

**League of Women Voters of Oak Park & River Forest**  
**Study of District 97 Referendum**  
**March 1, 2011**

**Criteria/Question for Oak Park River Forest League of Women Voters Consensus Meeting**

- A) Is the passage of the District 97 referendum, as currently formulated, consistent with other positions of the LWVUS, LWVIL, LWVCC and the LWV of OPRF?
- B) Considering the State Report Card, other pertinent data and reports, and the standards, and values of the community, evaluate the following:
1. Are cost-per-pupil expenditures in District 97 consistent with other benchmark communities?
  2. Are student-teacher ratios and student-administrator ratios consistent with other benchmark communities?
  3. Are salaries for teachers and administrators competitive enough to attract highly qualified, talented personnel?
  4. Are the curriculum and programs competitive and of a high enough standard to prepare students for their future?
- C) Is the passage of the referendum essential to maintain, restore or achieve the established educational goals of the district?
- D) Does the League of Women Voters of Oak Park & River Forest support the D97 Referendum for an increase in the limiting rate as proposed on the ballot for the April 5, 2011 election?

**League of Women Voters of Oak Park & River Forest  
Study of District 97 Referendum for April, 2011**

**Review Materials for Consensus Meeting  
March 1, 2011**

**Introduction**

The purpose of the consensus meetings is to determine whether or not the League of Women Voters of Oak Park and River Forest will support the District 97 referendum on the April 5, 2011 ballot. This referendum will increase the limiting rate for District 97 and add approximately \$38 per \$1000 of current property taxes.

Initially the District 97 Board planned to use a working cash bond referendum which would have produced an even greater increase in property taxes. At the January 18, 2011 Board meeting the Board changed to a limiting rate increase referendum. This decision was based largely on the passage of the Illinois state income tax increase, which appeared to offer greater assurance that the money the district is owed by the State (currently \$2.4 million for FY11) would be paid in a timely manner in the future. The District 97 website notes the following:

“After analyzing the impact of the income tax increase on the district’s 5-year projections, the District 97 Board determined that a limiting rate increase will:

- Offer a long-term, sustainable solution for managing the district’s structural deficit
- Cost taxpayers less money - \$38 per \$1,000 on a property tax bill as opposed to \$61 per \$1,000 under the working cash fund bond option
- Provide funding that will be invested in the educational experience being offered to the children of the community.”

League members are encouraged to pay special attention to two recent documents prepared by Superintendent Albert Roberts of District 97. These materials explain why the referendum is being put on the ballot in April, 2011 and what the consequences to the district would be if the referendum fails to pass.

The first document is entitled “FAQ regarding District 97’s Referendum” and gives considerable background on the reasons for conducting a referendum of this size.

<http://www.op97.k12.il.us/referendum/FAQ-Regarding-April-Referendum.pdf>

Also, the superintendent has done a careful review of current costs and has cut over \$1 million from the district’s budget. A large portion of the savings comes from an agreement with the District 97 teacher’s union to accept a salary freeze for the 2011-2012 academic year. Administrative salaries have also been frozen. These and other cost savings are described in the PDF entitled “Information Regarding Reductions.” This second document also describes what further cuts will be required if the referendum fails.

<http://www.op97.k12.il.us/referendum/Reductions-Information.pdf>

## Consensus Materials

To help you answer the consensus questions, the League committee on the District 97 referendum has researched League positions on education, attended the public forum held by District 97 on November 18, 2010 and Board Meetings in December, January and February. Committee members also held two meetings with the District 97 administration to obtain information on District 97 finances and to understand the meaning of the proposed budget cuts if the referendum should fail.

- League positions on education are included in **Appendix A**.
- On December 10, 2010, two members of the committee met with District 97 Superintendent Dr. Albert Roberts, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operation, Therese O’Neill, and Communications Coordinator Chris Jasculca to discuss a series of questions related to the finances of District 97. These questions were drawn from materials used by the New Trier and Elmhurst Leagues to study their school districts and requests for additional funding. The questions posed and the District’s responses are included below in **Appendix B**.
- To better understand the list of recommended reductions that Superintendent Roberts presented to the Board on December 14, 2010, we held a second meeting with Superintendent Roberts, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Kevin Anderson, and the Director of Human Resources and Development, Trish Carlson on January 7, 2011. At the end of January, the superintendent posted a memorandum entitled “Information Regarding Reductions.” He included a list of reductions that will happen regardless of the referendum status and those that would occur if the referendum failed. In **Appendix C** you will find further explanations of the programs that would be cut if the referendum does not pass.

