

**NEW TRIER TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 203
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**February 18, 2025
New Trier Township High School
7 Happ Road, Room C234
Northfield, IL 60093**

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A **Regular Meeting** of the Board of Education of New Trier Township High School District 203, Cook County, Illinois was held at New Trier High School – Northfield Campus, 7 Happ Road, in Room C234 on Monday, February 18, 2025, at 6:30 p.m.

Members Present

Ms. Kimberly Alcantara
Mr. Avik Das
Mr. Keith Dronen
Ms. Jean Hahn, President
Ms. Courtney McDonough
Ms. Sally Pofcher
Ms. Sally Tomlinson, Vice President

Administrators Present

Dr. Paul Sally, Superintendent
Dr. Christopher Johnson, Associate Superintendent
Dr. Joanne Panopoulos, Asst. Supt. for Special Ed and Student Services
Dr. Peter Tragos, Asst. Supt. for Curriculum & Instruction
Mrs. Denise Dubravec, Principal – Winnetka Campus/Assistant Supt.
Mr. Paul Waechtler, Principal – Northfield Campus

Also Present

Dr. Renee Zoladz, Director of Human Resources; Ms. Niki Dizon, Director of Communications; Mr. Michael Marassa, Chief Technology Officer; Ms. Molly Lombardi, Social Studies Department Faculty and Teachers' Association President; Mr. Dan Paustian, Assistant Principal; Dr. Chimille Tillery, Director of Curriculum and Instruction; Mr. Matt Mersch, Business Education Department Faculty; Ms. Mercedes Lopez, Modern and Classical Languages Department Faculty; Ms. Katja Steen, Modern and Classical Languages Department Faculty; Ms. Kathleen Tallmadge, Social Studies Department Faculty; Ms. Ana del Rey, Modern and Classical Languages Department Faculty; Ms. Beth Dirkes, Administrative Assistant for Curriculum and Instruction; Ms. Steph Gamauf, Modern and Classical Languages Department Faculty; Ms. Liana Pasquini, Modern and Classical Languages Department Faculty; Mr. Mike Hill, Technology Department; Mr. Eric Johnson, Technology Department; Mr. Jeff Bailey, Technology Department; Ms. Lindsey Ruston, Board of Education Secretary; members of the press and community.

BUSINESS MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER – 5:30 p.m. – C234

Ms. Hahn called the Regular Meeting of February 18, 2025, of the Board of Education to order at 5:30 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus. Roll call was taken, and all members were present except for Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Dronen, and Ms. Pofcher. Ms. Hahn asked for a motion to move to Closed Session. Mr. Das moved that the Board of Education adjourn to closed session for the purpose of the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees, specific individuals who serve as independent contractors, or specific volunteers of the District or legal counsel for the District, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee, a specific individual who serves as an independent contractor, or a volunteer of the District or against legal counsel for the District to determine its validity and the placement of individual students in special education programs and other matters relating to individual students. Ms. Tomlinson seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Mr. Das, Ms. McDonough, Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Hahn

NAY: none

ABSENT: Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Pofcher

The motion passed.

II. CLOSED SESSION – 5:30 p.m. – A201A

III. BUSINESS MEETING – Open Session – 6:30 p.m. – C234

Ms. Hahn called the Regular Meeting of February 18, 2025, of the Board of Education to order at 6:30 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus. Roll call was taken, and all members were present.

IV. Minutes and Reports

***A. Regular Meeting of January 21, 2025 (open and closed session)**

Ms. Hahn asked for any comments or adjustments on the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 21, 2025 (open and closed session). Ms. Hahn had one request for changes to the minutes which was incorporated. Mr. Das moved, and Ms. McDonough seconded the motion that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 21, 2025 (open and closed session). Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. McDonough, Ms. Pofcher, Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Das, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Hahn

NAY:

The motion passed.

