

Official Minutes of the
Oak Park Board of Education District 97
260 Madison Street, Oak Park
April 9, 2024 Regular Meeting

This meeting was held in-person and virtually using Livestream. Board members met in person along with Administration.

President Kearney called the meeting to order at 6:14 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Kearney, Moore, Ross Dribin, Kim, Spurlock, Hurd Johnson (remote – closed only)

Absent: Burns, Hurd Johnson (public business)

Also Present: Superintendent Dr. Ushma Shah, Assistant Superintendents Dr. Luis De Leon & Patrick Robinson, Assistant Superintendent of Finance & Operations Dr. Sheila Johnson, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources and Equity Dr. Natacia Campbell Tominov, Chief Safety Officer Dr. Felicia Starks Turner, Chief Learning Innovation Officer Dr. Eboney Lofton, Senior Director of Communications and Engagement Amanda Siegfried, Senior Director of Data Analytics Anna Colaner, Technology Specialist II Paul Duda, and Lonya Boose Director/Board Secretary.

EXECUTIVE
SESSION

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Spurlock 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, Collective Negotiating and Litigation.5 ILCS 120/2(C)(1)(2)(11) at 6:14 p.m.

OPEN
SESSION

OPEN SESSION

President Kearney motioned that the Board move into Open Session at 7:05 p.m. All present members of the Board were in agreement. The Board convened in Open Session at 7:12 p.m.

PUBLIC
COMMENT

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Candace Ward

Hi I am Candace Ward, I think this is my third public comment this school year alone, I just want to make it clear to the board and the community, that I did not know that my Facebook post about the cotton was going to go viral. I am glad it did, once I saw it went viral, I did see that as an opportunity to mention how this cotton situation was just the most recent issue for me and my family. However, the aftermath of the viral post resulted in some safety concerns with other moms and other neighbors throughout the community. That was never my intent. I had no knowledge of the threats or the things that made the teacher feel unsafe, but I did want people to push for us to get answers to a lot of the things that have been swept under the rug for me and my household. I don't want any parents to feel like the intent was to make your kids feel unsafe, because I had kids in multiple schools throughout Oak Park that day so their safety was a concern for me as well. I do however, want to make it very clear that I still have not gotten a response from the emails that I sent in regards to the cotton and the things that Amy Jefferson, the

Longfellow Principal put me through. I informed Felicia Starks over the last three school years; they swept it under the rug. Just as the community feels unsafe about the backlash from the viral cotton post and the comments that I made addressing my concerns about the safety of my kids, my kids have not felt safe for the last past two to three years because of the things Amy and Felicia have gotten away with doing. I want to make this my third request for a meeting with two board members, Dr. Shah, Felicia Starks, Amy Jefferson and Ms. Brown the cotton teacher. I also want to meet with the lunch lady that had a big blow up with my daughter a week prior. I figure since there are a lot of eyes on me about the cotton, this is my opportunity to express other things that have fallen on death ears for the last three school years. I wanted to put this out privately, I have been harassed by Amy Jefferson's sibling since the viral post. Her sister doesn't like fact that my post went viral and I spoke out about her sister. I am starting to feel like the more people get away with, the less they feel like they shouldn't do something. Nobody is being held accountable and can get away with things because they are in a position of power.

I also want to acknowledge that in the midst of my complaints, I have not stressed my issues with Dr. Shah because she has probably been the most willing person out of all involved trying to fix the situation so I want that clear as well. It took a while, but she has been accountable and one board member which I know for a fact don't get paid, has been working overtime to fix things that people who are getting paid over the last three years haven't done. I don't think it's fair that I am here three school years later, begging and asking you to work overtime for a response to things that people are not doing. I want my children to feel safe, and I want to feel heard. Thank you.

Kate Herron – Whittier Celebration

Hi all, I am Kate Herron and company. We are here today to give a Whittier and company update. We are pretty proud of some things that we have all been working on together. Our student council is thriving, our 5th grade student council is having a community lemonade stand that we are working on, and a very successful food drive for Beyond Hunger. The main focus this year has been fundraising. They are knocking it out of the park. We have been getting our whole school involved, it's been really great fostering a sense of responsibility and empowerment for our school.

We pride ourselves in having family nights. We have also been inviting parents and students to participate in "Whittier Around the World". This event showcases our different holiday celebrations and recently we had a great Black History Month where families were able to look at artifacts, learn some history and taste some soul food. We also had a science night where families participated in fun science experiments. We have also been partnering in the diversity of the community with local members. We have had some great assemblies about Ramadan and Hispanic heritage. Our staff theater club is rocking and rolling, we have 40 kids in CAST, 12 in CREW. This is the second year of theater club, with 56-kids. Over the past two years we have implemented a reading program, where we have reached out to the University of Illinois Chicago Flames players to come and read to our kindergartners.