## Comparisons with Similar School Districts

One of the consensus questions asks for comparisons to benchmark communities for per-pupil expenditures, student-teacher ratios, and salaries. The information to answer those questions is contained in Table 1 below. Data are taken from the Illinois Interactive Report Card through 2010.

Most of the school districts included in the tables below were on a list provided by District 97 staff and represent the schools they consider their peers. Three districts were eliminated from their list: Morton Grove and Niles which are relatively small, and the Elmhurst district which includes a high school and therefore is not comparable to Oak Park District 97. The committee also added two neighboring school districts: LaGrange South which is similar to Oak Park; and River Forest, our very close neighbor.

As shown in Table 1, Oak Park District 97 ranks fifth in the number of students, the percent minority, and average teacher salary; fourth in the average years of teacher experience, operational expenditure per pupil and in instructional expenditure per pupil; and eighth in the percent of low income students.

**Table 1: Selected 2010 Illinois Interactive Report Card Data**

District/Number of Students	Percent Minority	Percent Low Income	Instructional Expenditure per Pupil	Operational Expenditure per Pupil	Student to Teacher Ratio	Average Teacher Salary	Average Years of Teacher Experience
<b>Oak Park D97 5,421</b>	<b>43.3%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>\$7,911</b>	<b>\$13,348</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>\$72,208</b>	<b>12.7</b>
Evanston D65 6,346	55.7%	39%	\$8,119	\$14,441	13.4	\$70,251	12.5
Palatine D15 11,998	48.4%	29%	\$6,466	\$11,025	19.8	\$73,774	12.9
Wheeling D21 6,715	59.7%	39%	\$8,075	\$13,613	16	\$78,641	11.5
Flossmoor D161 2,414	77.3%	30%	\$5,977	\$10,276	15.3	\$53,188	11.3
Schaumburg D54 14,231	52.2%	17%	\$7,710	\$12,293	16.6	\$68,908	12.4
Northbrook D27 1,211	14.9%	2%	\$11,147	\$18,234	12.7	\$80,433	14.5
Arlington Heights D25 5,117	15.3%	8%	\$6,514	\$11,647	17	\$71,658	13
Skokie D73-5 1,044	55.3%	25%	\$6,680	\$12,845	16.1	\$63,044	12.1

Lombard D44 3,069	33.3%	26%	\$7,194	\$12,435	16.2	\$74,858	13.8
LaGrange D105 South 1,312	39.6%	39%	\$7,726	\$11,768	14.7	\$67,019	11.5
River Forest D90 1,368	21.5%	5%	\$7,518	\$12,363	15.3	\$68,213	12.5

Committee members were also interested in measures of student achievement. A second comparison was done of these school districts' performance on the Illinois Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT). See Table 2 below, Composite Percent That Meets and Exceeds – ISAT Assessment for Years 2008, 2009, 2010. These data were taken from the Illinois Interactive Report Card website. According to the website:

“The ISAT covers reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8, science in grades 4 and 7, and writing in grades 3, 5, 6, 8, and 11. Since 2006 the ISAT testing of reading and mathematics has been scored on a common scale for all grades. This "equating" process affords a reliable measure of student learning that is comparable from year to year over time. Students' numeric scores on the ISAT test are converted to performance levels which indicate progress towards meeting the Illinois Learning Standards.”

“Results are reported by subject according to four performance levels: exceeds standards, meets standards, below standards, and academic warning. ISAT measures individual student achievement relative to the Illinois Learning Standards. Curriculum experts and Illinois teachers developed these standards in collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education.”

Definition of exceeds standards: “student work demonstrates advance knowledge and skills in the subject. Students creatively apply knowledge and skills to solve problems and evaluate the results.”

Definition of meets standards: “Student work demonstrates proficient knowledge and skills in the subject. Students effectively apply knowledge and skills to solve problems.”

Table 2 shows first the overall performance for the state of Illinois on the ISAT tests, next Oak Park District 97, followed by the comparison school districts. Most districts, including District 97, show improvement across the three years in the percent that meet or exceed standards. All but one of the districts in this table exceed the state average performance in all three years. In 2010, five districts show higher performance than District 97. The schools with higher test performance also tend to have a smaller percentage of children with low income, as shown in Table 1. For more information on the ISAT, please look at the Illinois Interactive Report Card website.

