

**Official Minutes of the
Oak Park Board of Education District 97
260 Madison Street, Oak Park
November 30, 2021 Special Meeting**

This meeting was held in-person and virtually using Zoom during the time of the Coronavirus pandemic. One or more of the board members met in-person and everyone else were virtual.

President Kim called the meeting to order at 6:09 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Kim, Moore, Ross Dribin, Hurd Johnson, Kearney, Kinhal, Spurlock (remote until 7:15pm)

Absent: None

Also Present: Max McGee Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates, Lonya Boose Board Secretary

OPEN SESSION

OPEN SESSION

Kim motioned that the board move into Open Session at 6:09 p.m. The motion was seconded by Ross Dribin. All members of the Board were in agreement. The Board reconvened in Open Session at 9:00 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dear District 97 Board of Education Members and Administrators,

As I was driving to work the morning following the last BOE meeting, I was listening to the news and heard how the Hinsdale Board of Education had recently voted to give students and staff the two days prior to Thanksgiving off as a gesture of gratitude and self-care (what an optimal time of year to express this sentiment). For a moment, it warmed my heart...but then my own reality and the reality of my colleagues and students set in. I feel that we're not doing anything to help each other and show empathy here in Oak Park.

I'm sure you are all very much aware of the national teacher shortage and the extremely high burnout rate...it's everywhere. Unfortunately, teachers are leaving the profession in droves right now and finding ANY other means to earn a living. We're certainly feeling it here in Oak Park. I have students and staff members in and out of my room all day in all sorts of states of dysregulation, despair, and frustration. I've seen more meltdowns and tears this year than ever before (students and adults alike). To hear and see our very own Board of Education become so adamant about not lessening the upcoming school calendar by two days (which we are not required to have as attendance days by state law) was disheartening. To be honest, it felt like a slap in the face during a time when we've never worked harder or given more of ourselves. Then the union was used as an excuse because we previously agreed to go above and beyond what the state mandates? On the contrary, we'd be thrilled to show some grace to our students and fellow staff members right now!

We continue to operate as 'business as usual', when in fact, we are all experiencing collective, prolonged trauma. We are exhausted, anxious, and overwhelmed. We'd be remiss to think this isn't also affecting our students; they're certainly feeling it too and it's evidenced in their behavior, declining social/emotional status, mental health, and falling test scores.

I understand and agree that we all want our students IN school, but at a time when we have the opportunity to show some compassion and understanding, we are choosing not to. Districts all over the

nation are finding creative ways to alleviate the strain of this current school year...why are we not doing the same? We always talk about how valued and respected our teachers are, but then we treat them like cogs in a machine. We're dying out here...the pressure has never been greater and we're drowning. We are NOT fine. We are NOT ok. Oak Park is better than this. Why can't we be more like other Districts who are leading with kindness and humanity right now?

Thank you for considering my thoughts, I look forward to your response and further conversations.

With respect and partnership,

Hannah Boudreau
Social Worker
OPTA Co-President

I have reached out to the Board several times to express my concerns that Policy 7:50, as written, is flawed and does not serve the families of this community. Policy 7:50 requires children to enroll in kindergarten and first grade based entirely on their birthdate, beginning next fall, but leaves the door open for exceptions in "limited and exceptional circumstances."

As I have previously communicated to the Board, Policy 7:50 is overly vague and is left open to being applied arbitrarily because: first, the Policy provides no specific criteria for an exception; second, the Policy provides no guidelines for what material might be given weight in an application for an exception; third, the Policy does not explain or even require a formal process by which decisions will be made; fourth, the Policy provides no transparency whatsoever into the decision-making process (if there actually is any process) or as to who is involved in the decision-making. As a result, there is no accountability. Finally, the Policy does not provide any avenue for a formal appeal.

I understand the reasons behind a Policy preventing unnecessary "redshirting" and I support those reasons. As a member of the school district, however, I cannot support this Policy as written. As written, the Policy allows for an undefined, secret decision-making process with no absolutely guardrails to prevent arbitrary, inconsistent, or unfair application, and no accountability.

As to school board decisions that will profoundly impact the entire childhood of some individual children in our community, the families in this community are entitled to know the criteria for decisions, the guidelines for submissions, the process for decision-making, and who the decision-makers will actually be. Families are entitled to understand the rules, the process and to participate in that process with full transparency. Policy 7:50 provides none of that, and I call on the Board to pause Policy 7:50 until these flaws can be addressed.

Thank you,

Stephanie Harris

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Kearney moved, seconded by Ross Dribin that the Board move into executive session for the purpose of Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees or Legal Counsel for the District, Collective Negotiations, 5 ILCS 120/2(C)(1)(2), at 6:18 p.m.

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

ADJOURNMENT

ADJOURNMENT

Kearney moved, seconded by Ross Dribin that the meeting be adjourned. There being no further business to conduct, President Kim declared the meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Board President

Board Secretary