



# Oak Park Elementary School District 97

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Dear District 97 Board of Education and School Community,

As we get closer to the official start of the 2020-2021 school year, I know you are anxiously wondering what this school year will be like. Like you, I wanted our students back in-person this fall. We all know our students miss school; our families miss the beginning of the year routines and traditions; and so do we. We miss our students; and we miss the feeling of anticipation we'd have around this time of year.

Yet, I am reminded of the poem I read last spring and it continues to resonate with me.

*"We will not go back to normal.*

*Normal never was. Our pre-Corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction...*

*We should not long to return, my friends.*

*We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity."*

Our community has been given an opportunity. I know that each of you faces a unique set of circumstances. If I could, I would make a plan that addresses each of your individual situations. In reality, that is not possible. As your superintendent, I am faced with many diverse and competing interests. The very best I can do is find a way forward, in our new normal, that has the least negative impacts on the most--and most vulnerable--people.

I realize the decision to begin the school year remotely is a relief to some and a hardship for others. It is not a decision I wanted to make, but I feel compelled to do so based on a number of factors.

Infection rates in our region are not trending in the right direction; as of August 4, Cook County's public health department issued more restrictive guidance to address the sustained increases in COVID-19 cases. As the person who ultimately bears responsibility for the health and safety of our students and staff in our schools, I cannot in good conscience open schools for in-person instruction in September.

This evening, I am asking the Board of Education to approve the attached resolution, which affirms the district's transition to school plan for the 2020-2021 school year.

It is too early to predict whether we will remain in remote learning beyond Trimester 1. We will continue to monitor infection rates and rely on public health guidance to determine when we can safely reopen school buildings. When we can, we will move into our hybrid model. The district's transition plan includes the guidelines we will follow for both models of instructional delivery.

We have learned from your feedback and our experience last spring, and our Learning Models workgroup has worked tirelessly to develop an improved remote learning program that includes:

- Live instruction
- Virtual small group support
- A digital device for every individual student

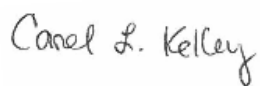
We recognize that remote learning cannot fully meet the needs of some students with special needs, and we are evaluating the extent to which we can safely provide services to students who need them.

I know you have many more questions and perhaps even a tinge of mistrust. We understand; but please know, we are working extremely hard, with a deep sense of responsibility to you and your children.

We continue to post updates to our [FAQs on our website](#). We will also continue to host webinars (Parent University is being hosted on August 13) and virtual town halls.

We all hoped this pandemic would be under control by fall. No one is more disappointed by that than I am. Yet, on behalf of each and every district and school leader, I want to assure you that nothing will dampen our commitment to creating positive learning environments that are equitable, inclusive and focused on the whole-child, whether we are in-person or at a distance.

I appreciate your support,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol L. Kelley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Dr. Carol Kelley  
Superintendent