**Table 2: Composite Percent That Meets and Exceeds – ISAT Assessment  
For Years 2008-2010**

District/Number of Students (2010)	2008	2009	2010
<b>State</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>81%</b>
<b>Oak Park D97 5,421</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>90%</b>
Evanston D65 6,346	87%	87%	88%
Palatine D15 11,998	88%	88%	88%
Wheeling D21 6,715	77%	79%	78%
Flossmoor D161 2,414	86%	86%	85%
Schaumburg D54 14,231	89%	90%	92%
Northbrook D27 1,211	96%	95%	96%
Arlington Heights D25 5,117	95%	95%	95%
Skokie D73-5 1,044	90%	90%	91%
Lombard D44 3,069	89%	90%	90%
LaGrange D105 South 1,312	88%	86%	86%
River Forest D90 1,368	95%	95%	95%

**Conclusion: Consensus Meetings**

League members are encouraged to read these materials carefully to prepare for the consensus meetings on March 1 at Dole Library, 255 Augusta Blvd, Oak Park, IL, 60302. There will be two sessions, at 1 p.m. and at 6 p.m. The sessions should last approximately 1.5 hours. The more members who attend these meetings, the better our consensus will reflect the will of our membership. A consensus is not a vote but the sense of the group and is arrived at through discussion, so by attending

and making your views heard, you will help us all. All participants in the consensus discussions must be League members.

Please print out your materials and bring them to the consensus meetings so that you have them available for reference. Also, bring the referendum and the two documents from D97, the FAQ and Information Regarding Reductions.

If you have questions about these materials, please contact the committee using the OP&RF League email address: [lwvopr@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lwvopr@sbcglobal.net). We will attempt to reply to questions received in advance of March 1. You can also leave a message on our voice mail: (708) 802-0697.

If you are unable to attend and wish to express your opinion, send us an email at the above address. For your opinions to be considered, they need to be posted by noon on March 1. The consensus, however, will be based largely on the discussions at Dole Library.

And please remember to vote on April 5!

**Appendix A: League of Women Voters of Oak Park & River Forest  
Education Positions of the LWVUS, LWVIL, LWVCC and LWVOPRF**

*Question: Is the passage of the District 97 referendum as currently formulated consistent with other positions of the LWVUS, LWVIL, LWVCC and LWVOPRF?*

- a) There is no specific policy on education by **the League of Women Voters, U.S.**, however a study will be conducted on the “Influence of the Federal Government on Education” during the next 2 years.
- b) There is no essential conflict with **the League of Women Voters of Illinois** position on schools. Here is the LWVIL position: “The League supports a system of high quality elementary and secondary schools for all children in Illinois which provides for local control of school program and budget within minimum program requirements set by the State. The State should provide leadership to local communities for program development and should set standards for recognition and accreditation of schools. The effectiveness of educational programs should be evaluated regularly. The League favors minimum standards for graduation and promotions of students. The League supports increased professionalism for teachers, including stringent teacher preparation standards, comprehensive teacher and principal evaluation, changes in tenure and increased teacher compensation. The State should assume the major responsibility for funding public schools and guarantee an adequate level of financial support. League believes that charters should be established by local school boards and the Illinois State Board of Education should continue to monitor the progress of existing charter schools before supporting further expansion.”
- c) There is no conflict with **the League of Women Voters of Cook County** position on education. The only position of the LWVCC is to “Support abolishment of the township school treasurers and trustees system within Cook County.” This was accomplished several years ago in a ballot initiative.
- d) There appears to be no conflict with the Program Position on Education by **the League of Women Voters of Oak Park & River Forest**. The current position is “Support of the public educational institutions that serve Oak Park and River Forest with emphasis on fiscal responsibility and educational excellence (Revised 1989, 1995, 1999).” One of the focus/priority programs of the LWVOPRF for 2010-2011 is to “promote LWVIL tax and school finance and positions within our communities and convene studies and discussions of local economic issues as needed.”

