

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

**April 15, 2024**

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

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, April 15, 2024, at 6:30 p.m.

**Members Present**

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

**Administrators Present**

Dr. Paul Sally, Superintendent  
Dr. Christopher Johnson, Associate Superintendent  
Dr. Joanne Panopoulos, Asst. Supt. for Special Ed and Student Services  
Dr. Chimille Tillery, Director of Curriculum & Instruction  
Mrs. Denise Dubravec, Principal – Winnetka Campus/Assistant Supt.  
Ms. Gail Gamrath, Associate Principal – Northfield Campus

**Members Absent**

Ms. Kimberly Alcantara

**Also Present**

Dr. Michael Marassa, Chief Technology Officer; Ms. Niki Dizon, Director of Communications; Mr. Myron Spiwak, Director of Business Services; Mr. Jon Lepeska, Math Department Faculty and Teachers' Association President; Ms. Molly Lombardi, Social Studies Department Faculty; Ms. Katie Kritek, Kinetic Wellness Department Faculty; Ms. Lucy Riner, Kinetic Wellness Department Faculty; Ms. Vicki Murphy, Speech/Language Pathologist; Jeff Bailey, Technology Department; Mr. Eric Johnson, Technology Department; Ms. Lindsey Ruston, Board of Education Secretary; students; members of the press and community.

**BUSINESS MEETING**

**I. CALL TO ORDER – 5:00 p.m. – C234**

Mr. Dronen called the Regular Meeting of April 15, 2024, of the Board of Education to order at 5:00 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus. Roll call was taken, and all members were present, except for Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Das, and Ms. Pofcher. Mr. Dronen asked for a motion to move to Closed Session. Ms. Tomlinson 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; collective negotiating matters between the District and its employees or their representatives, or deliberations concerning salary schedules for one or more classes of employees; student disciplinary cases; the placement of individual students in special education programs and other matters relating to individual students; and litigation, when an action against, affecting or on behalf of the particular District has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the District finds that an action is probable or imminent, in which case the basis for the finding shall be recorded and entered into the closed meeting minutes. Ms. Hahn seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

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

NAY: none

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

The motion passed.

**II. CLOSED SESSION – 5:00 p.m. – A201A**

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

Mr. Dronen called the Regular Meeting of April 15, 2024, 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 except for Ms. Alcantara.

### **IV. Minutes and Reports**

#### **\*A. Regular Meeting of March 18, 2024 (open and closed session)**

Mr. Dronen asked for any comments or adjustments on the minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 18, 2024 (open and closed session). There were no requests for changes to the minutes. Mr. Das moved, and Ms. Hahn seconded the motion that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 18, 2024 (open and closed session). Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

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

NAY: none

ABSENT: Ms. Alcantara

The motion passed.

#### **B. Report from Campus Principals and FOIA Report**

Ms. Gail Gamrath, Associate Principal for the Northfield Campus, shared the following student events and program updates from that campus on behalf of Mr. Paul Waechtler, Principal for the Northfield Campus:

- Spring is a big time for service at Northfield. The Pep Club and Tri-Ship organized a toiletry drive, and forty full boxes were donated to the Northfield Food Pantry. Many adviser rooms and clubs collected the items and Ms. Gamrath thanked Physical Plant Services (PPS) for delivering them.
- Students and staff could view March Madness games during lunch periods. Student Activities provided popcorn for students. The technology department won with their men's bracket and Mr. Waechtler and the B suite won with their women's bracket. Adviser rooms had their own brackets which folded over into the adviser room Olympics.
- Mr. Paul Moretta's adviser room won the Iditarod race during adviser room Olympics in March.
- Ms. Gamrath shared about viewing the eclipse together on campus.
- New Trier 101 recently took place and was organized by the New Trier Parents Association (NTPA). Over 200 parents attended, and Mr. Waechtler moderated the panel as current New Trier parents answered questions.

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

- Dance Day recently took place and Mrs. Dubravec shared her appreciation for the dance teachers and students.
- She echoed what Ms. Gamrath shared about what a wonderful opportunity the eclipse was for students. Mr. Jason English, Science Department Chair, worked to order the glasses well in advance. The department also put together a short video for advisers, so they had background information. Some students traveled to Indiana where they viewed the full eclipse.
- The District hosted the grand opening of the newly renovated Duke Childs Field. Renovations included a second softball field, turf infields, improved parking, more modern backstops, and a new locker room facility. Mr. Dave Conway, Director of PPS, and Mr. Jules Laude, Grounds Manager, threw out the first pitches. Both are set to retire this summer. Coach Kline, who the boys' field is named after, also attended.
- Ms. Michael Christensen, Social Studies Department Chair, hosted teachers and leaders from eight different area high schools to a day of learning on April 5<sup>th</sup> regarding the AP African American Studies curriculum. Teachers shared best practices and curriculum. The visitors observed one of Ms. Christensen's classes and had time with students. They noted that the students were welcoming and engaging.
- The Winnetka campus hosted its third annual March Madness Charity Tournament where adviser rooms had to earn the most points in the women's and the men's brackets. Winners received breakfast, t-shirts, and a trophy. First place this year was the Nichols adviser room and their donation went to Care for Friends, second place was the Yoon adviser room, and their donation went to Lurie's Childrens Hospital, and third place was Chao's adviser room, and their donation went to Misericordia. Departments also participated with Kinetic Wellness placing first and Athletics placing second with both donating to Embarc, which is part of the senior class service project. The technology department took third place and donated to the Alzheimer's Association. Each team donated \$20 and \$1,300 was donated to charity.
- There were two spring break trips that students participated in. She thanked the sponsors and families who helped to make this work. Jazz students went to New Orleans while choral students traveled to Spain.

