provide additional live lessons which gave students more choices and excited them about the topic. I think more of this creative thinking could have happened during the Friday planning sessions.

Mara Maas

As a pediatrician and mother of four District 97 students, I am very concerned that a return to full day, Monday through Friday school is not an option until Phase five of reopening. There is no guarantee of a safe, effective vaccine, and it could take years to reach herd immunity. I am worried that even a hybrid model of in person and remote learning will leave our children behind academically and impair their social-emotional development, not to mention the burden this places on single and working parents. I would like to see the board address a long-term plan for our students if Phase five is not achievable during the 2020-21 school year.

Liz and Irish Thompson

1. The plans listed mention return to previous learning, hybrid in-person learning or remote learning. I'm concerned that if we are not in Phase four, will District 97 not be doing E-learning as opposed to the less strenuous remote learning? I feel very strongly about the children having face-to-face teaching and learning with their teachers. Learning from You-tube videos is not the same and does not promote the same level of thinking that is needed for children to truly learn. They deserve real conversations with their teachers and to also listen to their classmates perspectives. How will this third option of learning from D97 plan to support E-learning that is meaningful for the students?
2. If the state of Illinois only requires remote learning, will the district work on a plan to support E-learning? More instruction, more structure and more direct interaction with teachers and other students is far superior to "self-directed" remote learning. Who makes the decision in regards to which level of learning and teacher involvement our district requires? What role do the teacher unions play? I do not feel that parents navigating the different links and screen-based learning is doing our children justice in regards to their education and social development during these formative years. Parents who are expected to be working full time cannot be expected to continue their jobs and also the full time job of a teacher, especially for families with kids of different ages.
3. If E-learning cannot be required district-wide due to equity concerns, can there be two different approaches that are offered? Is this being discussed? I am concerned that if we expect all families to do the exact same thing, that we will not come to a plan that best supports the students' learning and development. What plans has the district made and offered for families who need help with technology, wireless internet, etc.?
4. For students who are advanced in their learning and abilities, what will the district be doing to support and challenge these students?

Tory Patrick

I am writing to ask that you delay voting on the one and only proposal on the table for a "Climate and Culture" project at Lincoln Elementary School.

As part of the Change.org petition that circulated, the Lincoln parents requested

Professional Analysis. By April 1, 2020, secure a third party organization to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the problems Lincoln faces and how best to address them. This is a necessary first step in rebuilding trust both within Lincoln and community as a whole. This analysis should:

- Include interviews with the Lincoln community and District administration, including Lincoln teachers, parents, staff, and past employees. Special consideration should be given Lincoln's prior three principals;

- Be conducted by an organization with demonstrated expertise in this area.

- Be informed by data that is made publicly available, along with the analysis as a whole.

To start, for a project costing a considerable amount of taxpayer dollars, I would imagine you need more than one bid for a third party organization in order to make a decision. Otherwise it would seem there is a reason specifically that we are hiring Ms. Graham-Washington. It is unlikely that we hired the first bid for construction projects, etc. and this should be no different.

I also think we should revisit this after we get through this global pandemic. I am certain the culture at Lincoln has changed significantly in the last three months. The teachers and faculty were literally thrown into the unknown and have done quite well. When we all (hopefully) return to Lincoln in August it will be a "new normal" - maybe we should see how things shake out in terms of culture. It will be a new world.

Lindsay Bremer

I am a District 97 parent writing with regard to two items on the agenda for tonight's meeting.

First, I am writing to ask that the vote on the Lincoln climate and culture proposal be delayed until the board has at least two other proposals to consider to address the culture and hiring of leadership for Lincoln. I ask that the vote be delayed because:

1) It appears that the proposal being voted upon is the only proposal that was solicited and presented to the board for consideration. Considering the scale of the challenges at Lincoln and the costs involved in the work, the Board should consider several options to see which one is the best fit.

2) The families that signed the [Change.org](#) Petition requested a third party group with demonstrated expertise in area of school climate and culture resetting. While Ms. Graham Washington has some experience in schools, that isn't equivalent to demonstrated experience in the field of school culture redevelopment. There are experts in this field. If we are going to pay for an expert, we should hire an expert. Some people may feel Ms. Graham Washington is the best person for this work, and if that's the case then when the Board compares proposals, they will be able to feel confident that she's the best person for this job.

3) The Petition asked the board to step in to address the problems at Lincoln that our superintendent has been unable to improve. Because of that, the Board should absolutely not rubber stamp the consultant Dr. Kelley handpicked without considering other proposals. Without question, Dr. Kelley's instincts with regard to supporting Lincoln for the last four years have been wrong.

4) In order for a third party consultant to successfully address the climate and culture issues at Lincoln, they will need to have the support of the staff. I would like to see several proposals presented, and then ask the school staff which one they believe will best address challenges at Lincoln. The Board should use this data to inform their vote.

Without this due diligence, the Board cannot vote in good confidence on the proposal being put in front of them tonight.

Also, when reviewing the COVID-19 transition planning update, I was struck by this statement regarding increased needs for kids with IEPs in the wake of the pandemic: "Increases in special education due process filings and demands for compensatory education are likely to increase unless relief from some of the provisions in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is authorized."

This statement was very revealing. I would challenge that in order to effectively develop a pandemic transition plan that will deliver on the district's defined vision of equity, the teams should be thinking about the needs of our students including those in special education, rather than reducing them to due process filings and the laws that bind us to meeting their needs. How can we be a district that is focused and delivers on equity when we look at students as numbers and seek relief from the few laws and provisions that guide us in providing it? I would suggest that based on this, the vision of equity would seem to still merely be a statement and not something we truly believe in or are committed to. If we hope to change the way we educate all students, we need to start first with how we consider and talk about them.

Andrea Mikenas and Andy Jarasius

Thank you for your service on the board; having served several years on a much smaller school board, I can only imagine the time and effort involved in serving our district.

My husband and I have lived in Oak Park since 2004 and we were anxious to remain in the district where so much of our money and time educating ourselves about when our children were born. This is no longer the district we chose to remain in Oak Park for.

Two of our four children attend Lincoln Elementary currently, in the third and first grades, and we have two more coming up in the next few years. I am appalled at the unnecessarily stressful situations our teachers have had to encounter and I believe this stems directly from the superintendent. Teachers are not given enough professional development opportunities to meet the demands of the drastic annual curriculum changes, nor are they given the opportunity to receive proper training in restorative justice, which has led to chaos in our school because too few staff members have been trained in implementing a great program which has led the students to have no clear expectations or consequences for them, tying the hands of our teachers and administrators of getting any order over their own schools (please see the article linked at the bottom), causing some of our best teachers to leave the district, many even going right next door to District 90. Principal Zaniolo, a person who is invested in our immediate community and clearly looking to stay here for the duration of her career, was the first principal in the four years we have been at Lincoln to finally be grabbing the reins and, from my understanding in speaking with several staff members and teachers, was herself limited by our do-nothing superintendent who will not let anyone else do, either. Principal Zaniolo was looking to, at long last, expand the Spanish Immersion program in order to make it more equitable, as the community has been demanding since long before my children attended Lincoln, and the Superintendent, who it's been clear through various meetings after six years does not even understand, would not allow this expansion.