**Appendix B: League of Women Voters of Oak Park & River Forest  
District 97 Finances**

**Questions for the Evaluation of the D97 Referendum, Spring 2011  
Meeting with Superintendent Albert G. Roberts; Therese O'Neill, Asst. Supt. For  
Finance/Operations; Chris Jasculca, Communications Coordinator**

**Nancy Leavy and Mary Cay Murray, League Representatives**

**December 10, 2010**

**Documents Referenced:**

**Board of Education Budget Presentation, July 21, 2009**  
**2010-11 Proposed Budget, Board of Education Meeting of July 13, 2010**  
**Oak Park Elementary School D-97 Community Forum, A Vision for the Future, November 18, 2010**  
**Oak Park District 97 Board Meeting, December 14, 2010 presentation of Supt. Roberts Elementary School Matters, District 97, Fall, 2009**

**Note:** These documents will be available at the consensus meetings. Alternatively, most of them can be found at the District 97 website under packets for the Board meetings or information about the referendum. Information about the district's budget history since 2000 can be accessed by visiting <http://www.op97.org/administration/budget.html>

***1) Is there a report of District 97 financial health as required by the State or County? If so, please provide copies for the last three fiscal years. (\*)***

- a) Board of Education Budget Presentation, July 21, 2009
  - (a) 2008-09 End of Year Report\*
  - (b) 2009-10 Tentative Budget
- b) 2010-2011 Proposed Budget – Board of Ed Meeting, July 13, 2010
  - (a) Adopted 2009-2010 Budget
  - (b) Unaudited Actual 2009-2010 Budget\*
  - (c) 2010-11 Major Revenue Assumptions
  - (d) 2010-11 Major Expenditure Assumptions
  - (e) 2010-11 Tentative Budget\*

***2) Please list each D97 fund and briefly describe what expenditures it funds. In doing so, please indicate whether budgeted expenditures exceeded budgeted revenues at any time over the last three fiscal years. Please identify any reserves in each fund and for what purposes they will be used. Are any of these reserves fungible across funds?***

- a) Education Fund
- b) Operations and Maintenance Fund (buildings and custodians)
- c) Transportation Fund

- d) Municipal Retirement/Social Security Fund
- e) Working Cash Fund

Please see budgets noted above for budgeted amounts, expenditures, reserves.

- 3) ***In determining the amount of the referendum, were the district's current reserves considered? Is any portion thereof being used to reduce this referendum? If not, why not?***

Reserves were taken into account. The District attempts to hold reserves constant and fine-tune expenditures. Over the years they have constantly sought efficiencies and attempted to under-run budgets. See annual budgets and presentations for details.

- 4) ***Over the past three fiscal years, has the working cash fund been closed, combined with repeated short term borrowing, or incurred debt that has not been retired?***

This fund was not closed. It is used to bring in bond proceeds and then the funds are transferred to the appropriate accounts. The current bond rating is AA2. They also have insurance.

- 5) ***Over the past three fiscal years, have there been repeated postponements of (1) maintenance actions, (2) purchase of instructional materials and equipment, or (3) program implementation? If so, please describe each instance.***

D97 is never late, never tardy.

- 6) ***Over the past three fiscal years, has there ever been late payment of debt service, salaries, or contributions to pension funds? If so, please describe each instance.***

No on all counts.

- 7) ***Over the past three fiscal years, have limits been placed on borrowing by financial institutions or imposition of school bond rating changes?***

No, but the district is always scrutinized. They are already talking to rating companies concerning the new bonds.

- 8) ***What has been the impact of the State's failure to make timely required payments to District 97? Please describe in detail.***

D97 has had to borrow \$6.7 million because of late payments by the State and has been told not to count on the state. (See statement from Christopher A Koch, the State Superintendent, dated 7/12/ 10, that is included in July 13, 2010 presentation to Board.) The referendum would have been delayed if the state had been timely in its payments. On December 9 the state made its full payment on the balance due for the 2009-2010 school year.

- 9) ***Please describe any other unique financial hardships imposed on the school district (e.g. tax caps, tax exempt properties, TIF districts, rapidly increasing enrollment, property***

*reassessments)?*

Tax caps have limited annual increases in annual D97 levies and rates had been lowered due to increases in property values. Without the TIF, revenues would be lower. The TIF expires at the end of 2017. Enrollment has increased with the addition of full-day kindergarten in all elementary schools. State funds have been increased because of this change in the kindergarten schedule. Student population is currently at 5,500, up from 5,002 in the 06-07 school year.

***10) What are the D97 enrollment projections over the next five to seven years? What is the anticipated financial impact of demographic trends on the number “at risk” students, special education costs, special needs programs, and/or bilingual programs over the next five to seven years?***

D97 will do an enrollment study this year. Some students have transferred in to D97 from private schools. With respect to special ed programs, the national average is 11% while the local estimate is 14-15%. Superintendent Roberts is interested in adding interactive programs for foreign languages, a less expensive model than adding teachers.

