

# CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

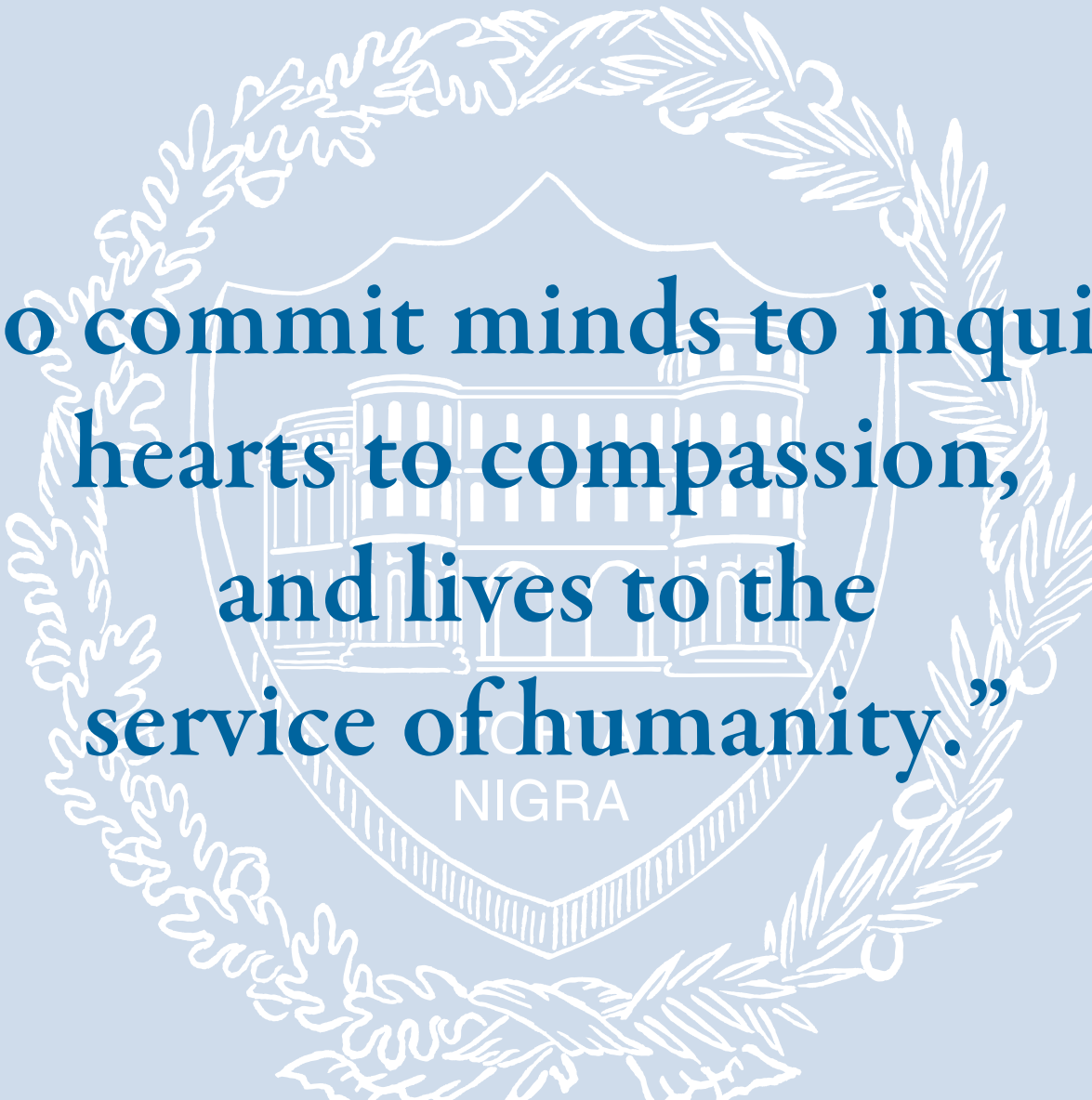
at New Trier High School



PORTA  
NIGRA

NEW  
TRIER

TOWNSHIP  
HIGH SCHOOL  
DISTRICT 203

The emblem of the University of Nigeria is a circular crest. It features a central shield with a building facade, flanked by two figures. The shield is topped with a mountain peak and surrounded by a laurel wreath. Below the shield, the word "NIGRA" is inscribed. The entire emblem is rendered in white lines on a light blue background.

