

Official Minutes of the
Oak Park Board of Education District 97
260 Madison Street, Oak Park
February 8, 2022 Regular Meeting

This meeting was held in-person and virtually using Livestream during the time of the Coronavirus pandemic. One or more of the board members met in-person and everyone else were virtual.

President Kim called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Kim, Ross Dribin, Kinhal, Spurlock, Moore, Kearney

Absent: Hurd Johnson

Also Present: Interim Superintendent Dr. Patricia Wernet, Associate Superintendent of Education Felicia Starks Turner, Interim Senior Director of Human Resources Tim Kilrea, Senior Director of Technology Michael Arensdorff, Senior Director of Communications Amanda Siegfried, Chief Academic and Accountability Officer Eboney Lofton, Senior Director of Equity Carrie Kamm, Senior Director of Buildings & Grounds Jeanne Keane, Caroline Roselli Robbins Schwartz, Dr. Ushma Shah, District 97 Principals and Lonya Boose Board Secretary.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

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SESSION

Spurlock moved, seconded by Moore that the Board move into executive session for the purpose of Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees, Collective Negotiating 5 ILCS 120/2(C)(1)(2) at 6:08 p.m.

OPEN SESSION

OPEN
SESSION

President Kim motioned that the Board move into Open Session at 7:02 p.m. All present members of the Board were in agreement. The Board convened in Open Session at 7:10 p.m.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

PUBLIC
COMMENT

I am writing to request that the board consider adopting a Covid mitigation framework. It is clear that Covid will continue to arrive in waves that require different mitigation at different times. The framework should also include vaccination rate goals where certain mitigations are dropped. For example, once 85% of those in the building or community are vaccinated, masks are optional and quarantine rules are relaxed. Or once case rates are less than 50/week for 100,000. KN95 masks can protect the wearer as well as others so optional masks are more feasible than earlier in the pandemic when these were hard to get. I realize this is not possible until ISBE/IDPH changes current mandates.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Cathy Raschke

Good evening,

Thank you for all of your time and service on our school board. I'd like to request that the D97 Board of Education commit to a date in the next 30 days to establish metrics around when we will start to discuss

reducing mitigations to be more aligned with current scientific research and the evolving (and reduced) risk for the majority of vaccinated individuals.

I understand there is immense pressure to protect all of our village citizens, and all of our students, and I appreciate that sentiment, but reducing our community's risk to 0 for most things, including an increasingly less virulent and more endemic virus, isn't only impossible, it's not aligned with scientific research and current public health guidance here in the U.S., and abroad. Given that our community is now over 80% vaccinated, I'd like to understand what metrics we're targeting for discussions to reduce mitigations in our schools.

I would like to request that the school board present to parents and our community within the next 30 days:

1) what metrics need to be achieved and/or what date can we remove guidance around wearing masks outside, to align with the current CDC guidance and ongoing medical research and recommendations?

2) what metrics need to be achieved and/or what date can we resume "normal" lunch schedules to allow students to socialize with one another, ideally outside of their classroom and to enjoy recess with their peers who aren't in their current class? Other local area private schools have been using protective plastic but having "normalized" lunch throughout the pandemic, without negative impact, given that their infections and outbreaks are aligned to and in some cases less, as a percentage, compared to D97. I'd like to understand the scientific basis for maintaining the classroom-segregated lunches, given the current research doesn't seem aligned with this strategy, since so much has changed in terms of the risk the virus presents after 2 years.

Thank you for your consideration, and again for your volunteer service and time,

Erin Mott

As a pediatrician and parent with 2 kids in D97, I hope that we will continue mitigations including universal masking in schools for the time being, as is still recommended by the AAP and CDC. We have done a great job with mitigations, and now is not the time to decrease them. We are still at very high levels with 370 cases per 100,000 over the past 7 days, and there is no vaccine available yet for kids 4 and under, who have just had their highest rates of hospitalization of the entire pandemic. The best thing we can do to keep our kids in schools and activities where they need to be, and protect their teachers, friends and families, is to continue what we have been doing.

Keeping mitigations in place for a little while longer can get our community to a better place and allow us to successfully decrease them later, knowing that we may need to adjust as cases rise and fall in the future. Please continue to follow the recommendations of the AAP and CDC.

Robin Kalish

Dear Board and D97 Administration-

As Illinois and Oak Park are well past the Omicron surge, I am writing to inquire about when the district plans to start taking steps to reduce some of the extreme mitigations in place.

Here are a few areas that I would hope the district can start making some changes so our students have

some steps toward a semblance of normalcy and at the same time help the mental health of students as well.

1.) Resume normal lunches

The silent lunches in grade school feels beyond extreme. Why are middle schoolers allowed to talk with peers during lunch, but K-5 students still are to remain silent as they eat? Also, the limited amount of time to eat means many students aren't eating enough to keep them full through the day.

2.) Stop outdoor cohorts

My child is having a hard time socially because he is only allowed to play with the small amount of children in his class because of the co-hort rules. I would hope that the district adjusts recess rules so that outdoors, children can play at recess freely and with students from other classes and grades. Currently my two sons aren't even allowed to play or interact, even though they have the same lunch recess.

3.) Stop outdoor masking

There hasn't been any supported science for masking outside. I think it's time to give kids a mask break when they are playing outdoors. We're lucky that our district families have followed the rules consistently this pandemic, but we need to also follow the science.

4.) Resuming Volunteers, Activities, etc.

Sadly, I think it's clear that D97's sense of community has really been shaken by the pandemic and created many divisions. Our grade school has had a new principal since the pandemic started, so there is literally no sense of community anymore and all the things that made the school feel special have been removed. Taking little steps like allowing parent volunteers, classroom performances, school fields trips, etc. will start to bring back an element of normal for students and families.

I would ask that the District openly communicates a timeline to parents for when some mitigations could be relaxed or what parameters would be required for changes. We are a highly vaccinated community and hopefully can make some adjustments for the sake of our students. Thanks for all of your hard work.

Best,
Megan

Hello, my name is Audra Fullerton and my kids are students at Irving.

As we continue to progress through the pandemic, I think it's important we begin to make changes to the Covid mitigations to transition to normalcy. To start, I would love to follow the science on outdoor masks. For months we have known that transmission outdoors is highly unlikely, and I think it's time to loosen restrictions for the children outdoors. A statement about masks being optional outside and allowing the children to play at recess with kids outside of their cohort would be a great start. We can never move forward without accepting when it's time to make changes and these are two low risk adjustments. Thank you!

-Audra

The recent ruling issuing a TRO against the state school mask mandate provides an opportunity for the school board to reevaluate the District's Covid-19 related mitigation efforts. It has been clear for months that the national government is shifting its messaging away from "eliminating" covid and to "living with covid." It is time that District 97 do the same.

Our community is more than 80% vaccinated. All school-aged children have had ample opportunity to be vaccinated. Their teachers, parents, grandparents, and other adults in their lives have likewise had opportunity to be vaccinated - and boosted.

