

**Official Minutes of the
Oak Park Board of Education District 97
260 Madison Street, Oak Park
February 23, 2021 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.

Vice President Kim called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Spurlock, Kearney, Kim, Breymaier, Moore were present. President Broy and Member Liebl participated via Zoom.

Absent: None

Also Present: Superintendent Dr. Carol Kelley, Director of Communications Amanda Siegfried, Senior Director of Technology Michael Arensdorff, Senior Director of Human Resources Gina Herrmann, Chief Academic and Accountability Office Eboney Lofton, Associate Superintendent of Education Felicia Starks Turner, Senior Director of Equity Carrie Kamm, Consultant Rob Grossi, and Board Secretary Sheryl Marinier.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE
SESSION

Breymaier moved, seconded by Kearney that the Board move into executive session for the purpose of Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees 5 ILCS 120/2(C)(1), Collective Negotiations 5 ILCS 120/2(C)(16) at 6:04 p.m.

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

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed

OPEN SESSION

OPEN SESSION

Breymaier motioned that the board move into Open Session at 6:26 p.m. The motion was seconded by Moore. All members of the Board were in agreement. The Board reconvened in Open Session at 7:01 p.m. President Broy and Member Liebl participated remotely, President Broy had technical difficulties and joined the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

SPECIAL REPORTS

SPECIAL
REPORTS

AUDIT REVIEW

Nick Cavaliere from BakerTilly shared a brief update regarding the recent financial audit performed by BakerTilly. He explained that it is management's responsibility to prepare the financial reports and statements, while it is the responsibility of the auditors to prepare an opinion on those reports and make sure that the reports are error free. The auditors also review the internal controls that are in place and assess the reasonableness of the statements.

Cavaliere reported that he reviewed the annual financial statements, the schedule of expenditures for federal awards (grants) and performed a single audit on the IDEA account. He reported that the findings were clear.

He explained that school districts are required to complete and file reports to the state. The state uses that information to rank the district. District 97 was ranked at two in a scale of four. Cavaliere explained that the district was rated this way because it moved funds around and ended up with a lower cash on hand at the end of the school year. He explained that this was of no concern, but it would be helpful for the

district to understand. It was noted that the fund balance appeared to be only a few days short of qualifying the district to be ranked as a three.

Cavaliere explained that due to the pandemic, the audit was performed remotely. He acknowledged the business office staff for their assistance. He shared that the fiduciary standards review has been pushed back for one year and will be reviewed during the next audit.

Cavaliere told the board that he identified a few system problems last year, and noted that a new software program is currently being put in place that should resolve those concerns.

RETURN TO SCHOOL PLAN UPDATE

Dr. Kelley reported that the district has hosted two vaccine clinics for the district staff. Gina Herrmann reported that 100 percent of the staff and active subs had the opportunity to be vaccinated. 92 percent of the staff will be fully vaccinated by March 13, 2021. The nurses were acknowledged for their assistance with the process, and for their ongoing support of the community since last summer.

Jeanne Keane updated the board on masks, noting:

- The disposable masks that District 97 has are three ply with a nose wire
- School administrators and PTOs have also supplemented and supplied staff with additional fabric masks during school material pickups
- As good neighbors, the district believes that medical quality masks should be reserved for our medical staff working with students who are unable to masks
- Filter inserts, if not properly maintained can cause more harm than good as people continue to breathe in the contaminate particle matter
- The District 97 framework to reopening guide speaks in general related to face covering with discussion about the fit of mask. There is a nurse in every school who can work with staff if needed
- The Building & Grounds Senior Director monitors what PPE is sent to the buildings. She has not had any additional requests for masks of any kind from any of the buildings except from her staff

One staff member requested a badger mask, and some have asked for different size masks. The district is looking into these requests. It was noted that a majority of the Superintendent's Advisory Panel members did not recommend the use of medical grade masks in the school environment.

Jim Hackett, Safety and Security Coordinator reported that 280 staff members have expressed interest in before school COVID-19 testing opportunities. Because of the large number of interested staff, the district would need to offer the testing at two schools per day to accommodate the need. Additionally, the surveillance testing will be available to middle school students. A video was shared that demonstrated the process.

Amanda Siegfried, Director of Communications referenced the pandemic dashboard. She noted that the dashboard is updated every Friday at 5:00 p.m. She acknowledged that some cases of COVID-19 have been reported, but assured the board that none of the cases were transmitted in the school environment. Siegfried explained that there is a procedure for notifying classrooms and schools when cases are reported within them.