Much like the other programs our superintendent brings into the district but then fails to adequately allow staff to implement and succeed with, hiring RGW Consulting would be yet another waste of money because, even if she had valuable suggestions, they, like those of previous reports and studies, would not be implemented and would exist as only a tick on the resume of our superintendent of what she has supposedly accomplished, while our schools continue to suffer. Furthermore, RGW Consulting's qualifications are questionable at best; she recommended hiring herself after her study that only interviewed 40 unspecified community members, and no other options for consultants were even solicited.

Proposing to hire RGW Consulting is a terrible joke, as is our superintendent, who we all know has no stake in this community. Stop with the consultants, allow teachers and staff to implement the programs we have and give them the proper time and resources to do so and watch them flourish. Furthermore, buy this superintendent out of her contract and bring someone in who is invested in the community, if you can find anyone at this point who is willing to serve a district with such a tarnished reputation. We live in one of the most educated communities in the country, surely we have people within it who are qualified, surely our existing immensely talented pool of teachers and administrators could be brought up into the positions of principals and superintendent instead of bringing in administrators who do not seek to have a career in Oak Park and are just looking for the next stepping stone to a larger salary, all at the cost of our children's quality of education.

I know these problems are not exclusive to Lincoln Elementary and if we have "toxic parents" here in our school, which one may also read as INCREDIBLY FRUSTRATED, continuing on the path this superintendent set us on will only breed more "toxic parents" here and in every school in the district.

I beg you, give teachers and staff the time and money to implement programs, DO NOT HIRE RGW CONSULTING, lose this superintendent, and watch our district again become the progressive place it once was on track to be.

Rachel Stark

Please delay the vote on RGW Consulting. I think to address the Culture and Climate issues at Lincoln, I believe you need more than one proposal from outside vendors. Please delay the vote until you have multiple options.

Robyn Pearson

I am writing to voice my discontent with the district even considering spending tens of thousands of dollars on work that should be able to be done by current district leaders and staff. If these leaders and staff were competent, there would be no need to even consider an outside consultant.

I am a teacher in another district that has no problem with principal turnover. This is something that the district is doing wrong, and if the current district leadership isn't working, then that leadership needs to change. The answer is NOT to spend thousands upon thousands of extra tax payer money.

I know that taxpayers are already paying for climate and culture staff; it seems like ensuring Lincoln has a positive culture conducive to retaining a building principal would be part of that position that already exists. If the issue is not building culture but instead district culture, then the board needs to look at the district leadership. Throwing a consultant at the problem is not a responsible solution. Instead, the board should have difficult conversations with the superintendent in order to try to solve the problem.

Karen Moore

In order for us to have confidence in this process and be active participants in its successful outcomes, I would like the Board to consider all responsible and qualified bidders for the consultant project at Lincoln. We need to solicit real solutions from all of the best who can help us stop the cycle of problems happening at Lincoln.

If it ends up that the superintendent's chosen candidate is the best proposal then let her chosen consultant compete for this contract and win the contract based on the merits of her proposal as any contractor should. An RFP process is the best way for us to move forward.

Julia Jenkins

I am writing today as a concerned parent in the Lincoln community to strongly oppose the proposal put forward by District 97 to hire Reesheda Graham Washington to do a culture and climate study at our school.

I attended the May 12 Board meeting and was dismayed to learn that Dr. Kelley had not solicited any other options or organizations when there were serious questions about why Ms. Washington was selected for the initial review of culture and climate at Lincoln in the first place. Dr. Kelley seemed surprised that the Lincoln community would want more options and the ability to weigh in on how we should move forward, which simply goes to show that she has not been fully listening to the concerns of the community throughout this tumultuous year at Lincoln. For that reason alone, an independent organization with no previous ties to Dr. Kelley should be chosen if we are to proceed with this culture and climate assessment.

Furthermore, I found it to be a significant conflict of interest that Ms. Washington was invited to speak on behalf of herself during the most recent board meeting to tout her experience and qualifications when no other organizations were even given the opportunity to submit proposals. In her speech, she mentioned many different organizations with which she has worked, but none of those mentioned seemed to be a large public elementary school such as Lincoln. She offered no examples of benchmarks or delivered improvements that came about through her consulting work. Her proposal, website and information available to the community do not provide these details. The Board should be aware that the optics of her selection and hiring appears to be a favor to a friend from a position of power. This selection makes it clear to me that Dr. Kelley has written off the families at Lincoln and feels that we are a group to work around rather a group with whom she should collaborate and this does further damage to our already strained relationship with the Superintendent who refers to the “special” and “unique” community with a wink and nudge at every turn.

This goes straight to the heart of the issues facing Lincoln which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. We face a challenging year ahead and the prospect of spending tens of thousands of dollars on this proposed contract that was cherry-picked with no competition and has had no vetting from anyone in the community is extremely troublesome. At this point, we don’t even know if there will be culture and climate to study in the fall as we face the reality of continued eLearning that requires significant improvement and coordination. My family strongly believes that this assessment needs to be tabled so all efforts made by District 97 and the Lincoln community can be focused on the health crisis we currently face. When plans for 2020-21 academic year have been solidified and improvements to the eLearning process have been implemented, a full request for proposals for this type of work from a variety of organizations should be made with weigh-in from the Lincoln faculty, staff and community.

We are cognizant of the fact that the challenges that face the District 97 Board, Administration, schools and community are immense. We want to help. We want to be part of the solution and we want things to be the best they can be for our children and our teachers. We want to be proud of our schools and know that we did the best we could do in an extraordinary time. We cannot give a proposal such as this our full consideration in this climate. Please do not approve this contract and instead focus your energy on the emergency in front of us. We should revisit this issue in the future when we can give it full attention and vetting.

Allison Lipsman

Thank you for this opportunity to virtually participate in tonight's meeting. My name is Allison Lipsman and I am the parent of a Kindergartener at Lincoln School, writing to express two concerns.

First, I am disappointed at the timing and minimal communications regarding the appointment of Lincoln's new interim principal. The Lincoln town hall discussing parent concerns about Principal Zaniolo's resignation was held on February 26, at which Dr. Kelley expressed understanding of the community's concerns and seemed to indicate interest in engaging teachers and parents in next steps. I was therefore very disappointed to read, just three weeks later, of the two co-interim principals' appointments - in the 16th paragraph of a District 97 newsletter on March 20. Lincoln families did not receive a stand-alone email regarding the appointments until April 24.

