

Official Minutes of the
Oak Park Board of Education District 97
260 Madison Street, Oak Park
February 22, 2022 Regular Meeting

This meeting was held in-person and virtually using Livestream 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 6:07 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Kim, Ross Dribin, Hurd Johnson, Kinhal (remote), Spurlock, Moore, Kearney

Absent: None

Also Present: Interim Superintendent Dr. Patricia Wernet, Associate Superintendent of Education Felicia Starks Turner, Interim Senior Director of Human Resources Cathie Pezanoski, Senior Director of Technology Michael Arensdorff, Senior Director of Communications Amanda Siegfried, Chief Academic and Accountability Officer Eboney Lofton, Senior Director of Equity Carrie Kamm, Senior Director of Buildings & Grounds Jeanne Keane, Caroline Roselli Robbins Schwartz, Rob Grossi, Dr. Orson Morrison DePaul University, Peter Kuhn Bulley & Andrews and Lonya Boose Board Secretary.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

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Spurlock moved, seconded by Hurd Johnson that the Board move into executive session for the purpose of Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees, Collective Negotiating 5 ILCS 120/2(C)(1)(2) at 6:09 p.m.

OPEN SESSION

OPEN SESSION

President Kim motioned that the Board move into Open Session at 7:04 p.m. All present members of the Board were in agreement. The Board convened in Open Session at 7:08 p.m.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

PUBLIC COMMENT

President Kim notes at the start of public comment, board policy outlines 20 minutes on any one topic and upon reaching that total time on a certain subject/topic, all other comments received will be noted in the official minutes for the meeting. Public comments are read by all board members and are taken into consideration.

As a parent of an 8th Grader at Julian, I was concerned to read in Principal Christian’s February 20th newsletter that none of the traditional 8th Grade Events- the Trip to 6 Flags or the Dance have yet to be approved. Just this past weekend, over 300 8th Graders went to DC- on a very expensive trip that many chose not to participate for a variety of reasons. A trip to 6 Flags is significantly more inclusive, less expensive and with proper cautions- relatively safe. We are at the point that we should be able to approve trips such as this one. We do not want to run into a situation like last year where it was too late to plan for this even though the Covid numbers had gone down. Our 8th Graders have had a chance to be vaccinated, we know that vaccines work and we should provide them the opportunity to have this special trip to 6th Flags as well as the 8th Grade Dance.

Thank you,
Susan Raphael

We are parents of an 8th grader and both physicians. This weekend our daughter went on the 8th grade DC trip. It was an emotional experience dropping her off because we knew that more than anything she needed an adventure with her friends. Our kids have persevered for the last two years and have done the right thing- they have vaccinated, boosted, and carried on with their middle school years in a mask. The numbers at the Chicagoland hospitals are down and the vaccination rates high.

Our daughter is coming back from DC today refreshed- she has had time to have fun, be nervous, and awkward around her peers- exactly what a 13 year old young women need to develop.

In concordance with the decision to proceed with the DC trip, our recommendation as parents and physicians is to proceed with both the 8th grade dance and trip to Six Flags.

Our kids need us to keep them safe. At this point in the pandemic there is a mental health crisis and stunted development in our kids. If we want to keep them safe, it is time to let them have some adventures with their friends.

Sheetal and Matt Kircher

Could the Oak Park Heath Department clarify that the new guidance issued on January 12th, 2022 rescinded the Aug. 5th guidance, and that in doing so there are no longer recommendations from our local Health Department for outdoor masking? If this is correct, I ask that D97 remove the policy requiring children to mask outdoors during school hours.

Thank you,
Marcella Douce

Dear School Board Members,

I write today as a parent of kids who attend public school in D97 and as a parent of a child who is ineligible for vaccination. I thank you for keeping school in session, I thank you for protecting the ability of children with disabilities to attend school, I thank you for protecting kids, families, teachers, and school employees from long COVID, and I thank you for protecting people who cannot get vaccinated.

I encourage you to retain a layered protection approach and seek to remove the layers as virus transmission rates allow. When appropriate to remove a layer of protection, I encourage you to seek input from those most affected by the protections (the students, the teachers, the staff) as to what would benefit them most. We are fortunate to have a lot of tools at our disposal to keep everyone in our community moving forward together.

I understand there are voices shouting for the end of masks, vaccines, and testing. They are emphasizing their own opportunity to get vaccinated and demanding that all of our tools be tossed at once. Living with the virus means using our tools and living with our variable layers of protection from the virus. Let's be creative as we move ahead. "Normal" - for whatever that term means - is a lot different when one million of our fellow Americans have died.

Thank you for your service.
Meghan Paulas

Good evening,

I urge you to remove all mitigation protocols - masks (indoors and outdoors), quarantines, SHIELD testing, face-forward 5-minutes-to-eat in altering-rows-facing-a-video-screen-with-no-talking lunches, zoned recesses - immediately. And let's bring back the option to play the flute.

It is time to let the kids breathe.

Thank you,

Karen Thomas

Dear D97 Board,

Since the onset of COVID-19, our country's response has been politicized. It is increasingly frustrating to find that a loud minority of voices are sounding similar alarms in our supposedly enlightened community. Public schools are here for the public. They need to serve the public. They need to protect the public, not a segment of the public --- the entirety of the public.

This loud minority would like nothing more than to ditch mask mandates. But now is not the time. We know vaccinations help. We know boosters help more. We also know vaccination efficacy wanes over time, and natural immunity is fleeting at best. In Illinois, 76% of the state has received at least one dose; 67% of the state is considered fully vaccinated; but only 33% of the state has received a booster dose. None of these numbers are sufficient.

Oak Park is not a bubble, and younger populations are more likely not to be vaccinated fully, let alone to have received a booster shot. In the U.S., only 19.9% of fully vaccinated people ages 12–17 years have received a booster. Vaccines are not yet eligible for those under 5. We also have vulnerable populations within our community who need to be protected. School should be a safe space, not one that puts at-risk children in a dangerous situation.

