

**Official Minutes of the  
Oak Park Board of Education District 97  
260 Madison Street, Oak Park, Cook County, Illinois  
October 13, 2020 Meeting**

This meeting was held virtually using Zoom during the time of the Coronavirus pandemic. Everyone participated via electronic means.

Vice President Kim called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Broy, Kim, Spurlock, Liebl, Kearney, and Moore, Breymaier  
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, and Consultant Rob Grossi.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Breymaier moved, seconded by Broy that the Board move into executive session for the purpose of Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees or Legal Counsel for the District 5 ILCS 120/2(C)(1) at 6:02 p.m.

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

OPEN SESSION

**OPEN SESSION**

Vice President Kim motioned that the Board move into Open Session at 6:35 p.m. The motion was seconded by Moore. All members of the Board were in agreement. The Board reconvened in Open Session at 7:00 p.m.

RECOGNITION OF NATIONAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR MONTH

**RECOGNITION OF NATIONAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR MONTH**

Broy moved, seconded by Kearney that the Board of Education of Oak Park District 97, adopt the resolution recognizing October as National School Administrator month.

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

**NATIONAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR MONTH**

**OCTOBER, 2020**

**WHEREAS**, school administrators play an important role in the education and growth of children in elementary, middle, and secondary schools throughout the Village of Oak Park; and,

**WHEREAS**, school administrators are responsible for promoting education and working with parents and teachers to ensure that each child receives services that meet their needs to excel in the classroom; and,

**WHEREAS**, it is the primary responsibility of the Oak Park Elementary School District 97 to preserve and improve resources for schools so that all students have the opportunity to receive a quality education and foundation for a successful future; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Education, which represents Oak Park Elementary School District 97, believes that learning is a lifelong process and that the education of our children is the highest priority; and,

**WHEREAS**, for that reason, the Board of Education is dedicated to developing, supporting, and advocating for innovative school leaders; and,

**WHEREAS**, educational leaders face many challenges in educating our young people and it is through their perseverance and passion that Oak Park Elementary School District 97 is able to continue to produce quality, career ready students; and,

**WHEREAS**, we must continue to encourage, support, and recognize those who have a positive impact on District 97 students and the educational system in the Village of Oak Park.

**THEREFORE**, the Board of Education of Oak Park Elementary School District 97 proclaim the month of October, as SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR MONTH to recognize school leaders for all they do to help our children learn and succeed.

A video was shared celebrating the dedication of the District 97 school administrators.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

The board members took turns reading the public comments that were emailed to the board prior to the start of the board meeting. They read as many as they could in the 30 minutes allotted for public comment and finished reading the rest at the end of the meeting.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**  
(Continued at the end of  
the meeting)

### **Oak Park Teachers' Association**

This is a statement made on behalf of the members of the Oak Park Teachers' Association. First and foremost, we need for the members of the Board and members of the community to recognize:

- We collectively want to be with our students in a SAFE environment.
- We are RIGHT NOW supporting our students in remote learning and providing a robust education that is different from the spring of 2020.
- We are taking COVID-19 very seriously.
- We want very much to work WITH the community, the Board, and the Administration.

Keeping this in mind, we must also ask that the Board and the community understand that while the Administration asserts that “[t]his document is the result of months of planning, research and collaboration by more than 100 District 97 staff members,” many educators have reported that their names are listed as part of the planning committees and task forces without ever having been invited to the most recent meetings.

The vast majority of educators learned about this hybrid plan when it was shared with district staff on Friday, October 9 at 10:05 am, only hours before it was shared with the community. Prior to the plan being announced to the community, the possible hybrid models were shared with members of our leadership and a variety of educator groups under the caveat of strict confidentiality. These leaders in our membership were asked for feedback, but the feedback given, which was in direct contrast to this “final” hybrid plan, was disregarded.

OPTA leadership asked to begin bargaining the hybrid plan for in-person learning while the remote learning plan was being developed to avoid any confusion or angst. This request was put off by the Administration on more than one occasion.

The Administration also states that “All of our decisions will continue to be guided by our three priorities: the health and safety of our students and staff; providing consistent, high-quality learning experiences; and our commitment to equity.” However, much of this hybrid plan is contradictory to this statement and the lack of details makes it difficult for both our families and members of the Association to make educated decisions, for example childcare options, async vs sync time if there are overlapping schedules, and A/B rotating days to name a few.

This plan is not in the best interest of the mental health and social emotional wellbeing of our staff and students for a myriad of reasons including:

- The mental health and anxiety of our students and staff will be uprooted and skyrocketed during the proposed plan. Asking students and teachers to switch class communities, rooms, teams, and even schools is cruel this far into the school year. Educators spent weeks planning remote learning and helping to foster and build relationships with their classes. Students are finally getting into the routine of remote learning. Upending everyone and destroying this work is an insult to the families of this community.
- The beginning of this school year relied heavily on testing and benchmark assessment. All of the work that educators have put into this, for example setting up common assessments, would be dismantled and stressful for both staff and students who are now in other classes with different personalities and teaching styles.
- November 30 is an arbitrary date that was already changed once this year to accommodate the new calendar and Trimesters. This date is also immediately following a holiday in which many families will travel and spend time with large groups of people. It is the beginning of cold and flu season. Many of us are expecting to see the number of COVID-19 cases to spike. In addition, we will only be 17 days away from our almost three week Winter Break. After spending two weeks rebuilding the community and routines, we will leave school for an extended break and have to repeat all of this a third time in January when we return.

Furthermore, this plan does not support consistent, high quality learning experiences. A few examples are:

- This proposed schedule is confusing for staff, students and community members. For example, AABBA, AABBB, using the alternating Fridays may keep students and families from understanding where to be and when. We think for childcare purposes, a more consistent weekly schedule would be better. This plan gives kids 5 days of no instruction, not to mention the confusion of it not being the same week to week.
- To date, teachers and students in the middle schools have only seen one another for a total of 14 days since the beginning of September, and many are just now starting to feel comfortable with remote learning and the routines associated with it. Making such a drastic change right now is unreasonable.

- Educators and students have been establishing trust and rapport since Day 1, and this hybrid plan will disrupt that consistency at its base. As stated previously, we will spend two weeks rebuilding the community and routines, we will leave school for a break, and have to repeat all of this a third time in January. This is a MAJOR loss in instructional time for all.
- Currently, staff is able to meet with students in breakout rooms individually, or with small groups. This work will become increasingly challenging with maintaining six feet of social distance when we are back in person.

Finally, this plan is not equitable.

- Students with IEPs, 504s, and significant needs could be switched to different teachers, case managers, classes, or even schools. Resource Teachers would also be affected. Related Service Providers who have established small groups for social-emotional education will be uprooted. How can we believe this in the best interest of our most vulnerable students?
- Childcare for families has to be completely reworked. How do we support this effort, particularly for our less fortunate and struggling families?
- The hybrid model proposed provides options for families that are inherently different--parents' ability to navigate this information or their comfortability with hypothetical environments will impact student experiences differently.
- Under the presented hybrid schedule, over the course of 10 days elementary students selecting the hybrid model would receive 5 hours of core subject instruction, where their remote counterparts would get 10.

As professionals, we recognize that there is no “one size fits all” scenario that will help the entire community, and that no solution is without risk. However, we are disappointed to have little active involvement in the planning of this hybrid model and the lack of our perspective that is evident throughout the document.

The OPTA is eager to meet with the Board of Education and the Administration to create a hybrid in-person learning plan that addresses the matters that we have raised this evening. We want to do our best to ensure that any plan meets the needs of everyone and is rooted in the district's three priorities: the health and safety of our students and staff; providing consistent, high-quality learning experiences; and our commitment to equity.

### **Colleen DeJarnatt**

1. Can you please provide actual survey results that indicate what percentage of parents think this current hybrid plan will actually improve their current situation, and what percentage of parents think the current plan will destabilize or negatively impact their current situation? If you don't have these statistics — when do you plan to acquire them, as they seem essential to making an educated decision for the community? And if the former percentage is smaller than the latter, how can you justify the upheaval that will result from this plan?

### **Rich Delaney**

Please find below the copy of a Facebook post that your webmaster took down in under 4 minutes.

Good morning. As an Oak Park parent I am outraged that District 97 would choose to implement the 1619 Project in our middle schools. Politics - especially such blatantly divisive politics - have no place in the classroom.

For those unfamiliar, the basic premise of the 1619 Project is that American was founded upon evil, and that evil has been infused throughout every aspect of the body politic – in essence, that America is

fundamentally evil. That our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. That our children are, therefore, growing up in a fundamentally evil country.

I do not agree with this radical, revisionist history. District 97 has no more of a right to teach our children politics than it has to teach our children religion.

Parents, please join me in asking that our district reconsider its decision to radicalize our children.

**Kathleen Odell**

I have an eighth grader at Julian, and a 5th grader at Longfellow.

First, I would like to thank the board, administration and teachers of D97 for their hard work and dedication to finding a solution that will work for Oak Park families. I know this is an impossible task during this pandemic and I'm grateful for your efforts.

Second, I would like to express that while remote learning is certainly not ideal, it is preferable to a hybrid option for our family. We will be electing to stay remote. It is really disappointing to know that despite sticking with our current remote situation, both of our children are likely to have to acclimate to new teachers, schedules and cohorts at the start of the new trimester.

Finally, I wonder about the wisdom of RETURNING to school right after the Thanksgiving holiday. My husband and I both work in universities with face-to-face classes being held now. At both of our institutions and many others that I am aware of, we will be transitioning to fully online classes after Thanksgiving due to an anticipated seasonal spike in Covid along with the reality that people's holiday plans are likely to lead to an increase in cases. I am concerned that the disruption of switching to hybrid may be immediately followed by the disruption of switching back to online as cases spike.

I would very strongly prefer D97 to remain fully remote, with current schedules and teachers, until well after the winter holidays. It seems most practical to consider a change in late January / early February. I am well aware that many families are struggling with the current model, but hope that we can keep the health and safety of our teachers and children at the forefront of decision making, and consider delaying the return to school.

**Katy and Desi Alejos**

Over the summer during board meetings as well as town halls, it was repeatedly promised that the district would support teachers with students in our district by prioritizing childcare for them. However, nothing was done. I personally reached out to the program directors at both PDOP and Hephzibah and no effort was made on your part.

Shall we expect the same should the hybrid plan go through?

**Ruby Alejos**

"Hello school board. I love my teacher, Ms. Knox, at Lincoln and I don't want another teacher this year. She is kind and fun." - Ruby Alejos - kindergarten at Lincoln

"Dear school board, My mom and dad explained the school schedule stuff. I don't know what to pick. I don't understand the part about maybe having a different teacher. We had a substitute teacher once in the afternoon. It was ok, but I like Ms. Cortez better! I like her schedule and the 'would you rather' activities every morning. She is so fun. And even though I'm not really with my friends in class, they are always with me and I want to stay with them" - Felix Alejos - 2nd at Lincoln

## **Julian PTO Executive Committee**

This letter has been written on behalf of the Percy Julian Middle School (Julian) PTO Executive Committee.

The Julian PTO has been utterly impressed by the administration and teaching staffs' dedication to D97 students during these times. Like you, we are passionately concerned about our children's educational outcomes, as well as their emotional and mental well-being. However, we strongly feel that while D97's proposed Framework for Reopening Schools Hybrid Learning Model plan for the second trimester may be an effective educational model for elementary students; it is not an acceptable model for our middle school students. We feel it will be detrimental to our middle school student's education and emotional and mental wellbeing and ask that you revise the plan to take the needs of our community's middle school children into consideration.

The Julian PTO Executive Committee has the following concerns regarding the proposed plan:

1. The likelihood that most children, regardless of which option their parents/guardians choose, will have to change teachers. This may not be as big an issue for elementary school children who have a single, dedicated teacher. However, our middle schoolers have 8 teachers. It takes considerable time for teachers and students to develop a routine, trust and rapport to ensure successful learning, regardless if that learning is in-person or remote. Your plan will dissolve these hard-earned bonds and thrust kids back to the first day of school, again - *8 times over*. All-new teachers and classmate cohorts also means that our children will lose many more valuable weeks while re-establishing these bonds and adjusting to new learning styles.
2. The possibility that children have to switch schools. We encourage school spirit for a reason; to build a sense of pride and community. It's not a minor issue to switch schools.
3. Forcing our children into more upheaval in a time when families are beyond stressed with the pandemic, social unrest, economic unrest and day-to-day uncertainty is not acceptable.
4. For the middle school student, the in-person learning option provides minimal interaction with live teachers or their fellow students and combines the worst of in-person and remote learning. We don't understand how you can ask our middle school children to take the health risk of returning to the classroom, when the plan calls for most of their learning to take place in the classroom via Zoom with teachers *not in their classroom*. This means that children in the middle schools will experience:
  - a. The stress of worrying about COVID exposure
  - b. The downsides of Zoom learning
  - c. Trying to navigate talking on Zoom with a mask (and the flip side of teachers trying to understand them)
  - d. The stress of not being able to physically interact with other students or teachers
  - e. A negative environment where many children are constantly being scolded and reprimanded to stay apart from peers, follow COVID rules, not be free to move around or drink water and losing any of the comforts they've developed to cope with this stress such as fidget toys, being able to walk around, etc.
5. This plan puts teachers and staff in harm's way.

The Julian PTO Executive Committee believes this Framework for Reopening Schools Hybrid Learning Model for the second trimester is focused on the elementary school teaching model and does not take into account the very different educational model implemented at the middle schools. This is unacceptable. The Julian PTO Executive Committee wants a plan that meets the needs of the 1,000 middle school children at Julian Middle School. We fully understand that some populations at the middle school need to be at school/in-person, such as children with IEPs and 504s, children who are homeless, who have unstable home lives, etc. We fully support a plan to bring these children back to school but to mandate a complete shift in the educational structure for all students at this time will cause many middle schoolers emotional stress and discontinuity in their education.

These opinions are from the Julian PTO Executive Committee and represent a small demographic of the school's population. We are currently developing a survey which will be sent to our parents and guardians asking their thoughts regarding the proposed Framework for Reopening Schools Hybrid Learning Model and will provide the results of that survey to you before the October 19th D97 Town Hall.