The risks of Covid-19 to young kids has always been extraordinarily low, and, after vaccination, it is essentially zero. The risks of Covid-19 to vaccinated teens and adults is also near zero. The data in our community proves that out.

It is clear by now that we cannot eliminate or stop Covid, not in Oak Park and not in the world at large. And that's ok, because we have vaccines, and the vaccines work.

But, now that we have vaccines, I challenge the Board to answer this question: what is the end-goal?

At what point will the Board's policies reflect the current level of risk we face, which is actually negligible?

At what point can we stop requiring masks, enforcing silent lunches, requiring masks even at recess, and tracking down completely healthy children to quarantine?

Ask yourselves, what exactly is the goal of these measures? And, is that goal reasonable, and is it necessary?

We are safe. Our families are safe, our children are safe, and our teachers are safe. It's time that the District's policies reflect that.

Thank you,
Stephanie Harris

I'm commenting as a parent of a D97 kindergartner and a concerned epidemiologist. While many of us are tired and frustrated at the pandemic, it's important to remember how high cases are currently. The CDC describes low transmission as less than 10 cases per 100,000 residents - about 5 cases per week here in Oak Park. We achieved that last June and that should be our goal again. In reality, there were 235 cases last week - we are still at a very high transmission rate. Fewer cases - not zero but fewer cases - mean fewer people getting sick, fewer long term consequences, and fewer chances for the virus to mutate. We should continue to protect our whole community with a layered approach including vaccinations, high quality masks, and ventilation. Normal is when schools don't have to close because too many teachers and staff are sick. Normal is when hospitals and healthcare workers are not overwhelmed. We need to work together towards that kind of normal.

-Maria Pyra, MPH PhD

My name is Lauren Hyde and I am a parent of a 7 and 3 year old here in Oak Park. I am also a teacher in a nearby district. I am asking that D97 allow our students to have a 30 minute lunch where they are able to talk to their peers and to make outdoor masking optional.

The idea of silent lunch is absolutely over the top and unnecessary. Lunch is an important time for kids to be able to socialize and eat. The current 15 minute silent lunch does not allow them to socialize or eat at a reasonable pace. This unnecessary policy ignores the high level of vaccination that our community has achieved while elevating mitigation strategies that, frankly, are of limited marginal benefit over the social and emotional health of our children. The Board should be doing its utmost to provide our children with a learning environment that meets all of their needs. We are almost in the third year of this pandemic. It is

time for all of us to approach this problem with common sense that is backed by science. Silent lunch is a policy that, in my opinion, is more harmful to our students' development than any limited benefit it has.

This is especially true where other school districts around the area have been able to provide students a safe, socially distant but otherwise typical lunch experience. There is absolutely no reason that our highly vaccinated and well-resourced community cannot provide the same to our children.

I am also asking that we stop mandating outdoor masking. There is no scientific evidence that it is necessary. Please allow children to safely socialize outside without a mask. From my classroom window, I see the elementary playground full of children who are not masked. I see my own middle school students unmasked for outdoor gym and when they are being picked up from school. There is no scientific reason for our children to be masked outside. If we are truly a community that prides itself on following the science, we should do that. Requiring children to be masked at recess is not supported by any data.

I am asking that the Board show parents in this district that you are focused on balancing all of the needs of our students by balancing the short-term requirements of COVID mitigation with the long-term emotional, social and educational needs of the students by using a common-sense and science focused approach. The policy changes that I seek meet that balancing test.

Thank you,

Lauren Hyde

I would like for D97 to immediately reduce Covid mitigations in the following ways: masks optional while outdoors; return of field trips and visitors; return of hot lunch options; reduce social distancing in classrooms. I would also like for D97 to develop an "off ramp" for stopping other mitigations, up to and including the indoor mask mandate. This is a reasonable request that can be discussed by reasonable people.

Thank you. - Lauren Arends

I am writing to request that the D97 board and administration work together to create an offramp for COVID mitigations in our schools. Yesterday four states, Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey and Oregon, announced their plans to begin removing mandatory state level COVID mitigations in their schools. These are all 'blue' states. Illinois will surely not be far behind. But I am worried that Oak Park will be a hold out, and leave our children behind.

Oak Park has very high vaccination rates among our children and among our population at large. Because of this high level of vaccination, we've had lower death rates and infection rates than surrounding communities and the state at large. We did our part, and it worked. Vaccine's work. They significantly protect children and staff from infection, and dramatically decrease infection severity and the risk of hospital or death.

We are not going to get back to COVID zero. We must learn to live with COVID, and continuous masking and cohorting in public schools is not sustainable. We've got to return to normal at some point. Please start that process now.

If you don't want to start this process, please announce that you have no plans to end COVID mitigations in our schools, so that parents can make the appropriate choices for their children's future education.

Sincerely,
Josh Vanderberg

Dear Board Members,

I first would like to thank you for your dedication to our community in serving on the D97 school board. Today I am writing to address the possible removal of the school mask mandate. I am asking that we continue to have our children mask in school until we are out of our current surge and the under-five age group are eligible for vaccination. I strongly feel it is too soon to remove masking, and risky to those with young children.

Thank you for your time.

Best regards,
Nora Amey

Good Evening,

I am writing to request that the D97 BOE and Administration work together to create an offramp for COVID mitigations in our schools. We are not going to get back to COVID zero. We must learn to live with COVID and continuous masking and cohorting in schools is not sustainable. If you don't want to start this process, please announce that you have no plans to end COVID mitigations in our schools, so that parents can make the appropriate choices for their children's future education. We cannot have a repeat of the return to school plans for the 2020 and 2021 school years where the Administration dragged their feet and communicated plans super late compared to other districts.

In the near term (meaning the rest of this school year), I don't expect our district to remove the mask mandate in the classroom and I'm ok with that because I know, if it were to be removed, we will likely see an uptick in common colds and I know based on precedence that this district will require a PCR test for every sniffle and that will be extremely disruptive to our students. That being said, I do expect to see the following mitigations lifted:

1. Mask mandate when playing outdoors – make outdoor masking optional
2. No hot lunch – we desperately need hot lunch back. The current cold lunch options are not healthy or appetizing
3. Cohorting – we need to return to the lunchroom, return to mixing of classes during outdoor playground time, allow use of the playgrounds in the morning, etc.

Thank you,
Julie Spyrisson
Mom to a Kindergartner and 2nd Grader

Last week our elementary school declared we are 82 percent vaccinated - an amazing feat. 82 percent of our population got our shots and did our part, yet life in our school continues on the same restrictive path.

My question to you is - what's next? What is D97's plan to return to normalcy?

When will our kids be allowed to play on the playground equipment before and after school instead of standing in line 6 feet apart on the blacktop?

When will we take off masks outdoors at recess?

When will you let our kids see ALL of their friends at school?

When will you let our kids mix freely inside their own classrooms?

When will you let parents' step onto playgrounds at drop off and pick up... and dare I say, do this unmasked?