B. Report from Campus Principals and FOIA Report

Mr. Paul Waechtler, Principal for the Northfield Campus, shared the following student events and program updates from that campus:

- The *All About the Electives* program recently took place for incoming freshmen. Ms. Gail Gamrath, Associate Principal at the Northfield Campus, presented and then parents and students were able to attend various sessions to learn more about specific elective options. It was well attended.
- Incoming Freshman Conferences were held at the junior highs. Students and parents discussed registration for next year. The hope is that this reduces anxiety and answers their questions. Mr. Waechtler thanked the over 100 faculty volunteers who served as registration counselors.
- National Girls & Women in Sports Day was celebrated on February 5th. All female coaches and athletes were invited to a breakfast where they also received t-shirts to commemorate the event. Ms. Hannah Hsieh, Science Department Faculty, did a great job with a speech about the evolution of female athletics at New Trier.
- Student Senate volunteers provided feedback to Quest about the food service. They set up several options for students to sample and collected feedback on those items and various other topics. This is a great way to empower students to help improve their peers' experience.
- The Class of 2028 Parents' Association hosted a coffee with Ms. Danah Ouimette, Student Support Coordinator, and Mr. Scott Williams, Assistant Principal for the Graduating Class of 2028, shared about some of the supports that are available to students. Ms. Ouimette also shared different techniques parents can use to help support their students' executive functioning skills.
- Mr. Waechtler has been meeting with Muslim parents throughout the year and shared an anecdote from a conversation he had prior to their most recent meeting.

Mrs. Denise Dubravec, Principal for the Winnetka Campus/Assistant Superintendent, shared the following student events and program updates from the Winnetka campus:

- Choir Opera will present *Brigadoon* while the Frosh-Soph play is *Miss Nelson is Missing*.
- Mrs. Dubravec then shared the following statement about Lagniappe Potpourri:

I wanted to give an update on the extracurricular program Lagniappe-Potpourri and the discussions our performing arts coordinators and Music and Theatre Department Chair have been having with our performing arts students and most recently at the February New Trier Fine Arts Association meeting. Right now many of those students are hard at work rehearsing for our choir-opera musical, Brigadoon, and the frosh-soph play and 2022 Directing Projects, which means the school's most substantial work together on ways to honor Lagniappe's history and student leadership opportunities will take place next week on Wednesday. So this is a "work in progress" update tonight.

First, I wanted to thank the alumni, parents and students who came to the last Board meeting and who have reached out to us to share their thoughts about Lagniappe. Next, I wanted to address a question that Sally P. asked at the meeting that I do not believe we fully answered - and that was: Why are we looking to change this experience?

The answer is truly in the question - it is about changing the student experience. Right now putting on a large scale production is not sustainable - and the student experience is not what we want it to be for many reasons.

The dimensions of the student experience that the Performing Arts Division considers are student voice, leadership, performance, and skill development. Lagniappe-Potpourri has historically been where the school has provided student leadership in Performing Arts and it was faltering in that dimension over the last few years.

Our Performing Arts leaders report student participation in Lagniappe has declined over the past several years. The production was becoming increasingly difficult to pull together even with moving the show in 2018 from a two hour production to a shorter one act, no intermission format. This year, the leadership positions in set design and technical director needed to be filled by adults. Far fewer students have been interested in writing than in the past. Music creation has more and more been put in the hands of a hired professional. In addition, the demands of college applications in the fall have increased significantly, making it more difficult for seniors to balance the time requirements of this large-scale production. Add to this that the audience numbers have fallen by more than 50% over the past decade, and this has not become the leadership or performance experience we want for students.

We have told you about plans to take the leadership opportunities offered in Lagniappe and have students use them to help lead all elements of the freshman-sophomore musical. We've had a positive response to this idea, which will make us a lighthouse school in the country for student leadership in the arts and is similar to opportunities at highly regarded colleges.

At the same time, we understand that this extracurricular opportunity does not offer some of the parts of Lagniappe that students have enjoyed for decades - namely the opportunity to write and perform sketch comedy, often with a musical element. This is what we will continue to discuss with students as we look for creative production ideas on a smaller scale.

The next meeting with students is on February 26, and they will be able to start working more actively after the Choir-Opera performances are completed on March 8. Our work over the next few months is to develop the positions on the Board and select students for those positions, determine the title for the Frosh-Soph Musical, and then consider options for a smaller scale comedy or variety performance. I look forward to reporting on our progress and the ideas students have generated in the coming months.

Ms. Pofcher thanked Mrs. Dubravec for her report, noting it was very clear.

Ms. Hahn inquired about who is able to attend the meeting on February 26th to which Mrs. Dubravec replied that it has been widely advertised amongst those who have participated in Lagniappe as well as students who participate in the theatre program, but anyone is welcome to attend.