***11) What are the D97 projections of income and expenses over the next five to seven years, and their effect on reserves, programs, and personnel (including labor costs)?***

See materials from PMA dated 10/28/10.

***12) What is the anticipated financial impact of changing technologies over the next five to seven years?***

a) A five year tech plan was put together last spring. All teachers would get laptops and would go through a certification program. Roberts would like \$5 million to bring in tech improvements sooner, such as electronic white boards in all classes. There is a real concern that such technological improvements would not happen if the referendum fails.

b) Illinois Clean Energy Foundation: \$240,000 to retrofit boilers, install new lights

***13) How or in what ways has D97 demonstrated fiscal responsibility? Please discuss implementation of cost containing measures over the past three years. How does D97 evaluate the cost-effectiveness of programs?***

a) See brochure “Elementary School Matters: Focus on Finances”

A decade of budget cuts: For the past decade, District 97 has been working to manage deficit spending, including the following revenue reductions:

- Fiscal Year 2000: \$912,022 in contracted Central Office administrative services
- Fiscal Year 2002: \$489,089 including equipment, supplies and materials, printing, technology, staff development, overtime
- Fiscal 2003: \$1,823,014 including nine administrators and 18 certified staff
- Fiscal Year 2004: \$1,452,562 including 1.5 administrative staff, 7.5 certified staff, teaching assistants, supplies and materials, technology supplies and

equipment

- Fiscal Year 2005: \$98,701 including one administrative support staff, textbook replacements, contract services, consultants
- Fiscal Year 2007: \$719,000 including three administrative support staff, 2.5 certified staff, two school support staff, lunch program staffing costs, supplies and materials
- Fiscal Year 2009: Operating expenditures under-spent by \$1,500,000
- Fiscal Year 2010: An additional \$250,000 of cost efficiencies to be identified (Note: In 2009-2010, D97 under-spent by \$3, 200,000.)

b) Revenue enhancements:

- Intergovernmental agreement to release properties from Village Tax Increment Financing districts to add “new” properties to the property tax extension base has resulted in more that \$2,500,000 in property taxes
- Intergovernmental agreement with Village to provide D97 with \$4,000,000 in operating revenue 2004-2007
- Intergovernmental agreement with Village to provide D97 with \$2,370,000 in operating funds for 2007-2008
- Establishment of Legislative Advocacy Committee to lobby for fair funding across the state has resulted in \$2,00,000 since July 2004
- Reestablishment of materials and co-curricular fees yields an average of \$300,000 annually since 2004
- Through the collective efforts of everyone in the district to identify efficiencies within our departments, programs and facilities, we under-spent our operating fund expenditures for 2009-2010 by approximately \$1,500,000. Savings included:
  - More than \$1,000,000 in the Education Fund accrued through salary accounts, contracted services, supplies and materials, and out-of-district tuition costs
  - Approximately \$500,000 in the Operations and Management Fund accrued by having in-house personnel perform tasks that had previously been contracted to external professionals/trades
- Increase in state revenues for full-day Kindergarten program
- Energy efficiency program: Going Green

***14) What opportunities have been provided for citizen input with respect to District 97’s financial situation and for responses to proposals for increased local school funding?***

- a) D97 has conducted a survey to obtain public comment on the referendum. All comments are available in the database at the D97 website.
- b) Superintendent Roberts has been holding community chats, meeting with stakeholder groups, business and church leaders.
- c) Public input at Board meetings.

d) Board study sessions.

e) A Community Forum held on November 18, 2010. Materials for this forum are available at the D97 website.

***15) What efforts have the district and the school board made to identify other suitable sources of revenue over the past three years? Please detail each effort.***

a) Innovation grants from the Education Foundation

b) Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs)

c) Zero waste initiative

**Appendix C: League of Women Voters of Oak Park & River Forest  
Understanding the Proposed Cuts**

**Questions for the Evaluation of the D97 Referendum, Spring 2011**

**Meeting with Superintendent Albert G. Roberts; Chris Jasculca, Communications Coordinator;  
Kevin Anderson, Asst. Superintendent of Teaching and Learning; Trish Carlson, Head of Human  
Resources**

**Pauline Koch and Mary Cay Murray, League Representatives**

**January 7, 2011**

Our direction to the district staff as they prepared for this meeting was the following:

Our main question to ourselves is “How is the passage of the referendum essential to maintain, restore or achieve the established goals of the district?” Please use this question as a framework for answering the more particular questions below.

