

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Regular Meeting

October 21, 2024

Equity and Belonging: New Structure Adds Voices to Work at New Trier

A new staff Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging (CCEB) Council and two new equity liaisons are helping lead the District's work this year toward advancing strategic plan goals to assure all students feel they belong at New Trier and learn about perspectives different from their own.

Superintendent Paul Sally told the Board that the District has made important progress each year since the strategic plan, *New Trier 2030*, was adopted in January 2019. Some of that work has included designating equity liaisons, expanding student affinity groups, hiring a diverse and exceptional staff, evaluating department curriculum to increase representation of multiple voices, increasing professional development offerings, making identities visible in the school through recognition months, and adding a mixed gender option to the adviser system. The work has also continued to evolve each year as the school responds to students, families, and staff who have asked for more explicit support and inclusion from New Trier.

This year the school has expanded staff voice in its strategic goals through the creation of the Staff CCEB Council, which includes more than a dozen faculty and staff members who provide feedback on district initiatives and lead discussions with colleagues. Similarly, a Student CCEB Council of about 25 students will provide input to the school and take action to help students feel a sense of belonging.

Equity liaisons Kristan Kenney and Alex Zilka, both faculty members with extensive experience working on equity and belonging, are leading the District's work in this area along with administrative supervisor Chimille Tillery, Director of Curriculum and Instruction. They said the CCEB Council began meeting this summer and participated in a workshop last month, preparing members to take on leadership roles in professional development. The staff and student councils will eventually work together on schoolwide initiatives.

CCEB Staff Council member Maricor Chang noted that in addition to the new staff and student councils, New Trier also has begun offering affinity groups this year for staff who share an identity to come together in a supportive environment. The school also continually reviews its student affinity groups in response to student requests and has added groups over time, including the addition of a Middle Eastern and North African group at the Winnetka Campus and the expansion of a Muslim group to the Northfield Campus this year. Click for the [Culture, Climate, Equity and Belonging Presentation \(slides 24-29\)](#).

Civil Discourse: New Trier Cultivates Critical Thinking in Divided Times

As discourse across the country becomes increasingly divided and partisan, New Trier social studies teachers told the Board about their efforts to develop students into good citizens who can listen to different perspectives and have the kind of productive and civil conversations that are essential to democracy.

Social Studies Coordinator Dean Pinos said New Trier's work in civics education, guided by its Civil Discourse and Critical Thinking statement, cultivates future-ready skills in students so they can make positive change and focus on problem-solving rather than distrust for the "other side." This includes developing skills in discussing controversial issues, part of the state's mandate for civics education in high school.

New Trier social studies teachers do this by creating supportive classrooms, helping students break down complex issues, and teaching students to listen and seek to understand other perspectives. These skills are an important part of the *Characteristics of a New Trier Graduate*, including preparing graduates to think critically about complex issues, engage in respectful conversations with others, and work for change in their communities.

Social Studies Chair Michael Christensen said teachers lay the foundation for civil discourse by creating conditions in their classrooms to encourage it. Discussions of difficult topics are well-planned, and teachers spend time building trusting relationships in the classroom, controlled environments with clear expectations, and standards and structures to guide students in making discussions successful.

In social studies teacher Alex Zilka's classroom, students do an activity in which they reflect on a series of cards that list different civic values such as safety, equality, patriotism, and spirituality. They consider which values are most important to them and why, while understanding how different values are most important to others. Working from a values-based approach comes from Monica Guzman's book, *I Never Thought of It That Way*, and helps students better understand perspectives different from their own and find common ground.

Social studies teachers also lead professional development for staff in other disciplines, teacher Laura Malia explained. For example, social studies teachers helped advisers understand how to navigate potentially difficult conversations that might come up in adviser rooms as the election approaches. Professional development also includes staff learning collaboratives, including a group of teachers learning about ways to promote active listening and critical thinking. Click for the [Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging Presentation \(slides 1-23\)](#).

Other News from the October 21 Meeting

- New Trier's average class size has remained steady over the past several years, with the 2024-2025 average at 22.4 students compared to 22.3 students the previous year. The District makes staffing and sectioning decisions each year with a goal of maintaining the average class size, meeting budget targets, and maintaining high quality programs as overall student enrollment declines. The number of small classes (equal to or less than 14

students) was 2.9% of overall enrollment, and the number of large classes (equal to or more than 30 students) was at 1%. Click for the [Class Size Report](#).

- Associate Superintendent Chris Johnson presented the District's tentative tax levy for 2024, which supports the fiscal year 2024-25 and 2025-26 budgets. The District's ability to increase its tax extension is limited by the Property Tax Extension Limitation Act to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or 5%, whichever is less. The 2023 CPI was 3.4%, which means the levy is capped at 3.4%, and that capped increase will be used in the calculation of the tax extension (exclusive of new property). Under the tentative levy the New Trier portion of property tax bills should rise by 3.4% on average for property owners. The levy is the primary funding source for the District, and the revenue it generates funds New Trier's hiring and retention of high quality faculty and staff, broad and deep curriculum, expansive student services, and extracurricular programs. The levy also helps fund needed facility improvements at both campuses. The Board is scheduled to vote on the final levy in November. Click for the [Levy Presentation](#).
- The Board approved the sale of \$25 million in alternate revenue bonds to fund renovations in some of the oldest portions of the Winnetka Campus, including new spaces for science classrooms, student services, and campus administration. The bond sale includes annual fixed debt service and does not increase the community's tax burden beyond the annual tax levy. In addition, the Board approved \$10 million in health life safety bonds to fund the replacement of plumbing and water mains at both campuses and of air handling systems at the Winnetka Campus.
- Board President Jean Hahn gave an update on the Board's superintendent search. The Board, working with search firm Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates, reviewed a slate of candidates and invited a small number for initial interviews earlier this month. That group has been narrowed to finalists who the Board will interview at the end of the month. Hahn noted that the need to preserve confidentiality limits the transparency with which the process can unfold, and that Board members are carefully considering the input they received from the community, students, parents, faculty, staff, and administration as they interview candidates. An announcement is expected at the Nov. 18 meeting.

The New Trier Board of Education generally meets on the third Monday of each month, with the business portion of the meeting beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Full videos of Board meetings are available online at <https://nths.mediaspace.kaltura.com/category/BOARD+OF+EDUCATION/>

Information about Board of Education members, upcoming meetings, agendas, minutes, and other documents are available at <https://www.newtrier.k12.il.us/boardofeducation>