Joseph Terry, from the Village Health Department reported that there are 2,719 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Oak Park since March 2020. He is seeing a slight uptick recently. Most of the current cases are in people below the age of 20 years old. He reported that 490 cases are in the school age group. Terry

reported that the Village saw a dramatic decline after the holidays, but he expressed concerned about spring break travel. He shared that the Village is currently following the IDPH guidelines which recommend that travel be limited to essential travel only, mask wearing and social distancing. People who need to travel should plan their travel during less busy times and make sure that they wash their hand, not touch their face, etc. If people do travel, they should stay home for 14 days after their return. He reminded the board that a lot of people are asymptomatic, and that is why quarantining is so important. Terry explained that there is an option for testing out of quarantine, but he does not recommend this practice. He acknowledged that the guidance may change once people are two weeks past their second vaccination. Terry clarified that the travel restrictions include travel outside of the state for more than 24 hours, even if you are traveling directly to your own property in the other state.

Terry reported that a few cases of COVID-19 has been identified within the spring sports teams and a local exercise gym has had several positive cases diagnosed.

Eboney Lofton, Chief Academic and Accountability Officer (CAAO) reported that several tools are being used to gauge student achievement and identify learning loss. She explained that the district is monitoring student achievement during hybrid learning and supports are in place to assist children who need additional help.

Siegfried reported that 72.2 percent of the District 97 families have expressed interest in returning to school for trimester three, leaving 27.8 percent to remain remote. She noted that trimester two had only 54 percent hybrid. She noted that some of the schools have a higher percentage of families expressing interest in hybrid learning, so space requirements will need to be addressed on a classroom by classroom basis for trimester three. Siegfried also shared a breakdown of the hybrid learners by demographics. Carrie Kamm, Senior Director of Equity reported that multiple direct contacts have been made with students to answer any questions they might have before making their decision on whether to return to school for trimester three or not.

It was noted that the principals are working with teams and Jeanne Keane to determine spacing needs. The task force met earlier today (union representatives, nurses, administration, etc.) to determine what the spacing needs will require and consider any problems that might need to be resolved. One of the goals of the task force is to help families feel safe returning to the classroom.

A special focus group is scheduled for families on March 4, 2021. The intent of this meeting is to listen to families of color about their hybrid learning experience and to learn how the district can improve the experience moving forward. A tele-town hall will be held for parent to receive information over the phone. The district will provide the phone numbers with an online registration. The online system will call the families that registered at a designated time so they can listen to the town hall.

Dr. Kelley noted that the district does not know what the pandemic will look like in the fall, and the guidance currently does not address the need that far into the future. The district will continue to follow the CDC and state guidelines, and will continue to improve the process. The safety plans are designed to operate the schools in a safe manner. Although there are elements of the plan that will still be relevant in August, administration will continue to prepare a plan for the fall aligned with state and local health departments.

Regarding trimester three, Dr. Kelley explained that the district is trying to keep the schedule as consistent as possible, and offering as many days onsite as possible. Principals are considering how many students are currently onsite, and looking at the needs in each classroom. Administration will have more to share before the March 9 board meeting. Dr. Kelley explained that families and staff who travel over

spring break will need to self-quarantine for 14 days, so the district will have to see what that means as far as staffing. She noted that the rules may change once staff is fully vaccinated.

Board comments included concern that people can travel down state and not have to quarantine, but cannot travel less than an hour to Indiana or Wisconsin and have to follow the guidelines for travel. Concern was expressed that the tele town hall will not give the black and brown families a safe place to express concerns, and it was suggested that a separate place be provided for that purpose. Interest was expressed in having spaces where the students are the focus so we can gather information in a more students centered way. Interest was expressed in making decisions about the distance that will be needed between desks to accommodate the increase of hybrid learners, to give the families as much time as possible to decide if this option is the best for their student. Interest was expressed in looking at the growth of students who are doing well and noting if they are learning at the same rate they did prior to the pandemic.

The board members agreed that parents should receive the classroom spacing information as soon as possible, but recognized that there are currently too many variables for the administration to make that decision.

PUBLIC COMMENT

PUBLIC
COMMENT

The agenda indicated that persons wishing to address the board either email their statement to the board prior to the beginning of the meeting, or email the Secretary to the Board of Education by 4:00 PM the day prior to the meeting to be given access to address the board. Members Kearney and Moore read aloud the public comments that were emailed to the board prior to the start of the board meeting.

Irving PTO

We, the families of students at Irving Elementary, are writing to you today out of concern for the health and welfare of our teachers and staff at Irving Elementary, as well as district-wide. We understand that the district has provided teachers and staff with single-layer cloth masks. However, given the recent recommendation from Dr. Fauci, our country's leading infectious disease expert, that we wear masks with multiple layers or of better construction, we would like to strongly request that the district provide KN95 masks to all teachers and staff in the district—if N95 respirators cannot be acquired.