I recognize the tremendous weight the COVID-19 pandemic is taking on District 97 administration and how stretched everyone must be. But if there was time for a full District 97 newsletter on March 20, I believe there could have been time for a Lincoln-specific - or District 97-wide, if necessary due to limited staff capacity - communication prior to April 24. At minimum, the staff news could have been at the top of the email. Moreover, I am disappointed by the timing because if the Board approved the interim principals' appointments on March 17, I wonder if Dr. Kelley knew this was likely at the town hall on February 26, during which I would have appreciated hearing more about the process - even if names could not be shared. I wish District 97 administrators would have shared next steps, including, "we will be searching for an interim principal from among the District 97 current staff community", or "we aim to appoint an interim principal by the end of March", or something that communicated possible or likely next steps - instead of this communication coming out of the blue, and, again, buried in an email. At the March 17 Board meeting, Dr. Kelley presented an After Action review memo outlining next steps, including two Lincoln parent town halls with dates to be confirmed by April 6. I understand the COVID-19 pandemic would have made this planning and implementation unfeasible but again, wish a brief email could have been sent acknowledging this fact. I am highly optimistic of Dr. Gordon's success at Lincoln but am disappointed by the roll out and poor communication and engagement here.

Second, I am writing regarding the Lincoln culture and climate audit contract being voted on today. I really appreciated Reesheda Graham Washington's thoughtful insights and candid analysis at the February 26 Lincoln town hall. It seemed to me that together, this report and the follow up After Action Review materials presented at the Board meeting on March 17 comprise ample data to move forward with recommendations - instead of a full-year audit. I am concerned that, especially facing likely short- and medium-term budget challenges, District 97 will commit to a year-long contract without the financial resources to act on any recommendations, and potentially, it would all be moot pending who is principal the following year. I hope the Board will consider tonight delaying this contract vote in favor of considering a non-audit approach to this challenge.

Lastly, I want to thank the Board for approving a receptionist and additional support for Lincoln next year. It is acknowledged and deeply appreciated.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and thank you to all staff and Board members for your dedication during this pandemic and the transition to remote learning.

Donna Hartin

My husband and I have discussed some of the issues related to this upcoming vote and we are both seriously concerned about voting for this proposal on Tuesday and ask that the Board DELAY or vote NO for the RGW proposal.

We will have three kids at Lincoln next year and have been at Lincoln since before the debacle over Cathy Hamilton's early retirement/not hiring her back. We have lived through all the principal changes and all the craziness that has come along with it. To us, the problem is created in large part by continuing to listen to Dr. Kelly's recommendations which have proven to NOT be working to effectively address the issues and concerns raised by Lincoln staff, Lincoln families and others around the district.

Specifically regarding this proposal, it seems ludicrous that we would hire the only person that was considered by the administration. Like with any home repair or project, you should seek multiple proposals and multiple quotes from qualified businesses. This has not been done yet so the board should NOT vote yes to go ahead with the only proposal it has on the table. Additionally, this proposal is from a party recommended or picked by Dr. Kelly which already makes us weary and it is clear we need more time, proposals and input from parties other than Dr. Kelly and the administration (i.e. Lincoln staff) before moving forward with a particular proposal.

Additionally, the district spent good money five years ago on this exact thing—a climate and culture assessment. Where has the effective follow through been with all that? RGW already mentioned similar needs during her report of her assessment after Zaniolo’s departure. Why are we not using/reviewing/executing the previous assessment and dealing with the issues reported in the RGW review before spending \$40K-\$45K?

I’m confident many District 97 families have similar concerns if not other concerns as well. Not sure with the holiday that you will get the level of response you would have gotten had there been more notice and information shared with families earlier (other than the day before a holiday weekend). I’d hate to see the likely negative response and backlash Dr. Kelly and the Board might receive if a more comprehensive path with an informed plan and multiple proposals is not sought. Please vote to DELAY or vote NO to Tuesday’s proposal.

Lisa Peloquin

According to the last board meeting agenda, and there is a proposal from RGW Consulting to address the Climate and Culture at Lincoln, and while I’m grateful that the district appreciates that this problem requires a third party, I urge you to consider more than just one proposal.

Considering the scale of the challenges at Lincoln and the costs involved in the work, the Board should consider several options to determine the best fit. The Petition the families signed on Change.org asked you, our Board, to step in to address the problems at Lincoln that our superintendent has been unable to improve. We need your leadership on this issue- or these problems will persist. The Board cannot just rubber stamp the consultant that Dr. Kelley handpicked. Without question, Dr. Kelley's instincts with regard to supporting Lincoln for the last four years have been wrong.

Additionally, the petition requested a third party group with demonstrated expertise in area of school climate and culture resetting. And while Ms. Graham Washington has some experience in schools, that isn't equivalent to demonstrated experience in the field of school culture redevelopment. There are experts in this field. If we are going to pay for an expert, we should hire an expert. Some people may feel Ms. Graham Washington is the best person for this work, and if that's the case then when the Board compares the proposals, they will be able to feel confident that she's the best person for this job.

Finally, in order for a third party consultant to successfully address the climate and culture issues at Lincoln, they will need to have the support of the staff. I would like to see several proposals presented, and then ask the school staff which one they believe will best address challenges at Lincoln. The Board should use this data to inform their vote.

I ask that on May 26, you ask for additional proposals to address the challenges at Lincoln, and delay the vote until you have time to decide what will best support our school.

Meghann Moses

I hope you are doing well and staying safe. Thank you for your volunteerism.

I'd like to ask the Board to delay the vote in the proposal for a culture and climate change consultant for Lincoln until you have at least three proposals to compare. I'd also like to ask that you develop goals for Dr. Kelly that are fair, rigorous, and transparent with regard to retention/turnover of principals.

Considering the scale of the challenges at Lincoln and the costs involved in the work, the Board should consider several options to see which is the best fit. This is simple best practice for a government entity. Please compare the proposals and choose someone with the best experience. Please do not "rubber stamp" the consultant picked by Dr. Kelley, as her choices for Lincoln have been disastrous. We should also have the input of staff on which consultant is chosen.

Amanda Turnbull

I want to express my concern of the District 97 Board's consideration of hiring Reesheda Graham Washington as a consultant for Lincoln School and would encourage the Board of Education to postpone the vote until more consideration can be given.

I appreciated Washington's initial report and found it to be relatively accurate from my perspective of what's happening. However, it was also a report that anyone who interviewed 30 people involved with the school could have written. The idea of hiring someone at \$250 an hour who isn't uniquely qualified just seems like throwing money at the problem so you can say you've done something.

Specifically, this proposal raises a number of concerns for me.

No other proposals were apparently sought for this project. That's not in the best interest of the school, staff, or students.

The culture and climate portion of this proposal relies heavily on the formation of yet another committee ("advisory team"). Committees are not the solution. A pivotal aspect to the proposed plan is the creation of a "culture and climate advisory team." This committee is to be primarily responsible for creating and implementing a strategic plan including "activities, benchmarks, milestones, and communications." As a newcomer to Lincoln from Irving, it has become apparent to me that there are a lot more families in this area who are living in homes with two working parents, and subsequently, there is a much smaller pool of volunteers compared even to schools with smaller enrollment.

Who exactly is going to serve on this committee? My guess: parents already heavily involved in the school, i.e. not the families who feel unhappy. Which circles back to the frustration that a group of people already content with the status quo (or at least, out of touch with the discontentment for it) will be put in charge of making a plan and organizing activities and communications to continue to hammer home this idea that Lincoln is the BEST, it is AWESOME, and everything is GREAT, and anyone who disagrees needs to be "educated" and "quelled."