We are also very interested in the new technologies that have been or will be introduced into the classrooms of D97, and how technology will enhance D97’s educational program.

**Note:** Included below are those reductions that will occur if the referendum fails. See the superintendent’s posting on the D97 website entitled “Information Regarding Reductions”.

**The Recommended Reductions if the Referendum Fails**

*1. Eliminate District Sponsored Festivals. Please give examples of festivals. How do they impact the students and the culture of the schools?*

Forty percent of District 97 students are minorities so it is important to highlight the variety of cultures so as to improve collegiality in the schools. In the future the District will have a three year cycle that will cut the multi-ethnic fest (now costing \$30,000) to something much smaller with mini festivals in two of the three years. The District is looking for potential external sponsorship. There are also festivals for young authors, young artists, and science. These will be scaled back to one per year. There is also a Music and Vocal festival which costs \$2000 each per year. There would be local school shows rather than all district shows to save money.

*2. What Middle School Sports programs would be eliminated? What proportion of children participate in these programs? Are they during the school day or after school or on the weekend?*

There are over 800 students in each Middle School. These programs cost about \$54,000 per school and we have 2 middle schools. These programs are always held either before or after school. The sports are Volleyball, Basketball, Cross-country, and Track. There are also 40 clubs, each with a teacher sponsor. The budget for these programs includes salaries for coaches and club sponsors, as listed in their contract. 40% of students participate. There are co-sponsors for Friday night place sports. There are also an 8-week learning summer program and summer sports.

3. *What after-school activities would be eliminated? How many children participate in them? Are they available at every school?*

See above: 40% participation. Most students in these programs can not afford to participate in these activities elsewhere.

4. *How many children currently attend summer school? Can they go elsewhere for these programs if they need them?*

The 8-week summer school program is tuition based, so it pays for itself. Remediation programs cost \$150 K and include 400 students in K-8.

5. *Describe the Multicultural Department and how it interacts with students and teachers. How does it impact the curriculum?*

The Multicultural Program was started over 30 years ago. It costs \$199K per year and all but \$20 K is for salaries at Julian. There is an administrator, an administrative Assistant, and a half-time clerical person. The program needs to be refreshed and revised since it is a bit out of date and is not being universally used. It needs to be integrated more into the instructional process. It is difficult for classes to come to the Center at Julian. Concordia and Dominican also use it. Could this program be sponsored by another group? The Public Library does not have room for the artifacts, nor funding for the staff, but would take the books.

6. *What are the responsibilities of the Assistant Principals at the Middle Schools? Who would take over these tasks if these positions were eliminated?*

The Assistant Principals are responsible for discipline, scheduling of new students, reviewing and evaluating tenured teachers, teacher development, curriculum consistency, and also lunch duty. Each AP starts with a grade level, then stays with that group until they graduate, keeping track of their grade grades and behavior. It helps the students to have someone who knows them their whole middle school career. If the assistant principals weren't there, the principal would be even busier.

7. *In the list of "further cuts" the Assistant Principals of Elementary Schools would be eliminated. What are their responsibilities? Who would take over those tasks?*

They do bus duty, discipline, and also evaluate tenured staff at Lincoln and Longfellow, two elementary schools with larger student populations. If they were cut, there would be more work for the principals of those two schools.

8. *Why does the Strategic Plan require \$200,000 per year? What are these funds used for?*

D97 will send us the Plan. See link at the end of this appendix. It gets cheaper every year. Committees of teachers meet after school concerning the curriculum and are paid for this after-school work including Response to Intervention (RTI) teams, Elementary Reading teams. They develop strategies to streamline activities and plan the integration of topics.

*9. How many Special Education Teacher Assistants are there now? How many positions would be eliminated?*

There are over 100 teacher assistants, a function of class size. Most of them, 95%, work with Special Ed children. The District would eliminate 11-15 across regular and special ed. classes. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has many requirements, over 900 rules that the District must live with, depending upon the needs of individual children, all of whom are in regular schools, and some of whom need individual instruction. Decreased mental health dollars have increased Special Ed needs. Cuts will probably result in increased litigation. The Federal government should support 40% of cost of these programs, but currently supply only 17%. Special Ed teachers would be cut to 6.