It is our hope that we can all return to school safely in the coming months and that the district will adequately provide for teachers and school staff, given the evolving recommendations as a result of new and more contagious virus strains. We know you are watching the changing science closely to determine how and when students can be safely in school. It makes sense to also follow it in terms of keeping those working in the school protected and as safe as possible.

We are aware of a local parent effort to procure masks in bulk for teachers and staff. However, we believe this to be the job and responsibility of the District 97 administration, not of the community. We are also aware of a local distributor in Oak Park that has stated that they have a steady supply of masks that can be delivered with very short notice. We are happy to pass along that contact information, if it would be helpful.

Above all, our concern is for our teachers, staff, students, and community during a very difficult time. We want school staff to feel safe and supported, especially while they wait for their vaccinations to take full effect. We want our students to benefit from great teaching by a dedicated district of educators, who are free from unnecessary anxiety. Hopefully we can all agree that when we meet individuals' basic needs—whether that be food, shelter, or personal safety—they will then be free to excel at their jobs, benefiting everyone.

Please provide all District 97 staff with higher quality KN95 masks, so they can do their jobs safely and with their minds more at ease. Thank you for your time and for hearing the families of the Irving community.

Gauri Khatkhate

I have a first grader at Mann. We very much wanted to do hybrid for trimester 2, but we are working parents and we were forced to enroll him in full remote through Hephzibah (so NOT because we think in person set ups cannot be done safely) because the district could not tell us if he would be 5 1/2 days or 3/2 before we made our choice, and the district and village did not work meaningfully with district partners to create childcare options for remote days in the event of a 3/2 option. We, and I'm sure all the other parents who have their kids at full remote with Hephzibah, are between a rock and hard place with no help from District 97 to sort through things.

I'm wondering if there has been any thought about how to improve this for next trimester 3. If the numbers choosing hybrid in the third trimester go up, are we back to a 3/2 model? If so, will there be thought given to providing programs through community partners for remote days? Or at least coordinating with these programs?

I appreciate the efforts the district has made to make hybrid possible, but it has remained inaccessible for many. In addition, we have been behind neighboring school districts in re-starting in-person learning. Some communities in our area are offering more in-person time, or even moving to full-day school. Why has it been so much more difficult for District 97? In listening to prior board meetings, we have been bombarded with all the reasons why in-person or full day WON'T work, with little talk of what creative solutions are being considered. As a parent whose child has been in 15 person rooms (including District 97 classrooms) and eating lunch, I have seen that this can be safely and responsibly done.

Finally, I am wondering what planning is underway for the fall. This year has felt like a constant scramble with plans being made and changing at the last minute. What is being worked on now, to help ensure next year isn't as chaotic as this one?

Megan Murray Elsener

First, thanks so much for providing the hybrid option for the past few weeks and continuing to listen to the science that schools are safe. My children have never been happier to be in school, even with the covid precautions, and are thriving.

My hope is that as more students opt in for Trimester 3 that the district is able to accommodate all students in the current five-day schedule, especially considering the majority of staff will be fully vaccinated by T3. Going back to less in-person hours and changing the schedule once again is NOT fair to students and especially the teachers. Students, families and teachers are adjusting to the current schedule and deserve for consistency to keep moving forward with the five-day hybrid.

I also hope the district is actively making plans for the fall and will continue to communicate to the community as decisions are made. I do hope District 97 isn't waiting until July when there is a new superintendent to be making plans. Being proactive instead of reactive is the key for our district moving forward.

Steve Coughlin

It seems that Full-time or Half-day in-person daily learning is achievable for trimester 3 in District 97 as neither Schools and the Path to Zero or the CDC strictly states that 6'-0" social distance is required in the classroom. In fact, Schools and the Path to Zero recommend "3 feet social distancing for young learners at all levels of community spread" and the CDC states "Space students at least 6 feet apart, when possible".

Are there plans to reduce the social distance from 6'-0" within the classrooms for trimester 3 as suggested in the Schools and the Path to Zero report?

Alyssa Arata

I would like to voice my support for the board's ongoing dedication to return-to-school efforts. My District 97 first grader has been in hybrid learning since Feb. 3 and loves being back in school with her teacher and classmates. She comes home with so much more energy and interest in learning than when she was fully remote. She can now describe her day and the people she interacts with in detail and with joy, which she did not do while remote learning. In-person learning has already made an immeasurable improvement in her life.