It has been proven without a doubt that masks are an effective mitigation measure. The risk to a healthy person wearing a mask near a COVID-19 carrier who is not wearing a mask is moderately high. The risk to a healthy person wearing a mask near a COVID-19 carrier who also is wearing a mask is low.

The levels of community transmission in Oak Park, Cook County, Illinois, and across the country are all still high. Why would we not continue to mask all parties who are in close proximity indoors for 7 hours each day? This would allow our schools to remain open. It would protect our students. It would protect our teachers. It would protect our staff. It would protect our community.

John Metzger

Please do not give in to the people asking for our schools and community to take away masks without any metrics. As a pediatrician, it is still recommended by the AAP that we continue masks in schools right now. We need to wait until cases are low, and ideally until our youngest children are able to be vaccinated. We need to focus on continuing to increase the vaccination rate, including boosters for all who are eligible, in all of our schools. We need to continue to ensure our ventilation in all spaces are adequate. We need to monitor the metrics of vaccination rate, case rate, and hospitalization rate. Please do not rush to make decisions based on impatience instead of science.

Thank you

Robin Kalish

From listening to past meetings, I know some would like all COVID precautions to disappear and life to return to pre-COVID times. I implore you, our School Board, not to remove the indoor mask mandate! Please allow in-person school to continue for as many students as possible. Masking indoors has been proven to keep more people healthy than if no masks are worn. We know this. Science has proven this in numerous, peer-reviewed studies. The American Pediatric Association just released information supporting continued mask usage. Please support this Science! Keep our students and their families safer.

We know people of color have been impacted at a higher rate than other communities. Now is the time to advocate for our students and families of color by continuing to mask indoors. This simple mitigation strategy will keep more families safe because they will not be exposed as much. Please help my D97 student of color stay healthy and safe!

Some may say that wearing masks are annoying or uncomfortable. I say contracting COVID when you do not need to be exposed is more than uncomfortable. For decades many professions have worn masks during their workdays. For example, doctors and nurses wear them for 10- or 12-hour stints during surgeries. They have been able to build relationships with colleagues and do their jobs well. Our students have proven that can thrive during in-person schooling while wearing a small piece of fabric too.

As someone growing up in the Far East for a time, I recall seeing many people wearing masks daily. Let's open our cultural mindset a bit more. Masking is not the villain a small sector is trying to make it be. Masking is an important mitigation strategy when a highly infectious disease is in our community. Please help us all stay safer. Keep schools open by continuing to mask indoors. Less students will get sick, fewer teachers will get sick, and families will be impacted at a lower rate. Masking is a win-win situation!

Thank you for your consideration,

Ardith Zucker, mother of a D97 student

Hello! I am writing to encourage the D97 BOE to be wise when discussing Covid mitigations. Please use both reason and emotion to take a middle path that meets the needs of our whole community. It is not time to remove all Covid mitigations in our schools, but it is also no longer necessary to continue with outdated or disproven mitigations. I hope that district administration, school board members, and public health experts can combine science and compassion to develop a clear plan for moving forward. Thanks! - Lauren Arends

I am concerned about the mounting pressure to no longer require masks in D97 schools, that such efforts are largely initiated and funded by outside, right-wing groups with agendas beyond just lifting mask restrictions. Please know that many families such as mine are grateful to the District 97 School Board for their hard work throughout this challenging time, and that I'm sorry for the added burden that the threat of a lawsuit poses.

I hope that we continue to use the mitigations that are necessary to keep our schools open and to protect our kids, teachers and staff. When restrictions like masks are no longer required, how will D97 compensate for the increased risk to vulnerable members of our community? What measures will be taken so that those children who are high-risk to severe disease can still participate fully? The "Urgency of

Normal Toolkit" calls for "focused protection for the vulnerable" with no concrete examples of those kinds of protections. We can't move forward without a clear way to guarantee the same school experience for ALL kids, not just those who are likely to be at low risk for Covid morbidity and mortality. No "normal" can be acceptable, if it is not also equitable.

thank you for your time,
Jenna Leving Jacobson, PhD
Oak Park resident and D97 Parent

I am the mother of two District 97 students. My 2nd grader is at Hatch and my 6th grader goes to Brooks. Two weeks ago, I sent in a public comment about my continued support of a layered COVID-19 mitigation plan for District 97 schools. I continue to feel strongly about this for all of the reasons I mentioned in that comment. Thanks for reading it.

By now, I am sure you have seen the petitions flying around on social media. The presence of one gave rise to another, and I worry they give an impression of polarization. I could be off base, but I suspect District 97 parents have much more in common than not, even around this hot button topic of school mitigations. Most of us are reasonable people with varied opinions, levels of risk tolerance, and volume settings. Many of our problems pre-date the pandemic, but got worse. It makes sense to me that we have different reactions to specific mitigations; the pandemic has impacted our families in different ways. We are off course and want things to improve.

Despite our investment in the planning around school mitigations, most of us are not public health experts or school administrators. I see that some parents have requested more transparency and accountability around mitigation contingencies. I fully support this and expect that others do, too. I agree that communication and transparency will help parents understand the rationale for decisions and manage their expectations and personal choices. Importantly, I would like to extend on this transparency and accountability request to include health equity efforts. School and work attendance is not optional, like going to a party or the Super Bowl. I would like to hear more about how District 97 applies what we already know about COVID-19 and racial and ethnic disparities to their assessment of how our schools are doing with vaccination and COVID-19 infections. I would also like to hear more about how we consider and address the needs of disabled and chronically ill students, teachers, staff, and family members.

Thanks again for listening and for your dedication to District 97 students and families.

Jennifer Gorski

Hello,

My name is Emily and I am the mother of two Chilton District97 schools. I have a 5th grader and a three-year-old who attends PKP at Longfellow. My three-year-old has an IEP and receives several therapies at school to help with his development. He is making great strides with these supports.