**Sara Yount**

I am writing to request that you reconsider the proposed hybrid learning plan for the middle school students. I do not see any upside to this plan for our middle school students or teachers. I am really concerned that this proposed plan, whether we choose remote or partially in-class learning, will upend much of the progress and connection my 7th grade son, his classmates, and teachers have worked to establish this fall. The idea that teachers and students may all be facing new cohorts is so disappointing, not to mention possibly starting over on entirely new teams and/or having teachers and classmates from another school. Being assigned new teachers means our kids are going to lose an additional 2-3 weeks of learning time to establish community and connection all over again, times 8 teachers! Truly, this goes deeper than losing out on education: the social-emotional havoc this plan will cause is tremendous. Children throughout our district have endured so much chaos in 2020 with COVID and all the political/social justice upheavals. Now, to disrupt the connections that they have established with their current teachers and classmates is going to be devastating. D97 claims to prioritize emotional/mental health - this plan does the opposite of that!

How can this in-person model result in a positive experience for our middle schoolers and their teachers? We are asking middle school kids to come to school for 3 hours to attend several of their classes over zoom with teachers who are physically in other rooms. This means they experience all the downsides of remote learning with all the downsides of potential in-person learning including the possibility of COVID exposure, removal of all emotional supports they currently receive (such as fidget toys, chewing gum, getting a drink of water, or movement breaks), and strict rules to enforce physical separation. What possible educational or social/emotional upsides will come from this?

I also question the timing of implementing this plan on the heels of Thanksgiving break and a few short weeks before winter break. We know that there will be many families hoping to see and planning to see extended family members over the course of these holidays. I understand that Trimester 2 begins on November 30th, but wouldn't it be more prudent to launch the hybrid learning plan in mid-January?

I am so disappointed that this is the plan proposed for our middle school students. I will not sign my child up for in-class learning - this plan doesn't even approach being close to worth the risk to students, teachers and families.

**Michele Gurgas and Douglas Chien**

We have one child in 8th grade at Julian Middle School. Her experience with the remote learning model implemented during the first trimester has been very positive. She is happy, doing well in school, and likes her teachers.

The proposed Framework for Reopening Schools Hybrid Learning Model plan seems targeted for elementary school students who have one primary teacher for the entire day. It will not be effective for middle school students who have eight teachers within a given day. D97 needs to develop two separate models: one for elementary students and one for middle school students.

The over 2000 middle school students deserve a hybrid plan teaching model which is more than sitting in a classroom watching zoom classes. We are not sure what that model should be or if it is even possible, but I would rather the district focus on continuing to bring middle school students into the classroom who

need additional assistance than to completely blowing up over 2000 students' schedules and creating chaos. We fully support bringing middle school students back to the classroom who are willing and able but to force all students specifically those students who wish to continue remote learning to completely new schedules with new teachers is not healthy nor productive for our children.

Please allow students the choice to continue remote learning with their current schedules.

### **Laura Lалlos**

As the parent of a Julian middle schooler, I am concerned about the stage 3 hybrid learning model plan for the second trimester. My child has already developed bonds with teachers under difficult circumstances. We are grateful for their care and commitment--and we are distressed at the possibility of starting over again and the setbacks that might ensue.

The plan would upend students' established relationships without significant benefits to offset that sacrifice. Some parents are understandably eager for their middle-school children to be back in the school building--either because their children would benefit from in-person instruction and/or because they need more support and supervision than parents can provide at home because of work or other circumstances. Either way, the plan doesn't do much to help. It offers minimal in-person instruction, and little time at the school building for support and supervision.

Here is a proposal to better assist families whose students need more support to succeed at remote learning: The district could replicate the Park District and Hephzibah programs for middle-school families that need it (while continuing to provide more in-depth services to students with IEPs). That would give students all-day support, every day, while leaving current schedules and class assignments intact and preserving teacher and team bonds.

This proposal might not answer the need for meaningful in-person instruction. But neither does the district plan, which suggests that there is no safe way to accomplish that at the middle-school level with heterogeneous cohorts. This proposal would help a lot of families, however, and harm no one.

### **David Kralik**

As the parent of two Julian middle schoolers, after reviewing the District 97 Framework for Return to School, I am unclear how the hybrid model provides any improvement over the current remote learning plan. The hybrid model offers the opportunity to sit in a classroom for three and half hours twice a week and participate in zoom classes masked, while the teacher is also masked, and likely in another room, as the students around you may be zoom-learning from other teachers. This adds the risk of exposure to the virus with very few of the benefits of being physically present at school. The learning experience will definitely be degraded with masked zooms in a class full of other zoom students as compared to unmasked zoom in your own space at home for remote learning. Only being at school for 3.5 hours two times per week offers little to no benefit for parents who are trying to get back to work. Being in one class with about a dozen other students who will be glued to their Chromebooks for 3.5 hours offers little value for socialization, and shuffling schedules and changing teachers removes any sense of community that has already formed within classes. While I recognize the challenges inherent in dealing with COVID-19, and I appreciate everyone's desire to return to some semblance of normalcy, this plan seems to be discernibly worse than the remote learning environment, and I challenge the D97 administration to head back to the drawing board to come up with a plan that is a reasonable alternative. I cannot see how signing our kids up for the hybrid option offers any improvement over the current remote model.

### **Carrie Kovach**

I have submitted these questions for the town hall next week but I hope that you'll consider raising them during the board meeting this week since they are time sensitive.



Why is there not a **third option to remain with the current teacher** whether he/she is remote or hybrid? Leaving that out puts parents in an impossible situation where maintaining teacher continuity is the highest priority for their kids' mental and emotional well-being.

Please consider moving the selection date to **after conferences** so that we have a chance to speak with our child's teacher to see how things have been going so far this year. It would make an immense difference to have the extra data points in making this decision.

### **Jay Shulman**

I've been a frequent attendee at past board meetings over the last 8 years and ran for the board in 2015.

As a board you represent our entire community: parents, students, and even those without a direct relationship to the school. Your job is to ask questions, evaluate the answers, and vote with conviction.

Specifically the board's responsibility is to "represent the needs and desires of the community in educational matters."

As a nation and as a community, we are facing challenging times which are challenging our ability to teach our children. If there ever was a time to revisit the board's core objectives and responsibilities, it is today.

The community is asking for more collaboration, transparency and innovation. It's time for the board to be the bridge, ask more challenging questions and represent the needs and desires of our community so that all voices and perspectives can be heard.

This board has the strongest voice in advocating for our children's education. Please make sure you are using it.

President Broy noted some confusion over how to submit public comments during the time that the board meetings are being held virtually and asked that more detail be added to the website.

### **SPECIAL REPORT**

#### **D97 RETURN TO SCHOOL PLANNING**

Dr. Kelley noted that materials were sent out to families last week to help them determine if they would want to continue with remote learning or if they would like their children to participate in the hybrid model. She thanked a huge list of staff members who participated in crafting the plan, and acknowledged Jeanne Keane, Jim Hackett, Ebony Lofton, Michael Arensdorff, Gina Herrmann, Carrie Kamm and Felicia Starks Turner for their leadership through the process.

Dr. Kelley explained that this evening's report was intended to help the parents find clarity in the process, to help them select the best choice for their families. She told the board that the plan was developed using the guiding principles of trust, patience and focus on the students and staff. The plan also took into consideration the mitigation plan (face coverings, gatherings less than 50 people, school-wide cleaning needs, the six foot distance requirement, the need for families to self-certify, and frequent handwashing and sanitizing).

She explained the four attendance stages and threshold levels that were used to create the plan and noted that they are supported by the Illinois Public Health and other local entities. She told the board that last week, the COVID infection rate was at 4.8 percent for the region and is trending in the right direction. She explained that the district reviews this metric weekly and will want to review it before making the decision to move into stage three.

Dr. Kelley explained that the team has gathered feedback from parents through;

- Written communications
- School-level surveys
- Parent leadership meetings
- Parent-administrative conference/meetings
- The Special Education Advisory Committee
- Focus groups

Staff feedback was gathered through;

- Covid-19 transition planning team participation members
- Learning models team
- School nurses
- Ed Council
- Union leadership

Community feedback was gathered through;

- Village of Oak Park public health director
- Oak Park social services agencies
- West Cook superintendents
- Black residents Oak Park community
- Affinity roles in the variety of districts

Dr. Kelley explained that while keeping the health and safety of the students and staff at the forefront, the district could move into stage three in the near future. At that time, parents could choose to send their students to in-person learning or continue to have them educated remotely. She explained that currently, the region is in stage two. Since September 15, the district has been providing the hybrid model to a select special area population. She explained that as long as the pandemic numbers stay in the safe range, the district will be able to offer the hybrid learning option for trimester two. She acknowledged that this is not a perfect plan, and noted that there are some tradeoffs and could be some unplanned consequences.

She noted that the district is currently operating under the full-time remote learning plan which offers synchronous and asynchronous learning. The administration will continue to refine the plan to continue intervention and learning experiences. The plan is guided by the health and safety for students and staff to offer high quality learning experiences.

Dr. Kelley explained that in the hybrid model students would be placed in one of two cohorts. There would be no snack or lunch built into the plan, but students could bring their own water bottles. Students would attend school for two mornings during one week, three the following week, and participate remotely for the rest of the time. Over a ten day period, student would attend school a total of 17.5 hours.

She explained that in order to bring everyone back on campus, there are several safety precautions that would need to be taken;

- Stations for hand sanitizing at entry, hallways and classrooms
- Touchless water stations
- Disinfectant wipes will be available in all classrooms for frequent wiping down of desks and other surfaces.

- Cleaning protocols would be in place

Students electing the hybrid learning option would need to do temperature and health screenings. In addition to home self-certifying, there will be temperature checks at key entries at the schools. She explained that even when the district returns to the full-time onsite programming, the full remote option would still be available for all.

Dr. Kelley explained that some of the existing challenges for the hybrid program are;

- Reaching all of our families equitably so they experience this in the same manner
- Care for students when they are home
- Teacher/student matching process
- Current caregivers will not be able to use our facilities
- Transportation may be a concern
- Students and staff with certain medical conditions will need to stay remote
- Some students live with elderly family members or have preexisting conditions. Students who experience symptoms onsite, would the family be able to pick up the student at the school
- Concern that some students who do or do not attend school may feel ostracized
- Concern about the care of the students while at home. The hybrid model would affect the childcare providers
- There might be an adaptive pause necessary should someone have symptoms
- What happens if there is no one at home to pick up a sick child?

Dr. Kelley explained that there may be students and staff not able to participate in the hybrid model. This could be because of their own health or that of a family member. Because of that, it is difficult at this time to know how many families will participate in the program.

Dr. Kelley shared the timeline and invited the board to join her in discussion. Member Kearney thanked the administration for their hard work. He acknowledged that the process of creating a plan for the children and staff to return to school safely is a complicated one. He assured everyone who sent emails to the board suggesting a different path, that the board received an equal amount of emails supporting the plan. He noted that the board received concerns and questions about the remote learning model as well. He told the community that the feedback has been helpful and constructive, and suggested that the district needs more time to plan. He suggested asking the parents if they would choose to keep the same teacher regardless of the learning model. He acknowledged that childcare is another issue, and noted the need to understand what parents needs would be under the hybrid model. He suggested that the district needs a new timeline and process to ensure that all key issues are addressed, and that parents be involved in the process as well as key stakeholders.

The board members discussed the options and agreed that the holidays make the hybrid model more complicated. After noting the concerns listed below, the board recommended that the district continue with the remote learning plan until after the holidays (January 2021).

- Other schools are not going back after Thanksgiving, some schools recently had to go back to remote learning
- Need to listen to the community
- Changing teachers and classrooms is a concern
- The symptoms of COVID are similar to the flu
- How do we meet the needs of a hybrid classroom if the teach has to go home?
- Concern that the hybrid model might unintentionally segregate students

- Need data driven information, including demographics
- Interest in what the parents are thinking
- Consider engaging the partnerships
- Consider surveying parents and staff who are participating in the special area phase in
- Be mindful of what we are already doing that is going well
- Educate the community on what we are already doing

One board member addressed the parents who are struggling with remote learning, assuring them that the district is trying to work to support their child’s needs.

It was suggested that the board and administration should meet as a committee of the whole to talk about this topic in more detail before a town hall is held.

It was noted that changing school boundary lines has never been supported by the board. Concern was expressed about the possible need to change a students’ teacher or school to meet the needs of a hybrid plan; however, it is not mathematically possible to not move some classrooms around.

It was noted that the hybrid model shared is not very different than other districts, suggesting that everyone may decide that it is the best model once some of the uncertainty is resolved.

Next steps

The board agreed to delay the timeline, hence, not needing the survey at this time. They agreed to make a statement explaining that the district will not be going back to in-person learning until after the holidays.

A new parent survey was recommended. One that distinguishes between the demographics of the parents and the students.

The board was unclear if they need to vote on the new timeline. Dr. Kelley reminded them that they approved the original transition plan.

Member Breymaier left the meeting prior to the action items.

**ACTION ITEMS**

**5.1.1 APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR THE SEPTEMBER 22, 2020 BOARD MEETING**

ACTION ITEMS

Spurlock moved, seconded by Moore, that the Board of Education, District 97, approve the minutes from the September 22, 2020 board meeting as presented.

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

**5.2 APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA**

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

5.2.1 Bill List

5.2.2 Personnel

5.2.3 Adoption of Policy

Policy 2:260 (Uniform Grievance Procedure)

Policy 2:265 (Title IX Sexual Harassment Grievance Procedure)  
Policy 5:10 (Equal Employment Opportunity and Minority Recruitment)  
Policy 5:20 (Workplace Harassment Prohibited)  
Policy 5:100 (Staff Development Program)  
Policy 5:220 (Substitute Teachers)  
Policy 7:10 (Equal Educational Opportunities)  
Policy 7:20 (Harassment of Students Prohibited)  
Policy 7:180 (Prevention of and Response to Bullying, Intimidation, and Harassment)  
Policy 7:185 (Teen Dating Violence Prohibited)

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

**5.3.1 APPROVAL OF PUBLIC OFFICIAL BONDS**

Broy moved, seconded by Kearney, that the Board of Education, Oak Park Elementary School District 97, approve the surety and public official bonds as presented.

