

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

**August 11, 2021**

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

A **Special Meeting** of the Board of Education of New Trier Township High School District 203, Cook County, Illinois was held in-person on Wednesday, August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

**Members Present**

Ms. Cathy Albrecht, President  
Mr. Avik Das  
Ms. Jean Hahn  
Ms. Sally Tomlinson

**Administrators Present**

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

**Members Present via Phone**

Ms. Kimberly Alcantara  
Mr. Keith Dronen, Vice President  
Mr. Brad McLane

**Also Present**

Dr. Michael Marassa, Chief Technology Officer; Ms. Aileen Geary, Social Studies Department Faculty and New Trier High School Educational Association President; Ms. Lindsey Ruston, Board of Education Secretary; Mr. Mike Hill, Technology Department; Mr. Eric Johnson, Technology Department; members of the press and community.

**BUSINESS MEETING**

**I. CALL TO ORDER – 6:00 p.m. – C234**

Ms. Albrecht called the Special Meeting of August 11, 2021 of the Board of Education to order at 6:00 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus. Ms. Albrecht then checked that those joining by phone could hear her and be heard.

Roll call was taken, and all members were present.

**II. Communications**

Ms. Albrecht 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 Mr. Peter Tragos, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. Ms. Albrecht also noted that the District would welcome public comments on the ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) and Return to School Plan. There were two requests for public comment. Ms. Albrecht reminded those speaking to keep their comments to three minutes or less per Board Policy 2:230.

1. Mr. Greg Eickbush, parent, shared comments about masks, immunizations, and other mitigation efforts.
2. Ms. Elisabeth Franzen, parent, shared comments about medical freedom and medical choices.

**III. Special Orders of Business**

**A. 2021-2022 Back to School Plan**

Dr. Sally began the presentation on the 2021-2022 Back to School Plan. He noted the District is ready to start a great year. We have about a 90% vaccination rate amongst students and staff, the District will continue with high efficiency ventilation, masking, hand hygiene along with what we learned from the successes of last year. Mrs. Dubravec, Winnetka Campus Principal, shared information about how we are supporting students as they transition back to school. Many of the examples of support that Mrs. Dubravec shared came from parent, student, and staff feedback. She noted that Lagniappe and fall athletic seasons are underway and QR code self-guided tours are taking place. There will be picnics and activities for freshmen, sophomores, and transfer students to bring them together. There will be two different parent webinars, one for each campus, next week detailing the transition back to New Trier. Department chairs, Ms. Michael Christensen, Social Studies, and Ms. Elizabeth Bennett, Music and Theatre, will join, along with Social Work, Adviser Chairs, Mrs. Dubravec, Dr. Sally and Mr. Waechtler, Northfield Campus Principal.

Dr. Sally noted that students and families are at different points regarding the pandemic and very important part of the transition is supporting students, especially as the District gets closer to normal. All students will be in five days per week which is an Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) declaration. Classroom learning activities, extracurriculars, activities, as well as student life activities and experiences will all be much more typical. They will be conducted as safely as possible and under the guidance of the state and the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH). Students will not need to check into areas for lunch or free periods, supplies will be available if students would like to clean their desks and they do not need to wear masks when outside. The overall approach is to keep students and staff healthy – mentally and physically, keep change to a minimum, maximize in-person learning and monitor. Dr. Sally provided details on each of these items.

Mr. Tragos went on to share about the return to learning plan, noting that the school will meet students where they are at academically and emotionally. While our teachers do this yearly, students coming back after a year and a half of remote and hybrid learning will take a more concerted and consistent effort. Mr. Tragos highlighted the areas that will be focused on which include growth mindset language, formative and diagnostic assessments, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), commitment to a high level of communication with all stakeholders around a student, a unified academic assistance center at the Winnetka campus and increased staffing in targeted areas. He shared details about each item.

Dr. Sally noted that a positive school community is important. It is exciting to be back to full in-person learning, yet we must respect the individual choices of students and families related to Covid, as long as they do not break school rules. A final part of a positive school community is to make efforts to reconnect, reclaim, and reinvent and we can have a great start by supporting each other.

