

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

August 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, August 18, 2025, at 6:30 p.m.

Members Present

Mr. Avik Das
Ms. Jean Hahn, President
Mr. Joo Serk Lee
Ms. Courtney McDonough
Ms. Sally Tomlinson, Vice President

Administrators Present

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

Members Absent

Ms. Kimberly Alcantara
Ms. Sally Pofcher

Also Present

Ms. Niki Dizon, Chief Communications Officer; Mr. Michael Marassa, Chief Technology Officer; Dr. Nashwa Mekky, Chief Human Resources Officer; Dr. Melissa Dudic, Director of Curriculum and Instruction; Mr. Dan Paustian, Associate Principal – Northfield Campus; Ms. Meg Garton, English Department Faculty and Teachers' Association President; Mr. Mike Hill, Technology Department; Mr. Eric Johnson, Technology Department; Mr. Jeff Bailey, Technology Department; and members of the press and community.

BUSINESS MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER – 5:45 p.m. – C234

Ms. Tomlinson called the Regular Meeting of August 18, 2025 of the Board of Education to order at 5:46 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus. Roll call was taken, and all members were present, except for Ms. Alcantara, Ms. Hahn, and Ms. Pofcher. Ms. Tomlinson 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. McDonough seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

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

NAY: none

ABSENT: Ms. Alcantara, Ms. Hahn, Ms. Pofcher

The motion passed.

II. CLOSED SESSION – 5:45 p.m. – A201A

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

Ms. Hahn recalled the Regular Meeting of August 18, 2025 of the Board of Education to order at 6:36 p.m. in

room C234 at the Northfield campus. Roll call was taken, and all members were present except for Ms. Alcantara and Ms. Pofcher.

IV. Minutes and Reports

***A. Regular Meeting of July 14, 2025 (open and closed session)**

The first order of business was to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of July 14, 2025 (open and closed session). Ms. Hahn noted that she had edits for both the open and closed session minutes, which were incorporated. She then asked for any other comments or adjustments on the minutes, of which there were none. Ms. McDonough moved, and Mr. Das seconded the motion that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of July 14, 2025, as revised, open and closed session. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

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

NAY:

ABSENT: Ms. Alcantara, Ms. Pofcher

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:

- He welcomed the Board to the beginning of the 25-26 school year.
- The new turf fields at the stadium and near Stepan are mostly complete with the field hockey one still in progress. He is excited for students to be able to use them.
- He noted that the rest of his report related to goal three of the Annual Plan, which is Culture, Connection, and Belonging. Transfer families attended an event where Mr. Waechtler presented and answered parent questions while their students went on tours and participated in activities hosted by former transfer students and Student Ambassadors. Over 30 students were in attendance, the largest group in several years. It is a great resource for new students to talk with those who were once transfer students themselves.
- The Northfield Campus Leadership Team returned last Monday, and he shared about their meeting together.
- On Wednesday, the campus will welcome the class of 2029. The Parents' Association will also help to welcome students. Students will attend a two-hour adviser room where they will take tours of the campus and participate in get-to-know-you activities.
- He also thanked Adviser Chairs, Mr. Mark Howard and Ms. Sue Ellen Haak for providing new adviser training.
- He shared other ways that students and families will hear the message of belonging such as through parent-adviser night and the extracurricular assembly.

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

- She began by sharing that she, Mr. Rai Pavely, Director of Security, and Mr. Angel Villaluz, Director of Technology, worked over the summer in preparation for Safety Day on August 27th. The day consists of each teacher reviewing the safety procedures, Standard Response Protocol (SRP), with each of their classes. Advisers will also show a video during adviser room. Emergency Notification Testing will also take place to ensure that faculty, staff, parents, and students receive communications from the school. Updates have also taken place with the Raptor Alert App. Mrs. Dubravec also shared about substitute training that Human Resources hosted and how her assistant Ms. Ashley Rasch, other support staff, and health services prepared for this training by making folders that contain consistent safety and health information, so no matter where a sub is working, they have access to the information they need. They also viewed the same videos that students do. The Raptor Alert App and the "I Love U Guys" Foundation with their SRP will partner on September 15th and 16th to train administration, faculty, and support staff directly involved in emergency response along with the various Village police and fire departments as well as local superintendents. Mrs. Dubravec also shared that she was invited to the Northern Illinois Public Safety Training Academy, NIPSTA, who assisted the District with its emergency plan, along with Village managers, fire and police departments.
- Mrs. Dubravec then went on to share about the various preparations for the school year that are not always seen. Mr. Augie Fontanetta hosted all coaches at his home for dinner, while the English Department Chair will host his department in the near future. She also thanked the Post-High School Counseling Department for the workshops they hosted over the summer to help prepare seniors for their college applications. She then shared about the