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

**5.3.2 APPROVAL OF AMENDED ADMINISTRATOR’S CONTRACT**

Moore moved, seconded by Kearney, that the Board of Education of Oak Park District 97 approve the amended multi-year Employment Agreement of Principal John Hodge as presented.

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

It was suggested that the board consider holding Monday, October 19, 2020. The date is currently reserved for a town hall meeting regarding the back to school plan, but could be used for a committee of the whole if the board desires.

**ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS**

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

**TIER 3 IN PERSON LEARNING**

Eboney Lofton shared a proposal that looks at common assessments to provide in person support for the Tier 3 students. She explained that the district’s best efforts are put toward remote learning, but some students need a little onsite support. She suggested two alternatives; Saturday Tier 3 support, and Weekday Tier 3 support. Lofton explained that the decision on which program to offer will depend on the ability to hire teachers, teacher assistants and a nurse during the time frame that is needed. She explained that students would need to find their own way to school for the program, as transportation would not be available.

Lofton explained that she is looking at all 10 schools. She has not identified who would fall into this tier yet, but the general sense is that most families are benefiting from remote instruction.

Board comments included support for the recommendation and interest in knowing if the district has received any parent feedback on the plan. Concern was express about the lack of transportation, as that

could stand in the way of some student's participation in the program. Lofton offered to check with the families about transportation needs.

It was suggested that part of the \$1,400,000 earmarked for childcare be used to cover the cost of this program. Grossi noted that funds have already been allocated in the budget for items related to the pandemic, like this program.

### **BOARD ASSIGNMENTS**

BOARD ASSIGNMENTS

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

#### FINANCE OVERSIGHT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE (FORC)

It was reported that the FORC committee is scheduled to meet on October 21, 2020. Topics to be discussed included a debrief on the budget and discussion on the tax levy. The board president requested that the board be updated on this meeting by including them in the distribution of the minutes or a follow up report as it might be helpful for the board to understand the committee's thoughts about using the money earmarked for COVID childcare needs for other things.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL LIAISON REPORT FOLLOW UP (as needed – IGOV, PTO council, CEC, OPEF, Community Council, Tri-Board on Equity, Policy, and Self-Evaluation)

#### OAK PARK EDUCATION FOUNDATION (OPEF)

It was reported that the OPEF is scheduled to meet on October 21, 2020.

#### COLLABORATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (CEC)

It was reported that the Collaboration IGA Governing board is scheduled to meet on October 21, 2020. The board secretary confirmed that the board will have a quorum.

### **CONCLUDING ITEMS**

CONCLUDING ITEMS

#### BOARD REMARKS

The board discussed the need for a town hall on Monday, October 19 since they are not moving forward with the back to school plan for the second trimester. It was suggested that the board could hold a Committee of the Whole in place of the town hall.

It was noted that Siegfried is scheduled to meet with the town hall facilitator tomorrow and should have a better idea of next steps at that time. The board agreed to wait until after Siegfried's meeting to determine their direction for October 19. President Broy and Vice President Kim will meet to determine next steps.

Concern was expressed about the number of families that are struggling but may not meet the requirements for free and reduced lunch. It was noted that many of these families are not aware that there might be financial assistance for their childcare needs during the remote learning period. The board talked about the need for a sliding scale and all agreed to support that idea. Consultant Rob Grossi offered to come up with various models of support using a sliding scale and share them with the board for consideration. It was noted that the sliding scale system is already in place within the community. It was suggested that the district supplement the sliding scales that are already in existence. Grossi suggested that the district get an idea of what the partners are doing and come up with a plan to supplement them.

#### AGENDA MAINTENANCE

The draft agendas for the October 27, 2020 meeting was not reviewed. The board secretary offered to send the draft agenda to the board members via email.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

### **Lisa Pearson**

Thank you for your service to our endearing yet challenging community. I am a proud resident and a teacher in our community.

No one expected this pandemic, and certainly no one wants it. But it is here, and we have to deal with it. It sounds like the “adequate” amount of vaccinations for the average citizen will not be available until the summer or fall of next year. We should hold course until science and medication has an accurate grasp on our predicament and gives the needed vaccines.

We all know that the epidemic is not the fault of the school community. Some act as if school is merely a warehouse for children while their parents work. Actually I think it is the responsibility of the businesses to let their employees adjust their schedules and give paid time off so this was not so difficult for so many.

Remote learning has been a challenge for most since there is little personal connection. It is difficult to know what students are thinking or learning when I cannot see them at all because their videos are off or they have left the room. Many students and families have adapted, using resources that haven’t been available to them or are fiscally inappropriate. Now there is concern that the connections made between teachers and students will be disbanded if class groupings change during hybrid.

Hybrid learning is not what most people think it is. Students will NOT be able to freely socialize with their friends in class or after. Students will be placed in one location, usually for the class day, where they will be unable to physically interact with their peers. They must keep their masks on all day which makes communication very difficult. I have bought clear masks, hoping that will make it easier, but they fog up quickly.

One of the techniques of a good teacher is to swoop in near a student’s desk to help answer a question, to motivate, or to encourage. Now the teachers will have to sit far from the students and cannot roam. They cannot give personalized instruction like they currently do in Zoom breakout rooms.

I am very concerned that a few people continue to ignore the social distancing guidelines. Allegedly the Covid spread a few months ago between 18 students at OPRF was due to a home party, where masks were not required and even adults attended. If adults cannot make good choice (at least part of the time), why should we expect our teenagers to do so?

My partner has several high-risk factors, which has made us consider separating while I have to be in the school building. He would not be able to care for his elderly parent out of state if there was any suspected transmission.

Thank you for considering that we are all human beings. Each of us has a connection to others in this community. Remote learning is the best way to help keep us all safe until we access to the vaccine.

### **Josh Chrisman**

School districts everywhere are facing unprecedented challenges and difficult decisions in the face of this pandemic. I appreciate the efforts put in by the district and teachers in the face of these challenges.

After reading the D97 Framework for Reopening Schools, I'm concerned that the plan does not achieve the goals of returning students to in person learning. Having middle school students return to school only to Zoom with teachers who are in different rooms is not a good plan.

The process of introducing this plan to families and the community is also disappointing. When the district announced the initial hybrid plan this summer, the plan was short on specifics and was announced without the chance to solicit input and refine the plan. The district's information session was to be held the night before decisions were due from families. Now, given extra months to come up with a revised hybrid plan, the plan is again short on specifics, there is no chance to refine the plan based on community input, and the town hall is the night before decisions are due from families. This is not a collaborative process.

In a 40 page plan, the most important information about instruction for middle school students is reduced to a single sentence: "Middle School students for most classes will physically be in one classroom while receiving remote instruction from a teacher who is in another classroom due to the current health/safety guidelines that do not allow for the mixing of student groups throughout the school day."

My hope is that the district will improve the hybrid plan based on feedback from the community, and that they will find a way to get middle school students in person instruction from their core subject teachers.

### **Cecila Villalobos**

While remote learning has been an extreme challenge for both my students and I. I do not think going back to school is going to be less challenging at all.

My students and I are starting to get into a great routine where we know each other and can make jokes and learn all at the same time. Going back to school doesn't guarantee I will have all of my students which means I will have to create relationships ALL OVER again which by the way has taken an entire month. I will not be teaching in person, since I'm a special area teacher which means I will have to spend weeks building relationships again which will only set us back even more than we already are.

It is not safe to go back. I live in a Latinx community where we have been told we are a hotspot for months now. I don't own a car which means my only means of traveling are 2 CTA trains. It is not safe for me to go out unless it's once every two weeks to go to the grocery store to get a necessary survival. Going to school every day while teaching remotely still, makes no sense for special area teachers and will only increase the spread of COVID-19.

Teachers and students will have increased anxiety and it will be extremely detrimental to our health. I do not think it's the right time to go back to school. Nothing has gotten better with COVID-19. Nothing.

### **Tammy Himes**

I am writing in regards to the proposed hybrid schedule. I know that there are no good options in the midst of a pandemic, however I believe what has been proposed to be the worst option available.

I have a third grader at Lincoln who has been doing great with remote learning. (I realize that this is not the case with every student.) I credit her success to her teacher who has gone above and beyond to build trust amongst her and the class and amongst the students with each other. They are a lovely group and have been doing remarkably well working together even as they have transitioned to more asynchronous learning as the year has progressed. Even though my daughter has been doing well, she is still increasingly fragile the longer this pandemic continues. She is frustrated more easily, is quick to cry, and is more worried in general. We are all struggling in these uncertain times, and I believe her fragile state is a result of that. I worry that to possibly have to transition to a new teacher and a class with new students will push her over the edge. We are asking too much of our teachers and students to upend all the work and progress that they have put into adjusting to this new normal of remote learning. It is not fair, nor does it make logical sense to now change everything on them one third of the way into the school year.



My second concern is the precarious timing of returning to the classroom right after Thanksgiving break. I realize that this is the start of the second trimester, and this has been the goal but I believe if we return just as people have visited with families and possibly have traveled we will be in an “Adaptive Pause,” by the second week of the second trimester. Using the links D97 provided in the “Framework for Reopening Schools” I looked up our current stats. In order to progress to Stage Three with a hybrid model we need to have less than **70** weekly cases per 100,000 and a positivity rate of less than **5%**. For last week we were at **69.8** cases per 100,000 and a positivity rate of **4.8%**. We are currently on the edge of an “Adaptive Pause,” and this is without being in the midst of flu season and without families getting together for the holidays. I don’t believe that this plan will be sustainable with these metrics.

We all as a community struggled with adjusting to the full remote learning plan this fall. Working parents suddenly had to find places for their children to go during the school day. The district stepped up and worked with the park district and other community organizations to create spaces for kids to go to do their e-learning while their parents worked. The district, again, stepped up to make sure that every student had access to iPads, laptops, and internet in order to complete their e-learning. Teachers had to learn entirely new ways to teach and create safe spaces over the internet so that their students could learn. Everyone adapted and rose to the occasion. This plan is simply not worth the chaos and turmoil that we will be putting our teachers and students through in order to get back into the school building 2 or 3 half days a week. It also does not address the fact that working parents will need to find a place for their children for the five half days and two to three full days that their children will not physically be in school.

The timing, logistics, and emotional toll are not worth this hybrid plan. I am asking that you do not follow through with it.

### **Elyse Smith**

I am a proud product of D97. Not only was I born and raised in Oak Park, but I returned here to teach in the district that made me who I am. I've spent the last 14 years teaching in D97 because I knew it was one of the best districts to be in. I even moved back here to raise my family so my daughters could experience the wonderful district I had grown up in. I have always stood by our district as a teacher and parent defending them and working hard to make them proud. However, I can no longer stay silent during this time because I am very disappointed in the district's hybrid plan.

I understand the need and want for families to send their children in person and I want everyone to do what they think is best for their family, but I think this plan is a terrible one. Believe me, I would love NOTHING more than to be back in the classroom with my students- who I miss more than anything- but this is **not** the time to do it. Why would we return to school during peak flu season and during various holiday seasons when students are going to be around numerous people and possibly traveling? How can we ensure that everyone is being safe and truly quarantining after going to an "at risk" state where they should quarantine for 14 days? How will we know when a kid sneezes or has a runny nose or cough that it isn't COVID? What happens if students or staff members get exposed to COVID right before Thanksgiving or winter break? Will we have to spend the holidays alone, away from our families to ensure we are healthy and won't pass it on to our elderly, immunocompromised, or "unknown underlying health issue" family members? The safety of all students, their families, and the staff of D97 should take priority over everything!

Aside from the health risk of returning, I would much rather stay remote because I want to stay with my current class that I've worked hard to build a rapport with and have gotten to know. It takes time to get to know each other and get used to remote learning, but we did it! We have all finally gotten into our groove. We have formed relationships, are able to meet one-on-one and in small groups with students in breakout rooms, and have been learning! However, many of these things won't be able to happen in person with this hybrid plan.

I get that families want to send their kids back to have some normalcy and for them to socialize, but unfortunately school will not be able to be what it was before. Students won't be able to play with toys together, work in small groups or partnerships, or even sit next to each other. Teachers won't be able to help tie student's shoes or zip coats, help comfort them when they have to separate from their parents at drop off (imagine how hard this will be after MONTHS of being home together), or sit next to them to assist them when they are struggling. In the past when my kindergartners were sad or hurt I was able to comfort them, but now I get sad to think that if this same situation occurred, I wouldn't be able to do that. I'd have to be like a heartless robot 6 feet from them assuring them they are fine. Picture that. Your child crying and needing someone to be there for them... but nobody can be. Instead they cry alone feeling like nobody cares.

I know that there are people on both sides of this that want remote or hybrid, but almost everyone I have heard from are saying they want to stay with their current teachers. This is one of the most important things to both parents and staff, however, this cannot happen if we go hybrid. There is just no way.

I know I'm out of time so I'll end with this, the district had staff members fill out a survey weeks ago on what they wanted to do. I chose remote for various reasons, however, I worry that my voice and opinion will not matter. I know you are giving the choice to families if they want to stay remote or go hybrid, (I already chose remote for my daughter), but maybe you can give that same choice to staff? If families and staff want to go back to hybrid, allow them to. But if teachers and families want to stay remote, allow them to do this also. It won't solve all the problems, but it will at least show that you truly value and care for everyone. I fear that if you don't do this and you force teachers to go back that don't want to or can't, you will face a shortage of teachers and what will you do then?

#### **Adrienne Court**

I am a teacher at Percy Julian Middle School. I first want to express my gratitude to everyone working behind the scenes on the Framework Document shared on Friday. While the document is thorough, I find it important to make my concerns known over the proposed hybrid model at the Middle Schools. The proposed model states:

1. Students will receive instruction from a different teacher and may have their teams changed
2. Middle School students for most classes will physically be in one classroom while receiving remote instruction from a teacher who is in another classroom due to the current health/safety guidelines that do not allow for the mixing of student groups throughout the school day.

