

**Background:**

The Illinois State Board of Education is reporting that more than 80% of all school districts in Illinois are spending more money than the revenue they are able to generate during the 2003-2004 fiscal year. Many of these districts are borrowing money to meet day-to-day expenses. Woefully inadequate State funding support for education, unfunded State and federal mandates, tax cap legislation, and policy and practice regarding property tax appeals and refunds place onerous burdens on schools that work to jeopardize fiscal health and compromise the educational experience of Illinois' children.

Oak Park Elementary School District 97 is confronting unprecedented revenue shortfalls directly attributable to many of the constraints listed above. These shortfalls, and mandated programs and practices are requiring major changes to the educational program offered to Oak Park's elementary school children. Changes in State and federal law, policy and practice are urgently needed to forestall actions that will severely compromise District 97's ability to maintain an attractive and fiscally healthy school system. The District 97 School Board wishes to establish a Legislative Advocacy Committee in an effort to impact State and federal legislation, policies and practices to assure that they better support the District's ability to provide high quality educational programs that support Oak Park's aspirations for its children.

**Purpose:**

Through the Legislative Advocacy Committee, the Board will engage District 97 stakeholders in an open discussion to develop a shared understanding about State and federal legislation, policies and practices that will allow District 97 to maintain an attractive and fiscally healthy school system. The Legislative Advocacy Committee will review and propose legislation at the State and federal level for endorsement by the District 97 Board. It will also recommend and facilitate actions by the Board and Oak Park voters that support adoption of the legislation.

**Charge:**

- Develop and propose an advocacy agenda for endorsement by the District 97 Board and Oak Park voters regarding school finance and policy issues at the State and federal levels.
- Strengthen connections and involvement with lobbying groups, especially those with whom the district currently has a formal relationship (ED-RED, the Legislative Alliance).
- Develop and promote strategies for mobilizing District 97 stakeholders to impact important legislative and policy issues.
- Develop informational materials such as issue papers, sample letters to legislators, action alerts, etc. for dissemination to and use by Oak Park voters.
- Develop strategies for engaging Oak Park's legislative delegation to keep them informed about the ways in which proposed legislation, policies and practices impact Oak Park's elementary schools.

**Composition:**

The Legislative Advocacy Committee will be composed of representatives from a broad cross section of District 97 stakeholders. Representatives will be sought from the following:

- The Board of Education
- Oak Park Teachers Association
- Oak Park Teaching Assistants Association
- Oak Park Secretaries and Tech Specialists' Association
- SEIU Local 73, Municipal
- Parent Teacher Organizations
- African American Parents for Purposeful Leadership in Education (APPLE)
- Supported Education Association (SEA)
- Community at Large

The Legislative Advocacy Committee will be led by two members of the District 97 Board.

**Notice of the formation of a Legislative Advocacy Committee**

- Letters will be written to the principals, leaders of the District's bargaining units, and PTO Presidents, APPLE, and SEA leadership about the formation of the Legislative Advocacy Committee to request representatives to participate.
- Public notice will be provided to the broader Oak Park community through appropriate media outlets and through letters to key groups and individuals.

**Time Frame [year 1]**

December, 2003 Establish Committee

December, 2003 –January 2004 Recruit members

February – March 2004 Educate committee members about key funding and policy issues affecting District 97 schools and develop legislative agenda for 2004

March - June, 2004 Coordinate activities with other lobbying organizations and lobby, lobby, lobby,

**Other Activities:**

- Host forum for legislators to present legislative agenda
- Host Legislative Breakfasts

The meetings of the Legislative Advocacy Committee will be open meetings. Time and place of all meetings will be posted for the public. Time will be provided at the meetings to hear public comment.

District 97 Legislative Advocacy Committee

## **Statement of Principles**

The following principles will guide the decision-making process of the District 97 Legislative Advocacy Committee. The decision of the Committee as to whether to support or oppose particular governmental initiatives will be informed by whether the measure is consistent with the core principles that guide the Committee's work. The Committee will strive to operate by consensus in determining whether a particular measure is consistent with these principles. If consensus cannot be obtained, a vote of 2/3 of the members of the Committee present at a meeting where a quorum of the Committee is in attendance shall be sufficient to cause the committee to take action on the measure.

The State of Illinois should meet its constitutional obligation to provide primary funding for education and measures that increase the state share of school funding for Illinois' schools should be supported so that all school children in Illinois have the opportunity to obtain a quality education.

Every school district should be guaranteed sufficient financial resources by raising the minimum amount that the state provides per student (i.e. the foundation level) to a level that supports a quality education for every child in the State of Illinois.

A school funding measure should be assessed on the basis of whether that funding measure provides a net increase in funding for District 97. In making this assessment the long term impact of a particular funding measure will be considered.

Measures that will diminish existing revenues received by District 97 should be opposed. In making this assessment the long term impact of a particular funding measure will be considered.

Programs that are mandated by the state or federal government should be fully funded by the state or federal government. Measures that increase the reimbursement level of mandated programs should be supported with priority given to measures that fully fund mandated programs. Mandated programs that do not contribute to District 97's Culture of Achievement should be opposed.

The State of Illinois should provide general state aid to District 97 according to a formula that allows District 97 to receive annual increases in general state aid.

Local school districts should be permitted to maintain or enhance current funding that is obtained through local effort.

Local school districts should be enabled to collect the full amount of property taxes that have been previously levied in accordance with applicable laws when such levies have been reduced by commercial property tax reductions.

Proven strategies that build capacity to improve student learning and to eliminate the student achievement gap should be supported.

Initiatives that promote early childhood education should be supported.