**“To commit minds to inquiry,  
hearts to compassion,  
and lives to the  
service of humanity.”**

NIGRA

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## MISSION

The mission of New Trier High School is to inspire students “to commit minds to inquiry, hearts to compassion, and lives to the service of humanity” by working in partnership with the community to provide innovative programs for all students, nurture their unique abilities, and encourage them to pursue excellence in their endeavors.

## BELIEF STATEMENTS

We believe that...

- Every human being is unique, has worth, and deserves respect;
- Diversity enriches the individual, school, and community;
- Each and every person can learn;
- Individuals are responsible and accountable for their actions;
- Education is a responsibility shared between the student, family, school, and community;
- Emotional, physical, and social well-being enhances learning and life;
- Integrity, civility, and fairness are vital to healthy human interaction;
- The pursuit of excellence in education justifies the investment of time, effort, and resources;
- Each individual has the responsibility to contribute to others, society, and the environment;
- The courage to take risks and the willingness to learn from mistakes offer opportunities for growth;
- Lifelong learning contributes to a meaningful life.

*The Mission and Belief Statements guide our work and support our focus on best practices in teaching, and the Characteristics of Professional Practice reflect these values and beliefs.*

## PHILOSOPHY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teaching is a unique combination of art and science. Understanding the interrelationship of students, subject matter, school, and community is analogous to appreciating the art of an intricate piece of music. Further, a growing body of research describes the science of teaching by delineating practices, philosophies, and dispositions that have proven to be effective in enhancing student learning and development. When teachers\* consider their professional growth and development, it is important to reflect on the subtleties and nuances of the art of teaching while examining the skills and techniques of the science of teaching. An appreciation of both the art and science of teaching is at the heart of understanding the complexities of the profession.

Current research also indicates that dialogue, reflection, and feedback about teaching are of utmost importance to the growth and development of teachers. The Characteristics of Professional Practice is intended to be a framework for such reflection and dialogue. Moreover, it is designed to help every teacher become more adept in the art and science of teaching while recognizing that all teachers, from novice to veteran, are in a continuous process of “becoming.”

The characteristics and descriptors articulated in this document identify the qualities and behaviors of effective teachers that we value as an institution. Not only do they embody our beliefs about best practices in teaching, but they also reflect the culture of our school and community.

## DOMAINS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

### *I. Understanding Teaching*

### *II. Understanding Students*

### *III. Understanding Professional Responsibilities*

### *IV. Understanding the School and Community Culture*

The Characteristics of Professional Practice describes an effective teacher at New Trier High School as someone who understands teaching, students, professional responsibilities, and the school and community culture. This document is organized around those four domains of teaching, with specific characteristics and descriptors set forth in each one that encompass what teachers should know, understand,

and do in the classroom, school, and community. The interconnection among the four domains of teaching is evident, and, in fact, they are often inseparable. Although the domains overlap, each one is important and distinct enough to differentiate and describe. *Understanding Teaching* attests to the thorough knowledge of content and methodology that teachers need in order to promote student learning.

*Understanding Students* affirms the knowledge of adolescent development that teachers must have in order to foster the growth and development of students. *Understanding Professional Responsibilities* addresses the personal, ethical, and legal commitment teachers must make to students, the school, and their own professional growth and development. Finally, *Understanding the School and Community Culture* emphasizes the connection teachers must make to the school as a whole, to parents, and to the local community.