I wanted to speak up in support of continuing with CIVID mitigation strategies, especially indoor mask mandates at school. Many people make the argument that all D97 students have had ample opportunity to get vaccinated. But this is untrue. My three-year-old is ineligible for the vaccine as are the other 121 students in early childhood classrooms throughout D97. At times it feels like everyone forgets about our early childhood students who are reliant on others to follow mitigation strategies such as masking as they cannot be vaccinated. Additionally, it is very difficult for young children to follow other mitigation strategies such as social distancing. How do you refuse a three year old a hug if they fall down for

example? Also, like my older child, many elementary and middle school students have younger siblings at home who are ineligible for the vaccine. If these students develop COVID from school, they could come home and pass it on to unvaccinated younger siblings even if the older child is vaccinated.

I have done all I can to protect my youngest child. Everyone in our family is vaccinated. I require everyone who watches him to be vaccinated and wear a mask. I have cut out birthday parties and trips out of state to visit close family. Everyone in our household wears a mask at all times when out in public in an indoor setting. But if those at his school and in the community refuse to wear masks around him, there is nothing I can do to protect him. I would be powerless to protect my precious child from a deadly disease.

Some have dismissed my concerns saying, young children cannot get COVID or if they do, they don't get sick. This is simply untrue, especially with the now dominant omicron variant. The fastest growing population of new COVID infections and hospitalizations are among children under 5. On a personal note, I have a young nephew who developed a COVID infection and was hospitalized. It was heartbreaking and terrified me that something similar could happen to my young son. Young children have and continue to contract COVID and get very ill and sadly even die. It often feels like the world has moved on and left young child behind and even more vulnerable.

I would ask the board to consider the needs of our early childhood students when considering COVID mitigation strategies. Don't forget about our youngest students. I would ask that the board keep in place proven mitigation strategies until all of our students have had the opportunity to be vaccinated. I would also ask the board to consider a different path forward for our early childhood students as they are a group who are unable to be vaccinated. For example, I am much more comfortable with my vaccinated 5th grader taking his mask off outside at recess as he interacts with mostly vaccinated peers. The thought of my unvaccinated three year old being unmasked outside in close contact with all unvaccinated peers on the other hand terrified me. Please consider continuing with mitigation strategies for our preschool programs such as universal masking in all settings and requiring staff to be masked and vaccinated and keeping these students separated from the elementary students.

My greatest fear is that mitigation strategies will be lifted before I can get my precious child vaccinated. And then I will be forced to decide between continuing to send him to preschool, where he is thriving, so he can access an education as well as the therapies he requires and, in the process, exposing him to a deadly disease that could cost him his life. Or I could pull him out of school and to protect him from a deadly disease. But he would miss out on not only his education but also the multiple therapies he relies on to grow and thrive. Please don't force me to make that choice.

Thank you

Emily

Dear School Board Members and Superintendents,

Based on the last communication from D97, my understanding is that the district will be voting on how we move forward with continued safety mitigations for Covid-19. I implore this board to keep the current mitigations in place particularly indoor masks. It was just six weeks ago that the school had to enter an adaptive pause, due to the numbers of kids and staff out due to Covid-19. Thankfully, numbers have come down dramatically since then, however we are still in a period of high transmission.

We still don't have vaccines for the youngest (<5) and there are immune-compromised individuals in our community. I recognize that we cannot keep all the mitigations in place in perpetuity, so I ask that the

board set benchmarks and use those to make decisions. Earlier in the school year, we talked about relaxing mitigations when we got to the point of low or even moderate transmission.

We are just now beginning to understand the impacts of Long COVID and we owe it to our children and our community to minimize the number of people that get COVID. I ask you to please not relax indoor mitigations.

Sincerely,

Ranga Bodla
Parents of Two Holmes Hawks

Hello board members,

Numerous pieces have been written over the last week about the immune compromised, but there was a particularly striking piece in the Washington Post from a child with a compromised immune system, and children with vulnerable family members at home who were both in Virginia, where mask mandates had been lifted. Those students spoke of their experiences - of being forced to sit near students who were unmasked, of being told their needs couldn't be accommodated because that would be segregation, and of being bullied by students who were no longer masking.

Community transmission is still high, putting students like these and their families at risk. We are one of those families, as my husband has both an immune system disorder and a blood cancer. The pandemic isn't over for us, and I know we are not the only family in the district that that is true for. There are also children under 5 in the district who have not yet had an opportunity to get vaccinated. Layered mitigations have worked well for the district thus far, and I hope that the district will listen to the voices of those who don't have the privilege of declaring this all over.

Thank you,
Kim Jackewicz
Mom of a Beye Bobcat

Dear D97 Board,

I am a parent of 2 young children in Oak Park, and I believe the time has come for reducing mitigations in schools and elsewhere. 82% of Illinois schools have removed such rules, and our incredibly high vaccine rate prepares us going forward. Glancing at publicly available numbers, a few data points stick out: no Oak Park resident under the age of 40 has perished from this horrible plague, and the danger to vaccinated teachers is shockingly low. When I go to restaurants or watch the NBA, I see thousands of unmasked people. It is time for Oak Park to join the reality-based community.

Thanks,

Doug Rosenberg

Village Board Members,

I must start by thanking you once again for your service to the community. It is my belief we are working our way out of this pandemic, but I do recognize others do not feel the same. For many the past 2 years have caused a lot of pain; maybe they have lost a loved one, their job, and a entire host of other

hardships. The level of hardship is unique to us all and these hardships include those of us trying to manage the social/emotional changes within our household and with our children.

I'm writing to ask the board today what is our district doing to ensure we are keeping pace with the communities and world around us to begin to return to what I'll call a new normal? It's becoming concerning to continue to hear from our local health officials that we are unable to make changes even though we are living in a community with one of the highest vaccine rates at over 80%. I recognize there is a level of fear still but it's time for our schools to start to put some of this pandemic in the past and focus on how we want to move forward and be a better place.

If we are unable to implement a mask optional policy or change policy around our contact tracing and other mitigations, I'd like to better understand why that is and what guidance that is based on?