Dr. Sally then went through mitigation efforts. The first is masking which will be required for all individuals when indoors in compliance with the Governor's Executive Order. The state superintendent followed up today with superintendents indicating that non-compliance to the mask mandate is not an option for schools. Masks do not need to be worn outside the buildings, but individuals should feel free to wear them outdoors if it makes them feel more comfortable. The District will continue to revisit guidance and policies as conditions and opportunities change.

Mr. Johnson, Associate Superintendent, shared information about vaccination, noting that about 88% of students and 92% of staff (97% of teachers) are vaccinated. Some procedures will differ depending on vaccination status and are based on Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance. The District is also asking for proof of vaccination from students and staff.

Next, Mr. Johnson spoke to testing, noting that last year the District participated in a saliva screening program which contributed to a safe environment. It helped to detect over 100 cases of Covid in the school environment. This year, the District will use the University of Illinois Shield program which is the official state testing program that is available to schools. Many schools across the local area and the state are participating. It is a free PCR-based saliva test. It is similar to what was done last year, except it provides an official diagnosis of Covid. Testing helps to reduce the spread of Covid in the school and community and reduces the risk of interrupting instruction and extracurricular activities for individual students. The District is encouraging all students and staff to take advantage of this testing. It is initially planned for one time a week, but the school will consider more frequent testing if there is an increase in the community infection rates as measured by community positivity and prevalence. Unvaccinated students who participate in extracurricular activities are required to test and all other unvaccinated students are strongly encouraged to participate. Unvaccinated staff are also required to test. Instructions will be sent shortly with testing planned to start the week of August 23<sup>rd</sup> when students return to school. All are encouraged to participate regardless of vaccination status.

Dr. Sally shared that the goal is to minimize students and staff out of school while following guidance and keeping them healthy. The District encourages all families to take advantage of the testing options that reduce time in quarantine. It is also evaluating Health Services workflow to see if the District needs to continue with the Ruvna symptom screener. Dr. Sally went on to remind everyone to be kind to the Health Services staff.

Next, Dr. Sally walked through quarantine procedures for a positive diagnosis and if someone is symptomatic, whether vaccinated or not. He also shared that since everyone will be wearing masks, it is unlikely that there will be many close contacts within the classroom. Dr. Sally noted the policies for vaccinated as well as unvaccinated close contacts. One option Cook County may allow for a close contact, unvaccinated student who does not have

symptoms is Test-to-Stay. These students may stay in school if they test negative on days 1, 3, 5, and 7 and remain symptom free. One clarification that IDPH and CCDPH have made is that close contacts within households are treated differently as the likelihood of transmission is very high so this applies to non-household contacts. This is subject to change based on health department guidance.

Dr. Sally shared closing thoughts noting that information will continue to develop and asked for flexibility. The District will continue to listen to the community and work with its medical specialists and the Covid Reentry and Community Wellness Team.

Mr. Johnson provided a summary on the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds. The District is participating in various federal stimulus programs to ensure it receives the money it is entitled to for the services and supplies that are provided for students. The District is entitled to about \$796,000 in ESSER funds. As part of this, the Board needs to approve the Return to Learning Plan which will be done later in the meeting. The District also needs to have a budget for what the funds will be used for with 20% of them used for learning loss. Mr. Tragos has been working on this plan and the memo provided a summary of some of the costs. Some of the funds can be used for previous expenditures that the District has not yet received reimbursement for as well as for needs that arise in the future. This is the District's commitment to make sure it is using its taxpayer funds efficiently by applying for and receiving the federal grant while ensuring that the fund is being used in the spirit and the letter of the law to address student learning and learning loss. The Board was then invited to share questions and comments.