The understanding that all teachers are in the process of “becoming” is embedded in the Characteristics of Professional Practice. At New Trier, teachers strive to excel in all of these domains, using the Characteristics as the basis for dialogue and reflection on teaching and learning. With the Characteristics of Professional Practice to guide and inspire our practice, we commit ourselves to the highest standards in teaching.

## USES FOR THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

As a framework for professional practice, this document serves as the foundation for the growth and development of all teachers, providing common language and vision for the following:

- Individual professional reflection and goal setting
- School-wide professional development
- Supervision and evaluation
- New teacher induction and mentoring
- Peer observation and dialogue
- Merit scale placement and review

\*The word “teacher” includes all certified educators in our school, including librarians, nurses, psychologists, post-high school counselors, social workers, speech pathologists, and administrators.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

## NEW TRIER TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL

### **I. Understanding Teaching: Knowing the Content and Pedagogy of the Discipline**

- A. Creating a classroom environment that values and enhances learning
- B. Setting and communicating clear, measurable learning goals
- C. Developing coherent plans consistent with learning goals, learner diversity, and learning theory
- D. Selecting and using instructional strategies and resources appropriate for learning goals and supportive of students' learning needs
- E. Engaging students in active learning
- F. Promoting critical thinking through inquiry, problem solving, and reflection
- G. Monitoring student learning through formal and informal assessments

### **III. Understanding Professional Responsibilities: Knowing the Personal, Ethical, and Legal Obligations of the Teaching Profession**

- A. Acting in the best interests of students and safeguarding their welfare
- B. Modeling behavior characterized by civility, empathy, and ethical decision making
- C. Fulfilling professional obligations
- D. Working collaboratively with colleagues in the department and school community to support teacher growth and student learning
- E. Reflecting on teaching and learning in order to improve professional practice and enhance student learning
- F. Establishing professional goals and engaging in continuous, purposeful professional growth and development
- G. Extending professional involvement and influence beyond the school to the wider community and profession

## **II. Understanding Students: Knowing Adolescent Development and Students as Individuals**

- A. Treating each student equitably, recognizing individual differences in gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and identity, religion, and abilities, and taking those into account when working with students
- B. Using knowledge of adolescent development to facilitate the way in which students process concepts, acquire skills, and develop habits of mind
- C. Managing student behavior and classroom routines effectively
- D. Providing meaningful feedback and communication to students about their learning progress
- E. Incorporating student feedback about the learning environment and experiences in instructional decisions

## **IV. Understanding School and Community Culture: Knowing the Unique Culture of the School and Community and How It Affects Teaching**

- A. Supporting the school's motto of "minds to inquiry, hearts to compassion, and lives to the service of humanity"
- B. Recognizing the importance and impact of the adviser system and other student services in supporting the growth and development of students
- C. Contributing constructively and creatively to the department, school, and community
- D. Establishing and maintaining communication with colleagues, students, and families

# I. Understanding Teaching: Knowing the Content and Pedagogy of the Discipline

## A. Creating a classroom environment that values and enhances learning

1. Fosters a safe, inclusive, and equitable learning community in which students are encouraged to take appropriate intellectual, social, and emotional risks and reflect on results
2. Holds appropriate and challenging expectations for students of all ability levels and learning backgrounds
3. Encourages students to take pride in their work and initiate improvement

### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Understanding the impact that the teacher's enthusiasm and seriousness of purpose have on student learning
- Understanding that learning is enhanced if students feel safe and valued in the classroom
- Understanding the importance of positive peer relationships in creating a climate conducive for learning

## B. Setting and communicating clear, measurable learning goals

1. Sets learning goals that represent important conceptual understandings in the discipline
2. Sets learning goals that reflect appropriate and challenging expectations for all students and address their individual needs
3. Communicates learning goals and expectations clearly to students
4. Establishes and communicates criteria for measuring achievement of learning goals

### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Knowing the key concepts and essential understandings of the discipline
- Knowing how to establish criteria and create standards and methods for measuring learning progress

## C. Developing coherent plans consistent with learning goals, learner diversity, and learning theory

1. Designs curricular units around essential understandings and long-term learning goals
2. Designs lessons and units that engage students, demonstrate clear purpose and coherence, and promote student reflection
3. Creates learning activities, appropriate to learning goals and students' needs, that produce a lesson or unit that is a unified whole
4. Adjusts plans throughout the lesson or unit in order to achieve learning goals and meet students' learning needs

### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Knowing the course content and objectives and how these are organized in the curriculum
- Knowing the strengths and needs of individual students
- Understanding how learning theory, adolescent development, and individual differences affect ongoing planning

## D. Selecting and using instructional strategies and resources appropriate for learning goals and supportive of students' learning needs

1. Selects and uses appropriate instructional strategies to achieve learning goals and encourage students to participate actively in the learning process
2. Selects and uses appropriate instructional strategies to differentiate instruction and meet the learning needs of all students
3. Selects and uses appropriate instructional materials and resources to heighten students' interest in the subject matter and promote their understanding of it
4. Guides students to use technology tools appropriately and effectively to access information, emphasizing the importance of critically evaluating, interpreting, and applying that information



**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:**

- Understanding the cognitive processes associated with various kinds of learning
- Knowing a variety of instructional strategies appropriate for achieving learning goals and meeting students' learning needs
- Knowing a wide range of materials and resources to enhance course content and heighten student engagement
- Understanding how content and skill development can be supported by media and technology and knowing how to evaluate these resources for quality, accuracy, and effectiveness

**E. Engaging students in active learning**

1. Uses a variety of questioning techniques to stimulate curiosity and create anticipation and manages questions and responses through effective use of wait time
2. Maintains energy and momentum in the classroom through effective sequencing of learning activities, appropriate pacing, and smooth transitions
3. Designs learning experiences that promote self-direction and responsibility for learning
4. Provides opportunities for students to share personal perspectives in order to heighten their investment in the learning community

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:**

- Knowing how to make subject matter meaningful to students
- Understanding the relationship between motivation and engagement

**F. Promoting critical thinking through inquiry, problem solving, and reflection**

1. Guides students to think critically through the use of questioning strategies, problem solving, and reflection on issues in the discipline
2. Designs learning activities that promote the development of critical thinking skills
3. Encourages students to engage in independent critical thinking by asking questions, posing problems, and reflecting on multiple perspectives of an issue or idea
4. Encourages students to apply content knowledge and skills to other disciplines

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:**

- Knowing how students scaffold knowledge and develop higher-order questioning skills and problem-solving strategies
- Understanding critical thinking processes and the importance of reflection in learning

**G. Monitoring student learning through formal and informal assessments**

1. Checks for student understanding continuously and adjusts instruction in response to students' learning needs
2. Provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge, formally and informally, through a variety of products and performances
3. Uses student assessment results to assist in measuring the effectiveness of instructional strategies, curricular materials, and other resources in the course
4. Involves all students in setting goals and assessing their learning progress

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:**

- Knowing the purposes, characteristics, and uses of different types of assessments
- Understanding the importance of providing students with criteria for assessment, feedback, and opportunities for reflection

## II. Understanding Students: Knowing Adolescent Development and Students as Individuals

### A. Treating each student equitably, recognizing differences in gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and identity, religion, and abilities, and taking those into account when working with students

1. Brings multiple perspectives to the delivery of course content, including attention to students' personal, family, and cultural experiences
2. Uses appropriate strategies and resources when working with students with exceptional needs, including those associated with disabilities, in order to meet those needs

#### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Understanding that students are individuals with differing abilities, skills, talents, perspectives, and interests as well as personal and family backgrounds
- Understanding that student learning is influenced by individual experiences, prior learning, and peer and social group interactions as well as cultural, family, and community values