If we are going to continue to have a mask mandate and not reduce Covid mitigations then at the least I'd ask for this board to clearly outline the steps or changes needed for our mitigations to change. I ask that there be some more transparency as to the why D97 is not in a place to move forward. At the very least I ask that it is shared publicly today when we can expect for changes to come or a timeline for planning and implementation of rolling back mitigations.

Thank you!
-Kerri Joy

I am so grateful that outdoor masks are no longer being required, but in the coming weeks I'd love to know of our plan for loosening other mitigations in our schools. What is the science behind the metrics/rules for more normalcy in schools? I'd love the board to publicly share the data they are using to base these decisions on.

Visitors/volunteers in school: Isn't there a way for this to be done safely? I think it would be both helpful to the children and teachers to allow this.

Mixing cohorts outside at recess: This feels like something to allow with minimal risk. Can we give the children some normalcy and allow them to socialize with their whole grade of peers?

Lunch. I am really hopeful some healthier options can be made for our kids. Nacho Cheese Doritos and processed cheese really feels unacceptable especially considering some children only eat meals from school. Also- plopping a child in front of a TV show to eat *may* have been needed early on, but can we quit this? We know screen time isn't great for kids- they have all been overloaded the last 2 years, can we give them this time to socialize with their classmates? Both my children have lost free time and recess for their class being too chatty- maybe if the kids got more time to socialize, they could focus better in class?

Finally- I think there are plenty of safe ways to have special school events and events and even field trips. Can we update the guidance on this?

Thank you,
Audra Fullerton

Dear Board Members,

I'm writing today to respectfully request that you seriously consider removing the policy of mandatory masking and allowing D97 schools to go to a mask optional policy for the students. I feel that we as

parents have waited long enough for a clear plan of action in regards to restoring normalcy to our children's lives. With the recent court ruling downstate, the number of nearby districts going mask optional and the City of Chicago reporting today that they will lift their mask and vaccine mandate at the beginning of next month, the time is now to allow the students in our district to resume their childhoods. Oak Park's vaccination rate for those over age 5 is well above the state average, cases are going down and all the data shows that the current dominant variant of Omicron is manageable and presents mild disease when infected. My 2nd grader hasn't known a normal school year and freshmen enrolled in March 2020 when schools first shut down will be entering their senior year of high school in the fall. All mitigations, though well-intentioned, since that point have failed, which is OK since this is an unprecedented situation and we are all kind of winging it. Nonetheless, as Covid-19 reaches endemicity and an effective vaccine is widely available, we know that children are at very low risk of having severe illness and that the effect of cloth masks at stopping the spread of the virus is negligible at best. I know that this is a difficult decision, but at the very least I would like clear and reasonable metrics for when we can reach an end here. If there isn't a current plan of action regarding the lifting of all mitigations in D97, then please let us know so that we can prepare to explore options outside of the district. My family doesn't have time to wait for another court ruling.

Thank you for your time.
Kevin Cebulski

It's now been 17 days that you have been unlawfully implementing Covid-19 mitigations in our schools, as ruled by Judge Grischow.

Since the 2/4/22 ruling on the TRO case, over 700 out of 850 school districts are now mask-optional in schools. Dozens of the school districts who are stubborn and unwilling to change, like you, are now in litigation proceedings. Is this what you want too?

Chicago and the state of IL, today, have officially, lifted the mask mandates. WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

Please, let the following sentences sink in, again. You have NO legal authority to force children to mask in our schools. This was outlined clearly in the TRO ruling. You cannot, under any circumstances, deny the statutory due process rights of children and staff. Yet, you continue to do this. It's stunning.

Please let the following sentence also sink in, again. There is NO significant evidence that masking in schools prevents the spread of C19. NONE.

Please let the following sentence also sink in, again. Healthy children are, by FAR, the lowest of the low risk population for advanced infection and symptoms from C19. This is well documented, public knowledge, as you know. Yet, you continue to punish these children, damaging them every moment of every day, by forcing them to mask. This is a disgrace.

You continue to pull in the opposite direction of the science, the health and well-being of the children, and the law. This is unacceptable.

The following statements are also directed at your attorney, for which I've requested to speak with, and genuinely want a response from:

Direct quotes from the TRO ruling:

"the Joint Guidance (IPDH/ISBE) is attempting to cloak the local school districts with the authority to mandate masks and require vaccination or testing without compliance with any due process under the IDPH Act. The Court has already ruled masks are a device intended to stop the spread of an infectious/contagious disease, and thus are a type of quarantine, and vaccination and testing are specifically covered under the IDPH Act, and as such any attempt to circumvent the statutory due process rights of the Plaintiffs by the Joint Guidance is void. Under no circumstances can guidance be issued which violates a statute."

"This Court finds that Plaintiffs (children) have a protectable interest to not be subjected to any mandates by the Governor, ISBE or the School Districts which interfere with the due process protections provided to Plaintiffs under the IDPH Act in regard to masks as a type of quarantine as well as vaccination or testing. The Plaintiffs have due process rights in need of protection which must be afforded before they can be excluded from the public school building and disallowed to perform their work duties for failure to wear a mask as a type of quarantine, be vaccinated for COVID, or submit to testing for COVID."

What gives you the legal authority to continue forcing masks on children?

End all school mandates NOW.
Rich Fobes

To the Board:

First, thank you for any part you may have had in dropping the outdoor mask mandates and allowing speaking at lunches, but I ask that the wording on those be clarified. The wording in the emails states: " Individuals should continue to maintain physical distance to the greatest extent possible when outdoors and unmasked, especially during arrival, dismissal, recess and other extracurricular activities." This wording indicates that if physical distance isn't maintained, masks must be worn.

I know many of the comments here tonight will focus on masks as the primary concern for our students. While I agree that it's time to look at when the indoor mask requirement can be removed, I believe we should be looking at dropping other mitigations right now since the positivity rate and other numbers are going in the right direction.