One of the bullets in the responsibilities of this committee is: "A host of interactions to increase family engagement in general, and more particularly in light of the impact of COVID-19 and the social distancing that has taken place." The idea that families being more "engaged" will make everything better is very disheartening. It's like saying "there's not really a problem, you're just not paying close enough attention."

The language of the proposal, as well as District 97's after-action review, makes me very nervous as it is already framed in the position of "quelling" voices in the Lincoln community. The language already seems to place all of the blame on the parents, with no portion of the responsibility on any District 97 employee. There are even plans in place already to host parent "education" sessions on how to

advocate for their children while respecting staff. But you've failed to address the need for staff to respond to parents with meaningful responses in an acceptable period of time. I fully admit parents can be oppressive jerks when it comes to their children, but I have heard MANY parents express frustration when their outreach to staff yields nothing.

The whole proposal is already poised to essentially find the people who are upset and teach them why they are wrong, when it should be focused on listening, understanding and THEN finding a solution.

The lack of qualifications of Reesheda Graham Washington for this project. From the HR perspective, RGW seems like a fine choice to evaluate and reconfigure administrative policies and procedures. She holds an advanced degree in Educational Leadership and has experience with educational administration.

However, her qualifications to address the climate and culture problem at Lincoln are less impressive. Her sole qualifications for this aspect seem to be that she did work like this during her time at Chicago Public Schools (though her bio does not include any concrete examples) and other people have (possibly) also paid her to do this. Climate and culture in education are sticky things. Why isn't the Board of Education looking for professionals with sociology/psychology/other people-focused experience?

Religious bias. On a personal note, I am not a fan of District 97 considering the hiring of a consultant with such an obvious religious tilt. Her bio lists her as a minister and "Christian Life Coach" and huge swaths of her work are for religious institutions. This background being so central to her philosophy and approach makes me uncomfortable, and I feel it is not appropriate in a secular school setting.

Heather Ethier

We would like to express our concerns in regards to the proposed contract with Ms. Rasheeda Graham Washington. Has the Board solicited additional contract proposals? As taxpayers and parents of Lincoln students we want to ensure that the most qualified party is hired, along with attention being paid to fiscal responsibility. Has the Board performed comparisons with additional consultants?

It appears that this contract could be a conflict of interest, particularly after attending the initial take away meeting with RGW, where she recommended hiring a third party consultant. In my opinion, as stewards of our schools, this hiring would include a comparative analysis of multiple consultants. RGW may be the best consultant for the job, but if you have not solicited multiple educational consultants, you cannot in good faith make that decision. Finally, awarding what appears to be a sole sourced contract in light of the current economic situation and revenue projections seems highly irresponsible. In light of these issues, we urge you to strongly reconsider awarding this contract until more due diligence is performed.

Tanesha Watkins

The registrar, which is classified as an administrative assistant position, had been operating in a coordinator capacity or even that of an administrator (meeting with attorneys, going to court, conducting investigations, interviewing, hiring, etc.) For the past several years. Earlier this year, the Board approved a promotion for the SIS manager to become the SIS and registration manager.

The registrar position was recently posted but still has the exact same job description. What was the point of the promotion, if not alleviate some of those higher level responsibilities and to allow the registrar to act as an actual administrative assistant? Did this person just get a raise and new title with no additional responsibilities? If the job description is not reflective of the actual duties, the job description should be updated. If the job description is accurate, which I'm told it was, and will remain the same, why are we

giving more money to someone else who's not doing the extra work? The registrar position, which services our 6,000 plus students, should be the one to receive extra pay for the work.

Reesheda Graham Washington, RGW Consulting

Thank you for the work you all do to ensure that all students receive an equitable education in Oak Park. As I have communicated to Dr. Kelley, I have opted to rescind RGW's proposal to work with Lincoln Elementary School regarding the recommendations that RGW Consulting proposed related to the culture and climate of the school. I am opting to rescind, and I think it important to share with you as the board of directors why I am doing so.

Perhaps most importantly, in the kind of work I do, I think it is tantamount to have significant support from the school community to share in their journey toward culture revitalization. In an effort to achieve the invitation to work alongside the school community, I met with key stakeholders to build the proposal that was submitted to you, in essence, drawing from their input and feedback as well as from the extensive discovery protocol that I implemented to hear directly from the school community about what they perceived as their challenges. I did the work of garnering the support and collaboration of the school's stakeholders PRIOR to submitting the requested proposal, a work that I think consultants often fail to do, rather, submitting only what they think is the best course of action, omitting that which has been voiced by the school community and its stakeholders specifically.

The reported findings (submitted to you last month) in conjunction with the report I provided directly to the community by way of the town hall meeting held prior to the shelter-in-place order gave me great confidence that we were building a way forward that was primarily constructed from the expressed felt needs of the community and its stakeholders.

I submitted my resume/vitae at the onset of that discovery work, again at the town hall meeting where Faith Cole read my credentials aloud and it was recorded, and then again at this last board meeting when asked yet again to vet/credential myself for the board.

I find it odd that I was asked to credential and then re-credential myself so many times for the same body of work, and I am curious as to whether or not this is a protocol that is practiced each time a consultant has been presented to the board historically, or if, somehow, my need to be serially credentialed is tied to some of the culture and climate issues raised in the findings I shared with the board in my report.

After the last Board meeting, multiple school community members who supported my consult with Lincoln contacted me to share that a "whispering campaign" had been launched, encouraging parents to question my capacity to lead this work forward and to "plant doubt" in my capacity to carry out this work.

Again, I wonder about the extent to which this behavior is tied to some of the very culture and climate issues that I was in hopes of working alongside the school community to mitigate.

I share this as something for the Board to consider coming from a stakeholder in its very own community-one who is as passionate as you about Oak Park, Education, and Equity.

At the end of the day, I rest in my own knowing that I have only ever taken on consultancies in organizations and communities to which I am invited to participate. Because I have not been invited in a way that would foster an enriching way forward for me or the school community, our primary concern indeed, I am opting out.

However, I am disheartened by the ways in which people, particularly women of color, are often wedged into the space that I am now experiencing as a more than qualified candidate of this work in order to forego the bullying culture that perpetually marginalizes people who look and sound like me out of leadership opportunities in the district.

Sadly, this is not a new story for us. But do know that as long as this continues, we will continue to maintain some level of status quo, and competent and capable bodies like mine will do what I am doing--self-select out of the process in exchange for our peace, balance, and sanity.

I hope that you can hear this call with the heart of sincerity and discontent with which it was intended. I look forward to continuing to work with the district and its schools in other capacities, and I am disappointed that I was not able to see this work at Lincoln to its culmination.

The following emails were received by the Board of Education after the cut-off time, and were not read aloud during the meeting.

Marcella Douce

Thank you for your service on the board, I truly value having community members represented on our school board.