- Kinesis Dance Company hosted their dance performance earlier in the month. The choreography is done by students.
- Ms. Darci Woodson, speech/language pathologist, and Ms. Maggie Schmieder, Special Education Department Faculty, presented at a conference in Orlando. Additionally, Ms. Hanna Cohen, Science Department Faculty, presented at a conference in Houston. Mrs. Dubravec shared details about both presentations.
- Ms. Kwun Lan Wong, visiting artist who has been working this year with glass art students, has an exhibit in the Brierly Gallery entitled "A Piece of Memory." Mrs. Dubravec shared that she has work on display in Belgium, Copenhagen, and Brussels. She also shared about Ms. Wong's accessible style of teaching.
- Next, Mrs. Dubravec shared about a variety of accomplishments from athletics:
 - Girls Wrestling took first in regionals and then New Trier hosted the first girls wrestling sectional, advancing two wrestlers to state.
 - Girls Bowling took second place in regionals. They also place second in sectionals with one bowler placing third. They are now headed to state.
 - Mr. Ben Crane, Boys Cross Country, was named the 2024 Illinois Gatorade Player of the Year.
 - Ms. Brittany Romano was named the Max Coach of the Year for field hockey. This is her first year coaching New Trier field hockey.
 - National Girls and Women in Sports Day was also celebrated at the Winnetka campus. Mrs. Dubravec thanked Ms. Stephanie Kuzmanic, Athletics Coordinator, for organizing the day. Ms. Elise Menaker, alum, delivered an inspiring speech and is now a broadcaster for the Chicago Cubs.
 - New Trier Special Olympics basketball hosted Lake Forest. It was a great game with adviser rooms cheering on their athletes. Mrs. Dubravec thanked Ms. Lisa Loris, Special Education Department Faculty, and her team for their work.

- The Dance Team placed in the top 15 at state.
- Science Olympiad placed third at MIT and fourth at the University of Michigan and is now headed to Northwestern for a tournament.
- New Trier had several Scholastic Art Winners. Those who won the Golden Key and Silver Key will be on display in Springfield. National award recipients will be announced in March.
- The Chess Team recently went to state.
- DECA has 60 students who are heading to state.
- The Athletics department honored girls' basketball coach, Ms. Teri Rodgers, who is retiring after many years as a coach and social studies teacher.
- Track and Field hosted their own indoor meet where 450 athletes participated.
- The 21st Annual Lit Festival will take place at the end of the month. Mr. Major Jackson, an American poet, will present on February 26th in the Cornog.
- The 42nd Jazz Festival recently took place and was led by Mr. Nic Meyer, Music and Theatre Department Faculty. The Chicago Neighborhood Suite also performed.
- The Athletic department celebrated Dr. Sally in honor of his retirement at the New Trier vs. Evanston basketball boys and girls basketball games.

Dr. Peter Tragos, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, provided a brief update on last Friday's Institute Day, entitled "*Institute 2025 Together for Tomorrow Empowering Our Students to Thrive.*" New Trier hosted the Township's six sender schools on February 14th. The last time the Township was together was about 12 years ago. Dr. Tragos thanked Dr. Chimille Tillery, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Dr. Joanne Panopoulos, Assistant Superintendent for Special Ed and Student Services, for their work and for representing New Trier at committee meetings. He also thanked Dr. Catherine Wang, Superintendent at Glencoe District 35, for spearheading the event and thanked the other sender school superintendents for their leadership and support of the day. He also thanked teachers from all districts who presented. There were two keynote speakers: Ali Hearn presented "*First Their Hearts, Then Their Minds*" and Dr. Lisa Damour who presented "*How to Support the Young People in Our Lives.*" Dr. Tragos provided details on each presentation. There were about 1,500 participants, 65 New Trier presenters with dozens of others from the sender schools, over 50 breakout sessions as well as over 35 job alike/articulation sessions.

Next, Dr. Tragos introduced three new administrative hires, first was Dr. Chimille Tillery, current Director of Curriculum and Instruction, as the new Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. She will replace Dr. Tragos who will become superintendent. He then introduced Dr. Nashwa Mekky who will be the new Chief Human Resources Officer as Dr. Renee Zoladz retires in June. He provided background on each hire as well. Mr. Waechtler then announced that Mr. Dan Paustian, current Assistant Principal for the Graduating Class of 2027, as the new Associate Principal at the Northfield Campus. He will replace Ms. Gail Gamrath who is retiring at the end of the school year. Mr. Waechtler also provided information on Mr. Paustian's background and experience.