- Mrs. Dubravec shared a variety of happenings. Several German students were inducted into the Illinois Gamma German Chapter, which is a National Honor Society. The Strength and Conditioning club have collected 3,000 diapers for the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago. For the second year in a row, the Student Council won gold for the National Council of Excellence Awards. Student Council had to show evidence in different categories. They have also been valuable in the school's equity, belonging, and inclusion by incorporating toolkits and other pieces of information that is shared with staff. Finally, Binary Hearts takes old computer parts that people drop off, refurbish them, and then gives them to public schools.
- Other happenings include a Starbucks fundraiser to help the Special Olympics team go to state. They partnered with the Enriching Lives through Service club. Girls' soccer partnered with Digs with Dignity to collect household items and deliver them to help refurbish a home. Ms. Tiffany Myers, Social Work Department Chair, is hosting a test anxiety workshop from April 18 – May 2.
- A parent program recently took place on the book *Quiet Power: The Secret Strength of Introverted Kids* by Susan Cain. Mrs. Dubravec and Ms. Elizabeth Bennett, Music and Theatre Department Chair, discussed what it means to be quiet in the classroom, in the spotlight, in friendship and with family.
- Finally, Mrs. Dubravec shared where several alumni are now. She noted the podcast where Mr. Rainn Wilson and Mr. Jake Johnson share about their time at New Trier. Mrs. Dubravec then shared about some former Trevians who are now NCAA swimmers: Ms. Greta Pelzek, University of South Carolina; Ms. Carly Novelline, University of Virginia; Ms. Kaelyn Gridley, Duke; and Ms. Jane Sanderson, Emory. Ms. Pofcher added that Mr. Peter Chatain and Ms. Grace Joyce both made the U.S. Olympic Rowing team.

Dr. Johnson gave the FOIA report, noting that there have been three requests since the last Board meeting. One related to employee communications, another related to a possible vendor, and a copy of the FOIA log. All have been closed.

### **Communications**

Mr. Dronen 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. Mr. Dronen shared the following guidelines: Comments should be limited to three minutes per policy 2-230. If a comment requires a response, either Mr. Dronen or an administrator will be in contact in the days following the meeting. Questions and comments should address the Board of Education as a whole only. No comments should be directed to an individual Board member, audience, principals, or other staff members. No complaints against individual employees are allowed during a Board of Education Meeting. Mr. Dronen also asked attendees to refrain from clapping or a response of any kind. There were six requests for public comment.

1. Ms. Jenifer Giller, parent, shared comments about a Title IX complaint.
2. Mr. Scott Giller, parent, shared comments about a Title IX complaint.
3. Rabbi Brian Immerman who serves Congregation Sukkat Shalom, though he noted that his comments were his own, spoke in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).
4. Mr. Jon Marshall, parent of New Trier alums, spoke in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).
5. Ms. Dorothy Elfring, parent, spoke in support of the culture, climate, and equity goals in the strategic plan.
6. Ms. Jennifer Lind, parent, spoke on the school's equity work.

## **VI. Special Orders of Business**

### **A. Student Voices: Sophomores**

Mrs. Dubravec began the presentation on Student Voice: Sophomores. This is the third of four presentations with the final one being in May with freshmen. She shared that student voice stands out as one of the most vital sources of information available to the school enabling it to better understand and extend assistance to students as they navigate their high school journey. Their input is essential in shaping the District's decision-making processes. It provides valuable insights and perspectives that guide the District towards creating a more responsive and student-centered educational environment.

The school prides itself on students having a deep sense of connection and belonging to the school community. After sharing further comments, Mrs. Dubravec highlighted two graphics that represent the larger outcomes, skills, and dispositions New Trier seeks to develop in each student. The first, *Characteristics of a New Trier Graduate*, are the non-academic outcomes or 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that the school seeks to develop in its graduates. The second graphic, *Be Brave, Be Kind, Be Proud*, is being used with the school's extracurricular programs. It represents the actions, behaviors, and relationships that the school wants students and staff to aspire to and model within the school day, extracurricular programs, the wider community, and after they have left New Trier. Sophomore student presenters

shared their journeys, particularly their transition to the Northfield and then Winnetka campuses. High school is filled with challenges, opportunities, and significant moments of personal growth. Their stories hold the power to inform and inspire both current and future students as they navigate their own unique paths through high school. Students were asked to share and reflect on their transitions, what they are excited about as well as what they are nervous about as they look toward junior year. Additionally, the District welcomes any constructive feedback or suggestions that can help enhance the overall school experience. Mrs. Dubravec introduced Ms. Yejin Yang, Mr. Max Dress, Ms. Catherine Ji, Mr. Zain Mian, and Mr. William Schellenberg.