My husband and I have lived in Oak Park since 2006 and we were anxious to remain in the district where so much of our money and time educating ourselves about when our children were born. When my son first started at Lincoln we had a truly wonderful experience. Over the past five years there have been many changes that have negatively impacted our children's educational experience and we have been unhappy with.

We currently have one child at Brooks Middle, one at Lincoln, and one in preschool. I am disappointed in the stressful situations our teachers have had to encounter and I believe this stems directly from the superintendent. Teachers are not given enough professional development opportunities to meet the demands of the drastic annual curriculum changes. I believe it is the leadership of the superintendent, who is not connected to our community and not invested in truly building a positive learning environment that has led to the frustrations at Lincoln. Lincoln has an incredible staff of wonderful teachers and administrators who care about our children. Our funding needs to be used to support our teachers in the building, and for direct services and opportunities for the students.

Much like the other programs our superintendent brings into the district but then fails to adequately allow staff to implement and succeed with, hiring RGW Consulting would be yet another waste of money. RGW Consulting's qualifications are questionable at best; she recommended hiring herself after her study that only interviewed 40 unspecified community members, and no other options for consultants were even solicited.

Please stop with the consultants and throwing money at random programs and allow teachers and staff to implement the programs we have and give them the proper time and resources to do so, and watch them flourish. Furthermore, buy this superintendent out of her contract and bring someone in who is invested in the community. We live in one of the most educated communities in the country, and have a good budget. Surely we can find a local, qualified candidate who values the children in our community.

Lincoln has gone through a unique set of circumstances in the past four years. Poor decisions around the departure of Mrs. Hamilton, poor decisions around hiring a qualified replacement, and poor leadership from the superintendent have led to frustrated staff and parents. But, at the core, we all want the students at Lincoln school to succeed academically, in a safe and positive school environment. I do not

believe RGW Consulting is the answer to this. Let's put faith in our building leadership and staff, give them access to funding, and let them use it to support the staff and students at Lincoln.

Please listen to the Lincoln community, give teachers and staff the time and money to implement programs, DO NOT HIRE RGW CONSULTING, let go of this superintendent, and watch our district again become the progressive place it once was on track to be.

Brynne Hovde

I'm not yet a Lincoln parent, but will be a year from now. I've been following the principal situation, have attended the meetings, and am part of the parent's Facebook page for Lincoln. I also own a small business and have worked with Reesheda Graham Washington on several occasions, both partnering on work we do together for clients and also hiring her to do consulting and coaching for our internal business team.

After reading some of the comments on social media, I am compelled to share that I believe RGW is well-positioned to take this work forward within Lincoln. The experience, approach and implementation that RGW brings will be a tremendous asset to Lincoln. During the parent meeting, I was impressed by Reesheda's ability to hold all stakeholders to a level of accountability, and by her thoughtful and precise insight on the issues at play. Do parents love that approach? Likely not, as it places responsibility on them as well as the staff and administration.

I'm admittedly ignorant of "primary education culture and climate consultants" that are readily available for an RFP process - so perhaps there is a long list of these consultants that should be considered along with RGW. But I submit that the identity of said consultant should be highly considered as part of that process as well. It is imperative that a Black woman be involved in this work, so that race and equity are not afterthoughts in the process. If the Board does decide to seek other proposals, I would ask that they consider race and gender of the consultant along with credentials and resume. It is not incidental to the overall scope of the task.

Thanks for taking the time to read my thoughts, and good luck to you all! I don't in any way envy you.

Stephanie Kissam

Regarding the email you sent on Friday, February 28, 2020, which included talking points from your hired consultant Reesheda Graham-Washington of RGW Consulting, LLC: I urge you to ensure a higher-quality product in the final report that she will present to the administration and Board of Education in March.

I presume that you found Ms. Graham-Washington's written talking points to be acceptable for distribution to the entire Lincoln school community, and that she approved sending them out. Because I was unable to attend the Town Hall, I was eager to read the summary of the discussion. Unfortunately, I found these talking points to be insufficiently analytic, prone to jargon instead of plain language (thus obscuring any insights she might have), and self-interested (with so many recommendations for third party facilitation). As a result, I am pessimistic that this consultant will offer any useful conclusions as a result of the after-action review. Furthermore, I am concerned that instead, the next steps could be misguided.

I have included excerpts from the talking points that need clarification below. Before that, a few things about me:

- Neither I nor any family or friends are in Ms. Graham-Washington's line of work, and therefore not a competitor. I have never met her or seen her in person.
- I do not have enough information to know whether Lincoln's annual principal turnover since my second

grader started at Lincoln is good or bad. I'd rather have people identify a wrong fit earlier than later, so I am not predisposed to "lay blame" on any party.

- I have never met with any of the three principals in the last three years, nor met with teachers outside of parent-teacher conferences, and so do not regard any of the talking points to address me personally.

I think having an after-action review is a great attempt to try to understand how to improve future hiring for this position. However, here are the four points of clarity that I hope the final March report achieves:

1. How does Ms. Graham-Washington reconcile the strengths she has identified with the note that there has been a "Gradual deterioration of the culture and climate of the school community"? The strengths seem to me to describe a positive school culture and climate, so in what ways is culture or climate measured by interviewees? Is this a sentiment voiced by all or some interviewees? Did interviewees with this sentiment share one type of perspective/role?

2. Under "Challenges," the phrase "toxicity among a few" sounds like an attack of personality rather than behaviors. If we are teaching a growth mindset to our students, then we should expect school staff, parents, etc. to have that mindset and treat them accordingly. It would be more helpful to give individuals feedback about their specific behaviors and how they undermine the team, and work with them on a plan for changing those behaviors, with the expectation that we can all grow and improve.

3. What role did the presence of Spanish Immersion play in principals' successes or challenges? It's not clear how the talking point on Spanish Immersion relates to the experience of principal hiring or retention.

4. What would it look like when administration, parents, and teachers have "relational trust" and "healthful ways to hold and mitigate power?" What are some concrete examples that Ms. Graham-Washington could identify to demonstrate that improvement is possible, and that we would know that a positive change has occurred as a result of this recommendation?

Again, I urge you to accept a final report that is of the highest quality and clarity. The threat of inadequate problem diagnosis – and the District 97 administration's willingness to pay for poor quality products – is of greater concern to me than what I see currently at Lincoln, where a strong set of teachers and staff are working to make a positive experience for students.

Stephen Weber

My son and daughter are both students at Brooks and I am writing as a concerned parent. I imagine you receive many communications that begin in this fashion, but I suspect my outlook may be somewhat different than what you might hear from others. Specifically, I am not writing because I think policy or practice at Brooks is disadvantaging my children. Nor do I believe that anyone at the school, the district or the union is acting in bad faith. I have tremendous confidence in the intentions and skills of all involved. In fact, I feel strongly that my children have been the beneficiaries of an exceptional education throughout our time in Oak Park. Their engagement in a diverse, innovative and effective learning environment is a source of great pride and satisfaction to me. I am grateful.

