



# Update on the 2017 Referenda

2018-2019

In April 2017, the residents of Oak Park voted to pass two referenda for District 97—one for day-to-day school operations and another for facilities.

These referenda have advanced the district's vision, aided the long-term viability of our schools and fostered the ongoing success of the children we serve. The referenda have also helped strengthen our five-year financial forecast, which, when coupled with our continued commitment to sound fiscal policies and practices, will limit the need to seek another referendum in the near future.

Below is an update on the progress we have made since the passage of the referenda.

## Financial Responsibility

- Allocated \$13.3 million in annual operating referendum funds and began expending \$57.5 million in capital referendum dollars in accordance with pre-referendum plans that are detailed below.
- Negotiated new contracts with our employee groups that reward the hard work of our faculty and staff, while also being responsible with tax dollars. In keeping with prior contracts, growth in salaries, which is our biggest annual budgetary commitment, is aligned with expected revenues.
- Redirected unanticipated referendum revenues toward the payment of the construction at Holmes Elementary School that was completed in 2018. The district's decision to cancel the planned bond sales for the work at Holmes saved about \$1 million in interest and has resulted in the return of those revenues to the community on an annual basis.
- Enacted a financial transparency policy to increase and improve plain language communication of financial issues to the community.



*Aerial image of the Holmes expansion, courtesy of Bulley & Andrews.*

## Opportunity Gap

- Approved a comprehensive racial and educational equity policy to provide a consistent framework for ensuring that every child we serve has access to an excellent and equitable educational experience.
- Launched the Internet for All program to provide free internet access to students who do not have it at home.
- Established an Equity Inquiry Team of teachers seeking to better understand and improve the school experiences of our African American students.

## Learning Environment

- Increased our total number of National Board Certified teachers from nine to 39 during the past two years, and have 34 National Board Certified Equivalents (nurses, social workers, physical therapists, speech/language therapists). In 2018, District 97 had the largest class of newly-certified teachers in Illinois.
- Added teachers and sections to maintain class sizes that are aligned with state averages and help meet Oak Park's growing population.
- Increased the number of teachers of color in our district by 2%. As of 2018, our proportion of teachers of color is 26% higher than the state average.
- Ensured that all District 97 students continue to have access to arts education.
- Enhanced the learning environment in our schools and better met the academic, social-emotional and mental health needs of our more than 6,000 students through the addition of social workers, a psychologist and interventionists.
- Expanded our co-teaching model in our elementary schools to help promote inclusion and support differentiated learning; one general education teacher and one special education teacher share planning, organization, delivery and assessment of instruction, as well as physical space, in a single classroom.



*Lincoln Elementary School teacher Erica Childress earned her National Board Certification in December 2018.*



*Julie Dunn and Claire Downs co-teach an inclusive kindergarten class at Whittier Elementary School.*

## Facilities

- Expanded Lincoln and Longfellow elementary schools to address capacity issues and provide access to enhanced learning spaces that support instruction in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math).
- Improved the accessibility, safety, core functionality, and sustainability of our schools for the next 20 years; working on upgrades to the year-round temperature control in our buildings.

**More detailed questions? Email [d97board@op97.org](mailto:d97board@op97.org). We will also post additional information and updates on our website ([www.op97.org](http://www.op97.org)) in the future.**