We have fun early childhood teachers who are also hard at work this year to implement home visits and monthly family days in order to educate and involve families in the learning. Recently, we saw the need to spruce up our school, so over Spring Break, we worked hard to paint a little bit so that when our kids come back, they were proud of the new look. We are proud, and this is Whittier and company.

Joseph Moore

My name is Joseph Moore, and I am speaking to Candace Ward's situation. I am one of those people who saw the viral post and I did share it and I did react to it but I can assure you I'm not one of those people that made threats because when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Darkness cannot drive our darkness, only Light can do that", and "Hatred cannot drive our hatred, only love can do that", I believe that and I take that with me so I'm not one of those people but I am on the other side with people that are disgusted with the trauma that this 11 year old was put through.

I myself was found with disgust which was compounded because when I look around the world and on social media, this country is trying to ban black history. I don't think they want people to necessarily know about black people's truth told through black history which does not stop with what they teach us in school. The books stop with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and starts with slavery but if we are honest, black history is more than and if I am a bit more honest its apart of white history too, we didn't enslave ourselves. We didn't auction ourselves or beat ourselves, we didn't sell ourselves so I think that's really the part that they are trying to sweep under the rug. I just came to share my story and concerns as a single black father in America that's not a statistic, that's not a threat to society. I am trying to use my voice because I know that there is strength in numbers. I know that I am looking at some people that can do something and not turn a blind eye, because I read somewhere about what happens when you turn a blind eye. Any fool can turn a blind eye but no one knows what an ostrich sees to this day and twenty years from now when your grandkids grow up and their part of white America, go away to school and meet a man that is part of black America and fall in love. We have a chance to do something. I am not here to make this about race but we know if this was vice versa, a black teacher and a white mother enraged with their white child, this wouldn't even a discussion.

Robin Glover

Hello, this is my third time giving this speech. I'm going to keep giving it until we start reacting. My name is Robin Glover and I'm a proud Alum of the district and a parent of current students at Whittier. I know some of the staff here today from Whittier. Today I voice my concerns over the opportunity gap of black student and to be frank and honest we are failing black children in this community. This latest incident regarding cotton showcases to me that there's just a lack of trust among students, among staff, among parents and our community, and we can do better. We have to do better. I'd like to highlight a few data points that stand out to me that I have highlighted every time, 79% of black students do not meet proficiency in standards for language arts, 80% of our black students do not meet proficiency standards in math. This means only 20% of our black students are meeting ELA, and 30% math. This is completely unacceptable. This is the type of problem that needs everyone's attention to solve. Parents, teachers, administrators and students in our community. I ask that we have a comprehensive plan with accountability metrics. I want to be part of the solution; I am ready to get to work. Thank you.

6. SUPERINTENDENT UPDATE

SUPERINTENDENT
UPDATE

6.1 Celebrations

- District 97 Comes together for the April 8, 2024 Solar Eclipse
- Multilingual Teacher, Jennifer Jaros wins the 2024 Staszak Outstanding Educator of the Year award from the Oak Park Education Foundation.
- Coming soon, District 97 Annual Identity Celebration Calendar. In order to increase awareness of the heritage and identity celebrations to create alignment across our schools, the district is

developing annual identity celebration calendar that will be shared with all staff and families ahead of the 2024-2024 school year.

- April is Arab American Heritage Month. Help us celebrate National Arab American Heritage Month with District 97

6.2 One Book, One District

(Presented by: Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, Patrick Robinson)

One Book, One District provides schools the opportunity to read the same book at the same time. New this year, Middle Schools will also join the activities, including conversations about the book across grade levels. This year's choice, "A Rover's Story", follows a Mars Rover named Resilience and his companions as they explore Mars and overcome tough challenges, all while communicating with friends at home. This is an exciting opportunity to connect to STEM and space research.

Events throughout the district include:

- Virtual "fireside chat" with the author Jasmine Warga
- Middle School ELA teachers reading along
- Prides, Nests, Dens, Stables etc. will focus on the theme of resilience this month
- Trivia contests and discussions questions weekly
- Communication with families and encouragement to read along at home

This event also provides universal access for district families by providing developmentally appropriate texts for PKP/EC students and in collaboration with our librarians, provide access to audio recordings and translations.

The district will host STEM night at the Oak Park Public Library on April 18, 2024 from 6-7:30pm. All Oak Park is invited to discuss and experiment with new STEM tools.

Thank you to the District 97 Library Department for all of their planning and support with this district-wide initiative!

6.3 Portrait of an Oak Park 8th Grade Graduat Update

(Presented by: Dr. Eboney Lofton and Amanda Siegfried)

Senior leadership, the teacher design team and affinity groups are now conducting data and feedback analysis. As previously mentioned, the community-wide engagement process to get feedback on the draft Portrait took place during the months of February and March. Upon completion of the data and feedback analysis review, the design team will develop the final recommendations and share the final draft Portrait of an 8th Grade Graduate. The team will also share this information with the Affinity groups who were first to view version 1 of the draft portrait. We have some exciting work ahead. We will keep you updated!