With all that in mind, I feel compelled to reach out to share my serious concerns about the execution of the E-learning programs put in place at Brooks during the pandemic. I have frankly been stunned and extremely disappointed in the fashion in which the programming put in place has fallen short not of some unreasonable standards on my part, but rather the standards and expectations that the Board, district leadership and teachers have together established and provided as educational leaders in the past.

We all recognized that this would be a challenge, one that educators and parents across the globe have faced together. I knew there would be a rough start. Even accomplished professionals need time to adjust to a paradigm shift such as this. I wasn't surprised that the first couple of weeks of E-learning were marked by such limited expectations and deliverables. However, as the term progressed, I saw very little improvement. With each passing week, our children were provided with the same rote activities, generally completed (to their teachers' satisfaction) with no more than 90 minutes of effort. Interactive exchanges were at a minimum; passive opportunities to connect with teachers during limited hours and scarce feedback about the work submitted. That this experience came in the context of three consecutive Fridays without E-learning to allow for preparation is frankly insulting.

My wife reached out on a number of occasions to raise these concerns. In one very telling exchange, Principal Capuder let her know that you were bound to provide these minimal standards as proscribed by the state, seemingly shifting accountability to either policymakers for lowering the bar or to individual teachers for not going "above and beyond." I suspect this was not her intent, but it hardly seemed the perspective of a key member of an interdisciplinary team with shared responsibility for the education of our children. As another key member of that team, I was very distressed.

At the end of the day, I am not writing to implore you to do better for my children. Will and Kate will be fine. We are blessed with the resources and the capabilities to lift our children up and to support their learning and achievement. Many families in our district are so blessed. But as you know, many are not. I expect you will hear from those families as well, but their voices may be muted owing to the health and economic burdens they are probably facing in the context of the pandemic.

But let me also highlight one more perspective. In adopting these low standards during the pandemic, I am very much afraid that you have sent a message to the students and our community that education, teaching, teachers and other professionals are just not important. That we could fail to rise to this challenge to deliver high quality education in the context of the pandemic suggests to all that the effort, time and expertise were not worth applying. If not important during the pandemic, when is education important? The decisions made and the substandard services provided have devalued education and learning. I am certain that is not your intent, but it is the inarguable consequence of your decisions.

Please do better. Not for my children. Not for me as a taxpayer. Do better for yourselves. You committed to education as a life goal and aspiration. Live up to that goal.

RETIREE RECOGNITION PLANS

RETIREE RECOGNITION

The Board Secretary shared that COVID-19 has changed the district's plans for celebrating its 2020 retirees, but staff has been working on some modified plans to honor them before the end of the school year, including a special video. The video will be shared in the June 16 board packet.

SPECIAL REPORTS

SPECIAL REPORTS

COVID-19 TRANSITION TEAM PLANNING

Dr. Kelley reported that she will update the Board on the transition planning for the 2020-2021 school year during each of the upcoming Board meetings.

She noted that the decision to move summer programming to a virtual format was made in late April. Those families were notified directly, and plans for the closing out of the current school year were shared previously.

She reported that the district has served 32,550 meals between March 16 and May 11, and has deployed more than 100 Hotspots devices, more than 250 devices to Kindergarten through second grade students, and 4,000 devices to third through eighth students. The technology department has responded to more

COVID-19 TRANSITION TEAM PLANNING (Continued)

than 2,000 support requests, with an average first response time of 94 minutes. 7,279 Google Meet sessions were held with staff and students between March 13 and May 20.

Administration has hosted five remote learning planning days in which 543 staff members engaged in professional learning opportunities. These opportunities included 41 live learning sessions, 15 self-paced learning opportunities, and 12 live self-care sessions.

In an effort to keep the community up to date, a COVID-19 Remote Learning Update Center was added to the district website. Additionally, the community is receiving updates through the school newsletters, emails and weekly updates from the district, and the District 97 social workers developed a Community/Social Services Resource Guide. The Remote Learning Family Survey was sent out, and nearly 1,500 responses were received in April. The majority of the feedback was positive. Targeted outreach was made to connect with families and ensure that all students are engaged in remote learning. The special education e-newsletter and virtual parent support meetings were held, as well as virtual parent meetings with school staff/principals. Staff videos were created to encourage and inspire students, and a virtual question and answer session was held with district leaders.

Dr. Kelley extended gratitude to the Buildings and Grounds team, reporting that they have been part of the essential operations, remaining on the front line of keeping the schools clean, sanitized and well-maintained during the closure. The team has secured disinfectant, paper goods, soap and PPE equipment in preparation for the upcoming school year.

She shared a quote by Sonya Renee Taylor and the graph of the Restore Illinois phases, noting that schools are scheduled to reopen during Phase four of the plan. She explained that the district will also use guidance from the health departments and the district's vision in making that decision.

She explained that the reopening process will be based on scenario planning, and that the eventual transition back to in person learning will take a great deal of planning. She told the Board that she is participating in regular calls with leadership where they discuss different scenarios and assumptions, including when schools are permitted to re-open, considering proactive screening of students and staff for symptoms, and social distancing in all settings. She explained that structural changes may be needed in the schedules and calendar in order to implement social distancing, and periodic school closures will increase childcare needs for many families and create new challenges for before- and after-school programs, which will impact the requests for building usage from outside organizations. Dr. Kelley explained that the challenges posed by COVID-19, and the duration of this threat, will make it more difficult for us to make unified decisions with other districts across the region and state. Differences in resources, negotiations, community concerns and direction from county public health services in response to local conditions will impact local decision-making. Additional assumptions include student learning outcomes going into the 2020-21 year will be uneven and vary broadly, increases in special education due process filings and demands for compensatory education may increase due to public health restrictions/guidance, and staff will need time for ongoing professional development, collaboration and support to implement a new model of "school". The assumptions also considered the possibility of deaths from COVID-19 while the virus is in circulation, fear, loss, and isolation will result in the need for increased mental health support, and student and employee attendance rates will decline in 2020-21.

Dr. Kelley reported that the district has created planning teams. The safety and security team met on May 4, 2020, with about 60-70 staff members who hold a variety of roles within the district in attendance. Since then, the team has increased by about 50 members. The team formed subcommittees (operations, learning models, social emotional wellness, safety operation protocol, and financial impact).

COVID-19 TRANSITION TEAM PLANNING (Continued)

It was reported that each subcommittee will continue to seek out the voices of students, staff and families through the process. Each subcommittee shared updates on their progress, and next steps were defined as;

- Planning will continue through the summer
- Opportunities to listen to voices of staff and families will be incorporated into the planning process
- The district will stay in communication with the Board and community

Board comments included interest in hearing about how a hybrid school attendance plan would work. Interest was expressed in using more textbooks in the classrooms. Interest was expressed in knowing what a parent would need to do if they chose to homeschool their children. One Board member expressed the need for consistency. Concern was expressed about the expectation of young students wearing masks, and that they could be asymptomatic. Let's Talk or an ombudsman were suggested as ways for community members to share ideas.