Mr. Dronen thanked the administration, staff and others who had input resulting in an excellent operational and instructional plan. He noted that it is important for the community and parents to understand, as Dr. Sally pointed out, that the District will continue to monitor and re-evaluate its plan in coordination with the Board, Covid Re-entry Team, students, staff, and parents. He shared his appreciation that the plan is student-centric focusing on growth, diagnostic assessment, and multi-tiered systems of support. Mr. Dronen noted that the District is adding a social worker and believes this to be a net increase of one over the past school year. Mr. Johnson responded that funds have been added to pay for contract services in social work. The plan is to have a drop-in center for students at both campuses who have been identified as needing some type of tiered support. These funds will address those students who need additional help this year. Mr. Dronen followed up by inquiring if this additional support will be permanent after this year, to which Mr. Johnson replied that it will be a year-by-year analysis and shared other details regarding this. Mr. Dronen then inquired how the administration will make sure that the drop-in service does not stigmatize or label students, particularly those who may want to use the service for the first time. Dr. Joanne Panopoulos, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services responded that students will be identified through the MTSS process. After further comments, Dr. Panopoulos said it should be no different than a drop-in center for an academic need. Dr. Sally added that students, often with the support from friends or advisers, seek out this support very actively. He also noted that there are good processes in place to make sure that students feel comfortable when reaching out for support.

Mr. Dronen inquired as to when the District would receive the ESSER funds to which Mr. Johnson replied that they will be available within this fiscal year, or perhaps even the calendar year. Mr. Johnson provided a summary of the other funds received. Ms. Albrecht noted that the Board needs to vote on the plan as that is required in order to receive the funds.

Mr. McLane noted that we are a beneficiary of a later start and being able to learn from what happened in GA, AL, TX, and MS with many of their public school openings this week, which soon became school closings. Many school Superintendents in those states have created mask mandates where governors have decreed them illegal. Those superintendents know the way.

He noted that at this meeting one year ago, he was a “no” and he did not think that we were ready. The future was murky and opaque. However, we dug in and rapidly learned what our options were. We got our act together. We were at the forefront of high schools and municipalities with our dashboard, testing, contact tracing, and vaccinating. We know how to do this. Thus, one year later, he is a highly supportive “yes” for this plan. It is a thoughtful, considered, fact and experience-based approach that reflects the needs of students, staff, and parents and is built on our prior rigor and success. He stated that he believes other schools will once again turn, and learn, from our example. He then asked about Shield Testing – what community positivity rate would trigger 2x testing per week?

Mr. Johnson replied that the District does not have a community positivity rate that would trigger twice weekly testing. Shield has noted that they are open to those who would like to test more than once per week. In terms of what the District recommends, that will be reviewed internally with the Covid Reentry and Community Wellness Team. Dr. Sally added that the District will start to gather data and will have more information in order to better decide. Mr. McLane noted that the District had a good dashboard and metrics in place and looks forward to hearing from the Covid response and Community Wellness Team. Mr. McLane concluded with two final questions about how to determine the value of RUVNA and what factors would need to occur to trigger all remote or hybrid.

Dr. Sally replied that there are probably circumstances that he does not know yet that may lead to this. He did note that one that would be of concern to CCDPH was if the school became the source of an outbreak and they determined there is something occurring within the school that they are worried about. Due to the success of last year, Dr. Sally does not anticipate this happening as the District has great mitigation efforts in place along with the understanding of how to manage this. Mr. Johnson also added that if any directive came from the state or Governor, but right now, the message is the opposite which is that the school must be open for in-person learning without exception. Mr. McLane suggested it might be a good idea to have something in mind, not that the District would operate independently, but so it has its own parameters and internal thoughts that may be added to the RAB 2.0's agenda.

Ms. Alcantara asked if vaccinated students would be able to participate in the Covid testing. Dr. Sally responded that the District is encouraging everyone to participate. Mr. Johnson added that this will be done on-site with a location at each campus. Those participating will be a mixture of vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Ms. Alcantara then noted that this is a different test than last year that will be done on-site and inquired if there were any other differences. Mr. Johnson replied that it is still a saliva-based test and happens on-site as it counts as an official PCR diagnostic test. He went on to share more information about the lab and sample collection. Results are received either that evening or the next day.