With the results of the Trimester 3 survey pending, I want to strongly encourage the administration and the board to stay the course and take additional steps towards full 5-day in-person learning for all students, regardless of the capacity to maintain 6-foot social distancing at all times. Moving to an A/B cohorting system would be a step backward for in-person learning.

The CDC's latest guidelines for our community level of transmission recommend K-12 schools be open for full in-person instruction. The physical distancing guideline of 6 feet or more is specified as "when feasible." The World Health Organization's social distancing guideline for schools is "physical distancing of at least 1 metre [~3 feet] between individuals including spacing of desks" and the Harvard Global Health Institute's Schools and the Path to Zero recommendation is for "3-foot social distancing for young learners at all levels of community spread." Six-foot distancing was never meant to be the only or even the primary guideline used in return-to-school planning, and shouldn't be relied upon now as the sole measure to keep our students from in-person learning. When using a layered mitigation approach, other measures such as universal masking are just as effective.

As a mother and biologist, I thank you for your efforts to support children's learning while following the guidance of experts who have learned critical information about SARS-CoV-2 over the past year.

LeeAnn Reinfurth

I am writing today to implore you to continue to keep students in the classroom for 5 days in Trimester three. I have twin daughters at Lincoln who are thrilled to be in the classroom in person with their amazing teacher. Taking that away from them will cause even more damage than what has already been done with the extremely slow return to in person education that District 97 implemented. While countless schools around us opened we have been one of the last to return in person. Now countless districts are INCREASING the time in the classroom and District 97 is telling us in T3 that time in the classroom may be decreased is unacceptable. Teachers and staff are now receiving the vaccine and the COVID infection rate continues to drop. We cannot continue to have these excuses. I will again implore Ms. Kelly and the administration to do hard things and open our schools up.

My daughters are so much happier and more engaged and state that they feel they are learning so much more in person than sitting on a zoom all day. Also the chance to see and interact with their peers has been priceless. Dual working households and single moms and frankly any combination household cannot keep this up. It is proven that IN PERSON education is best. Always has been and always will be. Do not take this away from these children. It's downright infuriating that we and our children do not get a say.

I will implore Ms. Kelly to finally do something hard and leave us with a parting gift of Trimester 3 in person five days a week and a comprehensive plan to open full time in fall 2021. It's the least she can do after the lack of action, nonstop deflecting, constant excuses, talking in circles and not putting the education of our children in District 97 first.

Margaret Nekrosius

I write to you this afternoon as an exhausted mother of two who has lived here my entire life. My daughter is a Longfellow bear in first grade. We are doing our very best to give grace and flex every way we can. But I'm running low these days as so many other working mothers are. I have seen that Dr. Kelley reported that planning for fall hasn't started yet. I'm watching districts all around us go full time now and yet here I am having nightmares, crunching budgets and worrying endlessly that we have another hybrid year ahead of us. Thank you for all your work this year and I'm sorry this isn't over. I'm sorry it's all so hard. But please, for all of the families in this village start preparing for fall. Our children need in person school after what will be 1.5 years of constant change. They need the stability of five in person full days. I would like to see the board will work proactively in the next few months.

Katherine Klette

I am writing to share the positive experience my children and I have had with returning five days a week to in-person learning. I have a fourth and second grader at Lincoln and am a substitute teacher there as well. I see how excited my own children are to be learning in person with their teacher and classmates. It seems like their teachers are also happy to be in their classroom with their students. We know they are working so hard to manage the 'roomers' and 'zoomers' to ensure all students are receiving the best learning experience possible. Being a substitute I also see how the community of hybrid learners are flourishing in the classroom. Elementary students that I have worked with know how special it is to be able to return to in person learning and do their best to adhere to the mask, social distancing, and COVID classroom protocols. They are beyond thrilled to be in school!

I have also experienced firsthand what being at home and awaiting a test can do to these kids who are now used to being in school five days. Even though my own children understood why they needed to at stay home, the level of disappointment and disruption it brought to my own children was heartbreaking. I truly worry for their mental health if third trimester brings a change to less than five in-person learning days. I understand we need to work with numbers but what planning is underway to ensure the max amount of students are able to continue with this same hybrid schedule or a max amount of days in person? What planning is in place? When will information about the schedule be shared? Many parents have returned to work and need time to plan. I look forward to more information during this meeting tonight.

Thank you to the teachers, staff, and school administration for bringing back a spark to my children's eyes.

Kathleen Lorden (the Martins)

Now that most of our teachers are vaccinated, studies show that children are less susceptible to the virus and that 3-feet of distancing is likely sufficient, we hope that a five-day school week will still be considered for Trimester 3. After all they've been through, it would be a shame for our youngest in-person learners to go backward. Thank you for all of your hard work and creative thought thus far.