Dr. Kelley explained that what the district has been doing since March 16, 2020 was an activity that was not planned for or anticipated. The pivot that the team had to make with little preparation was remarkable. Moving forward, the remote planning days and the work that is happening will be focused on trying to build our capacity to provide a new model for schooling that is more consistent, and administration will continue to listen to families.

Dr. Kelley told the Board that the pandemic is inconsistent, and it will be hard to make a prediction as to when schools will open again. She acknowledged the anxiety around the need for childcare for the fall, and shared that she hopes that a decision can be made by the July Board meeting as to the next steps. She will continue to meet with other leaders in the community on a weekly basis where she will share these concerns. She expressed the need to be in close conversations with them to ensure that all families are being considered.

One Board member noted that a lot of the comments being made to the Board are about not knowing what is going on. It was suggested that the leadership be clear about their plans. A weekly communication was suggested that would communicate what the leadership is thinking and what the plans are.

Dr. Kelley explained that since March 17, 2020, the Governor has been in charge, and the district must follow the direction given from the Illinois School Board of Education (ISBE). Until the control is given back to the district, all anyone can do is wait and speculate.

Dr. Kelley explained that each of the teams described above are guided by the CDC and the Illinois Department of Health, and each group solicited for support. Each team has professionals on it (social workers, psychologists, classroom teachers, business office representatives), and each small team has been asked to solicit input from stakeholders.

Dr. Kelley acknowledged administration for being so far ahead with communication, noting that some districts are just reporting their plans for their summer programs.

FINANCIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DISTRICT 97

Rob Grossi told the Board that the COVID-19 conditions heightened the state's vulnerability to the economic downturn, with the Governor's office projecting a budget gap of about 2.7 billion dollars this fiscal year, and 7.4 billion dollars for fiscal year 2021. This shortfall is primarily due to the COVID-19 crisis. He reported that the General Assembly passed the budget today, deciding to keep the budget flat from last year and borrow 5.8 billion dollars from the emergency federal loan program.

FINANCIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DISTRICT 97 (Continued)

He noted that the key takeaways from the state budget is that Kindergarten through 12 grades will be flat versus the previous year. Without the loan, legislators were considering a 35 percent cut across the board reductions in the budget. The state is hoping that the federal government will provide a grant sufficient to pay off the loan. He explained that some experts are projecting that the revenue projections are too ambitious and that the budget hole will actually be larger than predicted. Grossi explained that this decision only pushes the financial crisis back by one year. He told the Board that the economy was not big enough to deal with the pandemic, and that without a substantial federal bailout, school funding in Illinois will change dramatically. He noted the following assumptions;

- Probability of a future property tax freeze increases
- Property tax collection percentages may decrease
- Evidenced-Based funding may be cut significantly
- Property tax will likely increase
- Probability of pension shift for schools increases
- Property tax collection may decrease, property tax collection will be delayed.

Grossi supported the fact that the district has a three month reserve policy. He explained that if the state cuts funding per student, the district would lose substantial financial support. He assured the Board that the district is in a solid financial state. The assumption was that the surplus funds would cover the non-capital projects. The district would have been able to fund all of the projects and still have an ending fund balance in 2025 that would be similar to the current balance.

Grossi recommended that school districts create a transformational plan, be adaptive to evolving social distancing requirements, and develop a more cost-effective method to deliver instruction. He told the Board that all school districts are going to need to come up with a more cost effective way to deliver education, and he made the following suggestions.

- Make smart decisions now under the lens of delay in school openings
 - Delay staff hiring and purchases when possible
 - Factor school closings into all contractual agreements
- Limit growth in discretionary spending and essential staffing for fiscal year 2021
- If possible, pause on long-term expenditure commitments until the “dust settles”
 - Collective bargaining agreements
 - Major capital projects using fund balance reserves need to be revisited
- Continue to address the needs of your students “return on investment” filter
- Update financial projections once we have a better picture of federal bailout and economic recovery

Grossi recommended that the district contemplate what it is going to do if revenue decreases by five percent, and if that amount becomes the new base fund level. To prepare for this reality, he recommends that the district develop projections under three scenarios (best, most likely and realistic). In doing so, the district should assess the district’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The district should be transparent, seeking buy-in from major stakeholder, and include them in the development of the plan. He suggested considering shared services, and looking at the budget for areas that can be stretched. Grossi reported that every district has three choices;

- No budgetary changes – eventually running out of funds (fiscal bankruptcy)
- Balance budgets by adversely impacting student learning (academic bankruptcy)

FINANCIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DISTRICT 97 (Continued)

- Develop a more cost-effective method to deliver instruction to students (transformational leadership)

The Board engaged in conversation with Grossi. They asked questions seeking clarity, and Grossi shared the following responses.

Question - Is there conversation about relief on the health care side? Is the state having conversations about relief?

Answer - The focus this year was how to increase funding by two or three million, and now it is at zero. The reality now is that life in Illinois will be different. The state will need to consider consolidation, and redistribution of real estate taxes. District 97 has the time to make adjustments.

Question – How does the pension and graduating income tax play out in November?

Answer – If the state has to cut one billion dollars next year, optically, it may look better to shift pensions to schools than cut Evidence Based Funding by one billion. Some people are saying that the graduating income tax would lower the deficit, but Grossi expressed uncertainty.

Question – Is it possible for the district to keep up to speed with what other districts are doing?

Answer – Yes, Grossi explained that he participated in a state-wide conference last week, and plans on holding another meeting in the near future with business managers.

Question - In the last week we went from an alarming situation to a financial solution today. What do you think is the lead time on a financial cut, and how quickly could this change?

Answer - We will know how much money the state will get in the next CARES bailout and how the state wide real estate taxes are affected. Grossi explained that legislators know the crisis we are in, and he recommended doing what the district can with this budget. He noted that if the state does not get a loan or buy out we will see big changes next year.

Grossi offered to create different percentage scenarios to share with the Board when he presents the draft budget in August. He recommended that the district prepare to be able to move quickly as information comes out.

Board comments including suggesting that the Board hold a retreat to consider what types of items would fall into each category of the projections, and set parameters. It was also suggested that Hanover Research might be able to help the Board measure return on investment.

ACTION ITEMS

ACTION ITEMS

3.1 APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE MAY 12, 2020 BOARD MEETING

Kim moved, seconded by Breymaier, that the Board of Education, District 97, approve the minutes from the May 12, 2020 Board meeting.

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

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed.

4.2 APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

Spurlock moved, seconded by Kim that the Board of Education, District 97, approve the consent agenda as amended.

4.2.1 Approval of Bill List (amended)

4.2.2 Personnel

4.2.3 Approval of Board Meeting Dates for the 2020-2021 School Year

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

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed.

4.3.1 APPROVAL OF SUMMER PROGRAMMING

Spurlock moved, seconded by Kearney, That the Board of Education, District 97, adopt the Supplemental Summer 2020 Program for the summer of 2020, not to exceed \$140,310 as presented on May 12, 2020.

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

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed.