When will room parents be allowed back in classrooms for those special activities?

When will we have after school activities, hot lunch, field trips, in person PTO events?

When will School Board meetings be in person again?

When is it time to let us decide what is right for our kids and what our families are comfortable participating in instead of taking it all away?

Private schools in our community are not operating under such strict mitigations and their numbers are no different from ours. Our children are no "safer" - they are just missing out.

The bar for our children shouldn't be simply that schools are open - it should be that they experience a normal childhood in our schools. March is coming - marking two years of this -and Covid is never leaving. So, I ask, what is your plan?

-Rachel Fobes

Dear D97 board,

I believe we can all agree the last two years have been challenging for our district. I am writing to request that the board look forward and begin to plan proactively. What can we do now that improves children's experience in schools? Certainly, we can take off masks outside, we could begin hot lunch, we stop cohorting during recess. These "small" things make a big difference to the kids who have sacrificed so much "normal" so that we adults stay healthy. Additionally, start planning for the next wave. What do we need as a district to pivot so if/when the next variant appears we have all the masks, the tests, the plans in place? We waste critical days of in person time trying to react. Next year when winter arrives and the virus surges - what will we have prepared? Bottom line - there are things we can do now to make kids have a better life after two really hard years and we owe it to them to be ready for the next surge.

Sincerely, Margaret Nekrosius

I am writing to ask that D-97 consider moderating its COVID-19 mitigation measures to introduce more opportunities for mask-free time. I am one of a growing number of parents who believe that the social-emotional health and learning benefits of seeing faces for periods of the day outweigh the risk of COVID for students.

I ask that the D-97 introduce optional mask-free time at recess.

I also ask that the D-97 amend its requirements for not talking while eating lunch. Lunch should be a time for interacting, not watching TV (the default at most schools). At Holmes, at least some classrooms are broken into 'A' and 'B' groups who wait for each other to eat while watching TV.

The risk of contracting severe COVID among children was low before and is now substantially lower among the vaccinated. To date in Illinois, approximately 3,981 youth aged 0-19 have been hospitalized with COVID and 33 have died. Among the vaccinated, there have been 47 pediatric hospitalizations in Illinois and no deaths. This is an extremely low rate of severe illness or death in relation to the state's

almost three million cumulative reported cases among 0–19-year-olds. Numbers for elementary-age students would be even lower, if data were available segmented by pre- and post-adolescents.

With almost 80% of students and 95% of staff vaccinated, most D-97 community members are well-protected against severe infection. Until there is a vaccination requirement for students, their vaccination rate may not change much.

It's time to start talking about making reasonable adjustments in policy in response to the actual level of COVID risk for most students. If we don't, we run the greater risk of incurring impacts to social-emotional and academic learning that may only become evident in the longer term.

Thank you,
Sylvia Schveri

Hello to the board. My name is Kim Jackewicz, and my son is a 4th grader at Beye, and as one of the vulnerable families in the district, I think it's important to share our story with the world.

My husband has an immune system disorder, so this pandemic has been extra hard for us with the not-so-existential threat of his death always on our mind. We've been sending him to school after consulting with our immunologist in large part because of the measures D97 is taking.

In October, my husband was also diagnosed with a rare blood cancer, making him even more vulnerable and making the prospect of sending our son to school even more daunting. He takes chemotherapy that suppresses his immune system even further. Luckily, the mitigations put into place have worked. Our son has been a close contact several times, but has never brought covid home. We are very grateful for this.

I understand now that there is a movement to remove masks in schools, and I think there is a path to loosen mitigations going forward, namely around masks at recess, since we know that outdoor transmission is very unlikely. But until community transmission is lower, kids under 5 can get vaccinated, and antivirals are more readily available, I implore the board to continue to keep people like our family safe with masks. It seems reasonable to discuss a strategy to lower mitigations as the numbers improve, but we just aren't there yet. Who are we as a community if we can't take care of our most vulnerable members? It saddens me that so many would advocate for an ableist policy that could kill him. I know this threat feels non-existent to many in our community, but it's very real for us. I hope the board will remember families like ours in their decision making, as we are not unique in the community. Cancer doesn't discriminate.

Respectfully,

I'm writing to the board to request that the current level of mitigations including masking continue in our schools. I know too many families living or caring for family members that are immune compromised. This is a time to support everyone in our community.

-The American Academy of Pediatricians recommended, in January, using layers of protections, including masks and vaccines, to keep students safely in school. "Special considerations and accommodations to account for the diversity of youth should be made, especially for populations facing inequities, including those who are medically fragile or complex, have developmental challenges or have disabilities." ([COVID-19 Guidance for Safe Schools and Promotion of In-Person Learning](#))

COVID-19 Guidance for Safe Schools and
Promotion of In-Person Learning

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)
supports collaborative decision-making
among school districts and local...

-Normal is when schools don't have to close because too many teachers and staff are sick. Normal is when hospitals and healthcare workers are not overwhelmed. We need a plan to achieve that kind of normal.

Thank you.
Stacy Pflueck

Dear School Board Members,

First thank you for your commitment to D97, we all know these past couple of years have been challenging, to say the least. I would like to encourage the group to start implementing some goals that we can work towards and measure against. The risks and severity of covid have changed and so must the way we do things. I think there are small but impactful steps that can be made to get us on the path to returning to normal. I would love to see a plan laid out. I think that type of transparency would greatly help the whole community.

Thank you! Cammie Hunter

Dear School Board Members and Superintendents,

In the January 25 school board meeting, there was substantial discussion of off-ramps and removing mitigations from the schools. Since that time, there has been substantial disagreement at the state level about mitigations including masking. State masking policies aside, I ask this board to please continue to support and explore both individual as well as collective mitigations that minimize COVID spread. These mitigations include individual mitigations such as masking and social distancing, but also collective actions like air filtration and continuous CO2 monitoring.

Since the start of the school year, 16% of D97's student body has tested positive for COVID. That rate has accelerated since winter break. For the past five weeks, just over 1% of D97's student body has contracted the virus. This is a higher rate than Oak Park's population at large and for the D97 student population during the fall semester.

Additionally, Oak Park's youth (residents aged 0-19 years) have been over-represented in the new cases as reported by OPDPH. On average, Oak Park youth have comprised 35% of new cases, while only comprising about 24% of the Village's population. In the last Ready report just from last week, Oak Park's youth represent almost half of all new cases.

COVID is spreading in schools. According to IDPH data, schools are the number one Potential Exposure Location in the state. In our region, suburban Cook County without Chicago, schools are identified as a potential exposure location for 73% of new cases.

Cases are starting to decline and it appears we may be past the worst of the Omicron surge. Our current cases and spread would have been much higher had it not been for the mitigations that we've had in place. Removing these prematurely will lead to more positive cases. I know there has been much discussion about hospitalization and death, but there hasn't been a discussion about Long Covid and the potential long-term impacts that this disease could have on our children. I ask this board to please maintain the current mitigations, but also consider long-term mitigations like air filtration and continuous CO2 monitoring.