First, Ms. Yang shared that her educational journey began in Korean Public School, she went on to a small private school in Las Vegas, and then on to New Trier. She shared the challenges she faced as she moved from Korea to Las Vegas, noting it was a valuable learning experience though. She shared her interests while at her small private school. Ms. Yang attended Transfer Family Day and discovered the Club Finder app and through it found the Sports Medicine Club where she has been able to continue her passion of sports medicine. Ms. Yang also volunteers with the Special Olympics. She spoke of her challenges in math and how she took the initiative in her learning. She shared about one of her most significant experiences at New Trier which was trying out for the basketball team. She will attend a seminar and athletic training summer program at Northern Illinois University this summer. Ms. Yang looks forward to continuing her activities along with building relationships with new friends and teachers while exploring new opportunities that might be available in her junior year.

Next, Mr. Max Dress shared that he attended Wilmette Junior High School and attended a class at New Trier as an eighth grader. He shared that the transition to high school was not so much academic, but rather social. As a freshman, Mr. Dress took advantage of the many opportunities that New Trier provides. He also shared about his positive transition to the Winnetka campus, noting the acceptance he felt from upperclassmen. Mr. Dress looks forward to continuing fencing during his junior year. He shared nerves about having to push himself academically next year, noting that while freshmen and sophomore years were challenging, he has heard that junior year is even more so. He knows that pushing himself academically will help him for the rest of life and looks forward to what is to come in his academic journey.

Mr. Zain Mian moved into the township and attended eighth grade at Marie Murphy. He noted that it seemed that everyone had their own groups and interests already and he anticipated that high school would be more of the same. He shared that the transition to high school was great due to the freshman campus. As a freshman, he found the Sports Medicine Club and last summer, he attended the summer program at Northern Illinois University. During this time, Mr. Mian faced a diagnosis that created many barriers for him. When he started at the Winnetka campus, he saw it as yet another new beginning. He noted the support from his adviser, Ms. Molly Lombardi, and how she has helped him to grow over the past year. Mr. Mian has started a non-profit that provides free CPR classes to students from lower income families. He concluded by sharing that upcoming college admissions and tests do cause him stress.

Mr. William Schellenberg shared that he went to Central School and that theatre is a big part of his life. While excited to come to New Trier, he was nervous about meeting many new people. He did share that the theatre department is where he met all his friends. The transition to tenth grade was easier as he knew who he would sit with at lunch and most of the students in his classes. His sophomore year has been a bit harder than anticipated as Mr. Schellenberg shared, he took on too many extracurricular activities. He noted that this was a good lesson to learn going into junior year as there are even more opportunities available, particularly in leadership. He is excited for junior year and feels prepared. Finally, Mr. Schellenberg noted his gratitude for the block schedule.

Lastly, Ms. Catherine Ji shared that she went to Wilmette Junior High School. As she transitioned to New Trier, she decided to take the most rigorous classes possible, join the tennis team as well as the math team and Science Olympiad. Regarding her sophomore year, Ms. Ji shared how she was shocked by how much has changed. She also joined additional extracurricular activities. As thankful as Ms. Ji has been for the numerous opportunities, she has also been overwhelmed. She went on to share how she has dealt with that and grown from it. One thing Ms. Ji would have liked to have had was more awareness of what would happen during her sophomore year. She felt there was some disconnect between the transition from the Northfield campus to Winnetka. While Ms. Ji is concerned about the academic challenges of junior year, she is ready to take on leadership positions and was recently elected as secretary of student council. She feels prepared to enter her junior year.

Ms. McDonough thanked the students, noting they were well spoken, poised, and brave. She shared her appreciation for their vulnerability and willingness to share what has been great as well as what has been hard. She is excited to see what the students do next.

Ms. Tomlinson also thanked the students and noted she was struck by their willingness to take risks. She also shared that she heard the students talk about the risk they took in asking for help and recognizing when to ask. Ms. Tomlinson encouraged the students to keep taking risks as it would make them stronger. She also shared how accomplished they already are as well.

Ms. Pofcher added that adults grapple with similar things and shared her appreciation for the inspiration. She went on to say that every year, something does not go as planned and every year, new things can happen. Ms. Pofcher noted that the students described beautifully, in refreshing and inspiring ways, what to do when things do not work out, how to find new things, how to find new people, and how to find your own passion.

Ms. Hahn was struck by how genuinely curious the students were with their willingness to explore things they are interested in. It takes courage, and Ms. Hahn went on to say that it is heard a lot these days about students that jumping through hoops and doing what they need to do, and while the presenters are aware that college is coming and they will need to apply, she encouraged them to stay true to themselves as they have done.