*10. Describe the CAST program and its impact on the students, the schools, the community. Is there a brochure or written description of this program?*

CAST is the performing arts program at Percy Julian Middle School that focuses on drama and speech. It takes place in the afternoon and evening. The CAST program includes full scale theatrical productions, a speech team, production crew, resources for faculty, and performing-art-related after school activities. Under the guidance of professional artists, performance art is used to teach, mentor and empower students. CAST offers curricular and co-curricular opportunities during the school year and a performing arts camp for 3rd through 8th grade students during the summer.

A former teacher commented “Whenever you have children performing, you have happy and involved parents. I’m sure if this after-school program was cut, there would be a lot of unhappy parents and students. They do have to raise a certain amount of money each year themselves.”

At the January 11 District 97 Board meeting, a parent spoke about the importance of the CAST program. Heather McCammond Watts, an Oak Park CAST parent, reported that this year is the 25th anniversary of the CAST program. She shared that the CAST council and parents are concerned about the continuation of the program, as well as is the school board. She shared how CAST helps children mature and speak their minds, and helps to decrease negative behavior. Watts expressed her opinion that art is not optional; that it is an essential component of the Oak Park schools and that students who participate in arts increase their power of education.

*11. Describe the BRAVO program and its impact on the students, the schools, the community. Is there a brochure or written description of this program?*

BRAVO is the fine and performing arts department at Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School (GBMS). BRAVO supports the arts through academic classes, clubs, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. In addition, BRAVO sponsors workshops, master classes, concerts, and all-school assemblies throughout the year, bringing in guests artists, composers and ensembles to further broaden the scope of arts -related experiences for all GBMS students. The BRAVO team is comprised of nine full-time faculty/staff members, along with its very active BRAVO Parent Advisory Board. Funds are received from awards, grants, gifts, corporate sponsors, and District 97. Over 300 students are involved.

Approximately 40 students from Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School's BRAVO program were among the 2200 that recently traveled to Atlanta for the 2011 Junior Theater Festival. For the second straight year, BRAVO earned the festival's top honor of Outstanding Production for its production of Beauty and the Beast – besting 54 schools from across the country for the award. In addition, student Brando Crawford earned the award for Outstanding Male Performer.

Beyond capturing these two prestigious awards, BRAVO was one of four groups invited to perform during the Disney Theatrical New Works Showcase, which was attended by all festival attendees.

At the January 11 District 97 Board meeting several parents gave public comment at the beginning of the meeting to note their support for the BRAVO program.

- Ben Weinberg, an Oak Park BRAVO parent, talked about the festival that BRAVO students would be attending that week. He spoke on behalf of parent participation in the schools and shared that the district's investment shows a huge return. He explained how the parents are devoted to the BRAVO program and they support the program by volunteering their time and talents as well as through financial contributions. Mr. Weinberg concluded by reporting that the BRAVO board looks forward to working with the school board.
- Debbie Fiegel, also an Oak Park BRAVO parent, read a letter from her son concerning the BRAVO program. In the letter, her son shared his experiences in BRAVO and emphasized how it changed his life. He shared how important the program is to help students transition into adulthood.
- Craig Zeller, an Oak Park BRAVO parent, spoke on behalf of BRAVO by sharing a letter written by his daughter. The daughter expressed her concern regarding the elimination of BRAVO and the effect it would have on the students.
- Rick Leary, Oak Park resident and BRAVO board member, expressed his understanding regarding the huge task in front of the board and spoke in support of the referendum. He expressed concern that cutting the arts is not the answer. He expressed that BRAVO is almost self sustaining, and reminded the board that the district benefits by publicity through BRAVO events. Leary concluded by asking how the district can use the connections with BRAVO to reach out to the community.
- Aiden O'Leary, former BRAVO student, spoke on behalf of the program. He shared how the program changes students for the better. He shared that participating in the BRAVO program was an amazing experience.

These programs (CAST and BRAVO) are very well organized and have quite a following. They have their own Boards and conduct some fund-raising activities.

*12. What are the Middle School electives? What would be eliminated by reducing this staff by four positions?*

There are home, fine and industrial arts classes, tech classes, foreign language classes (French and Spanish), a writing class, band/orchestra/chorus classes, and physical education classes. A wise old middle school scheduler once said "all children need to be somewhere each period". Cutting out some of the choices would probably make bigger classes of the options left. The possible reductions here are in flux.