Respectfully, Ranga Bodla
Parent of Two Holmes Hawks

I am the parent of three d97 students and I am deeply concerned about the discussion of removing masks in our school buildings.

Not all families in our community have the luxury of thinking about a return to "normal." Many families, including ours, still have a member not yet eligible for a vaccine. Masking is something we can all do to keep our community safe, including the most vulnerable.

Colleen Burns

Hello board,
My daughter turns 5 on Friday, and all she wants for her birthday is to be vaccinated so she can "do normal things". As her parents, we are very excited for this added layer of protection against COVID19 and the more serious impacts of the disease, should she still catch it.

But we are also talking with her and managing her expectations about what "back to normal" looks like for us. We are reminding her of her friends who are not yet vaccinated, we are discussing the continued risks to her grandparents, and we are gently telling her that there are some people in our community who will always be at more risk than us.

We don't want to scare our daughter, or give her unnecessary anxiety. We don't have these conversations from a place of fear, or restriction.

Instead, we talk about our care for the whole community -- how much we love our family, and how much other people love their families. And how, as a community, we can work together to try and keep everyone safe.

I'm not so much afraid of my daughter getting COVID. I'm terrified of my daughter getting COVID and giving it to someone who can't (for whatever reason) overcome it.

Board, as you oversee one of the largest community hubs that we have, I urge you to continue with sensible mitigations and precautions.

Of course, no one wants to live like this forever. But we haven't. Things have improved. Quarantines have shortened, travel is open, most people are able to live "normally", with some minor inconveniences.

These stakes are still so high for many people, and they are people who tend to be already pushed to the margins of our society (elders, disabled folks, and others). Let's keep them centered in this conversation. Let's continue to do what makes sense, what our Health Department and Board of Health recommend. They have the interest of the entire community in mind, as I believe all of you do as well.

With deepest gratitude,

Hello,

Last week our elementary school declared we are 82 percent vaccinated. Additionally, the community of OP is highly vaccinated and has been for some time. School districts around the country have returned to "normalcy," allowing children to attend school in a manner similar to pre-pandemic life: maskless playground play, mixing of classrooms, eating in the lunchroom, etc. We have talked about "putting children first" repeatedly and the data shows that the mental health crisis is the most critical threat facing our kids. To that end, what plans does the district have to bring some semblance of "normalcy" to our children? Two years into this pandemic, OP schools continue to operate according to the most restrictive plans- while other districts are adapting, evolving and putting kids first. Other Districts are eager to return children to some semblance of normal. Please consider the following questions as you prepare your plan toward normalcy:

- What is d97's plan? What measures will be removed?
- When will we take off masks outdoors at recess? There is no medical evidence that suggests this is necessary, nor has it been.
- When will you let parents' step onto playgrounds at drop off and pick up... and when are parents and kids permitted to remove their masks outdoors? A growing number of parents are and will be removing their masks in the coming weeks.

- When will our kids be allowed to play on the playground equipment before and after school instead of standing in line 6 feet apart on the blacktop?

- When will you let our kids mix freely inside their own classrooms?

- When will room parents be allowed back in classrooms for those special activities? Currently, I have a child at another school in OP and parents are allowed in the classroom- for example I am attending a Valentine's celebration next week.

When will we have after school activities, hot lunch, field trips, in person PTO events?

- When is it time to let us decide what is right for our kids and what our families are comfortable participating in instead of taking it all away?

As I mentioned above, I have a son who attends private school in our community and they have 100% prioritized our children. They have made every effort to return to some semblance of normalcy: maskless recess, after school activities, celebratory parties, even in-person conferences! Our public school children are no "safer" than any other children engaging in these activities- or those throughout the country who are going maskless and living un-restricted life once again.

Covid has become endemic. It's time to abandon the narrative of fear. Let's look to Europe and nearly every other part of the US for guidance here. Parents have returned to offices, "front-line" workers have been working for two years, sporting events, concerts, restaurants- all happening. The bar for our children shouldn't be simply that schools are open - it should be that they experience a normal childhood in our schools. It's time for a plan.

Thanks

Elizabeth Newhart

To: District 97 (submitted over "Let's Talk")
District 97 School Board
Dr. Theresa Chapple

I am the parent of two District 97 students. My husband and I are also clinical child and adolescent psychologists.

In anticipation of local planning, I would like to express my continued support of layered COVID-19 mitigations in District 97 schools. I hope that D97 continues to follow the guidance of public health professionals, including the Oak Park Department of Public Health, during this planning. Layered protections will continue to support the health (including mental health) of students, teachers, and staff. They will also help us sustain in person learning during periods of higher community spread. In addition to planning “dial down” mitigation contingencies, I believe the district should realistically plan “dial up” contingencies, in preparation for future COVID-19 waves. As we already know, this is a dynamic “long game” of adaptation. In addition to ongoing vaccination efforts, there will be a continued, yet fluctuating, need for other key layers of protection, to reduce the overall harm of the pandemic on our community and healthcare systems.

Like many, I look forward to a time when community spread is lower, at which time it will be appropriate to dial down our mitigation plan. I am concerned about the cultural momentum to get back to what some refer to as “normal,” when things are clearly not normal. Premature removal of mitigations will negatively impact vulnerable members of our community and their families, including those who face health disparities, the disability community, those who are immunocompromised, and those who have not yet had an opportunity to be vaccinated. That is not acceptable to me. I believe we can use the guidance of public health experts to make wise and strategic decisions around the next phases of our pandemic response. I look forward to those discussions.

Thank you so much for your time and dedication.
Jennifer Gorski

We are incredibly grateful that the kids are back in school, THANK YOU for all of your efforts. That being said, we strongly believe that the district needs to continue to move FORWARD. We have one of the highest vaccination rates in the area, yet we’re still one of the most restricted. Not only is the mental health of our children suffering, but many will be reluctant to get the booster unless they see some clear incentives and/or signs of progress. A few simple, yet safe gestures, such as dropping mandatory mask-wearing outdoors, would show them that this virus is no longer something to be CONSTANTLY feared and that hope is on the horizon. After all the kids have done and been through, it's time to give them their childhood back.

Thank you,

The Martin Family

Dear D97 Board of Education

Thank you for your tireless effort to keep are children and staff safe during this school year while providing a high quality education for all its students.

We are writing today to ask the Board and Administration to revise its policy and protocols regarding elementary recess. Currently children are placed into classroom cohorts and must rotate between stations

each day which has limited their ability to play and develop social skills and interactions with kids in their grade. While COVID cases have steadily decreased these last weeks it would be a great time to once again allow kids to play with their peers in the playground or on the field with no limitations or restrictions to their movements.

School aged children are now highly vaccinated in D97 and we implore the board of education along with the administration to revisit the mitigations in place to see which ones such as recess can be revised to allow for increased social time for children during the school day.