Allow parent volunteers back into the schools for things other than lunch monitors. Art appreciation, class celebrations, and other activities can be led safely by a masked and triple vaccinated parent volunteer.

Allow field trips to return. Children are already riding busses to and from school, and there are locations such as MSI that are large and well ventilated that could accommodate field trips.

Allow in-person assemblies and stop having a presenter in one location and kids sit and passively watch their iPads.

Stop allowing students to sit and watch iPads during lunch. Between lunch, indoor recess, school work, and homework all being done on iPads, the students are spending too much time on their digital devices.

Finally, I believe it's time to update the photos on your website and in your slide-shows to show the current status of our students. Most of the time the photos are of mask-less children sitting together in groups playing and interacting. That is not the reality of our district anymore and it paints a false narrative to anyone looking in.

Thank you,

Beth Siegel

I am writing to respectfully ask the Board to consider going mask-optional beginning after the mask mandates are lifted on February 28. Given that:

- 1- 82% of Illinois school districts are now mask optional
- 2- The 7 day rolling positivity rate is 1.14%
- 3- School age children are at an extraordinarily low risk of severe illness
- 4- Oak Park has a well above average vaccination rate in both children and adults

It makes very little sense to continue to mandate that our children mask in schools when the rest of the population will be able to choose whether or not to mask. Additionally, I'm asking for parents who show proof of vaccination to be allowed back into schools as room parents and volunteers. Let's bring joy back into our public school system!

Thanks as always for your consideration and for all of your work during this challenging time.

Lauren Pero

My public comment is simple. As a parent of 2 kids in D97, I believe we are at a point where masks can be optional at schools, safely. 82 % of the schools in our state are now mask optional for schools. If D97 is going to continue to make masks mandatory when the vast majority of the state is optional, I would like a thoughtful explanation based on current science and data for our community and a clear and reasonable path forward that is actually achievable.

Thank You,
Joanna Ardell

My name is Molly Mansfield and I am a parent of two children at Mann school and one child at Goedert Center at Dominican University. As an immunocompromised parent of three children under 10 (one who is 3 and cannot be vaccinated), I am writing to ask that you maintain the requirement of masks in schools despite efforts from others in our community to remove these requirements. As most of you know, 117 new cases of COVID were reported in Oak Park during February 9-16. Five of those cases resulted in death and 26% of those cases were in children ages 5-13. While there has also been a decrease of cases over the last 30 days, the ICU hospital bed availability for Oak Park residents is at a warning level (under 20% availability).

Roughly 24% of Oak Park residents are under the age of 18, and while many of them may be vaccinated, they still have the risk of becoming infected and carrying COVID home and within in our community, potentially negatively affecting vulnerable populations. My children love attending school and not once since they have been able to be back at school have they complained about wearing a mask. They are happy and healthy and understand the importance of protecting their peers, teachers, administrators, family, and the community at large.

I have been saddened many times over with the response from parents in Oak Park concerning our kids' wellbeing during this global pandemic. Many parents have relied on rumor, hearsay, or false information in order to persuade others that our children are somehow in danger by following masking and other COVID mitigations in order to give their children the experience they think they deserve. I too want the best for my children, but I also want what is best for my community. Not requiring masks at schools could mean that the most vulnerable members of our community will be put at risk for COVID. Any family with a child with immune deficiencies or other risks will have to choose between risking their kids' health so they are able to attend school or keeping the child home to keep them healthy.

As an immunocompromised individual myself, I fear that my children will learn that care for our greater community does not outweigh our own personal selfishness. My children understand that if their mom gets sick there is a greater risk that I will go to the hospital or worse. They also understand that there are many others within our community that share the same risk I do. I ask that the mask requirement remains at all D97 schools until the end of the school year. I would much rather see my children finish out the school year healthy and in school every day, rather than a mass outbreak of COVID that could potentially bring numbers up and set the community back in terms of mitigation procedures. Yes, we could remove the mask mandate and see no negative impact, but why take the risk when we are seeing numbers fall and know that masks inside can help stop the spread of COVID?

Thank you for reading my comments.
Molly Mansfield

To the District 97 Board and Interim Superintendents:

I am a resident of Oak Park with two young children, one of whom is in kindergarten. First, I want to express that I know that the District carries a heavy load, and that charting a course earlier in the pandemic was made difficult by many unknowns and by rapidly developing science.

Proponents of continuing aggressive Covid mitigations like to say that Oak Park is not a bubble. I ask: then why must our schools be a bubble when it comes to rolling back mitigations?

More than 700 school districts in Illinois are making masking optional. Further, for months, all around us, restaurants and sporting events have been filled with maskless children and adults. Children and staff alike leave school and socialize, maskless. And the State of Illinois and the city of Chicago are both ending indoor mask mandates as of February 28th. And yet, our students are required to mask for hours on end at school.

All over the state, all over the country, schools and cities are making plans to move forward. Meanwhile, our very highly vaccinated school District has communicated no concrete plan for moving forward.

- We are more highly vaccinated than surrounding communities and school districts. We know that vaccines prevent serious illness. We also know that children under age 5 are exceedingly low risk. We need to move forward in accepting that our students and staff are safe.
- Further, Omicron has proven less severe than prior iterations of Covid. Case numbers now seem to bear almost no relationship to serious illness. We need to move forward in looking to severe illness, rather than positivity and case numbers, as the bellwether of community risk.
- We have long known that ventilation is a key in long term prevention of Covid, not to mention other infectious diseases. We should move forward to develop a plan to make capital improvements to our school ventilation systems.

Instead of moving forward, however, our schools are focused on "quiet talking" at lunch, masking children 40 hours a week or more, and keeping parents out of the buildings.

These mitigations actually accomplish very little, if anything at all - particularly in the face of our very highly vaccinated students, staff, and community. Worse, these mitigations require children to carry the burden of Covid. They carry that burden in lost learning, in anxiety, in lost socialization, in fear, in disruption to their lives and education. But the burden of Covid should be the burden of adults, not the burden of children. And with effective vaccines, that burden can no longer be justified.

