

Oak Park River Forest League of Women Voters Eyewitness Report

Observed by: Diana Shea

Date: 2/4/2020

Meeting Length: 2 hours (plus 2 hour Learning Session)

Meeting Name: District 97 Board of Education

D97 Board Hears Comments from Lincoln Community Regarding Principal Resignation

What did the Board decide?

- Approved school maintenance project grant

What else did the Board discuss or refer to committee?

- The D97 Board head a report on the **SY20 Priorities**.
- Rob Grossi presented **FORC's recommendation on consideration of Abatement or Series 2016 Bond**. FORC did not recommend this action last year, but the committee did recommend it this year.
- **Holmes PTO would like to make a \$9,000 donation** to the school to help cover the costs associated with the "Leader in Me" program that they implement. A discussion followed about PTO donations and acknowledging that each school has different levels of support from their PTOs. Overall, the Board would like to make sure that it doesn't build in inequity across the elementary schools. Board Members will have a conversation with the PTO Council about it.
- Board Members reported that the **Committee for Community Engagement** discussed the idea of building cyclical communication system that involves the Board. The Board would like to be more interactive with the community. A Board Member (cannot recall which one) stated that they heard from the Lincoln parents that there is a distrust of the Board and they think "there could be a more allied presence if the board members are more familiar to people". There will be follow up with the committee on best practices for communication.
- **The Board discussed its calendar for planned 'deep dives' with the Superintendent**. Dr Kelley will do a detailed report on the Equity Tool in March and the other topics will be pushed to SY21 (National Board Teaching Certificates, IB, Co-Teaching, Culture & Climate at Tier 1 level to shift towards restorative practices).

Unexpected Votes, Events, Testimony or Items to Watch for in the Future

- This was the first Board Meeting after the resignation of Principal Zaniolo from Lincoln School. This is the fourth principal that Lincoln has had in as many years (Ms Hamilton resigned in 2017, Dr Carlos was Principal for 2017-18, Ms Silva was interim principal for 2018-2019, and Ms Zaniolo hired for 2019-2020). The comments heard from parents included the following sentiments:
 - The events over the last three years have resulted in lack of confidence within the community and suggests incompetence on the part of the Board and Superintendent. Crisis at Lincoln.
 - There is a desire for confidential exit interviews of the last three principals with the aid of a third-party reviewer/evaluator (and some suggested Board Members present).
 - Request for greater transparency with the hiring decisions. The top choices for the Parent-teacher Search Committees for the last two permanent hires were not hired. Why not?
 - Lincoln Elementary school is large. Does it require a second principal? Or two vice principals to support principal with clear lines of responsibility? The problems that this turmoil has created further underscore the need for two full time social workers.
 - The superintendent should be evaluated based on employer attrition and employee satisfaction. Why is this not the case today?

Any other comments or observations

- Vice President, Jung Kim, notably ran the meeting despite the attendance of Board President Keecia Broy. Jung Kim has two children at Lincoln.
- During the Board Remarks..
 - Broy began by thanking Kim, for leading the meeting well, and Dr Kelley for “having a lot of grace, listening and being thoughtful about the comments”.
 - Spurlock stated that she can appreciate that there are “lots of emotions” [from the Lincoln parents that gave public comments] and asked Dr Kelley what the Board can do to support her. There seemed to be general agreement with this from other Board Members, with head nodding and concerned facial expressions. In anticipation of the Town Hall that is scheduled to take place Wed Feb 19 at Lincoln, Spurlock wondered if maybe emotions will be less high, suggesting that “maybe in two weeks people will have [calmed down a bit]”. Spurlock also wondered what the Board would like to disclose about the situation and suggested that they should talk to their legal team so that “whatever we can have freedom to say, I think we should say”. Spurlock also said that Zaniolo plans to write a letter to staff.
 - Dr Kelley reported that the format for the Town Hall on Feb 19 will be similar to community sessions that were held for the referendum, starting out with factual information, followed by a panel with various staff members who will answer questions from the audience. There will be a moderator. Questions will be written down on index cards and passed to the moderator. Childcare will be provided.

- Spurlock noted that a lot of the things that the Lincoln parents were asking about map to things that the Board have been thinking about already and that the Administration already plans to do. (No specifics were given as to what specific requests she was referring to). A discussion ensued about whether the community expects an action plan right away. Spurlock said, “We don’t want people to think that we weren’t already going to do the action steps.” Broy said that she thinks the Board needs to listen at this stage and not come with a pre-formed action plan. She asked to engage with the Committee for Community Engagement (CCE) to get some advice from them on how best to handle the communications with the community.