Kind Regards

Garrett and Katie Diamond

To the D97 Board:

I am writing to express my support for continued universal masking, contact tracing, and surveillance testing in D97 school buildings. Community transmission of COVID remains high in Oak Park and surrounding communities and new variants emerge continuously. Although Oak Park and D97 have high vaccination rates, vaccination is only one tool that must be layered with other mitigation measures to most effectively protect children and families. Despite high community vaccination, vulnerable members of our community, including immunocompromised people, young children, and the elderly, continue to experience serious infection and death due to COVID. Masking and other mitigation measures allow vulnerable children and their families to more fully and equitably participate in school and community life. Schools are a critical resource for children and families. We know that universal masking slows transmission in school buildings and reduces school outbreaks and closures. For a board and a community focused on keeping schools open, masks, testing, and contact tracing are the most efficient and equitable ways to keep buildings open and children safe.

Thank you for your service to our community,
Jonathan Tottleben, MD
(D97 parent and Oak Park community member)

Hello,

I have two children, one is 8 years old and in second grade, the other, a 4 year old in pre-school. I feel my family has done everything that has been asked of us in regards to the pandemic and abide by the safety measures that have been in place by our community. In the past two years, we haven't gone out of the country on vacations and have only been to Michigan a few times in regards to interstate travel. We always wear our masks in public and try to be as safe as possible.

I'm not understanding the policies you have implemented at the school level. To learn that kids are to remain silent during their lunch is ludicrous. Are we following the science or not? I haven't seen any evidence that says COVID is more transferable if kids speak during their lunch break (a whopping 15 minutes to eat). Aren't they already distanced 6' or more during lunch? This is on top of making sure they wear masks outdoors during recess, another travesty. We are one of a very few communities that have such strict policies when it comes to COVID. While I understand that our community ranks better than others in mitigating the disease, it's not going to be perfect, ever. But they've been vaccinated and if need be, we will have him boosted as well.

We have already demanded so much of them. They have been a ping pong ball much of the past 2 years while other people decide where is best for them to learn. Can't we allow them to talk to each other and be kids? Please think of the long term effects or repercussions of what we are asking of them. We are destroying their social and emotional well-being. It's enough already. As other municipalities and states are lifting their mandates, I beg you to please reconsider ours in Oak Park.

David Hesser

Dear D97 Board Members,

I am writing tonight to ask that you re-evaluate the COVID mitigations in place in our schools. Much has changed since our students returned to in person learning over a year ago. Our knowledge of the virus continues to grow. Vaccines highly effective against serious illness and complications like MIS-C are widely available to those 5 years and older. More than 77% of our students and 95% of our staff are fully vaccinated. In light of these facts as well as the moderate and rapidly decreasing rates of COVID spread in our area, I would like to see our schools rethink some of the mitigations we have in place that have the least benefit.

Overwhelming evidence indicates that the risk of COVID transmission outdoors is very low. Why do we continue to require masking outside? Why do we continue to require our elementary school kids to play only with children in their own class at recess? When can we allow cohorts to mix outside? When can kids play on the playground before and after school? Lifting mitigations in outdoor spaces is not going to result in an increase in spread, and it has the potential to bring a little more joy into our kids' days.

What's the plan for lunch? When can hot lunch make a comeback? As someone who has been supervising lunch twice a week since the district returned to full in person, I have seen what's in those brown bags. I understand this was a short term solution that got our students in the building, but Doritos and pre-packaged cheese goo should not be a long term lunch option.

I would also like to see parents allowed back in the building to volunteer and on the black top for pick up and drop off. Again, lifting these restrictions is extremely unlikely to increase rates of COVID in our schools and community, and there is a huge up side.

I hope that the conversation is ongoing about other mitigations, particularly indoor masking. Understandably, everyone has a different comfort level with going mask optional indoors, but at some point, that is in every school district's future. What metrics are we using to determine when that time is for D97? There will be a significant subset of students and staff who will feel very apprehensive about this step whenever it comes even if it is done when cases are extremely low. What are we doing now to plan for that and to support them?

And finally, a COVID adjacent concern: remote learning "emergency days." I am worried that the crutch of remote learning will allow the district to call emergency days out of convenience instead of true need, as was the case last week when our kids spent a day remote learning on Thursday despite not even a dusting of snow overnight and very drivable roads. I am confident that without the possibility of remote learning, D97 would not have called last Thursday an emergency day. I would hope the district would take steps to prevent unnecessary use of these remote days in the future.

Thank you all for your hard work!

Mara Maas

My name is Jennifer Gnolfo, and I have two kids at Lincoln elementary. I believe that the public health director in Oak Park is the most qualified person to make a decision regarding whether children should continue wearing masks in schools or whether they are free to discontinue use of masks. I am very concerned about children who may not be able to attend School if masks were no longer to be used by all students. Again, I think the public health director is the most qualified person to make this decision about whether discontinuing use of mass would pose a threat to some of the students in our schools. Personally, I hope that one day very soon we will be able to stop wearing masks in schools and in public places. But until then I trust our public health director to make that decision.

Thank you.
Jennifer Gnolfo

Greetings,
I am aware that various school districts have TRO's in place to do away with mask mandates and make them optional. I am the parent of a five year old who will be entering kindergarten in the Fall.

Children spend the majority of their day in school and safety should be the priority!! I urge you to keep in mind that there are studies which state the use of masks help to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (along with hand washing and social distancing). Prior to the pandemic, various illnesses spread easily throughout the school setting (pink eye, stomach viruses, flu, the common cold also a form of coronavirus). Do politicians, parents and school administrations believe the COVID-19 is any different? To remove the mask mandate means that you have no regard for the overall safety of the children that you claim to care about. It also means that you have no regard for children who may return home to vulnerable family members and those who may have siblings that cannot be vaccinated. Please also consider the teachers who are in a difficult position and must return home to their families.

I urge you to allow science and the medical profession to influence your decision. Please base your response on evidence based information!! COVID has taken lives since 2020 and children are not exempt. Lives are at stake and irresponsibility from those who dislike rules, believe they are invincible and have an overall disregard for others should not drive the decision to eliminate masks in the district.

Thank you for your time!
Salimah N. Turner

Dear Board Members,

I write this evening to thank District 97 administration for their continued leadership in communicating and enforcing important safety mitigations in our schools, including masking and weekly testing. The first half of this school year has shown that layered mitigations are still needed to keep our students, staff and community safe.

While I look forward to a day when masks won't be necessary in public and in school spaces, the current numbers make it clear that it is too soon to consider removing these requirements.

I hope the district and school board can work together, and with state and local public health officials to create a strategic plan and build parameters for adjustment mitigations when the community data shows that it is safe to do so.

Sincerely,
Erin Sowers

Masking in schools is a critical part of layered mitigation strategies to keep our teachers, support personnel, children and communities safe.

Vaccinations, boosters, social distancing and masks are all tools we can use to prevent the spread of COVID 19.

Continued testing strategies via rapid testing, PCR and shield testing is crucial for monitoring until guidance is available at what community level of transmission, we can peel back layers of the mitigation onion so to speak.