Ms. Hahn then noted that this class was the first to choose if they wanted to be a part of a mixed gender adviser room or single gender adviser room. She inquired if any of the students wanted to share how they made their choice and how it is going. Mr. Mian chose the mixed gender adviser room. He shared that New Trier does a great job of having something for everyone. He selected this adviser room because he thought it would be like a regular classroom, he ended up loving this option due to the mixture of people in his adviser room. Mr. Schellenberg added that he also selected a mixed gender adviser room as he was used to that during his time at Central School where they had mixed gender adviser rooms, though those are different every year so as to meet different people. He shared that he felt more comfortable in this kind of adviser room, and it allowed for more diversity of people.

Mr. Das shared his observations, noting how proud of these students he was. He shared his excitement that other children get to work and be in spaces with these students as well. Those spaces have been created where they feel confident to share their experiences, be vulnerable as well as encouraging. He went on to say that everyone can learn a great lesson of affirmation that they have to create a community that is willing to give space for these students' voices. That they can speak their point of view in spaces where people may not all have the same point of view. Mr. Das went on to say that because such promise is seen in these students who are able to be excellent with each other, explore different paths together, make mistakes, and be uncomfortable that the adults need to be able to support them with this. He said that they knocked it out of the park in sharing their personal journeys, that these students are doing something that everyone can be proud of and inspired by.

Mr. Dronen shared that this is why the Board is here and it is always a favorite part of the meeting. He also thanked the students for their presentation.

## **B. New Trier 2030: Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging Update**

Dr. Sally presented an update on New Trier 2030: Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging. Dr. Sally introduced Dr. Chimille Tillery, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, who would present with him. Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging is one of the important pillars in the New Trier 2030 Strategic Plan. There are two main objectives that this work falls under. The first is that all students should feel like they belong at New Trier and the second is that all students should learn about perspectives different than their own. Dr. Sally went on to acknowledge the importance of listening to students, staff, families, and community members about how they may or may not feel welcome or included at school. This two-way communication is crucial to becoming the type of school community that New Trier aspires to be and an important part of this work. In the past, Dr. Sally has said that when groups come to the school and say that they are hurting and do not feel supported by the school, it is the District's duty to listen and work together to make sure these students and families feel welcome and safe at New Trier. This happened most recently with the school's Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian parents, and community members. They shared stories of students experiencing fear of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab hate, feeling silenced at school, and worrying for family members here and abroad among the on-going conflict in Gaza and Israel. The school met with these families and heard clearly that they wanted their students to feel safe at school and their identity celebrated. The District is working to make sure that happens, and it will continue to meet with these parents and others to share ideas about how to best support their students. Dr. Sally thanked all the families who had come forward to engage with him and

the school. He went on to say that in talking with students and parents of many different identities, they share many of the same goals which include that they want the school to do better to ensure that their students feel like they belong as well as they want to make sure that the District is helping all students feel like they belong, no matter their identity. In terms of balance, Dr. Sally noted that the difficult part can come when talking about all groups, as it can sometimes feel as if the school is not understanding the unique contributions and challenges of particular identities, yet, when only one group is spoken about, it can feel as though the school is not paying enough attention to others. Dr. Sally noted that the shared goal is working to assure students and families that the school sees them and is committed to supporting them. Dr. Sally shared that the vast majority of the community supports one another no matter their identity and wants all students to thrive at New Trier. Dr. Sally noted his pride in the work but acknowledged the continual need to listen and seek representation from all groups to truly achieve the District's goal of creating a culture of belonging.

Next, Dr. Sally shared the documents that are at the foundation of this work. He highlighted the Strategic Plan, particularly the District's mission and vision, the commitment to equity part of the webpage, the statements that the Board has adopted over time around diversity and commitment to equity. Other foundational pieces include The Characteristics of a New Trier Graduate as well as Be Brave, Be Kind, Be Proud.

Dr. Tillery shared about the District's civil discourse and critical thinking statement, noting it embodies New Trier's commitment to equity and is the foundation of the culture, climate, equity, and belonging work that the school does. The Characteristics of a New Trier Graduate convey the District's goals for the skills and dispositions that it hopes students develop beyond their academics. They articulate the durable or soft skills that post-secondary institutions and employers are looking for which are critical for success in college, career, and life. Becoming an engaged citizen is one of these characteristics.

Dr. Tillery went on to share details about some of the 2019 – 2024 initiatives, beginning with department equity goals. Other initiatives included monthly observances, professional learning, and student affinity groups. Dr. Sally added that these initiatives have evolved over this time. This is an important part of the Strategic Plan as Annual Plans are created with yearly goals. Dr. Sally noted that a lot of work has gone into these initiatives, particularly by the District's equity liaisons. These positions have evolved over this time as well. Ms. Pat Savage-Williams, Ms. Kiran Subhani, and Dr. Tim Hayes, the equity liaisons, have put in hours of work with teachers, administration, and students. Dr. Sally then finished talking about the remaining initiatives, providing details on each. They included hiring an exceptional and diverse staff, sender school connections, restorative practices, mixed gender adviser rooms, and the religious and cultural calendar.