English Department meeting and the preparation that goes into it. Student leaders such as Junior Bridge Builders have met to prepare for supporting the incoming Class of 2029. Finally, with the addition of 80 teachers since 2021, the Winnetka Campus Leadership Team focused on the theme: Shaping Tomorrow Together: Mastery in Teaching and Leading for their start of the school year meeting. They worked on what it means to be a master teacher as well as looking at the scale system and how it plays a role as a master teacher as it is important to ensure a standard for this across all departments.

- Professional development also took place this summer regarding critical thinking and the Staff Belonging Council met as well.
- Mrs. Dubravec briefly shared about welcoming new staff and how they had a chance to meet a variety of people over their three-day training.
- Ms. Hilerre Kirsch, Performing Arts Coordinator and Director of the Fall Play, brought her students together to work on how they will create a culture where everyone feels like they belong.
- The Winnetka Campus also hosted a Transfer Family Day. Transfer students are part of the Newbies Club, which Mr. Bob Berlin, Math Department Faculty, is one of the sponsors of at Winnetka. He invites Newbies from previous years to attend the day and there were more former Newbies in attendance than Transfer students. It was a great opportunity for previous Transfer students to support the new students. Student Ambassadors are also in attendance. The NTPA meets with parents during this day. She further explained that there is a process for the school to reach out once a student transfers in.
- Several staff have been honored recently with awards. Mr. Jim Burnside, Assistant Athletic Director and Head Girls Soccer Coach, was named the 2025 National Soccer Coach of the Year by NHSACA. Mr. Burnside is entering his 29th year as the varsity head coach. Ms. Sandy Culver, Rowing Head Coach, was named Coach of the Year for the Midwest Scholastic Rowing Association. Mr. Jim Davis, Athletic Coordinator for Strength and Conditioning, received the 2025 Strength and Conditioning Coach of the Year award. Mr. Andrew Schmitt, Technology Department, was named the U.S. Track and Field and Cross-Country Coach of the Year for the state of Illinois. Ms. Elizabeth Bennett, Music and Theatre Department Chair, was selected to be a voting member of the Recording Academy, otherwise known as the GRAMMYs.
- The 3rd Annual Trev Fest will take place on Saturday, September 20th from 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. at Hubbard Woods.
- Athletics had a record 1,571 students try out for a Fall sport. Unfortunately, not everyone is able to make the team they tried out for, so Athletics has been communicating to students about what their other options are.
- She then shared all the theatre productions that are scheduled for the school year, including the new Comedy Showcase.

Ms. Hahn thanked Mrs. Dubravec for her report and work throughout the year.

Dr. Nashwa Mekky, Chief Human Resources Officer, began by welcoming new teachers and introducing each one with their department and campus location. She then went on to welcome new support staff. The Human Resources Department also hosted 100 substitute teachers for training on August 12th. Ms. Hahn welcomed new faculty and staff and thanked the new teachers for attending the meeting.

Dr. Chimille Tillery, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, shared that 17 new teachers participated in the three-day New Teacher Orientation last week. It was facilitated by Dr. Melissa Dudic, Director of Curriculum and Instruction; Ms. Aileen Heidkamp, Staff Development Coordinator and English Department Faculty; Ms. Leslie Skizas, English Department Faculty; and Ms. Anne Twadell, Special Education Department Faculty. Dr. Tillery then shared about the focus of each day.

Dr. Johnson gave the FOIA report noting that there has been one request since the last Board meeting regarding a contract that is still open.

Ms. Tomlinson noted that it was great to see new staff in the video this morning and hearing each of their fun facts.

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. Facilities Projects Update: Summer 2025

Dr. Johnson presented an update on the Summer 2025 Facilities Projects which also included an update on the 15-year facilities plan, accomplishments, on-going work, as well as future work. This work is rooted in framework six of the NT 2030 Strategic Plan of Finance, Facilities, and Human Resources. The underlying support of these areas creates an environment where students can learn and excel.