### B. Using knowledge of adolescent development to facilitate the way in which students process concepts, acquire skills, and develop habits of mind

1. Stimulates student reflection on prior content knowledge, links new concepts to familiar concepts, and makes connections to students' experiences
2. Creates learning activities that encourage students to understand, question, and analyze ideas from different perspectives in order to master the content
3. Recognizes common student misconceptions that might impede learning and designs activities that build accurate conceptual understanding
4. Creates developmentally appropriate instruction that takes into account the individual strengths, interests, and needs of students

#### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Understanding the connection between adolescent development and learning
- Understanding how adolescent development influences curricular and instructional decisions
- Understanding that instructional decisions respond to individual strengths and needs

### C. Managing student behavior and classroom routines effectively

1. Plans and implements classroom procedures and routines that support student learning
2. Establishes and upholds expectations for behavior and reinforces student responsibilities within the classroom
3. Demonstrates an awareness of classroom dynamics by monitoring student conduct subtly and preventatively
4. Responds quickly and appropriately to misbehavior, using the occasion, as much as possible, to convey positive alternatives to the objectionable behavior

#### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Knowing a broad range of classroom management techniques and how and when to apply them
- Understanding the positive impact a well-managed classroom environment has on learning

### D. Providing meaningful feedback and communication to students about their learning progress

1. Provides feedback that is accurate, substantive, constructive, and specific to the needs of the student
2. Provides feedback on student performance in a timely manner
3. Delivers formal and informal feedback on each student's performance in a manner that is sensitive and appropriate to the student
4. Offers support and suggestions for improvement to students experiencing difficulty with course content

#### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Understanding the importance of feedback in student learning and growth
- Knowing a variety of ways to give appropriate feedback to students

**E. Incorporating student feedback about the learning environment and experiences in instructional decisions**

1. Provides opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and growth
2. Solicits formal and informal feedback from students about the learning environment and their learning progress
3. Uses feedback from students to inform instructional decisions and modify the learning environment

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:**

- Understanding the connection between student voice and engagement
- Understanding the importance of reflecting on student feedback when making instructional decisions

# III. Understanding Professional Responsibilities: Knowing the Personal, Ethical, and Legal Obligations of the Teaching Profession

## A. Acting in the best interests of students and safeguarding their welfare

1. Treats personal and/or confidential information about students responsibly and discreetly
2. Meets the requirements and accommodations of Individual Education and 504 Plans
3. Communicates serious student problems to appropriate authorities as required by professional ethics and state and federal laws

### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Knowing the legal requirements related to students' rights and teachers' responsibilities
- Understanding the personal and ethical implications of teachers' legal responsibilities
- Understanding that confidential student information may be important in making sound educational decisions

## B. Modeling behavior characterized by civility, empathy, and ethical decision making

1. Demonstrates civility and respect in interactions with all members of the school community
2. Demonstrates concern and compassion for all members of the school community
3. Bases professional decisions on the highest ethical standards and the shared values of the school community

### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Knowing and understanding the New Trier Education Association Declaration of Professional Assumptions

## C. Fulfilling Professional Responsibilities

1. Maintains a high level of consistency in daily attendance, punctuality, and preparation for assigned responsibilities in the department and the school
2. Demonstrates a high level of commitment and professionalism through attendance and engagement at staff, department, and committee meetings
3. Maintains accurate and up-to-date records of student attendance and grades, including assignments, assessments, and quarter and semester grades
4. Meets deadlines for submission of student attendance and grades as well as other records required by the school

### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Understanding the importance of being punctual, present, and prepared in fulfilling professional obligations
- Knowing the legal requirements related to student records and teachers' responsibilities
- Understanding the role of accurate record keeping in the effective functioning of the school and in communicating with students and parents

## D. Working collaboratively with colleagues in the department and school community to support teacher growth and student learning