Ms. Hahn welcomed the new administrators and thanked Dr. Tragos and his team for their leadership in this thorough and thoughtful process.

Dr. Johnson gave the FOIA report noting that there have been four requests since the last Board meeting, all of which are closed. One was regarding student parking, one was for curricular materials, one for purchase orders, and one was for contact information.

V. Communications

Ms. Hahn invited anyone from the audience who wished to address the Board to come forward and fill out a yellow communications request form and give it to Ms. Niki Dizon, Director of Communications. There were no requests for public comment.

VI. Special Orders of Business

A. **Student Voice: Service Work**

Mrs. Dubravec began the presentation on Student Voice: Service Work where students shared the incredible work that they are doing with their peers within service clubs and programs. The District intentionally focuses on service as a fundamental pillar as it recognizes that education extends beyond the classroom. Service teaches empathy, responsibility, and the importance of giving back which are qualities that shape engaged citizens and future leaders. Mrs. Dubravec introduced the students: Mr. Charles Braatz, Ms. Mikaella Cord-Cruz, Mr. John Walther, Mr. Giles

Judy, and Ms. Ana Nedelcu. Each shared their experiences, the impact of their work, and how their involvement in service has shaped their perspectives and aspirations. Mr. Braatz, class of 2025, shared about his experience serving on the Serve with Dignity board. Next, Ms. Cord-Cruz shared her work as one of the equity chairs of Student Council. Mr. Walther, a senior, is a member of Special Olympics and the ELS (Enriching Lives Through Service) club. Mr. Judy is a member of the Social Service board. Finally, Ms. Nedelcu shared her experience as part of the Surf Sweep Club. All gave a brief background on their boards or clubs, the leadership opportunities they have had through those groups, the collaboration required with others, and the impact their work has had on them, the school and the community.

Ms. Pofcher thanked the students for their presentations. She shared that the work they are doing is inspiring with its impact on others as well as how it has broadened their sense of their role in the community and the world at large.

Ms. Tomlinson shared that people often share one should get involved in these programs as it gives one a sense of leadership or responsibility, but what she heard in the students' presentations is that it is all about others. She also spoke about how the students are trying to build a sense of belonging and trying to make a difference. She acknowledged that it can be overwhelming to think that there are so many problems in the world or people who need help but liked the mention of the ripple effect and how the students are starting in their corner of the world and that will ripple out to others.

Ms. Alcantara echoed the others' comments and thanked the students for representing their groups, acknowledging the time commitment to do so while also presenting in front of people.

Ms. McDonough noted they were an impressive group of students and thanked them for sharing their experience. She also thanked them for leading the charge to create a positive culture within the District and what they do makes a huge impact on so many people and throughout the community. Ms. McDonough thanked Mr. Walther for mentioning the challenges with scheduling and shared that the administration is working hard on this topic and the Board is aware of the issues.

Ms. Hahn shared her gratitude for how well the students are doing in leading the way and setting a good example. She inquired if there were other obstacles to pursuing service at New Trier or anything that they would like to see done differently to make it easier for the students coming up behind them. Mr. Walther responded that the club fairs at the beginning of the year are a great way for students to see what is available as well as how the school has advertised the service clubs have been amazing. Ms. Hahn noted that the one word that resonated with her was community, which she further explained. She concluded by encouraging the students to continue their service endeavors and look for ways to serve the communities they join after New Trier.

Mrs. Dubravec shared that all of this happens because of the sponsors and thanked them for their work with students.

Mr. Das left the meeting at 7:04 p.m.

VII. Administrative Items

A. Treasurer's Report for January 2025

Dr. Johnson provided the Treasurer's Report for January 2025, which is the seventh month of the fiscal year. There have been typical local, state and federal disbursements for January, which is generally a low point for the District's cash balances, as it is in between property tax payments, which is the bulk of its revenue. The low point is higher than recent years, as property tax payments are back to a normal schedule. The District continues to have strong investment earnings, with 4.33% at PMA and 4.32% at Fifth Third that is invested into its 5-year portfolio that has maturities occurring monthly. The fund balance for all accounts is \$118,732,078.