Next, Dr. Sally spoke about gathering feedback as the District looks to the next part of the Strategic Plan. Feedback has shown strong support for the District's equity work and its initiatives are making a meaningful impact on students in classrooms and hallways. The student experience is varied with these initiatives so the school will keep working to make that more consistent. There is also interest in expanding the District's professional offerings for staff. Dr. Sally would also like to increase student voice in terms of feedback on the District's priorities and its direction in this work. He also shared that the civil discourse statement is powerful, and feedback has included making this central to the school's work as it requires it to look at multiple perspectives and dialogue in a civil way. Lastly, feedback included stronger partnerships with all communities represented at New Trier.

Dr. Sally shared about the 24-25 school year and beyond, noting the continuing initiatives that will have tweaks of some kind. He also provided a preview of new areas of focus, some of which Dr. Sally shared earlier in the feedback portion including the expansion of representation and viewpoints, along with student voice. There is great support through the graduating class teams, but support would also focus on struggling students in underrepresented groups. Dr. Sally explained the District's Northfield Initiatives, as the campus is where various communities are first coming together, and the focus will be on understanding and learning about the various identities at New Trier. After sharing further details, the initiatives will also include curricular updates across the school. Dr. Sally shared that there will be more to come at the May and June board meetings as specifics on what the goals will be are determined. The annual goals will be voted on at the July board meeting. Mr. Dronen invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Pofcher began that she got the sense from the community comments and which Dr. Sally alluded to earlier is, that he is still thinking through the leadership model and staffing model to support this, her impression was though it may be shared leadership, there is no wavering in the level of commitment to DEI under any umbrella of description. Dr. Sally confirmed this and said that expanding the voices that are at the table as this is being discussed is an important piece too.

Ms. McDonough thanked Dr. Sally for highlighting the overarching goals of the framework of culture, climate, and equity. She noted that the goals themselves are simple, but it's been learned that it's complicated and challenging to achieve those goals. She believes that sticking with a sense of belonging is important as in order to be a fully engaged learner, one must feel comfortable and secure in their physical and social emotional well-being. For that to happen, one wants to make sure that their viewpoints are respected, which is an essential part of feeling secure and like one belongs in the classroom. Ms. McDonough commended the District's commitment to creating welcoming and inclusive classrooms where students feel seen and safe, and that their viewpoints and perspectives are valued while also being exposed to a wide range of perspectives. She believes it is important for individuals to be enriched in this manner as it makes for a more meaningful and robust classroom environment which trickles down to the community as well. Ms. McDonough is also excited to see how this is honed and refined and how the new initiatives are coming along. Dr. Sally replied that the focus on belonging is important, but not easy at all. He said that for students and families, it is about what the school does and what it does not do, it's about having a voice and being heard. It is also about feeling respected as well as feeling like one is represented in the school and that it matters that one is here. He shared concluding comments around this.

Ms. Hahn thanked Dr. Sally for updating everyone on his thinking and how this work is evolving over the course of time. She went on to share that she recently attended the Boys and Girls Club Youth of the Year Celebration. The seven finalists shared with the audience how their particular neighborhood club helped them pursue their goals as they go on to college. She shared how one young man's comments resonated with her as he noted that his club provided him with a place where he felt safe, seen, heard, and respected. He captured, for her, why this work has been and remains a priority for the Board. While this presentation was a look at how this work is going, Ms. Hahn thinks it is good to remember how it started. She went on to share that this started from student voice and recent graduate surveys where former students shared that while they were academically prepared, they were not optimally prepared to navigate the diverse environments they were entering. Ms. Hahn inquired if the school is getting the sense that that is improving for recent graduates who have had the benefit of this more intentional work. She also inquired how this is being assessed regarding the survey. Dr. Sally replied that the survey is still being conducted, and respondents are asked directly about being prepared for a variety of things, including the diversity that they are experiencing in college or a job or whatever else they are doing post-high school. Dr. Sally noted that Mr. Tragos could provide more information. Dr. Sally hopes that in the long run, that the sense of belonging shows up in other surveys that the school does. He also referenced the qualitative data that the school gets by talking with students. After further comments, Dr. Sally stated that the District looks at the overall trend, but also makes sure it is managing all of the ups and downs that can happen based on events that happen in the world or in the school. He shared this is something to think through as the District determines how it is making progress.

Ms. Hahn spoke to the Strategic Plan, which came from extensive community input, articulating the importance of this work. She applauded all of the administration's extensive efforts over the past few months to sit down and listen to the various community groups about concerns they had and how they felt. Ms. Hahn inquired how the District may gather feedback on an ongoing basis, not just when there is a problem or concern, but how the community can communicate about this work. Dr. Sally replied that the first is staying in contact with parents so as to hear what their experience is in the community and at school for themselves and their students. Next, and Dr. Sally will defer to Mr. Tragos as next year is thought about but bringing groups together of parents. Dr. Sally has learned that the vast majority of the community is committed to making sure the school is helping their student as well as making sure New Trier is helping all students and that no one feels left out. He shared comments around how the school may get parent conversation going.