1. Demonstrates collaboration and collegiality in all professional interactions, using cooperation, compromise, and coordination appropriately to strengthen professional relationships
2. Takes the initiative to grow and develop with colleagues through interactions that improve practice and support student learning
3. Contributes knowledge, skills, ideas, opinions, and support to collaborative efforts and values and encourages the contributions of colleagues

### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Knowing that a culture of collaboration expands opportunities for professional growth
- Understanding the benefits of collaboration and collegiality in professional relationships

**E. Reflecting on teaching and learning in order to improve professional practice and enhance student learning**

1. Takes responsibility for student learning and uses ongoing analysis and reflection to improve planning and practice
2. Makes thoughtful and accurate assessments of instructional effectiveness and the extent to which learning goals have been met

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:**

- Knowing how to use a variety of self-assessment and problem-solving strategies to analyze and reflect on practice and to plan for adjustments and adaptations
- Understanding how personal identity, worldview, and prior experience affect perceptions and expectation

**F. Establishing professional goals and engaging in continuous, purposeful professional growth and development**

1. Designs and implements a plan for professional growth and development that is aligned with individual needs and reflects feedback from observations and evaluations, data from student performance, and school priorities
2. Engages in meaningful and purposeful professional learning experiences aligned with individual professional goals and needs as well as the needs of students and the school
3. Seeks to deepen the knowledge and skills needed to provide students with meaningful and engaging learning experiences
4. Pursues individual growth and development through reading of professional publications, membership in professional associations, and involvement in professional conferences

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:**

- Knowing that effective teaching is the result of continuous self-examination, learning, and growth
- Knowing current research and developments in the discipline

**G. Extending professional involvement and influence beyond the school to the wider community and the profession**

1. Initiates activities and assumes responsibilities that contribute to the wider community and profession
2. Responds to educational issues and needs of the region, state, and nation

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:**

- Understanding educational issues in the region, state, and nation

## IV. Understanding the School and Community Culture: Knowing What Makes the School and Community Culture Unique and How It Affects Teaching

### A. Supporting the school's motto of "minds to inquiry, hearts to compassion, and lives to the service of humanity"

1. Keeps the principles of the motto at the center of planning, teaching, and interacting with all members of the school community
2. Supports the school's policies and practices as a means of creating and maintaining an effective community of learners and contributes to changes needed in policies and practices
3. Demonstrates a willingness to examine and critique current practices and values and to change them if they are not consistent with the best interests of students and the mission the school

#### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Knowing and honoring the school's history and traditions as well as its commitment to innovation
- Understanding the curriculum and programs of all departments as the reflection of the school's mission

### B. Recognizing the importance and impact of the adviser system and other student services in supporting the growth and development of students

1. Works effectively for students' best interests while also helping them develop self-advocacy and resilience skills
2. Collaborates with colleagues in the adviser system and student services in order to meet students' needs

#### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Knowing the resources within student services and understanding how they support the growth of students
- Understanding that the adviser system is at the core of student learning and development at New Trier

### C. Contributing constructively and creatively to the department, school, and community

1. Works collaboratively to review and revise curricular, guidance, and extracurricular programs
2. Seeks opportunities to serve in other roles in the school, participate in professional learning activities, and model effective practice for colleagues
3. Advocates for the school and its programs

#### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Knowing the values, issues, and goals of the department, school, and community
- Knowing the school's academic and student services programs

### D. Establishing and maintaining communication with colleagues, students, and parents

1. Listens thoughtfully and responsively to colleagues, students, and parents
2. Communicates effectively with colleagues and students to support student learning and development
3. Communicates effectively with parents in order to support student learning and development, and shares concerns about students in a timely manner
4. Exercises sound judgment and discretion when communicating with colleagues, students, and parents

#### ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:

- Understanding the importance of strong interpersonal communication skills
- Understanding the importance of effective communication with parents and fostering strong school-home relationships

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

### **2012 Characteristics of Professional Practice Committee**

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