As I look at these points, I am extremely concerned for the social emotional well-being of our students and staff. The dismantling of classroom communities which have been built in the remote setting, coupled with the fact that our students will not be able to interact with their peers is unsettling. My nephew, a middle schooler in another district, returned under a hybrid model in which his teachers traveled to him. He came home in tears and begged my sister not to make him go back. He expressed learning in the environment was traumatic, he couldn't work in groups, the teacher couldn't get close enough to offer support when he was struggling, he couldn't socialize with his friends, and he was beyond frustrated. He begged to go back to remote learning and he was receiving live in person instruction. Remote learning wasn't ideal for him either, but he felt it offered him the opportunity to work collaboratively, receive support as needed, and continue to build relationships with classmates. I can't even imagine how this will be compounded for our students under our proposed model.

I am also nervous that our students will not be provided with the same level of rigor or support that they are getting now in the remote setting under a hybrid model. How can we expect our teachers to successfully provide remote instruction to students in another space, while supervising or supporting the

students in front of them? Furthermore, how can we expect our students to actively participate in class when they will be competing vocally with both the teacher and their peers who are possibly receiving instruction from another teacher in perhaps a different content area?

Additionally, being that we are in a pandemic and heading into flu season, we should be assessing the impact quarantining, waiting for covid test results, and Adaptive Pauses will have as it relates to continuity of instruction.

I appreciate that safety is our top priority, and given everything we have learned, I beg that we continue with remote instruction through at least winter break. We should utilize the feedback given from students, families, and staff to make changes to the remote schedule to ensure more needs are being met. We should continue to identify our highest need students and provide supportive in person spaces for those in which remote learning isn't working. Let us use our time over the flu season to develop a more robust hybrid learning model for our Middle Schools that could better support students and staff when flu season is over.

The proposed hybrid model will not make things better for our students or staff. What it will do is water down instruction, increase stress, and ultimately create unnecessary health risks, without any benefits.

**Jamie Winchell, teacher librarian at Julian**  
**Jennifer Nelson, teacher librarian at Brooks**

We are writing to express our great concern for the hybrid model as presented for the middle schools. As teacher librarians, we work with every student in each building and we have been in many zoom classes this school year. We witness firsthand the energy and positivity teachers put into creating warm, welcoming virtual classroom environments. We collaborate with teachers as they create engaging, supportive learning experiences for all learners. We work with teachers to encourage students to turn their cameras on, to unmute themselves and share their thinking, to add a comment to the chat, or to show their understanding through formative checks. Remote learning is challenging but it is functional and consistent.

The hybrid model as presented for the middle schools seems alienating and isolating. Students will have live instruction for only one class. The rest of the time, they will be in a cohort of students who will be zooming other classes simultaneously while the teacher teaches their own classes via zoom. If it's hard to get students to turn on their cameras or unmute now while they are remote, imagine how hard it will be to get them to engage virtually if they are wearing a mask in a classroom of their peers while a teacher teaches another class entirely.

Students' schedules and teams will be reworked, eliminating the rapport and expertise teachers have developed regarding students' needs and strengths. Starting trimester 2 in a hybrid setting will be like starting the school year all over again, with the same amount of work needed to build relationships and develop classroom communities. These changes will be an unnecessary trauma to our students during an already traumatic time. Our work as teacher librarians would likely be on hiatus while teachers devote time to classroom atmosphere. The rhythm we are developing with teacher collaboration would likely be interrupted. Also, Advisory will be eliminated. As Advisors, we would lose the relationships we are building, often 1:1. SOAR will be the only time a teacher will check in on a student's holistic progress.

The payoff of the hybrid model at the middle schools seems negligible, if not negative. Please consider the safest and smartest option: keep us remote.

### **Julie Jenkins**

Like many others in the community, our family has significant reservations about the plan put forth by the district for the hybrid plans for learning. We are concerned that at no point in these last 6 weeks has the district asked us point blank whether or not this situation is working for our family. Without surveying families before asking us to make a binding decision for the next four months, the district is not capable of making a data-driven decision to best serve the needs of the Oak Park community. You are asking families to make a final decision that significantly impacts our child's education, mental health and physical well-being without giving us information to understand the full ramifications of that decision. It is simply not possible to make the decision with so many unknown factors.

We understand that the current remote plan is not workable for many families in the district, but instead of asking those families to self-identify and formulating a plan for those families while maintaining consistency for families that have a workable plan, this new plan throws everyone into chaos in an already uncertain time.

Additionally, we are concerned that the district is planning to start the hybrid plan on Monday, November 30th. We understand that this correlates with the trimester start and end dates, but the D97 community deserves a better explanation as to why we need to stick to this date. For students who will be assigned new teachers (and in some cases, an entirely new school), you're asking them to basically restart their academic year and give them only 3.5 weeks to settle into a completely new routine before the students have 3 weeks off for winter break. Our teachers have worked so hard to build community in this new learning modality and the November 30th start date for this plan is asking them to restart their academic year 3 times in a span of 5 months. The impact on our children is unknown because you have given us no information by which to judge which modality will be the least amount of upheaval for our children. You have also provided no information about what to expect in trimester three. If we are able to go back to school more than 2 days per week, will children be reassigned again in March? Will they return to their current teacher?

Based on this, we are pleading with the district to make two concessions:

1. Allow families to select from one of three options based on their family's priorities:
  - A) Continue full remote learning
  - B) Opt into hybrid learning
  - C) Stay with their current teacher regardless of the type of learning
  
2. Push back the start of the hybrid learning plan to Monday, January 11th and give families until December 1 to decide their plans when we have a better idea of what covid numbers will look like in the fall and early winter and if there will be any changes to covid response at a national level.

### **Alison Welch**

We know many people have worked hard to develop plans for remote learning and possible returning to school. This letter is not intended to take away from our respect for how hard this is behind the scenes. As a parent of a 3rd grader at a school that is open and an 8th grader at Julian, we are glad there is a plan for elementary school children to finally return to the classroom. We know that especially the youngest elementary school children need in-person instruction to help them not only learn to read but begin the journey of reading to learn. We have seen how our 3rd grade son is transformed by his opportunity to be in-person with peers and learning in the classroom with his teacher at Grace Lutheran.

**Our primary concern with your plan is that, as designed, it is a plan geared toward the structure and process in elementary schools and does not naturally or effectively translate to the middle school experience.** In fact, I would argue, this plan is hugely detrimental and will be extremely disruptive

to all middle school students, even those whose parents want them to return at all costs and with all consequences. We outline some of those details below.

We strongly urge the Board and Administration to do the following:

- A. Reconsider the plans for the middle schools and allow teachers, parents and principals to come together to figure out a less disruptive way to proceed.
  - B. Delay parents having to submit preferences for Trimester 2 until after parent-teacher conferences and until after the middle schools have been able to come together and craft a better solution.
1. **Changing Teachers:** My daughter has eight teachers - EIGHT. Middle school students and parents spent a great amount of time over the last six weeks, beginning with the meet-the-teacher and curriculum nights and extending through every day the students have met with their teachers. The thought of changing teachers already has our 8th grader on edge and worried. Honestly, the thought of this disruption has kept me up at night and kept a pit in my stomach. We have been marching ahead fine with known expectations and now that will essentially be thrown in the air. There will be several weeks of learning lost as teachers and students have to get to know one another again. How will you recreate those opportunities to get to know the teachers once new schedules are out for Trimester 2? Did you consider asking the students for input on how this would feel? Will there be more meet-the-teacher or curriculum nights? How will you even be able to measure the social and emotional impact of this decision both on the morale of teachers and on students?

*You indicate that providing consistent, high-quality learning experiences is one of your goals for the plan. Changing teacher's midstream absolutely works against this goal.*

2. **Teachers Not in the Classroom:** Even considering this reality baffles me. While I love my middle schooler and her peers, I also know the likely path of an unsupervised classroom filled with 13 year olds. Mask infractions. Phone infractions. Talking infractions. Distraction of others. Please explain how learning will occur under these circumstances. How much of this health-risking in-person time will turn into discipline and behavior management?
3. **Complexity and Logistics:** Entry - how will this occur with proper spacing of students, accurate temp checks/hand sanitizer, adults to run this process? (My son attends Grace Lutheran and it takes 8 parent volunteers every day of the week to manage entry of just about 160 children who are dropped off at the curb for a 35 minute rolling time period). Busing - how will this occur safely? Schedule - I don't have the words to describe how convoluted the schedule appears.
4. **Chorus and Other Electives:** How do children already grouped together for chorus get to have class together when they are now split into Hybrid A, Hybrid B, and Remote learners? How does this play out for the other electives like band, orchestra, etc.?
5. **Two Plans:** Why didn't the district just open for K-2 or elementary schools? Was a plan like this considered and, if so, why wasn't it chosen and, if not, why not? What role does the union contract play in this situation - could there have been two agreements negotiated with the two teacher groups?
6. **Timing Relative to COVID:** Oak Park families will no doubt become exposed to extended family members near and far over Thanksgiving and over Winter Break. Yet several weeks of Trimester 2 fall after both breaks, increasing the risk of exposure and spread of covid. (Schools in districts near NY,

for instance, are going remote between Thanksgiving and MLK day to go remote - why are we now opening?) For 3.5 hours per day, 2-3 days per week, with teachers not in the classroom, students not monitored for proper mask wearing, your hybrid model just does not seem worth the risk. Or is that the point?

I have a master's degree in Organization Development. I spent two years in graduate school and many years collectively professionally helping leaders and organizations implement change effectively, including in the government and nonprofit sectors. There is an art and a science to doing this effectively. **One of the key tenets of any successful organizational change is involving a cross-section of stakeholders.** Unless I am mistaken....

- No parents were involved in the creation of the plan or in reviewing prior drafts to provide input and perspective. Parents are now viewed as the enemy or as “difficult” for having reactions to a plan that, honestly, is paltry at best.
- The majority of teachers found out about the plan three hours before parents did; yet they are the ones being asked to implement it.

Why are so many people upset? They have had no voice in a decision that profoundly affects their children for many months to come during a pandemic that threatens their students' and families' health and well-being. It is no surprise to me that people are upset and, yet, the District continues to treat parents as annoyances rather than partners.

I get it....we are not always graceful. As a white woman who is active in anti-racism work, I see the rampant work that needs to be done in our community especially among whites. I get the concerns that everyone isn't thinking about the diverse family systems and backgrounds that come together to create our heterogeneous schools. And, yet, I really don't see how this plan is good for any middle schooler, particularly those living in circumstances with more day-to-day challenges than my own children face.

Back in July the District backpedaled based on Dr. Kelley's feelings that we should be remote. I am not a parent who participates in negative comments about Dr. Kelley, nor am I a parent who participates on Facebook communications related to the District. However, it is my personal and professional opinion that this situation is a result of a systemic failure and one that was allowed to play out by the leaders. A two-track remote-hybrid system should have been put into place before day 1 so parents could opt into one or another. Even if we all started remote those would have allowed families that wanted hybrid to seamlessly shift to that as health and safety allowed without creating disruption for everyone.

Where do we go from here? I am not sure but I really, REALLY hope the District and the Board listen to parents, hear the concerns, and think again about this middle school plan. You are risking ruining something that is going quite well for most students right now. This is a year to put our heads down, not try to fix something that is not broken, support our educators in doing their best, and minimize disruption for our kids.

### **Derrick Brummell**

I am writing in regards to the proposed hybrid plan that was sent out to families on Friday. This plan does not seem to be in the best interest of children, families or teachers. There are many other possible hybrid schedules that would meet the needs of families more appropriately. A half day morning/afternoon hybrid would put children in front of their teachers every day, providing consistency and an opportunity to be in the classroom, interacting face to face with teachers and classmates. Many other school districts are implementing this exact plan, and if funding for more custodians to safely clean in between cohorts is necessary, then those funds should be prioritized.

Oak Park is a desirable place to live for many reasons, including our school district, and we should continue to maintain that reputation by more effectively problem solving in the best interests of our children, families and teachers. This proposed plan does not meet those standards. Most troubling is the lack of transparency in arriving at this plan, without adequate family and teacher input, we were guaranteed a less than desirable outcome.

We can do better, let's not lose an entire school year due to our inability and unwillingness to meet the needs of all our community.

**Mike Kelley**

I welcome board responses to the following questions:

- How was the board involved with the current reopening school plan?
- If the board was involved, what feedback and changes were requested be made by the District 97 administration to the plan prior to sharing it with parents?
- What requests are the board hearing from parents including an option to have students return back to school 5 days a week for live in person teacher instruction in the mornings?
- Is the board aware that parents requested to participate in designing the reopening plans, and the District 97 administrators refused to allow any parents to be involved?
- Dr. Kelley received a number of questions from parents at a recent coffee Zoom meeting that were not addressed and answered. Would the board as the District 97 administration team to share these questions and answers on the District 97 website and with the board?

**Clare McDermott**

I understand that when we begin the hybrid model, students may not have the same teacher they've been with since the beginning of the school year.

My son is a first-grader and last year, in his kindergarten class, had two different teachers due to maternity leave. I really don't want him having 4 different teachers in 2 years. He finally has created a relationship with his current teacher and is thriving. There has been so much change to daily lives already, I fear this additional major change would just be too much. Please consider!

**Jenae Shanley**

For the children who have IEP's/504s and special needs where in-classroom experiences are most beneficial, I need help from our District to understand how this proposed hybrid plan benefits them with their needs? Yes, in-person learning is most beneficial for these learners but how are they supposed to manage the asynch learning? Do you believe this plan is a road to success for them?

**Jenny Austin**

Thank you for volunteering to guide our school district during these unprecedented times. I, like many others, am disappointed by the district's proposed hybrid plan. When public schools in New York City, Naperville, LaGrange, Riverside, Glencoe, just to name a few, and many private schools, are able to provide safe and effective in person learning at least half days five days a week, it is extremely frustrating that the district's plan provides between 6 and 9 hours of weekly in person learning. It is further frustrating that these schools have already started providing in person learning, and yet our district won't do so until maybe November 30.