Patrick Bracco

In reviewing the approved minutes on the District 97 website I have noticed that some public comments have been shortened in the official record. Why have those comments been edited?

In review of Mr. Bracco's concern, it was noted that the first paragraph of his public comment from the January 26, 2021 board meeting was inadvertently not included in the minutes. For that reason, the paragraph has been included below.

My name is Patrick Bracco and I am a resident who lives in the Whittier District. I will soon be a father of a child that will be a student within District 97. I submitted a public comment at the last board meeting in opposition to a Hybrid In Person/Remote learning plan. I am writing again to express my disappointment in our School Board. This time I am writing for another reason. It was apparent from watching the actions of the board on the January 20th Special Meeting that we have a "BINO" Board In Name Only. The complete and utter disrespect and lack of decorum that the public and another board member were shown by certain board members was deplorable. The complete lack of interest in hearing the public comments in their entirety before holding a vote further proved the point that certain board members only want to act in their best interests and not in the interest of the community.

ACTION ITEMS

ACTION ITEMS

3.1.1 APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR THE FEBRUARY 9, 2021 BOARD MEETING

Spurlock moved, seconded by Breymaier that the Board of Education, District 97, approve the minutes from the February 9, 2021 board meeting as presented.

Ayes: Spurlock, Breymaier, Moore, Kim, Kearney, Broy, and Liebl
Nays: None
Absent: None
Motion passed.

3.2.1 APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

Spurlock moved, seconded by Moore, that the Board of Education, District 97, accept the consent agenda as presented.

3.2.1 Bill List

3.2.2 Personnel

3.2.3 Approval of the minutes from the February 8, 2021 special board meeting

3.2.4 Approval of the minutes from the February 18, 2021 special board meeting

Ayes: Spurlock, Moore, Breymaier, Kim, Liebl, Broy, and Kearney
Nays: None
Absent: None
Motion passed.

3.4.2 APPROVAL OF FISCAL YEAR 2020 AUDIT

Spurlock moved, seconded by Breymaier, that the Board of Education, District 97, accept the Fiscal Year 2020 audit reports as presented and as prepared by the auditing firm of Baker Tilly Virchow Krause, LLP.

Ayes: Spurlock, Breymaier, Broy, Kim, Moore, Kearney, and Liebl
Nays: None
Absent: None
Motion passed.

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEM

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

APPROVAL OF SSP EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT WITH TRS

Rob Grossi explained that TRS sent a message stating that all districts have to approve an agreement that states that districts must offer teachers an additional benefit besides a 403B. This agreement must be approved by the end of March, 2021. Grossi went on to explain that he just received an email that stated that this approval will not be mandatory. He offered to update the board and if mandatory, the board could take action at the next board meeting.

The board was reminded that the bargaining agreements may need to be revised to reflect this change as they specifically reference the 403B option.

BOARD ASSIGNMENTS

BOARD ASSIGNMENTS

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

FACILITIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FAC)

The FAC committee met last night. They welcomed a new committee member, Mark Jolicoeur, and received an update from Bulley and Andrews regarding the summer work and the need for some boiler replacements.

COMMITTEE FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION AND MONITORING (CLAIM)

It was reported that the bill on data sharing between non unit districts is on track to be filed today.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL LIAISON REPORT FOLLOW UP (as needed – IGOV, PTO council, CEC, OPEF, and Self-Evaluation)

COLLABORATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD IGA GOVERNING BOARD

The IGA governing board is scheduled to meeting tomorrow, February 24 at 7:00 p.m.

IGOV

IGOV met last weekend where they recapped the candidates forum that was held the month before.

CLOSING ITEMS

CLOSING ITEMS

BOARD REMARKS

Interest was expressed in finding a way to get the middle school students onsite more often than every three weeks.

Interest was expressed in knowing if feedback from the teachers had been gathered regarding the trimester 3 plans, and what their experience has been with the students returning to onsite learning. Interest was also expressed in knowing how administration and the board could support the teachers through trimester 3.

Interest was expressed in trying to figure out which students will need the most assistance to avoid learning loss.

Board members acknowledged Dr. Kelley’s intent to leave the district at the end of the school year. They extended congratulation to her and wished her success.

AGENDA MAINTENANCE

The draft agenda for the March 23, 2021 meeting was reviewed.

Interest was expressed in receiving a staffing report and an update on the Hanover Research data in the near future.

ADJOURNMENT

ADJOURNMENT

Breymaier moved, seconded by Kearney that the meeting be adjourned. There being no further business to conduct, Vice President Kim declared the meeting adjourned at 9:18 p.m.

Board President

Board Secretary