B. Financial Report for January 2025

Dr. Johnson then provided the Financial Report for January 2025. Operating revenue for the first seven months of the fiscal year was \$73,664,000, or 13.3% higher compared to last year. Revenue from all sources should continue to trend at or above the adopted budget for operating revenue, which is 4.26% higher than last year.

Operating expenditures (exclusive of transfers) through January were \$65,654,000 or 8.93% higher than last year's. This is a small improvement over December, and the District's analysis indicates that the expenses should continue to move closer to the budget as the year progresses. The adopted budget for operating expenditures is 6.64% higher than last year. Fund book balances for all accounts were \$130,200,000 as of January 31st.

Ms. Tomlinson noted she is glad that there is more predictability in the District's local revenue sourcing. Dr. Johnson agreed, noting that the tax bills have been issued, and the District anticipates revenue for the first installment in March. The two continued a brief discussion with Ms. Hahn also agreeing that the predictability is nice, particularly with the largest portion of the District's revenue, to which Dr. Johnson replied.

VIII. Consent Agenda

- Bill List for Period, January 1 - 31, 2025
- Personnel Report (Appointments, Changes of Status, Leaves of Absences, Resignations, Retirements, Stipends - Appointment, Stipend list for Winter 2025, and Administrators Contracts)
- Policy Revisions - Second Reading - PRESS 117
- First Amendment to the Parking Agreement between New Trier High School and the Village of Winnetka
- Resolution to Accept Exemption of Board of Education from Cook County Paid Leave Ordinance by Villages of Glencoe, Northfield and Winnetka
- Capital Expenditures (FY 26)

Ms. Hahn inquired if any members wanted to pull an item off the Consent Agenda, no one chose to do so. Ms. Pofcher moved that the Board of Education approve the Consent Agenda, which includes: Bill List for Period, January 1 - 31, 2025; Personnel Report (Appointments, Changes of Status, Leaves of Absences, Resignations, Retirements, Stipends - Appointment, Stipend list for Winter 2025, and Administrators Contracts); Policy Revisions - Second Reading - PRESS 117; The First Amendment to the Parking Agreement between the Village of Winnetka and New Trier High School District 203; The Resolution Accepting Municipal Ordinances Exempting New Trier Township High School District 203 From The Cook County Paid Leave Ordinance; and Capital Expenditures (FY 26) over \$50,000 as presented. Ms. Tomlinson seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. Pofcher, Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Dronen, Ms. McDonough, Ms. Hahn

NAY:

ABSENT: Mr. Das

The motion passed.

IX. Board Member Reports

Ms. McDonough attended the **New Trier Parents Association's (NTPA)** meeting on February 4th. She shared that Dr. Tragos attended and presented on future programming, career pathways, and *Characteristics of a New Trier Grad*. Everyone was excited about the idea of flexible scheduling and career-connected opportunities. The group was also interested in how the District can leverage community partnerships to increase the student experience.

Ms. McDonough and Ms. Pofcher attended the **Community Engagement Committee** on February 5th. The group got a sneak peek at the Annual Report, which is the second mailer of the year. It will be hitting 24,000 mailboxes soon. ParentSquare officially launched on January 20th and feedback has been great from staff and parents. The storytelling video is almost complete with the hope of viewing it in March.

Mr. Dronen shared that the **Booster Club** is meeting this evening.

Ms. Pofcher attended the **Facilities Steering Committee** meeting that discussed the 15-year plan. Dr. Johnson added that the District is beginning discussions with the Village of Winnetka on the east side stormwater needs. The District partnered with them on the west side with Duke Childs Field. This initial conversation will focus on whether there is any assistance that the District can provide on the east side that would help the Winnetka campus and the community as a whole.

X. Calendar of Events & Board Members' Requests for Staff Research and Future Agenda Items

Dr. Sally highlighted the following events:

- The performing arts opportunities that are coming up at the beginning of March with the Frosh-Soph Play and Choir Opera.
- Third quarter will end on March 14th.

- The next Board Meeting is on Monday, March 17th.

Ms. Hahn inquired if there were any requests for staff research or future agenda items, of which there were none.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. McDonough moved, and Ms. Tomlinson seconded the motion, to adjourn. Upon a voice vote being taken, all members indicated they were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lindsey Ruston, Secretary

Jean Hahn, President