Before reinstating Ruvna, Ms. Alcantara would like to know if there is an ability to gauge whether the data gathered will be helpful or not. Dr. Sally noted this was a piece of what is being evaluated. After further comments, Dr. Sally stated that this is about working with the health services and technology departments to manage an efficient workflow. Mr. Johnson added that it is also for parents and what level of detail is needed from them to clear their child to return to school in the most efficient way. Dr. Sally also noted that the District is working with area schools to see how they are handling this piece as well. Ms. Tomlinson noted that there is a big different between this year and 88% of students being vaccinated versus in the past. Those vaccinated students are likely to be asymptomatic and she did not know how Ruvna would be effective.

Ms. Alcantara wanted to confirm that there will be food service this year in the cafeteria and if there will be other areas other than the cafeteria where students can eat. Mrs. Dubravec responded that it will be like normal, aside from any self-serve options such as the salad bar, which will offer to-go items. Students will be able to eat in a variety of locations like usual, with the reminder that those who are unvaccinated need to be six feet apart from others. Dr. Sally also reiterated there will be plenty of space. Mrs. Dubravec shared final comments.

Ms. Tomlinson thanked those who shared public comments as well as those who have contacted the Board to share their perspective. She also thanked Dr. Sally and his staff for their thoughtful and exhaustive planning. After further comments, Ms. Tomlinson believes that this plan supports students academically and emotionally within the guidelines of the governing bodies. She noted that the diagnostic and formative assessments make sense as a starting point and reiterated that parents, teachers, and students view this information as informative. In terms of communications, Ms. Tomlinson's hope is that at least within the first month, every parent gets some sort of touch point of how their student is doing. She also appreciates the steps being taken to support students emotionally in light of the mask mandate such as eliminating checking into areas. Ms. Tomlinson inquired if there was anything that could be done to give students mask breaks throughout the day. Dr. Sally replied that breaks can be taken outside, and the school will encourage this. Ms. Tomlinson then inquired if the District would reassess once the mask mandate is lifted, to which Dr. Sally responded that the District will continually reassess and shared further comments around this. Ms. Tomlinson also wanted to make sure that someone has eyes on faculty and staff as to how they are doing, which Dr. Sally spoke to.

Mr. Das noted his comments would be abbreviated as they echoed some of Ms. Tomlinson's. He noted the concept of the positive school community extends from student and families but also faculty and staff. Mr. Das spoke to Dr.

Sally's comments about the health services staff and noted his appreciation that Dr. Sally acknowledged that concerns should go to the administration, but also said that there should not be any areas or opportunities for being unkind to each other, to staff, to faculty and administration. He noted that this is a "we are all in this together" approach, ensuring that faculty and teachers are showing up, not from a position of fear, but from a position of hope ensuring that they know that the community is rooting for their success, is rooting for the school to shine and reopen with confidence and that everyone feels, that when they show up in this community, it is an opportunity to heal from all that we have been through.

Mr. Das then inquired about the slide in the presentation about testing on days 1, 3, 5 and 7, to which Dr. Sally replied that the guidance is still developing. The program that the District believes it may be able to put in place allows unvaccinated students to remain in school. The student would commit to testing on days 1, 3, 5 and 7 instead of a seven-day quarantine. Mr. Johnson commented that this may not be available if there is substantial community transmission, to which Dr. Sally replied that confirmation is needed as to when it is available. Mr. Das then shared concern about confidentiality when one utilizes this program. Dr. Sally responded that the testing will be full of people whose vaccination status is unknown and went on to share additional comments. Mr. Johnson added that with all the quarantine programs, it is complex, but health services staff will walk each family through each program.

