



# Oak Park Elementary School District 97

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August 21, 2020

Dear District 97 Families,

Welcome to the 2020-21 school year! I hope your summer has been filled with opportunities to relax, recharge, and radically practice various forms of self-care!

Last school year was unprecedented for each of us. For the first time in our history, we experienced a three-prong crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic, a financial downturn and a social crisis. Alone, any one of these is traumatic. Collectively, it can be overwhelming. Yet, thanks to your support and our amazing staff, our district accomplished bold, innovative actions, which have placed us even closer to the realization of our vision. Some of our accomplishments from 2019-20 included:

- Enabling teachers and/or parents to translate their child's online EL report card into 109 different languages.
- Providing new, innovative, 21st century collaborative work areas, STEAM labs, and enhanced learning spaces with adaptable furniture that is light, mobile and can be easily reorganized for different learning/teaching styles.
- The launch of an exciting new "Weekly Wrap-Up" newsletter to increase awareness of our equity efforts.
- Through a collaborative project with DePaul University and financial support from the Oak Park/River Forest Community Mental Health Board, we provided small group, mindfulness-based cognitive behavioral therapy to middle school students who were exhibiting symptoms of anxiety, depression, and executive functioning challenges. We also provided professional learning to school staff, as well as parent/community talks on adolescent mental health topics.
- The restructure of our Human Resources department to focus on the recruitment, hiring and retention of diverse talent; engagement and growth of our workforce; and the management of the employee life cycle.

Now as we prepare to welcome approximately 6,000 students to the 2020-2021 school year, I want to recognize and thank the more than 100 staff members who played a part in the district's planning team and who worked tirelessly this summer to develop our plans for the upcoming school year. As you know, the current plan for reopening is for District 97 to start the year in a remote learning model for the duration of Trimester 1. This plan is guided by three priorities:

- First and foremost, every decision is made with the health and safety of our students and staff in mind.

- Second is our commitment to providing consistent, high-quality learning experiences for all students. We know that an important supporting condition for learning is consistent student engagement, which has been a huge factor as we have contemplated different scenarios.
- Last, but certainly not least, is our equity imperative. Our district's equity policy continues to be the foundation of our work, and we will continue to apply an equity lens to every decision we make this school year.

It is too early to predict whether we will remain in remote learning beyond Trimester 1. We will continue to monitor infection rates and rely on public health guidance to determine when we can safely reopen school buildings. When we can, we will move into our hybrid model. The district's [transition plan](#), which was approved by the Board of Education on Aug. 11, includes the guidelines we will follow for both models of instructional delivery.

I realize the upcoming school year will be challenging. Yet, as the quote by Sonya Renee Taylor says, this is an opportunity for our school community to stitch a new garment, one that fits all of humanity. With this "call" in mind, we have been developing our "**2020-21 Collective Action Plan**," which we anticipate presenting to the Board of Education in the coming months. This plan aligns our focus areas for the upcoming year on the district's equity challenge. By prioritizing these actions, along with our priority of the health and safety of our students and staff, our goal is to align our time, talent and resources to the achievement of our vision—for each and every one of the students we have the honor to serve. And together,

*"We will not go back to normal.*

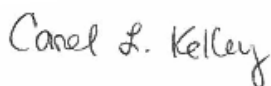
*Normal never was. Our pre-Corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction...*

*We should not long to return, my friends.*

*We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity."*

Once again, thank you for your patience, grace and compassion as we continue to work within the context of a global pandemic. With your continued support, I believe District 97 will **create positive learning environments for all students that are equitable, inclusive and focused on the whole child**. I hope you enjoy the remaining days of summer, and look forward to seeing you later this month.

Sincerely,



Dr. Carol L. Kelley ([@drkforequity](#))  
Superintendent  
#MyD97