In the spring of 2021, in the wake of an impossible year of remote learning for so many children, I reached out to the Board to inquire about Covid-relating planning for fall of 2021 so that my family could plan for our own children. Every time I inquired; I received the same answer: no planning is underway. This is the third year of Covid. At this point, a response that "we are not planning" is simply not adequate.

Around us, other communities are either already moving forward or making plans to do so as soon as possible. In fact, this is taking place all over the state and all over the country. It is time for District 97 to do the same.

Thank you,
Stephanie Harris

To the District 97 Board:

As a D97 parent and a parent of a child too young to be vaccinated, I'd like to thank you for all of your hard work in ensuring our schools remain as safe as possible for all students, teachers, staff, and families during the course of the pandemic.

Moving forward, I urge you to continue to support a science-based, layered protection approach. As the board considers temporarily or permanently lifting certain mitigations, I ask that we consider the impact on the most at-risk students, staff, and family members. We are fortunate to have a skilled Health Department in Oak Park who has done so much to keep students and families as safe and healthy as possible. I ask that we continue to collaborate with the Oak Park Health Department to make the best evidence-based decisions. While I understand as well as anyone the desire to feel like things are "back to normal," I also know this is a community that takes care of each other in tough times. Let's continue to keep our most at-risk students, parents, and community members at the forefront of our minds in all decision making.

Anne McNamee-Keels
Whittier Elementary parent

I am writing to urge an end to all COVID mitigation protocols in schools, period.

The director of our health department has already revealed her desire to reinstate mandates once they are dropped, and has stated her fear of people "going bananas". Never mind that the authority behind the mandates was never legally granted by any legislative body, and that the quasi-legal mandates have already expired.

Points of view have evolved on masking, testing, quarantining, zoned recesses, "low voices" and screen time at lunch. In the two years of COVID many of us have changed our minds about what is best for our

children's health and our own. We have done our research and uncovered what was actively suppressed by the media, the government and the rule-making agencies that act as though they are elected officials.

The 'north star' of guidance by the state is loosening restrictions on everyone but our school children. They have no voice and no choice. They are suffering on many levels.

No one is telling anyone that they cannot mask. It remains an option, no matter what happens here.

Please acknowledge the point of view that the level of threat posed by unmasking our children is negligible-to-none.

Blessings,

Karen Thomas

Greetings, my name is Emily Culbertson and I am a parent of children at Mann school. I want to thank the Board, D97 leadership and staff, and our public health director for their leadership in COVID mitigations, and I want to encourage you all to continue to balance our desires for fewer mitigations with the current case counts. We all want to be free of masks but our case counts are not quite there yet. These roles are thankless and I am grateful for your efforts.

Emily G. Culbertson

Sending in my middle schooler's words:

"Whenever I have been at school, I have noticed that some people never really wore their masks properly, and sometimes they just didn't wear them at all. I don't understand why. My mom says that apparently, they feel uncomfortable wearing masks. I forget I'm even have my mask on while I'm at school. [With a KN-95, a Badger Mask Fit frame, (<https://making.engr.wisc.edu/mask-fitter/>), and a cloth mask over both with a disposable filter.]-KTO] I'd be happy to teach them how to adjust them! And if they still feel uncomfortable then, they should get different masks, and I'm sure my mom and others can help with that.

"I don't want to go to school while it's only optional to wear masks. As it is, I wish there was a remote option because of how many people aren't wearing masks or improperly wearing them when it's mandated. Masks on wrists don't protect me or anyone else!

"Honestly, it's like we're all casting a spell together to keep a monster away, and some people are casting it wrong, and some people just aren't casting it at all."

Kat Tanaka Okopnik

As a parent of a D97 student, I urge the Board not to lift COVID restrictions prematurely. While Oak Park is a highly vaccinated community, not all of our D97 students have had the opportunity to be vaccinated (and those too young to be vaccinated are also the ones least likely to be able to mask correctly and consistently). Likewise, while children generally at lower risk of death or hospitalization from COVID than adults, D97 students are individuals, and their actual risk profiles (and those of the adults who keep D97 schools running on a daily basis, and those of the families those children go home to) may vary substantially. There is no data to support the idea that mitigations--as opposed to the stress associated with living through a global pandemic--are harming our children. There is ample reason to

believe that dropping mitigations prematurely will require our most vulnerable students, staff, and families to face additional physical risk in order to access a public education.

Ashley Goulden-Kiefer

4. SPECIAL REPORTS

SPECIAL
REPORTS

4.1 Discussion with Dr. Orson Morrison

Both Dr. Carrie Kamm and Dr. Orson Morrison presented to the Board and community, information on “**Understanding and Supporting Students Mental Health Needs Admist Covid Mitigations**”. The presentation began with context around students’ mental health.

- Children’s Mental Health in Pre-Pandemic Times
- Children’s Mental Health in Pandemic Times
 - o Loss/Grief
 - o Social isolation
 - o Limited extra-curricular opportunities
 - o Challenges with remote learning
 - o Familial and caregiver stress
 - o Overlay of other social issues (racial injustice, climate change)
- Vulnerabilities for greater mental health impact
 - o Previous mental health, cognitive, or developmental issues
 - o Cultural factors (disproportionate impact on Black, Indigenous, Students of Color and those from lower income homes)
 - o Underlying medical conditions (e.g., immunocompromised)

Impact of COVID safety mitigations on student’s mental health

- Remote learning
- Social Distancing
- Vaccines
- Masking
- Air Filtration
- Hand hygiene/Sanitization
- Temperature checks
- Routine testing

Dr. Morrison has seen some impact on students, but in comparison, for those that are more introverted, he has also seen kids do a bit better during these times. As the remote learning period continued, throughout this pandemic there was an increase in how students were able to cope with extended isolation.