Study after study show that schools are not super-spreaders. Professor Emily Oster, a professor of economics at Brown University, published the results of a study of more than 200,000 kids in 47 states over the last two weeks of September that showed an infection rate of 1.3 infections per 1,000 students

2.4 infections per 1,000 staff members. As Professor Oster wrote in a related article in The Atlantic, 0 is not realistic.

How the district has mishandled reopening schools has expedited the decline in the quality of our schools, which started long before the pandemic. We have several family friends who have already moved out of the district, many more who are actively planning to do so, and several more who moved their kids to private schools since August.

Our kids deserve to have an option for in person education that matches what our neighboring schools are offering and nothing less. Remote learning is not an equal substitute for in person learning.

### **Allison Nelson**

I am a lifelong Oak Park resident, proud District 97 alum, and I've been a teacher at Longfellow for the past 17 years. I am invested in this community and in our kids. I am writing to express my concern that we are looking to offer a hybrid return to school model to begin on November 30th. While I yearn to be back in the classroom with my students, being onsite in the physical classroom is not going to look the way any of us wants, needs, or imagines it to look at this time. The safety of all students, their families, and the staff of District 97 must take priority. I do not see a benefit of a return to school simply so students can sit in one desk, 6 feet apart from their peers and me, their teacher, for the entire duration of their school day. With remote learning, we are able to accomplish SO much more learning, interaction, support, and collaboration while staying safe.

There are a number of obstacles associated with any sort of hybrid return at this time. Here are a few examples: If we return to school at this time, unfortunately, due to necessary safety protocols, students will not be able to leave their seats. They will not be able to socialize or collaborate since the expectation is that we all remain 6 feet apart. As a teacher, I will not be able to meet with students to conference and check in one-on-one or in small groups the way I have been doing each day on Zoom. Students will not be able to take breaks to move around the room or go outside for recess. Students will not be able to leave their assigned seats to sit in a comfy spot to read or complete work with a friend. We won't be able to gather on the carpet for class meetings and circles. There will be no shared supplies or materials. Students will not be able to eat a snack at all while at school for 3.5 hours, and even drinking out of a water bottle is a risky practice considering the mask would need to come off to take a drink.

It takes weeks to establish classroom routines and build relationships. By the time we figure out, teach, and practice our new classroom routines for the hybrid return model (which will be unlike any routines and expectations we have ever had to enforce or follow,) it will be time for winter break and we will have to start all over again, reteaching the expectations after students return from a 2.5 week break. This will eat up the already limited instructional time the hybrid model will offer.

I also have many concerns about the fact that we are looking to attempt to bring students and staff back to the buildings in the heart of cold, flu, and holiday seasons. It is inevitable that many people will travel and gather in large groups in November and December, so why are we taking on this unnecessary risk that will not only put our students and staff at risk, but also their immediate and extended families? What protocols will be put into place to ensure that students and staff who choose to travel to locations with COVID surges, such as neighboring Wisconsin, self-quarantine for 14 days and not come to school?

While I know remote learning is not perfect for every child all of the time, I think there are a lot of benefits to staying remote. I have been able to meet with every student every day in an individual Zoom breakout room. I check-in on students' social-emotional well-being, conference with them about their academic work, and if they need help with anything, I am able to be there to assist. This will not be possible in the classroom, when we all must maintain a 6 foot distance at all times. The teacher will be



sitting at the front of the room. Each student will be seated, isolated from one another, 6 feet apart, completing work independently and submitting it to teachers on Google Classroom or Seesaw. Students in my class have also grown accustomed to working together in small groups to complete assignments and have discussions with each other via small group breakout rooms. Additionally, students have the opportunity to socialize with friends in "buddy breakout rooms" each day.

I am able to teach every core subject daily and check every student's progress in those subjects each day. With the hybrid return model, it appears students would get half the instruction and content in the core subject areas as those who choose to stay remote. With the remote model, we are able to begin our day promptly at 8 AM, as we don't need to worry about a staggered entry and we have established solid routines and procedures. Students are very familiar with our routines and schedule, and continue to make more and more gains each day in the remote learning environment.

I have spent the past 8 weeks building relationships with my students and their families, and fostering their relationships with each other. And yes, even though we have only been in school for 6 weeks so far, I have spent the past 8 weeks building relationships because this process begins well before school starts. I made contact with all of my family's 2 weeks before school even began to introduce myself and get to know the students and their families and to get the lines of communication and collaboration flowing. The thought of throwing all of this out the window and losing any of my students due to an offer of hybrid learning is devastating to me. I know my kids very well both on a personal level and on an academic level. It would be so unfortunate for our kids to have to start all over again in November with a new teacher, new classmates, new routines, and new expectations, when we aren't even sure how long remaining onsite will be sustainable. We are still in the middle of a pandemic. If the COVID numbers rise, everyone could be pushed back to remote learning again anyway, but teacher and class placements will have already been shuffled. If we are truly showing that we care and value the emotional well-being of our kids, we would not put them through this extreme change at such an uncertain time.

I also have many questions. What will the protocol be for students when they need to use the bathroom? How will we prevent students from different classrooms congregating in the limited bathrooms we have available? How will arrival and dismissal work? It seems it would need to be staggered to avoid a bottleneck at the entry and exit points. How much additional instructional time will be lost to account for this? How will we work to level the playing field moving forward if students who choose the remote model get twice as much core subject instruction as the students who choose the hybrid model? What will happen to the rest of the class if a student, staff member, or someone in their family tests positive for COVID?

If my child was old enough to attend school, I would choose the remote option for him without hesitation. Among other things, children need consistency, and the hybrid model does not offer consistency. I hope we can consider holding off on attempting a hybrid return at this time in order to maintain stability for our kids so that they can continue to grow academically and socially without constant changes and interruptions to established routines and schedules. While remote learning may not be perfect, it allows us to do so much more while keeping the health and safety of all students, staff, and their families at the forefront. With remote learning, students will be able to learn more by having an increased (daily) exposure to the core subject areas, socialize and collaborate with friends and classmates via Zoom small group breakout rooms, meet with, talk to, and get one-on-one differentiated support and instruction from the teacher that he/she has been working with and growing to trust over the past 6 weeks (it will actually be 12 weeks with the current teacher by the time this change is supposed to take effect,) and take more frequent breaks throughout the day since they won't have to stay in one seat for the entire 3.5 hours that they would be present for in-person learning each day.

**Erin Connor**

The school board must consider switching to a daily (4 or 5-day depending on teacher planning time) am/pm hybrid model. The current plan provides only 5 half days over a two-week period and the inconsistent schedule would be difficult for parents, particularly working parents or single parents, to manage. A daily am/pm hybrid model would increase the total amount of instruction time, provide students and families with a consistent schedule and be more equitable as students would receive in-person instruction more frequently.

It is unfair and unacceptable to make parents choose between the current remote plan and the flawed hybrid plan the district announced when there is a better option available, especially if teachers support a daily am/pm hybrid model. Follow Naperville in doing what's best for students and change from our two or three-day half-day hybrid to a daily am/pm hybrid model. Several other suburban Cook County schools are already following this plan, such as LaGrange, Riverside and Glencoe, and we must join them.

**Mara Maas**

I will submit a separate comment for tonight's meeting unrelated to the attached screen shots, but I wanted to make you aware that this letter was sent out from a D97 teacher to his/her students. I do not know which teacher or school, only that it was posted by a district parent on social media. I find the tone of this letter very concerning, especially the section about "Your child will be told repeatedly to get away from their classmates..." I understand that everyone involved in this situation likely has strong feelings and opinions, but this does not seem like an appropriate framing of teacher's having to remind students about physical distancing. There have also apparently been multiple teachers, including this one, informing parents that the children would not be able to drink water from a personal water bottle during the day. If that is not true, please make sure to clarify to teachers and families.

**Dawn Goulet**

I understand and wholeheartedly support exceptions for students with special learning needs and for those families for whom remote learning has been a horrible experience. But for the majority of us, it is either safe to return to school or it is not. This complicated hybrid approach throws everything into chaos. Daily routines, aftercare services, etc.

But most of all, a plan that threatens to break up classrooms after what will by then have been three months of PAINSTAKING and HERCULEAN efforts by our teachers to build a rapport with their students and establish classroom routines and methods of assessing and monitoring their assigned students in a remote environment is a simple failure by all involved to understand what school is. School is not childcare. School is not a building. School is not a curriculum. School. Is. Teachers.

This plan seems to place no value on the work teachers have done—above and beyond what anyone ever thought would be expected of them—in favor of forward motion at any cost. Did the teachers know this could happen?! I am heartbroken for them if this plan moves forward.

**Catherine Meredith, Lincoln Teacher & Irving Parent**

**Joel Blecha, Irving Teacher & Irving/Julian Parent**

**Jamie Winchell, Julian Teacher & Longfellow/Julian Parent**

**Ryan Winchell, Longfellow Teacher & Longfellow/Julian Parent**

**Kelly Belmont, Brooks Teacher & Irving Parent**

**Katy Alejos, Brooks Teacher & Lincoln Parent**

**Desi Alejos, Julian Teacher Assistant and Lincoln Parent**

**Tim Walsh, Julian Teacher & Lincoln Parent**

**Susan Walsh, Brooks Teacher & Lincoln Parent**

**Nefret Stringham, Brooks Teacher & Holmes Parent**

**Sarah Perros, Brooks Teacher & Longfellow Parent**  
**Catherine Knox, Lincoln Teacher & Parent**  
**Katie Trathen, Culture & Climate Coach & Irving Parent**  
**Maggie Cahill, Culture & Climate Coach & Irving Parent**  
**Lauren Brock, Brooks Teacher & Whittier/Longfellow Parent**  
**Johanna Clark, Brooks Teacher & Holmes Parent**  
**Kate O'Keefe, Julian Teacher & Holmes Parent**  
**Elizabeth Chu, Julian Teacher & Parent**  
**Carin McKinney, Brooks Teacher & Brooks/Longfellow Parent**

We are writing to you as a group of concerned District 97 Teachers and Parents. As teachers in the community with children who also attend our schools, we have a unique insight into how our decisions affect them. We believe that it is our job to raise and educate the whole child, a process that entails nurturing children's social, emotional, and academic development.

When we began remote learning six short weeks ago, we entered a veritable crucible of stress and anxiety as we navigated a completely new way of teaching, parenting and living in this pandemic version of our world. Despite this tremendous stress and hard work, we have been pleasantly surprised to have bonded with our students, as well as witness their bonds develop with one another, in a short period of time. We have also seen this with our own children, as we have watched their relationships with teachers and classmates flower over Zoom—a feat we thought virtually impossible at the start of the school year.

It was with this mindset that we received the new Hybrid Plan in our email inbox on Friday October 9th, just a few hours before the community-at-large received it. Our collective hearts sank into our stomachs when we read the following statement:

**"When the district begins offering hybrid learning, we cannot guarantee that students will maintain their current teachers/class assignments—whether they continue with remote learning or transition to the hybrid schedule...it is possible that students will not have the same teacher or, in some cases, be assigned to the same school."**

Attachment and security are paramount for children, now more than ever, as the world around them grows increasingly uncertain. A tenet of trauma-informed practice — which has been emphasized during multiple teacher Professional Development sessions — is building trust. Trust is built through consistency and stability. This current Hybrid Plan and its possibility of repeated separation of children from their teachers, as well as their home schools, would rupture trust and cause children even more anxiety than they are already experiencing. This highly stressed state will make it incredibly difficult for children to feel safe and secure, and in turn will make it much harder for them to effectively learn.

Additionally, we have been pleasantly surprised by just how much our students and children are able to learn in this new remote format. Teachers have created systems, schedules and routines that are maximizing both student learning and relationship building. These systems, schedules and routines that are currently working will be obliterated by the new Hybrid Plan.

Given these concerns, we ask that the proposed Hybrid Plan be **put on hold** for the general population of District 97 until **January 11, 2021**. In the interim, students can remain remote with their assigned teachers and classes, and more time can be spent on alternate solutions that better address the social-emotional needs of our students and children.

**Brett Williams**

My wife is a teacher in District 97. I would like to state that my wife's health -- and the health of all staff and students -- is more important than anything else at this time.

We should stay the course with remote learning until a vaccine for COVID-19 has been approved and made available.

**Valerie L. Kahn**

I am writing to share my absolute horror at the hybrid plan for T2. It is such an awful plan that I don't even know where to begin with all of its problems. This plan represents a worst-case scenario for pretty much everyone -- teachers, students, and families. I'm dumbfounded that anyone thought it would be a good idea and pretty appalled that the District would allow a small but noisy group of parents to bully them into changing a system that is working for most students and families.

I have two kids at Hatch -- a 4th grader and a kindergartner. The proposed plan negatively impacts both of them as well as me and my husband. It also is horrible for our teachers and their families.

We've spent five years establishing connection and community with Hatch -- teachers, students, and other parents/families. And my kindergartner (who is very social) has finally only just started developing friendships with his classmates. My kindergartner has finally settled into remote learning. He's finally making some progress. His teacher understands his strengths and what he needs help with. I finally don't have to sit next to him for every second of the school day. And all of that, all of our hard work will be tossed out the window if he's placed with a new teacher and new classmates. I'm devastated for him.

And kids who need in-person -- the amount of exposure is outrageous for those kids, their families, and the teachers who will have no choice but to expose themselves to a deadly virus with no reliable treatment and their families too. These kids will be in one cohort for in person school and one for the rest of the day? This expands exposures by multiples. Moreover, how will working parents possibly navigate a work day when they need to pick their kids up after 3 hours and then find alternative child care for the rest of the day? Especially those who work outside the home. This solution makes absolutely no sense and is downright dangerous.

Rev. Emily Gage posted the letter she wrote to the board on Facebook. I would like to second every single point she made. I'm too horrified to list all of the unbelievably unrealistic and awful aspects of this plan. Emily's letter expresses exactly how we feel about the proposed plan for T2. I've been so upset and the District has caused such upheaval that I haven't even been able to gather my thoughts to write an email. I wanted to send something before the meeting today voicing my opposition to the proposed plan. I'm begging you -- please do not implement the proposed hybrid plan for T2.