Dr. Johnson began with an overview of the 15-year Facility Plan which was adopted by the Board in 2019. Projects were categorized into five frameworks and prioritized each year based on several factors such as the impact on students. The plan called for a thoughtful, phased approach to the work while aligning with the NT2030 Strategic Plan. It also focused on existing revenue sources and made an initial commitment not to ask the community for a referendum for the foreseeable future. Seven years of work have been completed under the plan and have transformed the campuses with significant improvements. Projects include the Winnetka Campus East Side and Academic Project, Duke Childs Field in collaboration with the village, and the opening of the District's first new facility in 60 years with the establishment of the Transition Center in Glencoe.

Next, Dr. Johnson provided an update on current projects, beginning with the 2025-2027 Winnetka Campus North and Tower Building Project. It addresses the strategic areas previously mentioned such as academics, security, mechanical and environmental systems. The project includes ten new science labs, collaborative space for the graduating class teams, space for campus administration and student and parent reception, enhanced environmental and mechanical systems and an improved security profile. He displayed a map of the Winnetka campus which showed how much square footage was renovated and how much remains as of 2023. He went on to share the project schedule and milestones for the North and Tower Building Project from this summer through the summer of 2027. It is happening in three phases to ensure safety and efficiency so school can still be conducted. While the project will continue during the school year, it will be at a reduced level. There is no impact to student programming or the extracurricular program. Pepper Construction and New Trier's Physical Plant Services (PPS) staff supervise construction daily and monitor noise and safety. There is minimal impact to campus neighbors as the work is mostly inside the school. Summer school will continue to be offered at the Northfield campus for summers 2026 and 2027. Dr. Johnson then shared visuals of what the various spaces will look like and details of each. The second-floor rotunda will be named the Nobel Rotunda to honor Nobel Laureate Dr. Jack Steinberger, a New Trier alum, who donated his Nobel Prize in Physics (1988), to New Trier. It will be a collaborative space for the Science department and a way to commemorate Dr. Steinberger's work. Dr. Johnson then shared pictures of work that is currently taking place.

Dr. Johnson shared about the District's other major project, the Northfield Campus Athletic Project. It will improve outdoor athletic facilities at that campus with work taking place during the summers of 2025 and 2026. The project was spurred by a generous anonymous donation of \$10 million which is funding a large portion of the project. The campus is home to outdoor sports and used by many students and visitors. Phase One of the project has replaced three fields, while Phase Two will include two new fields, new bleachers, scoreboards, and lights. It will have a significant impact on not only freshmen Kinetic Wellness classes, but the 9-12 Athletic program. Dr. Johnson also shared how the community will benefit from this project through feeder programs and a new walking path. He summarized the first phase of the project with the work that was done at the stadium field as well as the field hockey and multipurpose field. He then went on to summarize the second phase, highlighting the community walking path which would replace the track and will be almost twice the distance of the current track. It will also have six fitness stations with 12 pieces of outdoor equipment.

Other projects that took place over the summer include the Winnetka Campus Solar Project, which is now complete. The District will file for a federal rebate that will cover a third of the cost. He also shared pictures from the solar installation. Masonry work also took place this summer at Winnetka. Phase One of the Winnetka Campus Health Life Safety (HLS) project also occurred and consisted of the replacement of the interior water mains in the 1957 Tower Building, as well as other plumbing work. Phase One was completed ahead of schedule, and much of Phase Two was actually completed this summer as well. Energy efficiency is a Strategic Plan goal and significant progress has been made with upgrades reducing maintenance and energy costs while reducing the District's environmental footprint.

Dr. Johnson then shared that the Northfield Campus cafeteria serving area is a future project that the District is working on. Quest, the District's food service provider, approached the District and offered to fund a portion of improvements. They will cover about half the cost to create a new serving area. The project design is underway, and

construction will take place next summer.

Dr. Johnson went on to present about Long-Range Planning, noting the resources provided by the community have had a meaningful impact on students, improving instructional and extracurricular spaces, enhancing security, and reducing maintenance costs and energy consumption. These improvements have been made without a referendum since 2014. The District will undertake the process this year to revise the 15 Year Plan as it thinks about the connection to the Strategic Plan and what future programming needs may be and how the physical environment can support that. The review will be a collaborative process involving input from students, staff, parents, and other stakeholders. The Facilities Steering and Finance Committees will be kept apprised of the progress and a plan will be presented this spring laying out a path and options for the next 15 years. The plan will be comprehensive, and the Board will have choices regarding the timing of projects and how to fund the improvements. Dr. Johnson noted the admirable job that teachers have done in working with some classrooms that are close to 100 years old.