*13. What are the responsibilities of the Student Support Specialists? How many positions would be eliminated? What would be the impact on students?*

These people are certified teachers who provide support for the principal, but are not administrators. They help with the organization of the school. There isn't one at Hatch which is the smallest school. If these positions were eliminated their responsibilities would be transferred to the principals who need to focus on evaluating teachers. Tenured teachers are evaluated every two years; new teachers and those with out tenure are evaluated every year. There is a process for expectation of change if a teacher receives a poor evaluation, but it can take up to two years to terminate a tenured teacher.

*14. How many media specialists are there? What do they do? How many positions would be eliminated?*

Each school has one media specialist (think librarian). The middle schools also have a media center clerk to help students find materials and check them out. Some media specialists do more teaching and training of students in their facilities. Under the cuts, half of these slots would disappear and the remaining media specialists would each cover two schools. There would also be half-time media assistants so that someone would always be available to the students.

*15. Describe the Gifted and Talented Program. How many positions would be eliminated? What would be the impact on students?*

There are 10 teachers, actually 9.6, in this program. They have pull-out classes for advanced students and help teachers with programs and strategies for these students.

*16. Describe the Elementary School Foreign Language Program (FLES). What languages are taught? How many teachers are there?*

The only language taught is Spanish. The Referendum would add languages to this program and provide daily instruction in basic skills to help students master a new language. The District is applying for a planning grant to get this program started in kindergarten. Currently in the elementary Spanish program, there is one hour a week spread across two classes, not enough time to be very effective. The District would use technology to expand instruction at the same cost as now. Currently there are 9 elementary Spanish teachers working across 8 schools.

*17. How many Elementary Art positions would be eliminated?*

There are nine teachers who would be eliminated in this program and they currently share schools. Parents we have spoken with said their children were very happy with their art classes and would be very disappointed to lose them.

## **General Questions**

*1. Please provide a general overview of the Technology Plan. Is there a copy of the Plan? When was it implemented?*

In Year 1, desk-tops were replaced with laptops. Some of the equipment was quite old. Teachers received 6 hours of training on the new laptops and equipment. Also, LCD projectors with speakers are available on carts. In Year 1, 120 Dell Netbooks were purchased. In Yr 2, this will be increased by 1500 Netbooks and 90 LCD projectors. The District will add smart boards and more student devices in the future. It was noted that some school PTOs have raised funds to buy smart boards and other items for their schools while other less wealthy PTOs can't afford them. Whatever is purchased for the schools belongs to the District. The Referendum will, in effect, become the great equalizer so that all schools will have good equipment regardless of the wealth of the parents in particular schools. The District needs to establish gift guidelines and criteria for what is appropriate, what they can afford to maintain and support.

Here are links to the Technology Plan.

Part 1 - <https://v3.boardbook.org/Public/PublicItemDownload.aspx?ik=30049706>

Part 2 - <https://v3.boardbook.org/Public/PublicItemDownload.aspx?ik=30153980>

Update on the first year of implementation -

<https://v3.boardbook.org/Public/PublicItemDownload.aspx?ik=30577619>

*3. To what extent does D97 integrate its programs with those of D90 (River Forest) so that children entering OPRF (D200) have a common preparation for the high school curricula? Are D97 programs coordinated with D200?*

The principals meet monthly. The math and science teachers for 6-12 grades also meet regularly.

*4. The State of Illinois Report Card shows considerable differences between the time spent in English and Language Arts classes on District 97 and the Illinois state average. The district is shown as offering 50 hours of classes in each of these categories while the state average is 103 for grade 6 and 93 for grade 8.*

These discrepancies are most likely due to classification differences, not to real differences in total time on task. For example, how are classes such as speech and drama or writing skills counted from one district to another?

*5. Who counts as an administrator?*

There are 28 with this certification including the superintendent, district office administrators, and assistant superintendents. There are also directors and curriculum coordinators. Altogether, there are 10 principals and 8 Asst. Principals.

*4. On the State Report Card the ratio of pupil-teacher is 15.5. The ratio of pupil-certified staff is 11.4. Please explain the difference.*

The first number includes speech and language specialists, librarians, gifted teachers. The pupil-certified number included all the administrative staff that also have certificates.

*4. How many children have IEPs? Who initiates an IEP, a teacher or a parent?*

There are over 900 out of 5600 students who have an IEP. The superintendent thinks this number is high and is looking into a computerized program to help offset the need for an IEP.

**Note:** Peggy Kell, Retired D97 Teacher, assisted the committee in reviewing and understanding this material.