Ms. Hahn echoed Ms. McDonough's sentiment about bringing belonging into the description of this work. She recognized the efforts of those tasked with doing this work that is hard and complex. The District is trying to celebrate and learn from each other's differences to build a stronger community. She shared that it would continue to evolve, emerge, and expand as the school expands its thinking about who needs to be included so that it is a better, stronger community. Ms. Hahn went on to say that to focus on work on the Northfield campus is brilliant as they form their community, and it is their first example of belonging. She inquired if some of the lessons will focus on digital literacy as this is how these students communicate. Dr. Sally replied that the library partners with departments on digital citizenship and digital literacy. Ms. Hahn clarified that it is about language and not just what is said in the halls, but what one might post online, to which Dr. Sally responded.

Dr. Sally added that all of the Equity Liaisons have done amazing work, he also thanked Dr. Tillery for her work. He also acknowledged the teachers and sponsors of the affinity groups as this is where much of the work happens in making students feel like they belong.

Ms. Tomlinson mentioned that the Board receives many emails encouraging them to continue these efforts and how Ms. Elfring referenced retirements in her comments. In 2018, there were hundreds of people involved in focus groups, thousands of people who returned surveys, around 30 people on the committee that helped craft the Strategic Plan, which included students, staff, administrators, parents, and community members. Ms. Tomlinson went on to say that when people ask if they are committed to creating a sense of belonging, she would argue it is not just about the Board or administration or the teachers being committed, but that it is the community that is committed to making sure the school does right by students. She noted her appreciation for all of the work that has gone into this.

Mr. Das referenced a recent Board presentation that included information on the four-year teacher induction program that the District has. He shared that the equity work is critical to the development of young minds. He is looking forward to hearing how this is a commitment to faculty in recognizing that this work is best practice for how one teaches. He went on to say that the craft of teaching involves the skill sets that the school is trying to foster. After additional comments, Mr. Das said that as the District builds on the strengths of its past that it is actually sending out the signal that it supports a particular view of the teacher in the classroom, that says this is not tangential or an add on to the work, this is in fact, how the richest classrooms are created, unlocks the best potentials of their teaching abilities and the students in the classroom. That the District ensures that there is not an exception where a teacher happens to be in interested in doing the equity or belonging work, but in fact what the school is demanding of the craft is that excellent teaching includes this work and that the school builds around it. Dr. Sally replied that it is a good point, while Dr. Tillery added that the new teacher induction program has been revised as younger teachers are joining the faculty. She shared that an emphasis has been on relationships with students, parents, and colleagues, culture, and what is happening in the classroom. This is all grounded in the District's equity work and in the piece of belonging. Dr. Tillery shared that students do not, cannot, and will not learn if they are not comfortable. She added that various speakers are brought in from different departments pertaining to many of the different facets of equity and it is a key component throughout the four-year program. Often the mentor teacher is doing the work alongside the new teacher, so it is a great way to tap into new staff while ensuring that established staff continue to learn and grow as well.

Mr. Dronen thanked Dr. Sally for the presentation as well as the equity liaisons and Dr. Tillery for their work on this important topic. Mr. Dronen noted that going forward, it might be beneficial in the culture, climate, equity, and belonging reports to provide more detail, like was done during this presentation, about what New Trier is doing in all six areas: race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, academic levels, and innate abilities. Mr. Dronen then went on to provide a few examples. He noted that about 16% of students have IEPs at New Trier and a smaller number have significant physical and cognitive disabilities. There are also many students who have mental health issues which may impact their sense of belonging at New Trier. Mr. Dronen believes that New Trier does a great job in these areas to create a climate of equity, inclusion, and belonging for these students and encouraged including this information in the annual reports so as to cover the whole universe of equity. For those students with unique needs, the reports could share about the many ways that New Trier provides a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment such as High Five Choir, Special Olympics, providing independent living skills, as well as access to the community for vocational training. Mr. Dronen shared that the successes of the comprehensive approach to student mental could be shared. While this topic may be reported on separately during the school year, he also encouraged that it be discussed during the equity updates. Mr. Dronen's concern is that the public may perceive equity and inclusion only in the content of the important areas of race and gender, but not in all areas discussed in the core values of framework three – culture, climate, and equity in the Strategic Plan. His concern is that if the successes and details are not talked about more then sometimes the perception can become reinforced. Mr. Dronen was happy to hear about the expansion of student voices. He knows a lot of work has been done since the goals were first introduced, that the District is progressing and encouraged everyone to keep up the good work.

**\*C. Election of New Officers for the period April 15, 2024 through April 2025 Regular Meeting**

Mr. Dronen moved this item to after the Consent Agenda.