**Jennifer Costanzo**

As I shared with the District earlier this fall, my husband and I are very impressed with the remote learning model this school year. It is clear that the administration and teachers went to great lengths to address and improve remote learning on many levels including creating a community and connection with the teachers, tactics for engaging the students, and much more. My children, third graders at Beye, LOVE their teacher, Ms. Walsh-Kallay, and are responding very well. One of my sons, who has been diagnosed with ADHD, is responding better in remote learning than in-person learning.

As impressed as we are with the remote learning model, we are equally disappointed with the decision being thrust upon us. Having to choose between hybrid and remote, and not having the ability to ensure

that our children maintain the same teacher and the same community that our teachers have worked so hard to create over the past two and a half months, is a choice of frustration and a no-win situation.

I am totally sympathetic to the fact that the remote learning model is not ideal. But the proposed hybrid model is fraught with more negative side effects than the remote model exhibits currently. These include the following (and others)

- Disruption of Continuity: potential loss of teacher, loss of classmates, loss of connection to the classroom community. This is the most distressing from an educational and social/emotional standpoint. The teachers have worked so incredibly hard to create a community, to learn the strengths and weaknesses of their students, and to create that teacher/student bond that is so important.
- Disruptive schedule for both students and parents with a half day model two days a week and sometimes three days.
- Instructional issues due to issues of mask wearing (acoustical, lack of watching lips move, annunciation)
- Pandemic Status: Over the past two weeks, IL saw its greatest positive test results since last spring. As we enter the winter months, it seems ill-advised to return to in-person school with flu season approaching and a pandemic that is far from under control. At what point do we have to go back to remote anyway? And this happens just 3 weeks before the winter break....

Remaining remote seems the most equitable way to proceed. One that affords continuity, and still provides the safest avenue for educating our children while protecting our teachers and the families that the students go home to. Remote learning provides a set schedule that all can count on, gives a set routine for the students, and won't be disrupted by IL positivity rates, or a positive test within a classroom setting, etc. D97 made the right decision in July, and I implore you to stay the course. It is the course that provides the most stability for all of the reasons stated above to all members of the D97 community.

### **Elizabeth Newhart**

- How was this plan decided on and why? We have learned through multiple teacher and union sources that the teacher's association wanted a plan for hybrid with group A attending mornings in-person 4 days/weeks and group B attending the afternoon in-person learning 4 days/week. This is a model similar to what LaGrange has created. Why was this plan not heard / considered / respected?  
The current hybrid plan is unlike any other in Illinois. How will D97 ensure children participating in the hybrid plan don't fall behind the remote learners given the disparity in instructional time?
- How were return to school metrics decided? Why were those metrics selected? The metrics we have selected to follow make Oak Park an exception and outlier among other suburbs. The metrics stand to create inequity. Who was involved in choosing metrics? Are there recommendations from IDPH or ISBE for what metrics to use or if they should be used at all?

The criteria for return to full in person learning is phase 5. The concept of "phase 5" or "post-pandemic" was developed early in the COVID crisis. It has become obvious since then that even with a vaccine, there will likely not be a clear transition to phase 5, but more of a gradual loosening of restrictions as community spread lessens. Given that "phase 5" may be an impossible criteria to meet, what does that mean for our children returning to full in person school?

**Amy Korchek**

I would like to express my concern for the proposed hybrid option. While I appreciate the desire to get the kids back into school, I do not agree with the timing or the proposed plan of the hybrid model.

I'm concerned with the timing of moving to hybrid as we are coming out of the Thanksgiving holiday, going into winter/flu season, in addition to expected rising Covid cases as we move into a season where we spend most of our time indoors. I think this puts an increased risk to the teachers, the students, and to the families of both. This will add an additional exposure as many families have had to come up with cohorts outside of school and many are also attending the Hephzibah/PDOP, and programs of the likes.

In addition to the timing, why are we uprooting our kids to only gather in person for 5 hours per week? They may not get the same teacher or even the same school. This adds an additional layer of complexity to them and uproots their daily routine. In addition to the students, our teachers have poured their heart and soul into making connections with the students. They've also fostered relationship building between the students in their classroom. They have done an AMAZING job under these circumstances. When I mentioned to my kids the possibility of not finishing out the year with their teachers, they screamed. They have such a genuine love for their teachers, and while I'm sure there are plenty of great teachers out there, I don't believe it is in the best interest of our students to make this change.... They have had enough change to deal with in 2020.

In a nutshell, I think there needs to be an extension of the current remote plan until it is safe to get the kids back in school. I don't think we need to rush this.

Rob Breymaier returned at 10:20 p.m.

**Cara Carmody**

I am writing to voice my concerns over the recent hybrid in person plans that were released Friday. As someone who is a teacher, who has family members who are teachers, and friends across the country who are teachers I am highly sympathetic to what schools are experiencing during these unprecedented times. It has forced me to realize we MUST be all in this together to get through these times. What I have experienced in district 97 is that we are absolutely NOT all in this together. All in this together would mean that the most important stake holders in education- the teachers and the students would be brought to the table in deciding the best educational plans that work for both.

I have been asking the district and this board since the spring to include professionals- experts who are trained in viruses and pandemics to be a direct part of the planning process for a possible safe return to school. Many parents in this district have asked to be a part of the discussions especially those with specials needs. Many teachers have asked to be heard in any reopening plans. Their requests have not been met. How is that all in this together? When you do not include the people most impacted by a reopening plan in your planning what results are plans that no one likes. This has not happened once, but twice.

The current hybrid plan is not only detrimental to teachers, it is extremely detrimental to those vulnerable learners and working families. As someone working with numerous d97 students as a private tutor I am seeing firsthand the results of almost two months of remote learning. Most have regressed, many are falling behind, and a few are even failing. We cannot allow this. There are many students in this district that remote learning simply does not work for: There are too many distractions in the home, they are burnt out from being behind a screen all day, they need live instruction, and they need social connections. The idea that the district believes support for these students is free tutoring behind a screen with a stranger does not come close to cutting it. These students will not benefit from more teaching behind a screen with

someone they do not know. What they need is consistent, in person instruction with a live teacher who can actually check for understanding in real time.

The current hybrid plan takes away more instructional time, which for these students is completely inequitable. It also takes their current teacher and classmates away, which is also not supportive for a better learning environment. How is this supposed to help these struggling students? And two days a week for a few hours is extremely difficult for working families. There has to be a better model. Many local schools have returned to some in person instruction. There have been no local outbreaks at any of the private schools and some that have just recently returned are seeing positive gains. We should be following their models and leveraging them. It would appear the most successful models are ones that have half day A/B groups that come in the morning and afternoon. There is no lunch and they have one day a week off in the middle for extra cleaning and planning time. Certainly a district with such resources as Oak Park could follow that model.

One thing that has impressed me about this community is its efforts on equity. Equity is achieved by offering people choices. By recognizing what works for one, may not work for another. We need a plan that those who need in person instruction can rely on, that will set them up for success not failure. I am glad that those who want remote are able to have success with it. But for those students and families who are not so lucky, an option is needed. And it needs to be an option that teachers and families of struggling students support.

### **Makesha Flournoy-Benson**

My name is Makesha Flournoy and I'm the parent of a 5th Grader named Lucy who attends Holmes School. We all have stories and I don't often put the story of my child and her well-being ahead of others, but this time...I'm going to tell Lucy's story in the hopes that you can see her and also see her peers that sit shoulder to shoulder with her in the margins.

Lucy is light! She is a ball of energy and therefore needs to move. She is highly social and craves the day when she'll be able to return to school to play with her friends again. She misses her teachers and she misses the warmth that she feels when she's in school alongside other students. This school year is hard. She's struggling and she needs a lot of help; Lucy has an IEP and she has ADHD.

Lucy also has an amazing team that knows and is invested in her. She is an assembly leader this year and she gets to do most of the things that she'd do if she was in school. She engages with her friends on zoom and she has the occasional "safe" play date. Lucy is also black and this year, she has a black teacher, which is big news in my house because it's a first for her. This year is important and although the setting isn't ideal, we are making it work - we have to because there's another part of Lucy's story too. She has only one kidney... so she can't return to school; if she gets sick, she could die.

To say the least, I was frustrated when I heard of efforts by some community members to usurp our school's leadership during a global pandemic. These very same parents felt as if they were better equipped to decide what happens to my kid's future; they in fact behaved as if it would be better if I, as opposed to them, comforted my child who would be made to feel excluded as she watches her friend's play in the school play lot from our living room window. I write to the administration and board and ask that you consider the audacious attitudes that you will be otherwise upholding by not boldly addressing the harm that could be caused if we return to in-school learning without every assurance that students and teachers will be safe.

I also write to the Administration and the Board to ask that you strongly consider the culture that you want for our kids. Is it a climate that is stable and consistent? Is it a culture that emphasizes the well-being of our children while maintaining an environment where they feel safe and as if they belong? Or...is it

all of this while maintaining high standards of learning? And if so, how is any of this achieved during a global pandemic? I'd argue that even with improvements to be made, that you're doing it now, while students are at home or in daycare learning remotely.

I am requesting that you consider the current CV-19 data that's in front of you and then consider the individual stories of the kids that have the most to lose if we return to school. Staying the course and staying remote is uncomfortable but it is equitable and will provide the stability and consistency that families, students, and staff need during this unpredictable and unprecedented time.

***Jean Walsh Kallay***

As a long-time, proud Oak Park resident and dedicated teacher in D97 for over 20 years, I have serious concerns about the proposed hybrid plan for reasons of academic rigor, physical health, equity, and the emotional toll on children, to name just a few. In the hybrid option, the students will receive much less direct instruction at a time when they have already lost instructional time since the pandemic started last March. The physical health impact on students, families, teachers, and the community could be cataclysmic with November 30th as the date the rollout is scheduled. This timing is just when flu and the 2nd wave of covid forecast by Dr. Fauci may be hitting its stride. The forecast is for the worst winter in a century in terms of health. I have many equity concerns as some families are able to choose options due to their privilege while others are not. The emotional toll on our students could be quite severe as they may be separated from their teachers, classmates, and even their home school at a time that they have already endured too much stress during this pandemic. In school, they will not be returning to what school used to be. They will be masked, unable to play with friends, unable to walk around and talk with friends, unable to leave the class to go to their specials, unable to go to the playground for recess, unable to eat and talk with friends in the lunchroom, unable to gather on the carpet to listen to read aloud. Finally, I believe teachers should also have options in this return to school plan because teachers are people, too, with the same health and family concerns as all families. Right now, teachers are not given the option to return to school in hybrid learning or to remain teaching remotely. For all of these reasons and many more, I hope the district will at the very least push the date of return to school until January after students and families may have a chance to quarantine after mixing with many people during the holidays. Beyond that, I hope that the district will take another look at this plan and remember that we cannot make any plan be what we all want, which is a return to the past way of going to school. That is not possible and beyond our control. We need to stop trying to expect that any plan will be better or even as good as what was before the pandemic. We have to just do our best for these little ones who are looking to us to lead the way for them, who are looking for us to put their best interests first, who are looking to us to treat each other respectfully and kindly and with the grace and flexibility we need to sustain us...until we get to the other side of this pandemic. And we will do that successfully, but it takes a village. We are an incredible village. Let's show the kids that we can take care of this!

***Emily Dagostino***

I recently spent a day in a hospital with my child. My child and I, along with all others, wore masks. We were greeted with kindness and smiles, and screened upon entry. We were each permitted to carry and drink from water bottles. My child was offered snacks. In the area where I waited, three healthcare workers answered phones behind a reception desk. They chatted with passersby about what they were planning to dress up as for Halloween, about what they were ordering for lunch. They laughed.

It looked and felt and sounded normal. I felt at ease and safe. It's what essential workers have been doing since the pandemic started, with grace and bravery and selflessness, out of a sense of service and a call to care.

It is a stark contrast to what's going on here in Oak Park around our public schools. Here, messages are circulating about how dangerous schools are for children and teachers right now. These messages threaten that if my children return to school, their basic rights of food and water will not be protected. They would



not be able to drink from water bottles or have snacks. These messages threaten that teachers would not be able to go anywhere near students if they return to the classroom. These messages suggest that there is no way to safely reopen schools.

This isn't true. While there is no way to eliminate all risk, there are many ways to mitigate and reduce it. That is where we have an incredible opportunity to reallocate and invest our resources. That is the direction you --- the board, the administration, educators at every level --- have had an opportunity to move in since March, and it is an opportunity you continue to fail to advance.

Your latest proposed plan is terrible for everyone, and I question whether you're serious in proposing it. Or was the goal to propose something so absurdly and patently awful that you'd have an excuse to fall back on remote learning as the only foreseeable option?

You have allowed public education to become politicized, further polarizing and dividing a community at a time when we need unity and leadership.

I work in healthcare and I have seen so much sacrifice this year. I have seen communities rally to take care of healthcare workers, so healthcare workers can take care of our communities. And here, in Oak Park, when it comes to our schools, I am seeing so much division and so little support for each other.

Let's please start moving in the right direction.

Instead of teaching our children to live in fear, let's lead with courage. Instead of sowing discord, let's build community. Instead of mismanaging resources, let's teach stewardship. Instead of shifting the burden, risk and blame to others, let's model responsibility and accountability. Instead of arguing, let's respectfully listen and value opinions and experiences different from our own. Instead of stalling indefinitely, let's innovate solutions and move forward together, even in uncertainty.

Like hospitals, public schools are essential to healthy communities. Look what's happened to ours in their absence. We're a mess.

Please, let's work together and use our resources and gifts as a community to safely reopen our schools. Let's protect our teachers and students, and let's welcome back kids who need to be in school with love, kindness and acceptance.

**Susan Raphael**

My 7<sup>th</sup> Grader son really wants to go back to school and see his friends and teachers in person, however, it broke my heart to tell him about the current plan for the middle school and the fact that he would have to Zoom classes and stay with the same kids all day. He was sad at first, but understood. He said keep me home then.

And then I told him either way, I could not guarantee he would have the same teachers and he was no. I really like my Team and teachers. I don't want to lose any of them.