As a parent - 1 child or teacher or support personnel in the hospital or dying of COVID-19 is too many.

As an essential worker/OB/GYN/Community Health Provider - more infections lead to more variants, lead to more unpredictable illness and burden on the health care system.

Continued masking is not too much to ask.

Regards,
Tracy Irwin, MD, MPH

To the District 97 School Board,

As a primary care physician, I've been on the frontlines of this pandemic for the past 2 years. Trust me when I say that I'm very ready for Covid 19 to be over and done. However, as I continue to treat multitudes of patients with Covid and my hospital has been at near-capacity for the past 2 months, it is clear that the pandemic is done with us.

As the board tries to make sense of the recent overturning of the Governor's mask mandate in schools, I urge you all to hold the course and continue to require masks in our schools.

Keep the masks ON to protect the siblings of students too young to be vaccinated.
Keep the masks ON to protect vulnerable teachers, some of whom have underlying medical conditions.
Keep the masks ON to make our kids feel safe and secure while Covid numbers remain high.
Keep the masks ON to keep transmission rates low and our kids in the classroom.

Masks are safe. They do not deprive one of oxygen nor leave our kids emotionally stunted in any way. They bother loud, opinionated, and often ill-informed adults far more than they've ever bothered our children.

I implore you to hold the course a bit longer, to follow real science and the expert opinions of our public health director, and keep the masks ON.

Respectfully,
Amy H. Buchanan, MD
(Mother of a Whittier 4th grader and a Brooks 7th grader)

I am writing to express support for the life and well-being of Oak Park children and their families, inclusive of those in the immune-vulnerable group. Growing pressure and calls to "return to normality" must not come at the expense of another person's life, dignity or health. In today's world, who decides

what constitutes “normality”, anyway?

A vocal anti-mask segment asserts “some will die anyway”. They say it is time to “enjoy our freedoms”. Calls to “alleviate the sadness that mask wearing brings to our children” prioritize convenience over life. These voices, while loud, do not speak for my family and are not a majority. The anti-mask segment demands that we should “follow the science”, disregarding that public health measures like vaccination and the wear of masks have centuries of success under scrutiny of the scientific method. Do we feel the same about hand washing? Surely, in the early days of Lister’s research, an anti-hand washing segment found it inconvenient, perhaps sad, to wet their hands. While the comparison is ridiculous it is necessary.

Calls to disregard recommendations by our public health department, depict a concerning lack of compassion and are at best misaligned with D97 values. Compassion, empathy and respect for life should guide our thoughts and actions.

Continuing to support our Health Department, including adherence to recommended health measures like mask wearing is the fastest and easiest way ease restrictions, for all.

Melisa Alabsy

Please continue to let science and public health officials make decisions to keep our children safe at school by requiring masking. While it is frustrating to continue to be inconvenienced by the pandemic, it is not the time to give up and let politicization of masks endanger our children, teachers, unvaccinated children under 6 and those who are immunocompromised.

The omicron spread late last year and throughout the return to school from break was total chaos for all involved. We are not at a point in this pandemic where we can abandon the safeguards that we know work. Masks keep us safer than we can be otherwise. Please continue to make fact based decisions that keep our children safe and learning in-person.

Nic Bell

I appreciate the work the board has done with the layered mitigation strategies, especially given the continued high spread of infection. I understand that people want to go back to normal, but we also need to do what's right for our community. Thank you for your leadership on this.

Ryan Abbott

To District 97 school board members and Administration,

We are writing to express our support for your adoption and implementation of recommendations made by the Oak Park Department of Public Health (OPDPH), including continued masking and remote schooling when necessary. We are grateful to have local public health experts who are focused on the metrics of our school district and larger community and a District board and administration willing to make the tough choices — between imperfect trade-offs — that will ultimately increase overall public health.

We are concerned about students, teachers and staff breathing in our schools every day, particularly those who are older, have lung conditions--especially asthma, have heart disease or diabetes, are immunocompromised--as [these have all been shown to increase the risk of severe Covid-19 symptoms](#). As

the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recently stated in support of continued mitigations such as universal masking, modified mealtime spaces and remote learning when necessary: "Children cannot learn effectively if there are not enough healthy adults in the building to adequately supervise and teach them." Mitigations while the COVID transmission rates are still high protects their physical safety and allows them to attend school in-person. Families who live in multi-generational households, such as with grandparents, also need these mitigations until our public health experts tell us otherwise.

Our OPDPH director is the one who should be making recommendations about removing mitigations in our schools, based on her public health expertise, the rates and numbers and other local data. And our school district should continue to follow these recommendations.

In gratitude,

Laura and Scott Sakiyama, Andrea Kovach, Dr. Kip Adrian, Carrie Kovach, Dr. Wendy Borlabi, Kristen and Eric Fenton, D97 parents

Hello Board Members-

I am writing as a public health professional and a parent of children in Lincoln and Brooks to encourage you to maintain the mask mandate in d97 despite the fact that other districts are or will no longer be enforcing it.

The continued high rates of transmission throughout Cook County, the ongoing risk to unvaccinated children under age 5, as well as the immunocompromised in our community all, unfortunately, require that we maintain a multilayered approach which includes masking.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Jarpe-Ratner, PhD, MPH, MST

Parent of Lincoln and Brooks students

Dear D97 Board Members and the D97 Community,

First, I would like to welcome the new Superintendent, Dr. Ushma Shah, whose contract is likely to be approved tonight. Thank you for taking on this position and helping lead our district during this difficult time and transition. We look forward to working with you in the future.

To our dedicated board members, once again you are most likely going to hear from the loud voices in our community urging you to make changes to d97 Covid Protocols based on opinions and feelings and the recent news of a lawsuit, which as d97 communicated in a recent letter d97 was not a part of that lawsuit. I am sorry that you are all put in another difficult situation to change guidelines and that this has to take up precious time when we could be discussing other matters of our children's education and well-being.

Despite the recent court ruling on the mask mandate and its enforcement, the guidance from the health professionals remains clear. At this time indoor masking is recommended for all individuals regardless of vaccination status. I will site the documentation below but based on the current guidelines from the CDC, the Illinois Department of Public Health, and the Illinois Board of Education I am asking the board to keep the current indoor masking policies and most other covid mitigations we currently have in place at d97 including testing.

However, I do ask that we consider putting on the February 22nd agenda and discussing changing a few guidelines around outdoor masking, extracurricular activities, and cohorts. As the weather warms up and cases hopefully continue to drop to more manageable levels, I would like to see the board consider bringing back extracurricular and community-building activities and events for elementary students and middle school where applicable also. Examples of things that were removed during the pandemic and should be able to safely return this is spring are Garden Club and other extracurriculars which can be done safely outside, Eagle Nests (as they are called at Irving) that help build a greater sense of school community and help socially and emotionally, field trips to places like the Arboretum which educates and enrich, and finally all school outdoor events like the egg drop which educate and build community.