**VII. Administrative Items**

**A. Treasurer's Report for March 2024**

Dr. Johnson presented the Treasurer's Report for March 2024, the ninth month of the fiscal year. Dr. Johnson is pleased to see significant disbursements of the first installment of the 2023 property tax bills. Interest income



continues to be significant with a similar amount to the prior month. The District is earning 5.2% on its cash at PMA and investments that are less than a year are about 5.2%. Long-term investments continue to tick up and are at 3.28% as previous investments mature. State, local, and other receipts are typical. The balance for all accounts is \$131,949,591.

### **B. Financial Report for March 2024**

Dr. Johnson presented the Financial Report for March 2024. Operating revenue was \$128,000,000 for the first nine months of the year, or 37% higher compared to \$94,000,000 last year. This is due to property tax distributions being a month earlier than last year and year-to-date collections outpacing last year. The other local sources category is higher than last year due to investment earnings, a trend likely to continue all year. The adopted budget for operating revenue is 6.51% higher than last year. Operating expenditures were \$99,776,000 through March, or 9.95% higher than last year. Exclusive of transfers, the expenses are 6% higher than last year. The District expects expenses to wind down in the final quarter of the year, as they have done in the past, but they will be monitored closely as the year comes to an end. The fund book balances for all accounts were \$133,799,401.

### **\*C. Tentative Amended FY24 Budget**

Dr. Johnson began the presentation on the tentative amended FY24 budget, noting that periodically the District does a budget amendment. Mr. Myron Spiwak, Director of Business Services, shared more about the process. The presentation needed to take place at this meeting as part of this process requires a public hearing with 30 days' notice and the time between the May and June board meetings does not provide that. Mr. Spiwak noted that it is a straightforward amendment this year. The first amendment is increasing the revenue budget because it's too low, noting the investment earnings that Dr. Johnson previously reported. The District always budgets conservatively, but earnings have stayed fairly high and substantial. Therefore, the District will increase its interest income by \$1.5 million. Even with that increase in the budget, Mr. Spiwak anticipates that the District will still probably exceed it for the full fiscal year, but the District does not want to pinpoint it too closely.

The second amendment involved a couple of funds, but there is no net change to the overall budget. It is a reallocation of the property tax revenue that the District will receive. Mr. Spiwak noted that over the past two years, the District has shifted how it levies in the funds and it is now just starting to see that money come in, so there is beginning to be a discrepancy between actuals and budget. In the Operations and Maintenance (O&M) fund, the debt service is paid out of that fund which is \$3 million for the East Side Academic and Athletic project. Initially, the money was going to be transferred through several accounts to pay the debt, but it was realized that that the levy could be increased in the O&M fund to have that money available to transfer. So, this amendment is increasing the revenue in the O&M for property taxes. With the IMRF fund, over the last several years, the District has done two UAAL pay downs, which shrank how much its tax rate was for IMRF or its contribution rate. The IMRF fund has started to grow a significant fund balance, so in the last two levies, the District has reduced the amount its levying in this fund because there is plenty on hand. By reducing this and moving it to O&M, the debt payment is covered, and it will start to shrink the fund balance. When the budget was set, this decision had not been made yet, so the revenue budget is much higher than it is going to be.

The last amendment is in fund 60 and involves the bond sale that was held in October. When the budget was set, an estimated \$10 million was entered. The sale involves bond premiums and closing costs, so once the sale is complete, that information is given to the auditors who in turn give Mr. Spiwak the actual entry to make. The fund will increase by \$201,000.

The public hearing is scheduled for June, where this information will be reviewed again, and if something should change between now and then, it will be brought to the Board. Mr. Dronen invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Hahn inquired about the discrepancies between the tax receipts and the tax budget and if they were related to the delay in property taxes by Cook County. While this is part of it, Mr. Spiwak replied it is more how the District levied as it started collecting from the levy two years ago in the fall and last year's levy starts coming in in the spring. When the budget was set, the District did not know what the split would look like and now it is clear that it should be reallocated. Ms. Hahn inquired if Mr. Spiwak anticipates that this will happen again next year because the District will be in a similar situation or if it is something that always happens. Mr. Spiwak replied that this should fix it. He also noted that the revenue budget for next year has not been set, so for the FY25 budget, the District will know this is happening and will not budget as much while ensuring that there is enough in the O&M fund, so it should line up better.

Mr. Das moved, and Ms. Hahn seconded the motion that the Board of approves the 2023-2024 Tentative Amended Budget and that a Public Hearing date be set for June 3, 2024. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

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

NAY: none

ABSENT: Ms. Alcantara

The motion passed.

### **VIII. Consent Agenda**

- Bill List for Period, March 1 - 31, 2024
- Personnel Report (Tenure, Appointments, Changes of Status, Retirements, Stipends - Appointment, Stipends - Separation, Administrators Contracts, and Addendum)
- Resolution to Appoint District Treasurer

Mr. Dronen 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, March 1 – 31, 2024; Personnel Report (Tenure, Appointments, Changes of Status, Retirements, Stipends – Appointment, Stipends – Separation, Administrators Contracts, and Addendum); and Resolution to Appoint District Treasurer. Mr. Das seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

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

NAY: none

ABSENT: Ms. Alcantara

The motion passed.