I know it has been over said that these kids have lost a lot, but the truth is they have. But for many, the fact of changing teachers for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Trimester and classes for my kids really breaks their heart. In this time of uncertainty, why can we not just keep kids with their same teachers? When I have the chance to listen in to my son's Zoom classes, I hear great conversations before class instruction has begun. Some real bonding and getting to know each other. I would hate to lose this now, especially at the Middle School level.

I have not discussed the plan with my 4<sup>th</sup> graders because they would get really sad if they learned they would lose their wonderful 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and current schedule and there was no choice that I could make to keep things the way they are. I would choose whatever plan keeps the teachers that we have for my girls and son, but we don't have that option. I understand why, but I believe the district can do better and find a creative solution to this issue.

**Grant Johnsey**

Thank you for putting together a hybrid learning plan.

Despite the teacher's best efforts, remote learning over a screen has been far less effective than in-person. Other benefits like socializing, personalized attention, and support for working parents are also lost.

The current hybrid plan targets in-person learning of 7 to 10 hours per week. This amount is not enough. I urge you to please re-consider your plan and add more in-person hours.

I recognize that it is impossible to build a learning plan that pleases everyone. But the common thread is the value of the in-person learning experience, shared by ISBE. Many children, including mine, are simply struggling to learn over a screen. I hope you can amend your plan to add more in-person learning time.

**Steve Miller**

I want to thank the teachers and administrators who put in so much extra time this summer to prepare for this unprecedented school year. While there have been hiccups along the way, many students and the teachers really seem to have found a good rhythm with e-learning. I do want to recognize the very real difficulties that some students are facing with remote learning though and acknowledge that does need to be addressed. However, in reading the district's hybrid plan, I'm extremely disappointed that it misses an extremely important point. The plan is extensive and seems to take into account the necessary rules and regulations, but where it falls flat is the strength of the student and teacher connections, as well as the long term relationship with the school, that have already been developed.

Providing two choices for parents that both potentially involve changing teachers and even schools completely misses the importance of these connections. I can't imagine how hard it has been for the teachers to connect with the kids in the remote setting, but from what I've seen with our daughters' teachers, they have managed to do just that. Asking them and the kids to start that over again next trimester regardless of what option the families choose for their child is going to be detrimental to all of the students. My 3rd grade daughter is quite reserved and has found herself in a very nurturing classroom that I would hate for her to have to leave and start over forming bonds with a new teacher and classmates. I would ask that you consider a third option that allows students to remain with their current teachers regardless of remote or hybrid and/or continue to reserve the in-person models for the highest need students who are not thriving in the remote option until such a time as all students can safely come back full time.

**Adam Yaws**

Multiple teachers I've spoken with say the survey they received had 3 questions: whether they think school should be hybrid, remote, or in-person. Why was the hybrid plan that was laid out not shared with the teachers \*before\* this survey was taken?

What makes Oak Park different from other school districts who are doing a half-day A/B session? I.e.: other districts around us are doing an A-group roughly 8:30-11:00 and a B group: 12:30-3:00 in-person 5 days per week.

What plans are being put in place to address the "targeted" (underperforming) rating of Julian?

**Brian Pearlman**

I am a tutor who works with a Fifth Grade student at Lincoln. Though there have been some recent improvements, I continue to have concerns about remote learning going into Week 7.

First, the positive: There is more asynchronous work than there was during the first four weeks of school. There is now a school-wide break from 1:15-1:30pm. And Math has been moved up; it is now immediately after lunch.

Still, I am concerned about the outsourcing of teaching to apps like Lexia and Zearn, an over-reliance on Zoom Breakout Rooms, and the sheer amount of screen time that kids are being exposed to -- even during asynchronous work.

In terms of the apps, they are not always integrated into the lesson -- for Lexia, the kids are supposed to spend a certain amount of time on the app each week. It is not based on content or benchmarks. While Zearn is used more effectively to review math concepts during asynchronous time, the usage of apps and quote unquote "enrichment tools" still feels somewhat arbitrary -- like the learning is being "outsourced" rather than "enriched."

With Breakout Rooms, the issues are pressing. Kids continue to be distracted and have difficulty working together in small groups on Zoom. There is lots of fighting, shouting and exhaustion. The only time it seems to work is when the teacher is present, guiding the group; when the kids are left to their own devices and just expected to work together, it tends to be disaster, filled with frustration. Several times I have given the child I work with permission to mute himself on Zoom and simply work solo, because this allows him to focus and actually get his work done.

As an example, during the week of Oct. 5, several math problems were given and the kids were forced to work in groups. Every single child in the group shut their screens off, muted themselves, and worked on the problems alone -- this enhanced their own focus, and they did not have to worry about someone else's work. At the end of the exercise, the teacher came in and berated the kids: "How come no one is sharing their screen?" "You were supposed to be working together!" "That's *not* very good group work."

When the kids are telling -- and showing -- the way that *they* learn best, I would urge district leaders, teachers and staff to listen.

Finally, I wish to remind parents and community members that asynchronous learning does *not* mean that kids are not on screens. They are often still on their iPads, staring at slides, videos, and apps. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends only 1 hour per day of screen time for kids ages 2 to 5; for kids 6 and older, they recommend "consistent limits" on screen use. The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends minimizing screen time for kids ages 5-11 to no more than 2 hours a day.

I appreciate you taking the time to hear this feedback, and I hope as we move towards a Hybrid Plan, the D97 Board, faculty and staff take the time to think about what the remote learning is *truly* like from a child's perspective.

**Karin Johnsey**

I appreciate the board and Dr. Kelley coming up with a hybrid plan but cannot understand why those who opt in cannot have a hybrid plan similar to some of our surrounding suburbs like LaGrange where students go half day in person 5 days a week for reading, writing and math instruction and go home for

lunch and specials remotely. This plan would keep current teachers with their current students and keep kids at their home school. It would help students like my son who has a 504 plan for adhd and anxiety receive the in person supports of school while being safe. We need to optimize safe in person instruction time for all kids especially those who are English Language Learners, low income, and with IEP and 504 plans. We can't leave our children behind in District 97.

### **Rhetta Gibbs**

It is abundantly clear that the hybrid plan released on Friday is not ideal for anyone - kids, families or teachers. This is not surprising given that the decision was seemingly made in a vacuum without taking community feedback into consideration. What will it take for our board and district leadership to listen to the concerns and suggestions of both parents and teachers?

The following public comments were not read aloud during the meeting.

### **Cathy Raschke**

I realize it is difficult for kids to keep their teachers in the 2nd trimester. But to my son, that is the most important thing - more important than whether he is remote or in person. It would be very helpful if teachers let us know whether they are requesting a remote learning assignment. I am left trying to guess which option to select so he can keep his teacher. And the possibility that kids can be assigned to other schools needs to be explained in more detail. In what situations will this happen? This could be traumatic for the kids involved. I also am concerned about the limited amount of time devoted to core subjects and the reintroduction of asynchronous only learning multiple mornings a week. As a parent I'd rather just keep things all remote than have all this disruption. I realize there are some kids that really need to be in person. Perhaps there can be a process where parents can apply for in person instruction on an as needed basis. This would allow some kids who really need it to be in person even if suburban Cook county numbers are too high for a hybrid plan.

Thank you for your consideration!

### **Trisha Girdwood**

I would like to suggest a change in how information about hybrid, remote, and in person learning is distributed to the community. Instead of publishing a plan and then asking parents for their decision / selection, there needs to be adequate time for the district to answer questions. The current process is creating anxiety and unneeded speculation.

I suggest publishing a plan, have a follow-up meeting to answer questions, and then go back to the drawing board OR if the plan moves forward as is, only then ask for parent selection.

I would also like to be reassured that teachers will be able to select the option that works for them too - Will they have the freedom to choose remote, hybrid or in person and not face possible termination if it is not a welcomed decision? We need to remember that teachers have not been trained as nurses or doctors - Just as we wouldn't expect a nurse or doctor to wrangle a classroom of kids.

Lastly, I think the hybrid plan is too disruptive for only 7-10.5 in person hours a week. And it doesn't lend itself to being safer. I believe the options should be fully remote or fully in-person.

### **Jamie Lewis**

Can context be provided for why such limited in person instruction has been offered in the hybrid plan? Neighboring districts seem to have options with a 4 or 5 day 1/2 day program (am or pm). Was such an option considered and if so, what were the limitations for implementing such an option? The current plan requires significant change for all, but only provides an average of 8.5 hours of in person learning a week.

**Esther Lopez**

What plan does D97 have to mitigate COVID transmission in regards to our HVAC system? Will we have any filtration system in place, if so- how will this happen?

**Meghan Paulas**

I really value and appreciate the time, commitment, and creativity you have for your work to support our community. I urge you to pause on the hybrid plan for the second trimester. Illinois's cases are rising and the uncertain and disruptive nature of the plan would affect all students, whether they choose to stay remote or not. I urge you to reconsider the commencement of a hybrid plan until there can be a more stable release, with classrooms remaining intact.

**Dan Portincaso**

I am the father of a fourth grader and kindergartener at Irving. The current plan to transition to hybrid learning on November 30<sup>th</sup> is misguided and will surely cause harm to the children, faculty, and staff of District 97. Try as I might, I can't think of a single positive outcome to this plan. The face-to-face instruction students will receive will not bear any semblance to normalcy and will only cause further trauma for everyone. Students will lose out on a significant amount of instruction time. Students (and teachers) will have to isolate if any one of them comes to school with regular cold/flu symptoms just as the traditional flu season begins. And, of course this return would also coincide with the beginning of the holiday season where infection rates are likely to increase as families get together indoors.

Parents who want more time to work will only have a few hours to do so and will have more to do in transporting students and getting them ready for asynchronous learning. As a working parent (my spouse also works) this plan will actually take more time away from me than afford me. Parents who rely on daycare services may lose it because those services will lose their physical space at the school. And, let's all remember that having more children together puts more children and adults at risk. This means that cases of the Coronavirus will increase in our community. This also means that deaths will increase. How many more people will die so students can be uprooted, have less educational quality, and suffer from additional trauma? Remote learning isn't easy. In fact, it is really difficult. But it's better than destroying parents' lives completely with the death of a child or how becoming an orphan would hurt a child. This, by the way, is not hyperbolic. This is reality.

In order to provide an option for some families to choose a hybrid model, all students who will be affected by having to change their class composition, and teachers. That is not equitable or wise. The model seems to exist because it can exist, not because it should. We are living in a traumatic time, and disrupting a now established routine adds to the trauma. This will cause students to fall further behind in their learning because they will have to adjust to a new teacher and routine.

As a parent, a teacher myself at a college that is largely remote, and a community member, I honestly cannot think of a single positive outcome of this plan. Therefore, I urge the board to do the right thing and reject this plan and continue with remote learning until Illinois enters Stage 5.

**Heather & Dominic Cianciolo**

We plan to submit a longer board letter, but feel the need to comment on a section of the OPTA's letter that was read at tonight's board meeting.

It said that several people listed as having been consulted on the district's plan had never actually been consulted, and only saw the finished plan when the final version was released. I know this to be accurate from speaking with at least two different people named by the plan, including one of the safety experts.

Unfortunately, I know from experience that this is not the first time Dr. Kelley and district-level administration have performed a bait-and-switch by claiming support in published plans from named people who did not in fact sign on to support the proposal. In this particular case, the letter to the community had been substantially rewritten from the time it was presented to the teachers for support, so that the arguments of the letter were not the same.

It is particularly upsetting to listen now as Dr. Kelley claims she works from a principle of “trust in the people” when she herself does practice basic honesty and transparency. As a result, this list of groups and institutions she claims to have consulted is suspect. This makes the entire plan suspect.

**In a time of pandemic, the community’s safety — particularly the health and well-being of our most vulnerable populations — depends on honesty and transparency.** I do not see this being demonstrated here. Please take a page from the D200 Board of Education and bring in the community experts to speak for themselves. I found the Fire Department’s infection disease expert to be particularly helpful... especially because it was clear he had actually been consulted before D200’s plan was published.

I implore the members of the Board of Educations to exercise your oversight powers. Moving forward, please do not take Dr. Kelley and the administration’s claims at face value.

#### **Nic Bell**

I’m reaching out to express my serious concerns and frustration about D97’s initial plans to return to a hybrid. If you have advice for whom else I should email, please let me know.

While I can appreciate that there are numerous opinions around this issue and that it’s not an easy path to navigate, this plan is terribly upsetting. Thinking about families who are working full time and understandably cannot support their child’s learning, this doesn’t seem to solve much because kids are still on their own for a decent amount of time. For families who have figured out how to manage this remote learning, this puts a major wrench in plans that, for many, took weeks to sort out. If they were going back to school in person full-time, that might be OK, but now there’s MORE to work out -- for example, who gets the kids home from school in the middle of SOME days.

What upsets me most of all is the idea that children will switch classrooms and teachers after spending months trying to adapt to remote learning. My children, for example, are already emotionally tied to their teachers. I have no doubt that’s true for many others as well, especially those in the younger grades. The fact that the one thing we expected to remain a constant through this challenging situation (i.e. the teacher) will change is heartbreaking. Furthermore, I expect it to a tremendous negative effect on their learning and engagement. Julian, for example, took several weeks to warm up to remote learning, and Ms. Grogan has been instrumental in his willingness to stay connected. Although I know there are many amazing teachers, yanking a young child from such an important relationship could be detrimental. And, if we move to a full in-person approach by spring, I imagine they could change yet again! How can a kindergartner build up the trust of a teacher, if that person keeps changing?

I realize D97 is trying to serve many interests, but thinking of the kids, I find it difficult to see the ROI on this plan. If our kids’ holistic well-being is really the number one priority, I don’t see how D97 can move forward with this plan.

#### **Sally Ziegler**

Thanks so much for all you do for our kids and families.

I know this is a difficult time and appreciate the amount of work you have done.

I wanted to express my concern about the hybrid model. I feel that it is not best for our kids or families. The amount of instructional time that is wasted and lost doesn't make up for the limited amount of in person time we are gaining. The school we are going back to is so different that continuing with remote makes more sense. Let's work really hard to make remote the best we can and have the students who need to go back, go back now. There is a chance we will go back to remote this winter. When we keep changing we are causing more stress with our kids, families and teachers. Time is wasted on all of these models, when focusing on remote would be best.