The CDC's current guidance on outdoor masking is as follows: In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors. CDC recommends that people who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people. (source updated 1/13/22

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019ncov/vaccines/recommendations/children-teens.html>)

While there are many kids at recess, they are NOT involved in sustained close contact throughout extended periods of time. It is also widely known that outdoor spread is very unlikely according to many epidemiologists. I don't have the exact numbers on this but if this was on the agenda for 2/22 then the board would have time to gather the exact data on this as well.

Throughout this pandemic, one of the most difficult things as a parent (and probably for the students, staff, and community members) is that the guidelines continue to change often. There is no stability. While I look forward to the day kids no longer need masks indoors at school, I believe removing indoor masking at this time is not in the community's best interest. It's possible the court's decision will be overturned on appeal in a couple of weeks and removing indoor masks then going back to them will cause more confusion, mental health problems, and safety concerns.

At this time, I hope the board does NOT consider removing the indoor mask mandate for the various reasons I mentioned here along with the fact that current cases are still not below safe levels and our youngest community members are not yet eligible for vaccines. The vaccine for the under 5 group is coming hopefully soon and when that happens OR if CDC guidelines on indoor masking change only then we should reconsider our indoor mask guidelines. Until then we should consider smaller changes as I mentioned that will have a big impact on student and staff mental health.

I am putting my sources, the CDC and IDPH current guidelines below, they do not need to be read as a public comment but I am attaching them so they are part of the public record and for the board.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration.

Tina Harle
Parent of a vaccinated 3rd Grader at Irving and a preschooler

Board members and Interim Superintendents Dr. Powell and Dr. Wernet,

During your previous public meeting, board members discussed the possibility of allowing students to go maskless. These conversations did not seem rooted in recommendations from public health experts, nor the transmission rates among the District's students—which has seen 3.6% of the total student body test positive for COVID in the last three weeks. While I appreciate the need to plan for the future, I hope that the District will continue to make decisions in close collaboration with Oak Park's Department of Public

Health. On that note, the current public health recommendation is for people to wear high quality masks. To that end, thank you for providing such masks to all students and staff.

As the District plans its COVID future, it must also adequately address classroom air quality. After winter break, the OPDPH Director stated that it would be unusual to see the in-school transmission that the District experienced if the air inside the classrooms was being adequately filtered. A single point in time measurement is insufficient to evaluate ever changing conditions. The District does not know how well the ventilation systems are performing today.

Indoor air quality will become even more critical if (or when) students begin attending school maskless, while the virus continues to circulate in the community. Layered mitigations are the best way to control viral transmission. If the District removes masks from these mitigations, there are few layers remaining. You must ensure that students and staff are breathing clean air. Continuously monitoring classrooms' air quality and adding air purifiers to all classrooms is the best way to achieve this goal.

Thank you for your consideration and service.

Regards,

Alicia Chastain

(Mother to two D97 students)

I caught covid two weeks ago. Everyone in my house is vaccinated, the adults have boosters, and yet after I caught it so did the rest of my family. The kids have now recovered and the adults have lingering congestion and coughs - I wake up each day feeling almost as sick as the day before. To fully recover will be a slow process, it seems, even though we are healthy, active people with no relevant medical preconditions.

For many families, two weeks of sickness would mean lost wages and potentially lost jobs for those many workers without paid sick leave. What about all those families with mitigating health conditions that put them at greater risk for hospitalization or worse? Even a kid who heals rapidly can first pass it on to a grandparent for whom this could well be fatal or have lasting effects. Some of our kids and teachers in D97 are immunocompromised themselves. I don't think wearing a mask is too great a sacrifice to make for the safety of *all* our community.

Charity Anne Caldwell

Parent of two D97 Beye School kids

With a three-year old son at home who is still too young to be vaccinated, I am very concerned about Lincoln remaining a safe place for his older sister to attend school without the risk of catching COVID and bringing it home. As such, I urge the school district to please follow the direction of the CDC and other health experts and keep the mask mandate in place. Obviously, like everyone else, I would love for school to be mask-free someday, but not until it has been deemed medically safe. Thank you so, so much to the teachers, administration, and other staff who have worked so hard during this pandemic to take such good care of all of our children.

Alexander Nied

It seems a significant push is being made in our community towards removing mask requirements and other mitigations in our schools. The pressure to do so from the downstate lawsuits and from developments in other states is sure to arrive in Illinois and Oak Park. I believe we all want to get to a place where these mitigations are no longer necessary. I am married to an educator and care deeply about

her and her colleagues as much as she cares about her students. My hope is that mitigations are reduced only after sustained flattening of community spread and with a clear plan of how/when to reinstall them if/when necessary. I do not believe that time comes when other states say so. Or when a downstate judge says so. I believe that time comes when all staff concerns are heard and addressed and when the entire community is considered - including those among us who are immunocompromised and remain at risk when rates of infection are high. I believe educating children throughout this time has become a nearly thankless task in the face of nearly overwhelming (but understandable) parental frustrations, anxiety, and concern. I'm grateful for your ability to make difficult decisions that have prioritized safety and I wish to express my gratitude for those efforts.

Michael Ciacciarelli

Dear D97 Board,

My family has become aware of the organization efforts of those seeking to return to normal, no matter the cost to our community's health. No man is an island. Infectious diseases don't just impact those with enough resources to beat it at little personal cost. My household will continue to follow mitigations for the public good. We ask that the schools continue to teach our children about how to be good citizens, willing to give a little for overall public good. This lesson will help them in the future as they work to protect our planet from climate change, and for any other societal level disaster they will face in their lifetime. We hope the lesson D97 is teaching all our children is that societies are judged by how they care for their most vulnerable. After all, no one cares about what you know, until they know that you care.

Thank you,
Andre Mcgruder and family

Please for the mental health of our children make it mask optional.

Ursula Merten

Dear D97 Board,

I am writing to express my support for continued masking in schools. The district has done a tremendous job keeping our students, teachers/staff and our community safe throughout the pandemic. I am in full support of continuing masking until positivity rates are down and vaccines are available to the youngest in our community. Thank you for the work and all you have done the past two years. Let's not give up and "go back to normal" yet; we are still in a pandemic and can do our part to protect the most vulnerable.

Thank you,
Susan Tsan

Good evening,

While we are not named plaintiffs on the 2/4/22 TRO lawsuit, we are writing to remind D97 to uphold the rule of law and respect the due process rights of every single child in our district. Pursuant to Judge Grischow's ruling, the C19 mitigation protocols -- mask mandates, exclusion from school, vaccination and testing of staff -- are illegal. Her ruling states the Governor, ISBE, and IDPH do not have the legal authority to institute said mandates. These emergency orders have been declared void by the court.

While we would hope D97 would immediately communicate their compliance with the order, it must be noted that a child's legal right to due process is NOT subject to the school board's vote nor OPDH's decisions. These are protected rights under the law and have been upheld by the court. School boards have no authority to enforce mitigations and suspend due process rights by a show of hands. Children have been subject to the illegal actions of ISBE, IDPH, OPDH, and this school board for nearly two years.