6.4 Illinois State Report Card: District Finance Data

(Presented by: Dr. Anna Colaner)

The next series presentation of the Illinois State Report Card, is on district finance data. These presentations allow the district to assess progress towards meeting the expectations of the board's equity policy 7:12. The policy language calls for the Superintendent to develop and recommend to the Board both a viable long-term plan for funding, staffing and implementing activities and initiatives to achieve the equity objectives as well as annual updates. The analytic question becomes, how is our funding aligned with the equity policy. Throughout this process, there are many questions that we ask ourselves such as:

1. Are we spending our dollars strategically enough to support the equity policy?
2. Do we need to spend our dollars differently than the typical district in order to achieve excellence and equity?
3. Given the level of local investment in the district, how do we ensure that the work of the school district is reflective of our community's vision for equitable outcomes for our children?
4. What accounts for variable spending across schools?
5. Where do we need to invest in order to ensure equitable outcomes for our students across grade levels?

The complete presentation is available by viewing the livestream of this meeting on the district YouTube channel, or by viewing the materials uploaded to the board packet.

7. ACTION ITEMS

7.1 Consent Agenda

ACTION
ITEMS

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

- 7.1.1 Approval of Minutes from the March 19, 2024 Board Meeting
- 7.1.2 Bill List
- 7.1.3 Personnel

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

8. DISCUSSION ITEMS

8.1 O&M Fund to Capital Projects Transfer (action 5.14.24)

(Presented by: Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations Dr. Sheila Johnson)

Tonight, the Board was presented with a request to process a Transfer Resolution from Operations & Maintenance or O&M to Capital Projects

Summary

DISCUSSION
ITEMS

A transfer of \$4,000,000 from the Operations & Maintenance Fund to the Capital Projects to fund various capital projects. As required by the Illinois Program Accounting Manual and ISBE Regulation Section 100.50(d)(2), the construction expenditures are required to be recorded in the Capital Projects Fund and a board resolution is required to execute the transfer. Attached is the resolution to transfer \$4,000,000 from the Operations & Maintenance Fund to the Capital Projects Fund.

Motion

Administration is seeking a motion that the Board of Education of Oak Park Elementary School District 97 approve the attached resolution to transfer \$4,000,000 from the Operations and Maintenance Fund to the Capital Project Fund at its May 14, 2024 public business meeting.

BOARD ASSIGNMENTS

BOARD ASSIGNMENTS

- FORC could not get a quorum and was not able to hold its last meeting looking forward to meetings scheduled for the upcoming year. Dates coming soon.
- CEC is working to reschedule its last meeting of the current school year.
- OPEF is hosting its annual Bingo Bash, get your tickets!
- EDRED recently met, and had conversations around tax levy and assessments. Discussions also started around reassessment. EDRED is working on legislation for newcomer student programs. There is a letter circulating around for Superintendents to sign a bill to support.

CONCLUDING ITEMS

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Board Remarks

Board member Moore: It's not lost on me that we have police here, it's not lost on me that we have the news here today and as a board member one thing I love about this community is how diverse we are and that includes diversity in lived experiences. How we engage and how we advocate. The one thing that brings us together regardless of race, income and all those things, we want the best for our students. In today's case, we failed our students. When I think about why I ran, I think it's also important for us all to reflect. I think a lot more could have been done in the situation that we talked about earlier.

In regards to our student experience, I think about the way I would advocate versus the way another Board member would advocate, at the end of the day I am going to do what is best for my child. I want us to get out the respectability politics of what we would do, and how we would do and just focus on students because that's why we are all here. I don't agree with everything that has been said and done within this district and I also feel like we dropped the ball and I just want to call that out. I want to take responsibility for myself and I also want to acknowledge Dr. Shah. Dr. Shah has done a lot, going above and beyond in terms of trying to make all families feel whole and that we meet families where they are because we are not always going to get happy emails. We are not always going to have the best experience; we are going to drop the ball but it's important that we be accountable and we say when we have messed up. What are we willing to do to repair harm within all of this, that sticks out to me, that two students were harmed and I would like to bring us back to that point. I think we talk a lot about black student experience and sense of belonging, let's bring that back to the table. Not who was wrong, or how

you feel, I want to thank Patrick Robinson for your leadership and just helping to make this whole. Thank you.

EXECUTIVE CLOSED SESSION OF THE BOARD

EXECUTIVE
CLOSED SESSION

The Board of Education moved back into Executive Closed Session of the Board after its public business.

Spurlock moved, seconded by Moore that the Board move into executive session for the purpose of Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees, Collective Negotiating and Litigation.5 ILCS 120/2(C)(1)(2)(11) at 8:45 p.m.

The Board moved back into open session at 10:02pm.

9. ADJOURNMENT

ADJOURNMENT

All five present members of the Board were in agreement that the meeting be adjourned. There being no further business to conduct, President Kearney declared the meeting adjourned by voice vote at 10:02 p.m.

Board President

Board Secretary