

**Official Minutes of the
Oak Park Board of Education District 97,
260 Madison Street, Oak Park, Cook County, Illinois
Special Meeting May 2, 2017**

President Spurlock called the meeting to order at 12:12 p.m.

Present: Broy, Spurlock, O'Connor, Liebl and Datta
Absent: Breymaier, Spatz
Also Present: Superintendent Dr. Carol Kelley, Sr. Director of Administrative Services Dr. Felicia Starks Turner, and Board Secretary Sheryl Marinier

ROLL CALL

PUBLIC COMMENT

Reverend Allen Taylor, an Oak Park resident and Senior Pastor at the Unity Temple shared that he is active with restorative justice, and introduced David Lowe, who has also participated in peace services. Taylor expressed concern about student discipline and the need to make decisions that will not destroying student's lives. He asked the Board to reflect on how a path of engaging and restoring these children will help the community. He suggested that by having them acknowledge their behavior and apologize, kids will know what was wrong and improve. He reminded the Board that these are our kids, and questioned how to engage them so they are not marked for life.

Kelly Flemming, an Oak Park resident, shared that this is her second time attending a Board meeting. She shared that she is a member of the "E" team and wished to speak to the Board regarding equity. She expressed interest in everyone being successful (children and teachers). She questioned how information should be communicated to the public, if at all, and questioned how the Board, the family and the community found themselves here today. She said that she has heard the voices of the community members acting out of fear, and questioned if that is the best use of time. Flemming questioned if the Board has enough information about the student discipline issues they are going to hear about today, noting that the children were out of school for more than 10 days. She shared that her son has been in school with these children and one of them does not have legal representation. She questioned how the Board is navigating this issue and encouraged them to make decisions for their success. She noted that her son's comment about the student in question was that he is a good boy and should be in school.

Makesha Custard, an Oak Park resident with three children in the district, shared that she will soon have one child attending Brooks Middle School. She expressed concerned about the security and safety at the school, and encouraged the district to take a hard look at security issues and reduce the number of occurrences. As a black parent and the PTO President, she expressed grave concerns about the Board holding a special meeting, and disappointed that this Board, who has cited the need for "restorative practices" in just about every talk that she has heard since this new administration got here, that they would react so quickly to feedback and anger born from the loudest people in the room. She expressed concern that the voices that need to be heard may be silenced due to the color of their skin, their income bracket, or their inconvenient schedules.

She suggested that the schools, community and society in general have a bad habit of criminalizing the behavior of the least fortunate kids and communities and sometime without all the facts, information, data and research – data that undoubtedly predict outcomes based on history. She encouraged the Board to not scar these children for life by expelling them.

Terry Keleher, an Oak Park resident with a son at Julian Middle School, recommended that the Board not expel any middle school students for the incidents that occurred on April 17, 2017. He explained that in his capacity as a researcher, trainer and consultant on issues of equity and inclusion, he is very familiar with the adverse impacts of overly punitive disciplinary actions. He shared that she co-authored a national study on school discipline and zero tolerance, and testified before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and served as an expert witness in U.S. District Court. He shared that she has facilitated healing circles and cares deeply about the safety of the children, and about how our students, and we, as an entire community, respond, learn and grow.

Keleher expressed concern that expulsion is the ultimate exclusionary consequence, with life-long impacts, and suggested that it should only be used as a very last resort when all other remedies have been exhausted. He noted that years of evidence-based research shows that zero tolerance practices are ineffective, counter-productive, and often, discriminatory. He shared that a growing body of research points to the success of alternative approaches, including restorative justice, social-emotional supports, relationship-centered schools and creating nurturing school climates. He asked the Board to begin to robustly embrace restorative practices so lessons can be learned, relationships can be restored, and healing can happen.

Sheree Johnson, an Oak Park resident for 19 years, shared that she sent her children through District 97, and noted that this is the second time that she is addressing the Board on the same topic. She suggested that Oak Park has never fully embraced the minority students fully, making sure that they are successful in their community. She suggested that this is a recipe for failure and suggested the need to look at ourselves and the schools, and consider the attention the students got before these incidents. She suggested that Oak Park has been slow to embrace restorative justice practices. She suggested that the district look to support the children and bring them in as part of the community.

Kathleen Jonosky, an Oak Park resident with three children (one at Brooks Middle School and two at Hatch Elementary), came on her lunch hour to address issues of inequity in the schools and ask the Board to deeply look at what is dividing kids and work on restorative justice. She urged the schools to work though the mission, and suggested that children 12 years old should not be set aside. She expressed interest in having the schools work on healing and consider ways that the community can work with all the children. She encouraged the Board to not expel the children in question.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Datta moved, seconded by O’Connor, that the Board of Education move into Executive Session at 12:34 p.m. to discuss (Student Discipline 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(9)). Roll call vote.

Ayes: Datta, O’Connor, Broy, Spurlock, Spatz, Breymaier, and Liebl
Nays: None
Absent: None
Motion passed.

OPEN SESSION

Spurlock moved, seconded by Datta, that the Board of Education move into Open Session at 5:20 p.m. All members of the Board in attendance were in agreement.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to conduct, President Spurlock declared the meeting adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Board President

Board Secretary