It is past time for this board to respect the statute and abandon all illegal mandates and practices immediately. D97 has no other lawful option but to adhere to Judge Grischow's order and respect every child's right to due process before masking, exclusion and testing can be required.

You are seeing it all over the country, and all over the world. Mask mandates are going away. What are you waiting for?

While hundreds of districts in IL are now mask-optional after Friday's ruling—in favor of students' health and well-being and education—you're choosing to continue your harmful and needless mitigation protocols.

By continuing to institute these protocols under this TRO ruling, you will be doing so knowing they are illegal.

My 10 year-old son was refused an education today at Longfellow school. He would not comply with your illegal mask mandate, which was 100% his choice and with our support. They sent him home. This was shameful. Defying the judge's ruling and implementing this mandate today on my son may open the District to legal liability under the law. I'm saddened to have to write these words to you. I never, ever imagined it would get this far. Please drop all mandates now.

Sincerely,

Rich Fobes and Karen Thomas

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm strongly in favor of the mask mandate. Please consider kids with health conditions and please consider the message it sends to kids to be thoughtful and kind and work together, wear masks, and stay healthy. If even just a little bit longer for med development that is presently, imminently even, in the pipeline.

Sincerely,
Mom of middle schooler, preschooler, and high schooler,
Tammy Tamayo

Dear members of the Board,

I am writing to ask that you support and recommend that schools be able to move forward with the 5th grade Outdoor Education field trips that are planned to occur later this year. Some schools were able to participate in this earlier in the fall. At this time, it is my understanding that field trips are not approved. Even if the district does not approve all field trips at this time, I believe that a special exception should be made for the Outdoor Education program for schools in which this trip has not yet happened. I believe there are strategies that could make this trip safe. Let's work together and problem

solve around how we CAN make this experience a possibility, instead of just saying that we can't. To make this a success parents could opt in or opt out of the trip given their comfort level with the trip, masking can be used, students could all be tested that week with our in school testing capabilities, parent volunteers could show proof of vaccination, or a negative test. The majority of the activities are held outdoors, where the risk of transmission is low and the CDC does not even advise masking. The school and parent chaperones will need time to plan this larger activity. I ask the board to approve this now, so that the needed plans can be made for a safe, successful, and meaningful trip for our 5th grade students. We are a highly vaccinated community, and school district and local case numbers are declining. Let's find ways to help our 5th graders experience some of the 5th grade traditions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Marcella Douce

Dear Board members,

You should bring back hot lunch. Because the bagged lunches taste horrible! They also aren't that healthy. For example, in the nachos they serve Doritos that taste like nachos, not actual nachos. Another reason the bagged lunches are bad is that the sun butter and jelly looks more like a ravioli than a sandwich.

Your student, Jocelyn Morgan
3rd grader, Mann Elementary

Dear School Board,

My name is Avery and I am a kindergartner. I really want to know if you can do this thing that I am asking, bringing back hot lunch. I want hot lunch because my sister says it tastes better. The sack lunches are bad because they're cold and unhealthy. I wish the school would make pizza already cooked and strawberries, and yogurt and spaghetti and meatballs and breakfast for lunch.

I also want to not wear a mask because it's sweaty and hot. Sometimes it hurts behind my ears.

Thank you and I hope I'll see changes soon,
Avery Morgan

4. ACTION ITEMS

4.1 APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

ACTION ITEMS

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

- 4.1.1 Approval of Minutes from January 25, 2022 Board Meeting
- 4.1.2 Bill List
- 4.1.3 Personnel
- 4.1.4 Middle School Sports : Wrestling Proposal (01/25/22)
- 4.1.5 Weeding and Disposal of Materials

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

5. SPECIAL REPORTS**5.1 Discussion of TRO Court Ruling**

Administration invited Caroline Roselli from Robbins Schwartz, the Districts legal firm, to join this evening's Board Meeting. Tonight's special report centers around how the recent "TRO" ruling affects current COVID-19 mitigations for students and staff of District 97. On Friday afternoon, an Illinois Judge issued a temporary restraining order temporarily prohibiting the Governor from enforcing executive orders and emergency rulings regarding school mask mandates, exclusions for close contacts, and employee vaccination and testing requirements.

Roselli explains that District 97 is not a party to the lawsuit and therefore advises following the current Order that's in place. As a result, there are no changes to the district's safety mitigations. Administration is asking that students, staff and families continue to comply with these measures until advised of any change.

Dr. Wernet and Dr. Powell appreciate everyone's patience and understanding as the District continues to review this decision and navigates any potential changes to the COVID-19 guidance and rules for Illinois schools. The priority remains providing a safe and healthy learning environment for all students and staff.

6. ACTION ITEMS

ACTION ITEMS

6.1 Appointment of District 97 Superintendent

Kearney moved, seconded by Spurlock that the Board of Education, of Oak Park Elementary School District 97 moves to approve the three year contract for Dr. Ushma Shah as the new Superintendent of Schools for District 97. The contract will commence June 1, 2022. On behalf of the Board of Education, Welcome to the Oak Park Community.

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

7. CONCLUDING ITEMSCONCLUDING
ITEMS**7.1 Board Remarks**

Board members each thanked Dr. Shah for her commitment to being the next Superintendent of District 97 schools. They welcome her strategic approach and knowledge of diversity and equity. Each are excited to get started working with Dr. Shah as she transitions to the district full-time.

Dr. Shah thanks each of the Board members, the Administrative staff in attendance for tonight's meeting and those watching the livestream. Knowing how important this appointment is to the Board and the Community, Dr. Shah is honored to serve as the next Superintendent. Building on the strengths of the community, Dr. Shah takes a look at the district logo, the "Acorn", and further explains her commitment to equity and academic achievement for all students.

As she looks ahead towards planning and approach, Dr. Shah, looks at "gardening and growth" in comparison. How would you plant, trim and build trellises to support growth? In looking at all the resources including funding, staff and time, her question to others would be, Where do we need to "plant, trim and prune", what also needs to be strengthened in this process? Dr. Shah is eager to get started, and thanks everyone who has been part of this process.

CLAIM Update: CLAIM recently hosted its annual legislator’s forum. Board member Ross Dribin would like to thank everyone who participated and Lou Anne Johannesson for coordinating the meeting. District 200 approved the IGA on Data Sharing at its meeting last night. We are excited for this agreement and thankful to Senate President Don Harmon, Senate Majority Leader Kimberly Lightford, and Representatives Camille Lilly and La Shawn Ford for all their hard work on this committee. A special thank you to Gavin Kearney and Jay Rowell for all the behind the scenes work that went into this successful event.

8. ADJOURNMENT

ADJOURNMENT

Moore moved, seconded by Spurlock that the meeting be adjourned. There being no further business to conduct, President Kim declared the meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Board President

Board Secretary