Related to Masking, Dr. Morrison has not seen a direct correlation between child mental health and wearing masks, however he does believe that there should be some strategies and plans in place to help children and adults cope with any upcoming changes to mitigations. Masking or Mask Optional, as an example. Children should be able to work through feelings, and reasons why changes are or will happen. He encourages use of strategies that allow for discussions and lessons on how to cope with change in school.

4.2 School Update

Celebrations

On Tuesday, February 22, ISBE announced that Ashly Kannan, humanities teacher at Julian Middle School is a Regional Teacher of the Year for Cook County. He is also a finalist for the State Teacher of the Year. Congratulation Mr. Kannan!

Those Who Excel Winners 2022

Awards of Excellence

- John Hodge, Irving Principal (Administrator)
- Lee-Ann Roskopf, Lincoln AA (Educational Service Personnel)
- Melissa DeJesus-Vasquez, Irving Parent (Community Volunteer)

Awards of Meritorious Service

- Natalie Campbell and Nicole Grant, Whittier Co-Teachers (Team)
- Nicole Pines and Elyse Smith, Mann Co-Teachers (Team)

COVID-19 Updates

On February 17, 2022 the Appellate Court in Springfield dismissed an appeal from Governor Pritzker against the temporary restraining order (TRO) that temporarily prohibited him from enforcing executive orders and emergency rules for certain COVID-19 safety mitigations in schools. The court's decision was based on a ruling earlier in the week from the Illinois Joint Commission on Administrative Rules (JCAR), which declined to extend the emergency rules from the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH).

However, the court has also stated in its ruling that districts are not restrained from acting independently from the executive orders or IDPH in creating provisions addressing COVID-19.

Prior to this ruling, the administration had been in the process of reviewing the district's current safety plans and discussing the criteria that will determine when mitigations may be eased or removed. On February 18, 2022 District 97 announced the following changes related to:

- Exclusion of asymptomatic, unvaccinated close contacts
 - Outdoor masking
 - Clarification and Formalization across the District
 - o Lunch – Limit conversation
1. Effectively Immediately, we will no longer be excluding asymptomatic unvaccinated students or staff who are identified as close contacts or a positive COVID-19 case. Students and staff who are symptomatic or test positive will continue to follow our previous exclusion procedures.
 2. Beginning February 22, face masks will be optional outdoors at all D97 schools. This decision was based on decreasing COVID-19 cases in our district and the Oak Park community, and risk of transmission outdoors being extremely low. **Masks continue to be required indoors, except when eating or drinking.**
 3. **It is not an expectation that students are completely silent while they are eating.** However, in order to reduce the risk of aerosol spread, the local health department has advised that students should continue to focus on eating and limit loud talking as much as possible while unmasked. We will continue to utilize videos and/or activities during lunch to assist with this effort.
 4. We are monitoring our metrics to determine if we can bring back hot lunch. Our goal is to implement after we return from Spring break. Our Principals are working on a plan to ensure students are adequately distanced while eating.

Our primary focus continues to be the well-being of our students and staff. Our layered mitigations have proven successful in keeping our buildings and community safe. We are committed to taking a thoughtful, science-based approach as we consider any changes to our protocols moving forward.

The administration in consultation with the local health department has been engaged in proactive planning with staff to determine criteria that will be considered and how mitigations may be eased or removed as conditions improve.

As presented by the Oak Park Department of Public Health, District 97 will consider the following criteria/indicators to determine the level of layered measures that can be eased or removed.

1. Community Transmission Rate
2. Test Positivity Rate
3. ICU Hospitalizations
4. Community Vaccination Rate
5. District 97/School Metrics (Cases and Vaccination Rate)

District 97 COVID-19 Cases

Week of February 14 – Students 5, 597 Positive cases = 0.3%

SHIELD Testing – Total Samples 3, 497 Positive tests = 6 (0.2%) Opt-out rate = 9.5%

District 97 Vaccination Rates

District 97 ~Staff 95%

District 97 Students (Total Enrollment: 5,597)

- All Students 77.6%
- Eligible Students (Ages 5 and Up) 79.3%
 - o Above information does not include students younger than 5 in Early Childhood/PKP
- All schools are over 70%; 5-schools are over 80%

Other factors to Consider

- School outbreaks
- Immunocompromised individuals, including the provision of reasonable accommodations under ADA
- Approval of vaccinations for children under 5
 - o There are currently two schools, Longfellow and Whittier, with students under age 5
- Ongoing consultation with our community partners at District 200 and District 90

District 97 will continue to monitor community metrics and positive cases among students and staff. The administrative teams will review this information weekly to assess trends indications of in-school transmission over 14-days. When increased or decreased mitigations is required related to school COVID-19 data, it will be implemented at a two-week interval, then reassessed based on data.

Indoor Masking

We will continue to review the village and district data with the Board of Education to determine next steps. According to CDC, the recommendation is to “Wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area of substantial or high transmission.” Currently, Oak Park is in the “High” transmission category. Outdoor masking is optional for adults and students, effective February 22, 2022.

Student Performance and Indoor Athletics

Current procedures: Proof of Vaccination and/or negative COVID-19 test results 48 hours prior to activity; guests limited to two-people per/student; indoor masking/outdoor optional masking, and maximized social distancing will continue.

Field Trips/School Events

Organizers must submit a Building Usage Form. Events must adhere to existing mitigations.

Next Steps:

Continue to monitor village and community metrics to determine when we can ease additional mitigations.

Lastly, we had a surge in COVID-19 cases after winter break. We do not want the same results after spring break.

- We will closely monitor metrics after spring break and decide if mitigation measures are appropriate based on our metrics.
- We are asking parents to monitor their children’s symptoms if they plan to travel.

5. ACTION ITEMS

ACTION ITEMS

5.1 APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

Spurlock moved, seconded by Kearney that the Board of Education, of Oak Park Elementary School District 97, approves the consent agenda as presented.