Ms. Hahn shared her thanks for the comprehensive report which represents a tremendous amount of thought and effort that students will benefit from this year. She specifically applauds the commitment to help students center their narrative less on the academic losses they may have suffered and more on the obstacles they overcame and the resulting strengths they gained. Ms. Hahn shared her sadness as the District starts another school year tainted by the pandemic. She went on to note the importance of modeling the growth mindset that is being asked of students. After further comments, Ms. Hahn shared that she is hopeful that if losses can be reframed as gains as a community, there will be confidence that students can be kept in school this year.

Ms. Hahn inquired how teachers will be supported in administering the assessments, evaluating them, and differentiating for students. In areas where teachers will use a standard diagnostic, Mr. Tragos noted that practices are in place to help teachers interpret the data. He gave an example with the English department, noting that the assessment will help teachers to calibrate the readings to meet students' needs as well as utilize resources outside of class for students who may have more intense needs. The department leaders have been looking at this and committees will review student responses during time on the early dismissal/late start days in September. After further comments, Mr. Tragos noted that it is teacher to teacher collaboration as well as professional development that goes with it. Ms. Hahn inquired if the Board would hear about this throughout the year, which Mr. Tragos confirmed.

Ms. Hahn noted that while she understands there will not be an option for the hybrid teaching model, however, should it be needed, she assumes the District is prepared to ramp it up back up as that was one rationale for the schedule this year. Dr. Sally and Mr. Tragos replied yes, with Dr. Sally stating that the schedule and plan were created as the District does not necessarily know what is ahead of it. He went on to share further comments. Ms. Hahn followed up by noting that last year, students were able to stay home when sick and keep up with school, however, this year there will be a more robust Canvas program which will offer a similar opportunity. She encouraged communication to families around this along with supporting families in the moment when it occurs on an individual basis. Mr. Tragos confirmed that Ms. Hahn's comments about Canvas. He went on to share additional comments, noting that the District has a simple and effective plan for students to continue the pace of their curriculum and then reenter school after quarantine seamlessly. Dr. Sally added that with the vaccination rate in the community, he hopes for few positive Covid cases as they will have to be out for ten days. Those who are symptomatic should stay home and have a test done. Those who are close contacts of a positive case are minimized due to mitigation efforts and the testing allows for minimal time away from school. The plan is meant to keep students in school in different circumstances as much as possible.

Regarding Ruvna, Ms. Hahn will leave it to the District to assess the workflow internally, but externally it is such an effective and efficient communication piece to parents. She noted it as a hand-held decision tree that a parent can turn to daily. She encouraged the District to find a way to make it work and frame it as a positive, helpful tool.

Ms. Albrecht noted that teachers will also need mask breaks and there should be enough spaces for people to go to do so. Ms. Albrecht then went on to speak about the Shield test, noting it is different from last year as it is a

diagnostic test. Mr. Johnson shared comments in response, noting the District is excited to bring Shield to students and staff at no cost. Ms. Albrecht noted that new guidance will come out from time to time, and to her, the most important goal is to have students in-person five days a week and the District will adjust as needed with this focus. She then gave a brief timeline of what has taken place in terms of guidance by the state since May such as in-person learning, mask mandate and a note from the state superintendent. Dr. Sally then commented that the District is not allowed to mandate vaccinations for students. On the staff side, the District has been working with the Associations and individuals to do the assessment needed around medical and other issues. Ms. Albrecht also shared comments about collaborating with peer schools.

**\*B. 2021-2022 ESSER and Return to School Plan Approval**

Ms. Albrecht noted this is a voting item, so the District has access to the ESSER funding. Mr. Das moved, and Ms. Hahn seconded the motion, that the Board of Education approve the 2021-2022 ESSER and Return to School Plan, as presented. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Mr. Das, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Hahn, Mr. McLane, Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Alcantara, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

The motion passed.

**IV. ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Albrecht noted that now that there has been a return to regular Open Meetings Act rules, there is no need for roll call to adjourn, only a voice vote. Ms. Hahn moved, and Mr. Das seconded, the motion to adjourn. Upon a voice vote being taken, all members indicated they were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Lindsey Ruston, Secretary

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Cathleen Albrecht, President