### **\*C. Election of New Officers for the period April 15, 2024 through April 2025 Regular Meeting**

Board Secretary, Ms. Lindsey Ruston, opened nominations for the office of Board President for the period of April 15, 2024 through the April 2025 Regular Meeting. Mr. Dronen nominated Ms. Hahn for the office of President of the Board of Education from April 15, 2024 through the April 2025 Regular Meeting. There being no further nominations for President, it was by acclamation that Ms. Hahn was declared the President of the Board from April 15, 2024 through the April 2025 Regular Meeting.

Ms. Hahn asked for nominations for the office of Vice President of the Board of Education for the coming year. Mr. Das nominated Ms. Tomlinson for the office of Vice President of the Board of Education April 15, 2024 through the April 2025 Regular Meeting. There being no further nominations for Vice President, it was by acclamation that Ms. Tomlinson was declared the Vice President of the Board from April 15, 2024 through the April 2025 Regular Meeting.

Ms. Hahn asked for nominations for the office of Secretary for the Board of Education for the coming year. Mr. Dronen nominated Ms. Ruston for the office of Secretary of the Board of Education from April 15, 2024 through the April 2025 Regular Meeting. There being no further nominations for Secretary, it was by acclamation that Ms. Ruston was declared the Secretary of the Board from April 15, 2024 through the April 2025 Regular Meeting.

Dr. Sally thanked Ms. Hahn and Ms. Tomlinson for their willingness to serve as president and vice president, noting it is a significant commitment. He also noted that it is important for the community to understand the level of commitment that it takes to be in these positions. Dr. Sally thanked Mr. Dronen for his many hours of hard work and good conversation around what is important for the District to accomplish, how it navigates certain situations that arise, what its priorities are, and how students are kept at the center of what New Trier does. Dr. Sally then presented Mr. Dronen with the traditional gift that the outgoing president receives – the gavel he used during his tenure as president.

Ms. Hahn thanked Mr. Dronen for his mentorship, noting it was wonderful to partner with him over the last two years. She went on to say she learned a tremendous amount and hopes to carry on in his tradition.

## **IX. Board Member Reports**

Mr. Das shared that **TrueNorth Leadership Council** met on April 10<sup>th</sup>. Ongoing discussions around next year's budget and how that applies to member districts continues. Mr. Das shared a highlight which was the recognition of an extraordinary young student, Mr. Benjamin Spear, from New Trier. Mr. Spear was recognized for demonstrating leadership skills and excelling in his academic courses, as well as his participation in many, many service-learning projects, sports and the culinary arts. After sharing additional comments, Mr. Das noted how proud he was that New Trier had supported this student.

Their work is focusing on projecting what FY25 might look like as well as the overarching value and cost arrangements that are shared by the collective. Mr. Das will keep the Board updated on their deliberations. TrueNorth Leadership Council is also following legislation that brings to light how members participate in TrueNorth as a collective and the extent to which members might withdraw from it. It will be reviewed to see how it impacts the structure and the future sustainability of the council.

Ms. McDonough shared that the **New Trier Fine Arts Association (NTFAA)** met and that the spring break trips were a huge success. May 1<sup>st</sup> is Dionysus Day, which is a day-long theatre festival and has been a New Trier tradition for 50 years. The upcoming spring play, *Noises Off*, will have a two-story set that rotates.

Ms. McDonough shared that the **Booster Club's** benefit will be on Friday with food from local vendors, a band with the auction going live this week. Mr. Fontanetta, Athletic Director, shared the equipment list with the Booster Board and they are working together to prioritize those requests and are hopeful they will be able to fund the majority of those requests. The next meeting is tomorrow evening.

Ms. Hahn shared that the **New Trier Educational Foundation (NTEF)** held its quarterly meeting on March 18<sup>th</sup>. They provided a recap of their biennial gala and netted \$56,000 with the sold-out event. Ms. Hahn reported that the Foundation will use some of their on-going funds to, in perpetuity, fund the Go Baby Go project. Usually, their grants for projects are three-year cycles so as to allow opportunities for other grants to be funded. They felt that this was an important event for the community and students, that their board voted unanimously to continue it.

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

Dr. Sally highlighted the following events:

- The next Board meeting is May 20<sup>th</sup>.
- There are many end-of-the-year committee meetings in order to finish this year and then have the right direction for next year.
- Dr. Sally also encouraged everyone to look at the Performing Arts calendar as there are many events taking place. The spring play is May 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup>.

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

## **XI. ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Das moved, and Mr. Dronen seconded the motion, to adjourn. Upon a voice vote being taken, all members indicated they were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Lindsey Ruston, Secretary

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Jean Hahn, President