

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Regular Meeting

April 18, 2022

Critical Thinking Series: English Department

Teachers and leaders in New Trier's English Department presented examples of how they use their curriculum to develop strong writing skills in students, deepen students' understanding of literacy and research tools, help them engage with ideas and texts, and inspire curiosity and essential reading habits that will serve graduates well into the future.

The English Department presentation was part of a series of department reports to the Board to demonstrate how teachers foster a culture of inquiry and critical thinking at New Trier. In the four-year English curriculum, teachers use different classroom activities to develop and build upon students' learning and skills at each grade level.

For example, in 9th grade students read Homer's "The Odyssey." Department Coordinator Sarah Gompers showed the Board an activity that compares different translations of the text over time, asking students to annotate for prompts such as structure, syntax, or figurative language. The activity demonstrates how shifts in language can cause shifts in interpretation, painting protagonist Odysseus as capable, manipulative, or complicated depending on the translation.

Another example focused on developing nonfiction reading skills in 10th grade students, which requires students to consider multiple perspectives, approach topics with open-mindedness, and practice civil discourse around differing ideas. Teacher David Noskin showed how he uses the book "Five Days" by Wes Moore to help students develop these skills. The nonfiction book examines five days in Baltimore in 2015 alternately described as a riot or an uprising from the perspectives of eight different individuals involved, including activists, a police officer, a city councilman, attorneys, and the owner of the Baltimore Orioles. Students use this text as a springboard to research a contemporary topic addressed in the book, where they develop critical research skills in evaluating resources for reliability and bias as they draw informed conclusions.

In the junior year, a major focus is the junior research paper, which requires students to use the critical thinking skills they have developed in their first two years of high school and apply them as confident researchers and writers. Department Chair Ed Zwirner noted that the research paper begins with curiosity, as students pick a broad topic that interests them and narrow that topic to a singular question their paper will answer. Students then engage in several one-on-one writing conferences with their teachers to develop ideas, organize their papers, and eventually polish their technique and style.

Senior students can choose from a variety of English electives that explore different media and approaches to writing. Topics include Literature and Film, Literature and Psychology, Senior Writers' Seminar, Creative Writing, and Great Books, as well as Global Voices, Humanities,

Myth and Mind, Good and Evil in Literature, Social Change in Literature, and AP Literature and Composition. These choices help students expand their critical thinking skills and explore different uses and sources of language and ideas.

New Trier students consistently perform well on standardized tests measuring language and reading skills. Over the last two years, New Trier students have ranked at the top of the state among non-selective enrollment public high schools in English Language Arts proficiency with over 80% of students meeting or exceeding the ELA benchmarks on the state SAT. When the state required the ACT as its high school exam, New Trier students had an average ACT English score of 28.2, and nearly half of students were in the top 10% in the nation. Alumni rate their preparation for college-level writing exceptionally high. Nearly 90% of graduates surveyed rated writing as the skill area for which they felt most prepared in college.

Click for the [English Department Critical Thinking Series presentation](#).

[New Trier 2030 Strategic Planning Update](#)

As the 2021-2022 school year comes to a close, District leaders are planning for the upcoming year as they shape an Annual Plan to meet goals outlined in the District's strategic plan, [New Trier 2030](#).

Superintendent Paul Sally previewed some of the areas of focus for the 2022-2023 school year, including aligning curriculum and programs with the *Characteristics of a New Trier Graduate*, expanding New Trier's work in creating belonging through a culture of dignity, aligning the work of the many groups that support student services, and monitoring the effectiveness of the block schedule and school calendar.

The District recently adopted the *Characteristics of a New Trier Graduate*, a powerful document that defines New Trier students as becoming Healthy Resilient Individuals, Engaged Compassionate Global Citizens, Effective Courageous Communicators, Creative Critical Thinkers, and Innovative Collaborative Problem Solvers. In the next school year, the District will make sure those characteristics are explicit in the work of the school.

Sally said the District will build on the success of this year's work creating a sense of belonging through a culture of dignity and equity by devoting more time to that work, particularly in the area of articulation with New Trier's sender districts.

In student services, New Trier will continue to look holistically at the support available to all students as the District breaks down obstacles separating different areas of support. Finally, the District will monitor the effectiveness of changes to the block schedule and school calendar next year, gathering feedback from students, parents, and staff.

While these are the major areas of focus, Sally told the Board he will present an Annual Plan this summer with additional goals in other strategic areas including communications, facilities, hiring, and leadership. Click for the [New Trier 2030 Update](#).

[KW, Student Leaders Partner on Wellness Week: *Healthy Relationships*](#)

New Trier will devote its annual Wellness Week on April 25-29 to the topic of *Healthy Relationships*, including discussion of issues such as consent, sexual assault, and resources for survivors of sexual assault.

The Kinetic Wellness Department conducts Wellness Week each year to emphasize the connection between mind and body. This year, the department has partnered with a group of students who began working with the school this fall to bring more attention and awareness to sexual assault.

The students have been meeting weekly with administrators and department leaders to give input on how to increase student awareness of sexual assault and how to support survivors. They suggested some curriculum changes in KW classes, the reintroduction of the Empower social work group for survivors of assault, and better tools and resources for survivors.

Winnetka Campus Principal Denise Dubravec told the Board that the school has taken many of the students' suggestions, including adding resources to the school website home page for students to easily access 24/7 support and reporting tools. She also thanked the students who have committed hours to meeting with administrators and helping plan Wellness Week.

Other News from the April 18 Meeting

- The Board approved a full [school year calendar for 2022-2023](#), including Institute days, staff professional development time, testing days, and parent-teacher conferences, which will be virtual. In November, the Board approved a calendar that included school year start and end dates as well as school holidays so families could plan ahead, and those dates have not changed. The calendar approved this month includes the new block schedule with Wednesday Anchor Days and early dismissal or late arrival days each quarter for professional development.
- The Board elected new officers through April 2023. Keith Dronen, who previously served as Vice President, was elected as the new Board President, while Board Member Jean Hahn was elected Vice President. Superintendent Paul Sally and Board members thanked outgoing President Cathy Albrecht for her leadership over the past three years and said they are happy to continue to work with her over the final year of her term.
- Associate Superintendent Chris Johnson updated the Board on the East Side Academic and Athletic Project. Major demolition activities and mass excavation have concluded, with some continuing excavation specific to the foundation. Concrete footings and foundation walls are being poured in preparation for the mobilization of structural steel at the end of the month. Johnson also gave an update on the Special Education Transition Center in Glencoe, where renovation work will take place in two phases. This summer, the work will focus on making the restrooms ADA accessible and creating a retail space for program participants to sell New Trier branded and other items.

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

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

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