Dr. Johnson thanked students and parents for their flexibility during this work, staff for their input in the design and development process, PPS for their work, the architecture team at Cashman Stahler and the construction team at Pepper, and the Board and community for their continued support of New Trier. Dr. Johnson then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Tomlinson noted that the list of accomplishments is tremendous considering it was 2014 when the referendum passed, and all the construction that has happened over the past ten years, the District has not asked for any more money. She went on to thank Dr. Johnson and Mr. Myron Spiwak, Director of Business Services, for their continued careful oversight that enables the District to afford these huge projects without going back to taxpayers for additional money. Ms. Tomlinson also acknowledged that there is a lot of work still to be done and is grateful that Dr. Johnson and his team are spearheading this.

Ms. McDonough thanked Dr. Johnson for his leadership on this, and although overwhelming in terms of the projects that still need to happen, it is amazing the impact that these improvements have had on students, the community and families while being done in a fiscally responsible way.

Dr. Johnson shared his appreciation for the Board's support and acknowledging everyone's work. He also thanked Mr. Jim Maile, Director of Physical Plant Services, and his staff.

Mr. Lee shared that the easiest way to destroy a budget is with construction projects and the District has stayed on budget for these projects, which the kudos are apt, but he inquired how the District is able to do this. Dr. Johnson replied that it starts with a good design team, so when one goes to bid the work, and the District uses a competitive public bidding process, one gets good prices, which reduces the amount of change orders. The second piece is building in contingency, especially with the District's 1930s and 1950s buildings. The architects and construction managers know New Trier and that it is building for the long-term while trying to make the right decision for students and do it in a way that shows respect for the taxpayer dollar.

Ms. Hahn added her gratitude that the District can do this with financing in a volatile bond market and increased construction costs. It is a testament to the work that Dr. Johnson and his team does, the tremendous energy of the PPS staff, and the importance of having a plan. She is supportive of the re-examination of this plan at the half-way point. Ms. Hahn also highlighted the security aspects of the projects as it is important to the community, not only parents and families, but also teachers and students. She spoke particularly to the reconfiguration of how visitors will enter the Winnetka campus building. Dr. Johnson also reiterated the work that Mrs. Dubravec and her team are doing on the District's procedures and systems. The combination of improving the facilities and having the right leadership in place to put the procedures and training into action gives the District a good foundation for security. He also noted that each year security systems and procedures have improved significantly, and this year is no different. Ms. Hahn replied that it is something that is operationalized, as it not one of the highlighted, explicit annual goals, but it is there in the daily work. She thanked Dr. Johnson on behalf of the community. She also noted that he will be working closely with both the Facilities and Finance committees as this moves forward.

VII. Administrative Items

A. Treasurer's Report for July 2025

Dr. Johnson provided the Treasurer's Report for July 2025, noting that the main focus for the Business Services team is working on the audit for FY 25, which is expected to be presented in November. The audit is off a good start, thanks to Mr. Myron Spiwak and his team. The July reports reflect just one month of the fiscal year and there is

significant variability on both the revenue and expenditure side due to the timing of the receipts and payments. There is continued focus on the delay in property tax receipts due to the delay in issuance of the second installment of tax bills as the County continues their computer system upgrade. Dr. Johnson shared additional details of the upgrade and while excited for its improvements, he did share concern for the District as well as other taxing districts in Cook County who are not positioned as well as New Trier is. Property taxes represent 91% of the District's revenue. Typically, bills are issued July 1st and due August 1st, and funds are received by the District starting even in July. Last year at this time, the District had \$28 million in local funds, the majority of which were tax revenue. This year, there has been no tax revenue and funds have not been distributed to taxing bodies. The District has carefully analyzed its liquidity position through the fall and will update it monthly. He shared that the fall is an important time for the District as everything gets underway again and to not have cash coming in from property taxes is a significant concern. Right now, the District is projected to maintain adequate liquidity through the end of November with cash on hand and existing investment maturities. The District has paused additional investments in its five-year ladder, which will have a long-term negative impact on future year interest earnings, as it is generally assumed that investments that could be placed can be done so at a higher rate than when the tax revenue arrives in a few months. While the District earns significant invest earnings on cash, those are reduced as well, as the amount of cash on hand drops. As Dr. Johnson noted earlier, this will be a significant issue for other districts, including Chicago Public Schools, who are issuing tax anticipation warrants of \$1.2 billion to meet their obligations as they await tax revenue. New Trier is fortunate to be in the position it is but will have to monitor its liquidity carefully as time progresses. This will be a standing item on the Finance Committee's monthly meeting agenda. As a reminder, the District budgets on an annual basis so property taxes received this year will be recorded in this fiscal year and will not change the year-end results aside from interest earnings. The District is earning 4.11% with its PMA cash investments and the long-term five-year ladder is at 4.32% with Fifth Third. The fund balance for all accounts is \$123,864,000.