4.3.2 APPROVAL OF LANDSCAPING BID

Kim moved, seconded by Spurlock, That the Board of Education of Oak Park District 97 approve the Landscaping Bid that was presented on May 12, 2020, in the amount of \$43, 794.

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

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed.

4.3.3 APPROVAL OF ASBESTOS ABATEMENT

Moore moved, seconded by Breymaier, That the Board of Education of Oak Park District 97 approve the summer 2020 Asbestos Abatement Consulting Services bids that were presented on May 12, 2020, in the amount of \$50,680.

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

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed.

4.3.4 APPROVAL OF HEPHZIBAH AGREEMENT RENEWAL

Moore moved, seconded by Kim, that the Board of Education of Oak Park District 97 approves the Hephzibah Program Agreement Renewal that was presented on May 12, 2020.

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

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed.

4.3.5 APPROVAL OF RESOLUTION DESIGNATING INTEREST

Kim moved, seconded by Moore, That the Board of Education of Oak Park District 97 approve the resolution designating interest as presented on May 12, 2020.

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

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed.

4.3.6 RGW PROPOSAL – CULTURE AND CLIMATE WORK

The Board agreed to table this item until the next school year when additional consultants can be invited to submit bids.

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

APPROVAL OF CLIC RENEWAL

Grossi reported that the district is part of a coop, with 137 members in the group. The district’s portion of the fees for the coming year will increase by 18.5 percent. He noted several reasons for the increase, and although he is not happy to see such a large increase, he recommended approval of the agreement.

Some Board members expressed concern about the large increase. Grossi agreed to look into what CLIC does for risk management, and noted that one of the reasons for the increase was the fact that Lincoln School had broken pipes and flooding last winter. One Board member suggested that the district consider going out to bid on this item in the future. Grossi offered to check in with the other districts in the coop and see what they are thinking about the future. This item will return to the Board for action on June 16, 2020.

VEHICLE PURCHASE

Jeanne Keane reported that the Buildings and Grounds department is in need of a new truck for plowing. She would like to trade in the 2010 truck as the repairs needed on the truck outweighs the value of the vehicle, and purchase a 2020 truck in its place. She told the Board that the vehicle purchase was budgeted in this year’s budget. This item will return to the Board for action on June 16, 2020.

Keane noted that the life span of a truck is 7-10 years, but with proper maintenance, a vehicle could last 15-20 years.

DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY

Michael Arensdorff reported that the Hatch, Irving and Mann libraries performed their annual weeding of books. There are also some technology items stored at the warehouse that are no longer of any use to the district. These items will return to the Board for action on June 16, 2020.

RESOLUTION – FUND BALANCE TRANSFER TO DEBT SERVICE FOR 2019 TAX LEVY ABATEMENT

Grossi reminded the Board that in December of 2019, the Board decided to abate the tax levy to provide tax relief for the community. Because of that action, the Board now needs to transfer money to the Debt Service Fund. This item will return for action on June 16, 2020.

RESOLUTION – FUND BALANCE TRANSFER TO DEBT SERVICE FOR CAPITAL LEASES

Grossi reminded the Board that they annually need to transfer funds from the Education Fund to the Bond and Interest Fund to pay for leases on iPads, Chromebooks for students, teacher Macbooks and staff iPads. This item will return to the Board for action on June 16, 2020.

AUTHORITY TO PAY BILLS AND HIRE STAFF DURING THE MONTHS OF JUNE, JULY AND AUGUST

The Board Secretary reminded the Board that in May of each year the Board is asked to give administration the ability to pay bills and hire necessary staff in between board meetings, asking the Board to take action on each item during their next meeting. This is done because the Board only holds one board meeting a month in June, July and August, and allows for bills and hiring to occur in a timely manner. This item will return to the Board for action on June 16, 2020.

BOARD ASSIGNMENTS

BOARD ASSIGNMENTS

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

FINANCE OVERSIGHT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE (FORC)

It was reported that Rob Grossi's report has been sent to the committee members for review. Interest was expressed in knowing when FORC needs to review Grossi's recommendations and change practices. Interest was also expressed in knowing when the Facilities Advisory Committee (FAC) should reengage to consider finances and the capital improvement needs.

Grossi recommended meeting with FORC in June to talk about the budget. He reminded the Board that the tax levy and long-term analysis will be due in October.

FACILITIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FAC)

It was suggested that FAC should meet sometime after the first FORC meeting, sometime between June and October.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL LIAISON REPORT FOLLOW UP (as needed – IGOV, PTO COUNCIL, CEC, OPEF, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, TRI-BOARD ON EQUITY, POLICY, AND SELF-EVALUATION)

IGOV

It was reported that IGOV held a meeting recently where the conversation was focused around what each governing body is doing regarding COVID-19. They talked about ways that each governing body can support the other, but no decisions were made. Most of the focus was on what the Village will do.

LINCOLN FOLLOW UP FROM THE BOARD

President Broy reviewed the list of requests made in recent public comments, noting the status of each one.

- Board participation in the Lincoln principal exit interview – President Broy and member Kearney participated in the meeting.
- Board participation in the principals hiring process – The Board is currently exploring their options to participate in the principal hiring process.

Additionally, the Board is working on the Superintendent's evaluation, finishing up SY20, and working on the SY21 preview.

CONCLUDING ITEMS

CONCLUDING ITEMS

BOARD REMARK

Member Liebl is working with the Safety Team and is impressed with what is going on in those meetings. She is working with eight to ten people twice a week. Everyone is supporting the idea of getting back to school as soon as possible but understands the need for safety to accomplish that task safely. She

BOARD REMARKS (Continued)

complemented the planning team and the maintenance staff for going above and beyond during this difficult time. President Broy thanked members Liebl and Spurlock for volunteering to participate on this team.

Member Moore expressed interest in discussing the issue regarding the Lincoln consultant. She expressed disappointment in the process and how it evolved. Being a woman of color, she expressed the desire to have those voices heard.

Member Spurlock acknowledged Whittier School for their transition efforts for the fifth graders, as they were made to feel special. She questioned the plans for the eighth graders, and the Board’s involvement in that celebration.

Member Breymaier supported the comments made by member Moore regarding the Lincoln consultant, noting that the community could have handled the situation with more grace. He noted that there are things happening that the community does not know about, and encouraged the Board to be transparent as possible.

Vice President Kim suggested that transparency would make the situation a bit easier. She questioned how the Board might demonstrate to the community that it is taking their comments into consideration before making decisions. She suggested that perhaps explaining the decision making process along the way might help with transparency.

AGENDA MAINTENANCE

The draft agenda for June 16, 2020 was reviewed and revision recommendations were suggested.

The Board expressed interest in having a COVID-19 Transition Plan Update on every agenda until updates are no longer necessary.

Interest was expressed in knowing when the Board should start holding budget discussions, and it was noted that the agenda schedule for next year needs to be created.

A policy on Board member participation during principal/administrator exit interviews was suggested.

It was suggested that the district consider social distancing as it related to transportation.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to conduct, President Broy declared the meeting adjourned at 10:50 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Board President

Board Secretary