- 5.1.1 Approval of Minutes from February 8, 2022 Board Meeting
- 5.1.2 Bill List
- 5.1.3 Personnel
- 5.1.4 Interim Superintendant Resignation
- 5.1.5 Approval of Music Department Field Trip
- 5.1.6 Approval of FY22 Tenure Teacher Evaluation Memorandum of Understanding

Ayes: Kim, Kearney, Ross Dribin, Hurd Johnson, Kinhal, Spurlock, Moore

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion passed.

5.2 DISCUSSION AND ACTION

5.2.1 Resolution Abating Levy Discussion (continued 01/11/22)

As was discussed previously, the Illinois General Assembly passed Public Act 102-0519, which allows taxing bodies to recapture lost revenues paid for certain property tax appeals paid from district tax collections over the past 12 months. For Oak Park District 97, that figure is \$1,080,022.

Without any action taken by the Board, the County will extend these additional taxes to all the taxpayers of the district above the 1.4% tax levy increase that was approved by the Board in December 2021. If the Board elects to abate (eliminate) this additional tax levy, then it will need to approve an abatement resolution and file such resolution with Cook County by April 1, 2022.

While the decision on this matter is nuanced and I could develop a solid argument for either capturing the levy or abating the levy, it is my recommendation that the Board of Education abate (eliminate) this tax levy for the following reasons:

1. This revenue source was never including in our budget or long-term financial projections
2. This abatement of the tax levy will generate a one-time reduction on the District’s revenue stream and will not have a perpetual impact like a traditional abatement.
3. I believe that the Board will make good faith decisions both on the revenue side

and the expenditure side of the budget to ensure fiscal stability without this onetime revenue increase.

Motion:

Hurd Johnson moved, seconded by Ross Dribin that the Board of Education of Oak Park Elementary School District 97 moves to approve the Resolution Abating the Levy Adjustment created by Public Act 102-0519 (2021).

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

5.2.2 Summer 2022 Life Safety Work Bids

At 2:00 PM on Thursday February 10th, 2022, sealed bids were publicly opened at the Oak Park Elementary School District 97 Administration Building for Summer 2022 Life Safety Work. Bid Group 1 included the following trades: Mechanical, Plumbing, Electrical, and General Trades. Bid Group 2 included Roofing.

Trade	Proposed Contractor	Actual Award Value
Pre-Order Equipment	Trane (approved by BOE on 1/11/22)	\$510,000
Mechanical	Helm Mechanical	\$1,306,900
Electrical	ProArc Electric	\$1,770,411
General Trades	Bulley & Andrews	\$1,032,831
Roofing	Knickerbocker	\$1,554,000
Plumbing	FE Moran	\$57,843
Totals		\$6,231,985

FAC reviewed the bid summaries on Tuesday February 15th, 2022 and recommended awarding of bids in accordance with the attached summaries.

Administration will be seeking board approval of the Summer 2022 Life Safety Work on February 22nd, 2022 due to equipment lead times.

Motion:

Spurlock moved, seconded by Kearney that the Board of Education of Oak Park Elementary School District 97 moves to approve the Summer 2022 Life Safety Work in the amount of \$5,721,985 as presented on February 22, 2022.

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

6. ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

ADMINISTRATIVE
ITEMS

6.1 District Data Warehouse and Dashboard

Michael Arensdorff and Anna Colaner Director of Data Analytics and Research presented to the Board an update on the districts Data Warehouse and Dashboard.

Goals for Dashboard:

- Streamlined and efficient process for data collection and tool to provide readily actionable data for staff at the district, building and classroom level to support instructional decisions. We want our staff to own the data.
- Flexible and customizable tool with public facing access
- Secure, web-based tool that has integrations with many assessment platforms

Planning Timeline

September

- Ad-hoc Committee Formed

October-December

- Peer District Conversations
- Analysis
- First Round Product Demonstrations

February

- Director of Data Analytics and Research onboarded
- Review of focus group data and SWOT Analysis
- Continued Conversations with T&L, School Staff
- 2nd Round Product Demonstrations
- Sandbox Exploration
- Vendor Reference Checks Completed
- Board Memo with Recommendation Submitted

March

- Seeking Board Approval
- Contract Execution

The plan is to have a phased timeline for rollout. Throughout this process, we will continue to seek feedback, provide a FAQ page for data and support along with office hours to help with the transition to the data tool. We have also created a success metrics, that will help us gauge where we are, and how are we meeting the goals we set.

Data from previous tools, such as Hanover Research and the Equity scorecard will be imported into the new district tool for ongoing analysis. As this department grows, we will be looking at reaching out to Universities for interns to help with data specific projects that come up aligned with their field of study.

9. BOARD ASSIGNMENTS

BOARD
ASSIGNMENTS

Standing Committee Reports: No Updates

Intergovernmental Report Follow-ups:

The Collaboration for Early Childhood has a board meeting tomorrow night, 2/23/22 beginning at 7pm, information is posted on the district website.

OPEF welcomed their new director, Latoya Baker. Base Camp is now open and fills up fast. The annual fundraiser is coming up information will be shared soon.

10. CONCLUDING ITEMS

10.1 BOARD REMARKS

Follow-up question to School Update, looking at a calendar on 2/22 we did outdoor masking. Two weeks later, since we don't come back to meet until 3/15 if we need a standard do you have to come back to the Board to discuss. Do we have an opportunity for 2- two week peelbacks?

Dr. Wernet, mitigations we are focusing on is Masking, Social Distancing and Hot Lunch. We will monitor every two weeks and if there is a problem we can pinpoint where the issues are, to give you a timeline is hard. With these main mitigations, if we see a downward trend and based on CDC guidelines, we will come back to change/remove mitigations.

Weekly updates, to include metrics to show where we are and why we are moving in a certain direction.

Follow-up communication will be put out to families and staff in weekly.

AGENDA MAINTENANCE

The draft agenda for the March 15, 2022 meeting was reviewed.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Spurlock moved, seconded by Moore that the meeting be adjourned. There being no further business to conduct, President Kim declared the meeting adjourned at 9:39 p.m.

Board President

Board Secretary