B. Financial Report for July 2025

Dr. Johnson then provided the Financial Report for July 2025. Operating revenue was \$2,264,000, or 93% lower compared to last year due to the delay in property tax payments. Any revenue that is attributable to last year, which is received in July or August, will be attributed to last year as part of the accrual-based audit. It was also noted that the year-over-year comparisons for the first several months of the new year are not significant due to timing delays and the delay in property taxes.

The report also provides a window into the FY 25 preliminary results as the District continues to post expenses to last year. It shows that last year is closing well and a bit better than budget on the revenue and expenditure side. The final audit will confirm all the numbers from last year. Both Dr. Johnson and Mr. Spiwak are pleased with how last year's numbers are concluding.

Mr. Lee asked if the audit was internal or external, to which Dr. Johnson replied that the District has external auditor Wipfli conduct their audit as the District is required to have one done. Dr. Johnson explained how the District has moved to a two-part audit. RSM, the District's previous auditor, has been retained as a technical accounting consultant. They do a first pass and assist the District in implementing new national accounting standards and then Wipfli comes in and conducts the audit. The auditor will also attend a future Board meeting where they will report on any findings.

Ms. Tomlinson reiterated her appreciation for how the District goes through the budgeting process of being conservative in revenues and more aggressive regarding potential expenses which helps it plan for any issues such as the delayed property tax payments. She and Dr. Johnson exchanged additional comments, with Ms. Hahn adding that it also highlights the importance of healthy fund balances. While it is a policy of the Board, it not only allows the District to borrow money less expensively because of its high bond rating, it also allows the District to weather these storms. Ms. Hahn noted that the prudent financial management allows the District to take advantage of opportunities and meet challenges.

VIII. Consent Agenda

- Bill List for Period, July 1 - 31, 2025
- Personnel Report (Appointments, Change of Status, Resignations, Retirements, Stipends - Appointments, and Stipends - Separation)
- Northfield Campus Cafeteria Project Approval
- Northfield Campus Athletic Improvements Phase 2 Approval
- Contract with Southern Bleacher for Northfield Campus Athletic Improvements Phase 2

- Winnetka Campus North and Tower Building Construction Report
- Carehawk Clock Bell PA System Upgrade (Northfield)

Ms. Hahn inquired if any members wanted to pull an item off the Consent Agenda, no one chose to do so. Ms. McDonough moved that the Board of Education approve the Consent Agenda, which includes: Bill List for Period, July 1 - 31, 2025; Personnel Report (Appointments, Change of Status, Resignations, Retirements, Stipends - Appointments, and Stipends - Separation); Northfield Campus Cafeteria remodeling project as presented; Northfield Campus Athletic Improvements Phase 2 as presented; Contract with Southern Bleacher for Northfield Campus Athletic Improvements Phase 2 as presented; Winnetka Campus North and Tower Building Construction Report as presented; Approve and award a contract to First Security for \$223,185 and authorize the Deputy Superintendent to execute the contract subject to final attorney review. Mr. Lee seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

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

NAY:

ABSENT: Ms. Alcantara, Ms. Pofcher

The motion passed.

IX. Board Member Reports

Mr. Lee noted that the first **Booster Club** meeting of the year is tomorrow.

Mr. Das noted that the next meeting for the **TrueNorth Leadership Council** is on Wednesday. Ms. Hahn thanked Mr. Das for all of his work with the Council, particularly over the summer.

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

Dr. Tragos highlighted the following events:

- The first day of student attendance is Wednesday, August 20th.
- The next Board meeting is on September 15th.
- He encouraged everyone to check out the athletics schedule.
- Wednesday, September 17th is the opening of the Fall Play, "Romeo & Juliet."

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

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Das 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 7:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lindsey Ruston, Secretary

Jean Hahn, President