Could you survey the community again and see if people now prefer remote or hybrid?  
I do not think that hybrid was fully understood until recently.

Going back after Thanksgiving doesn't make sense to me.

I really do not want my child to switch teachers. We have worked so hard getting used to her routines and procedures to he can gain independence. This would not support his learning.

What happens to families that rely on childcare like Hephzibah and Park District?

**Christine Fenno**

I am writing with gratitude for how well the first trimester has gone in our district. Our family, and so many of my neighbors, appreciate the hard work that has clearly gone into all the logistical problem-solving and the new tech and engagement training.

I have two **middle schoolers**, and as of last week I am very concerned about the disruption to the remote learning routine as the students who stay remote may soon be assigned new teachers—and additionally, these educators will now be required to wear masks while trying to educate remote kids over zoom, because at the very same time these teachers will apparently now be simultaneously supervising classrooms of in-person students who will be zooming into various lessons happening elsewhere.

This plan is not in the best interest of anyone that I can see. We are not living in this school district because we want teachers yanked around classes mid-school year and becoming overly stressed by having to successfully instruct kids online while wearing masks over half their face, while lifeguarding other middle schoolers in the room with them. We value our teachers, we value their health and safety, and we value the positive rapport and engagement they have established online with so many students.

By the way: Immuno-compromised kids who must stay at home are totally disregarded in this plan. That is the opposite of equitable.

We are navigating our way through a pandemic, and I encourage d97 administration to stay on course and find solutions for struggling families that don't create new harms for others. Our household **STRONGLY** prefers this school district stay with the current remote learning plan. Thank you for all that you do.

**Stephan and Marjorie Benzkofer**

The current hybrid plan as we understand it — changing teachers, zoom classes at school — is in no way an improvement over the current remote learning plan.

**Julie Duignan**

I am very much against the district moving to hybrid learning next trimester. Putting little kids together is too risky. We finally have a routine down that works for my kindergartener and my 4th grader, who are at Irving, and routine is crucial at this moment. Cases of the virus are on the rise across the country. I understand that the district wants to appease certain vocal families but it puts all of our lives on the line.

Furthermore, I can't imagine that the district can afford to offer two separate learning models in a safe way.

**Petra Choi**

Today, Arne Duncan said, "Everyday, wake up and fight for what's in the best interest of kids."

I am very concerned about the roll out of the hybrid model. I am especially concerned about the educational equity issues that arise from teaching the hybrid model students with a slower pace than the full remote kids.

I have a few questions:

- Shouldn't we consider staying fully remote to ensure safety of staff and students? There is not enough ventilation in most rooms and in the hallways.

- How can we make it equitable when I need to repeat my lessons to group B, while those doing fully remote can continue with academic rigor and steady pace?

- Could we at least push the hybrid model to after winter break? This will help people feel more at ease if there is no big rise in the Covid-19 rates after college kids return and families meet for holidays.

- What if a teacher lives with her parents who are elderly? Can she be considered immune compromised, given the data of how easily Covid-19 is spread?

- It would break my heart to lose one of my students from my remote class student in the reshuffling. I have worked so hard to build a classroom family. Could we stay with the class remotely at our homes if the majority of the class wants it?

**Lauren Gibbs**

The hybrid plan is a performative gesture that asks parents to pick between more or less schooling for their kids. Instructional time versus social/emotional development. Is this, truly, the best this District can do?

**Jessica Royer Ocken**

Here's a question/thought/comment I would love for you to consider and discuss regarding the proposed hybrid plan.

It seems to me that this plan—at least as presented—is much easier to implement and manage at the elementary level than the middle school level, and therefore it makes a lot more sense to attempt it there. While I know children of all ages are experiencing challenges related to remote learning (including those in my house - 6th grade and kindergarten), it seems like developmentally it might be wise to focus first on getting younger students back into their classrooms.

**Has anyone considered phasing in a hybrid model starting with the youngest students first and proceeding from there as conditions improve and the virus is more controlled?** I would appreciate your thoughts on that.

Also, I have to mention that the idea of separating children from the teachers they will have spent the past several months establishing a classroom culture and building a relationship with seems a negative that outweighs any of the positives presented in these plans. I understand that there are logistical factors that make this potentially necessary, but surely there is another way. Or if not, perhaps the fact that such



drastic changes would be necessary for just a few hours of in-person learning each week make this plan not worth it.

**Talley Hann, Chloe Cunningham and Jessica Flannery**

Co-owners of Oak Park Friends School

We are writing to address the current elearning model being used by D97, and the district's approach to community partnership. Given our strong ties to D97, as both educators and parents, and our own extensive experience as educators, we believe we can offer valuable feedback as the Board evaluates the effectiveness of the learning models.

While we are not renting space from D97, we are serving forty-five D97 children. **We would like you to recognize that childcare providers are a VERY important component in the success of remote and hybrid learning.** While D97 is providing a packed schedule of elearning, our staff are providing the physical, technical, and social support **in-person** with your students. It would benefit D97 and the Oak Park community for you to consider and listen to the providers working to support the families in our district and to work on that community partnership.

Prior to the start of the 2020-21 school year we had several recommendations:

- Connect the D97 teachers directly with the teachers/childcare providers. This would allow the community partners to address issues in real time, parents to work, and kids to feel some accountability to completing work and being attentive.
  - We were told by the district this was not possible and would violate both privacy and equity issues. We offered to get our parents to sign releases and were told that was not possible.
  - The result has been parents having to email, text or call us in the middle of the work day to let us know their child is off task (it's sometimes difficult to tell when the kids are in break out rooms) or has not turned anything in at all for the day.
- We had our PODs together before classes were assigned and shared them with the district asking that they place our kids with the same teacher as much as possible. Since that did not happen, we now facilitate elearning for over 45 kids with over 27 different D97 staff.

OPFS's Feedback based on what was asked from the 3 community partners providing childcare in D97 buildings currently:

- What has worked well
  - We have kept everyone safe and healthy
  - We have great partnerships between our staff and parents so that we can help meet their needs and allowing kids unplug when needed
    - D97 is starting to provide additional support for special needs kids
    - We have AMAZING D97 teachers who are trying to make the most of a terrible situation
- Areas of opportunity/challenges
  - Ideally, K to 2 would be half day synchronous instruction with half day asynchronous to help provide longer breaks (or K just do half day)
  - Communication between D97 teachers and elearning support staff is 100% necessary to ensure a child's success and allow parents to work.
  - Too much pressure and blame is shifted to childcare providers, parents, and even students when wifi issues come up or students log-in late.
  - Remote learning with learning pods in childcare settings present their own set of distractions, and logistics (accommodating all schedules, breaks, assignments, noise level)

- Our elearning support staff are demoralized and fatigued after just a month. They are getting messages from all sides saying they are not doing enough.
- Kids need more breaks and longer breaks away from the iPad
- We've received feedback from our parents that D97 administrators are telling parents that OPFS is difficult to work with. This information is disheartening, untrue, and unprofessional.
- Any additional information you want to share
  - Ideally, K-5, or at least K-2, would be half day synchronous instruction with half day asynchronous to help provide longer breaks
  - Synchronous lunch through the district for K to 5
  - Synchronous breaks that are longer instead of the 10 minute break here and there. Combining the breaks and lunch would be ideal - do something like an 8 to 10:30/11 and come back at 1 to 3.

**Zachary Paradis**

I understand everyone is trying to produce a great outcome and please many divergent perspectives. I thank you for your efforts.

Unfortunately, the proposed plan seems to reflect a need to please: it is a plan with many ideas appealing to this or that group, but lacking a cohesive and cogent strategy to achieve unclear objectives. It will likely do more harm than good by disrupting the things that are working well without necessarily replacing them with better alternatives.

I would strongly suggest we delay moving forward with this plan and define both clear objectives and a strategy that can achieve those objectives.

**Kate Niehoff and Jamie Levinson**

I have been moved to tears by the patience my daughter's teacher has shown her classroom while working tirelessly to create a community among the kids during remote learning. It is evident that our teachers have put in an extreme amount of time and dedication to ensuring that our kids can learn while being outside of the classroom. Our kids' lives have been disrupted by the pandemic and some sense of normalcy and continuity has just recently been established with these online classes. The thought that the District may upend this entirely to kowtow to the few vocal parents who demanded in-person learning is frightening and seems downright cruel to do to our children whose mental health is already suffering.

My husband and I bought the house we did because it was in the Irving school district. We have loved being at Irving for the sense of community it has provided and the relationships we've built. During this pandemic the kids have at the very least recognized the teachers who speak to them on Zoom; know the principal who gives updates via Zoom every morning; and chat with their classmates who they know and have relationships with already. Threatening to take my child out of this community because we prefer to stay remote is negligent and destructive.

Our state and our county have not significantly improved their infection rates since the start of the school year. You made the incredibly difficult yet correct decision to keep kids remote then, and November 30th is a dangerous time to second guess yourself. Thanksgiving celebrations with family and increases in head colds/flu mean that a second school shutdown is imminent. Will that be the third time you disrupt these children's education and send them spiraling further? Our job as adults and community leaders is to project confidence with our kids and choose the right path, even when that's difficult and we face negativity. The impression to all of us is that you're making this decision as a reaction to negative comments; not based on sound science with priority given to our kids' mental health and education.

We are not alone in hoping that you work WITH your community and your parents to make these decisions, and urge you to reconsider the hybrid model and continue with remote learning.

**Chris Patrick**

As a parent of two elementary school age kids, this plan simply does not feel right. School has been in session for roughly six weeks and this plan proposes to introduce even more chaos and disruption to the school year. My kids are settled and happy in their classes. Is it ideal? No. Do I wish they could be in the classroom? Yes, but not if the district will not or cannot ensure continuity in the classroom. My kids have built relationships with their teachers and they need stability in these challenging times and this plan does not ensure that.

To make matters worse, the district is demanding I make a choice without giving me the information I need to make that choice. In a perfect world, we would stay with remote learning with the teachers my kids have now, but that decision hinges on them still having the same teacher. I don't want them to have remote learning if it puts them in a class full of kids from other schools with a teacher they don't know. I cannot make an informed decision about what to do and that is incredibly frustrating. The district cannot ensure they get to keep their teachers, but what can I do to improve the chances that they do? The district doesn't say.

I appreciate the desire to try to find a solution that brings our kids back to the classroom but this plan just introduces too much uncertainty for me to support it. If this is the best the district can do, we should stay with the status quo.

**Carrie Bernabe**

Number 1, I wanted to question if we chose hybrid for Middle School, Why would my child would be still taught sitting in front of a screen when in-person? It really doesn't make sense and is even more taxing on the parent to get the child to school only to be taught from a screen so what is the use?

From the 40 page document we read-

"Cohorts will be heterogeneously grouped. Middle School students for most classes will physically be in one classroom while receiving remote instruction **from a teacher who is in another classroom due to the current health/safety guidelines** that do not allow for the mixing of student groups throughout the school day."

Number 2, it does not state who will be in the class moderating the students. Another teacher or a sub?

These are my two questions.

Personally, this plan is poorly thought out and its primary objective is not for the better of the students and will cause more disruption.

**Cara Sherrard Blesch**

I'm writing because I'm extremely concerned and confused by the plans being developed for a return to school in November. It seems as if the district is responding to the loudest, angriest voices in the community, rather than assessing the wants and needs of all stakeholders. There has been no single, simple survey (unless I missed it among the myriad other surveys) to determine how many families actually want a return to school right now. It's also my understanding that the OPTA membership has also not been asked who/how many teachers feel safe returning. Given that, I would assume that the staff have

also not been surveyed. It's incredibly troubling to me that this plan is being rolled out without this critical information.

The number of days and hours students would be able to return in your plan is still far from helpful to most working families, and, apparently will mean the disruption of the amazing work teachers have done to be able to build relationships and community, as well as master the tools to effectively teach remotely, as well as the many arrangements for child care that people have had to make. We would like our children to continue to learn remotely, but we would like them to continue with the phenomenal teachers they've started with, allowing our family and those of your incredible teachers and staff to stay safe and healthy until a vaccine or reliable treatment are widely available.

I urge you to gather all the relevant information and consult many voices, beyond the angry correspondence and threats of protests at your homes, in order to develop a plan that best meets the needs of our community.

**Carrie Scott and Brawley Reishman  
Clara & Julia Reishman**

Thank you for the work you have done since March to keep our children safe and connected. We realize that accommodating the varying needs of families in our district is no small task.

We represent 17 students in Leslie Weiss' 2nd grade class at Whittier School. In light of the new plan announced on Friday, **we are writing to request that our 2nd grade class with Leslie Weiss at Whittier School be protected and allowed to continue in its present form, remotely.**

Young children form substantial attachments to their teacher and as our children have limited exposure to friends, family, and the outside world during this pandemic, Mrs. Weiss has become family. Leslie has fostered a community that makes our children feel safe and seen and they are actively engaged and learning. She has worked hard to understand how our children learn, what they're capable of, and what they need both emotionally and academically. We, in turn, have encouraged our children to trust that they can depend on Leslie and their class community, every day.

Discarding this work, these relationships, and this trust would bring emotional and academic setbacks for our children. Addressing the childrens' best interests must be primary in any plan and reassigning them to new teachers, classmates, and even schools works in direct opposition to this goal. We are committed to protecting the mental health of our children during this pandemic and know the district prioritizes this, as well. We ask that any new plan be designed and executed without breaking the existing learning environment our children depend on.

Again, we ask that our childrens' class be protected and that they continue learning remotely with Mrs. Weiss which is, as the kids pledge to Whittier every morning, "where we belong."

**Charles Field**

Unfortunately, while I know that my children miss their friends, there isn't a vaccine yet. I don't see enough advantages of the hybrid plan over the current remote practices. And the risks greatly increase. We will continue with remote learning.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to conduct, Vice President Kim declared the meeting adjourned at 10:48 p.m.

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Board President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Board Secretary

ADJOURNMENT