

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Regular Meeting

December 13, 2021

New Trier to Offer More Opportunities for Student Support in 2nd Semester

New Trier is planning to provide Winnetka Campus students with approximately two extra 40-minute half blocks of personalized learning time per week during second semester so they can meet with teachers, make up tests, and access other support they may need. These blocks would take place during the school day for the second half of specific classes.

One theme that has emerged consistently among Winnetka Campus students and staff in examining this year's block schedule is the difficulty finding time to meet with teachers or access other resources such as Social Work or the Academic Assistance Center. Northfield Campus students have not voiced the same concerns, so leadership on that campus continues to examine whether additional personalized learning blocks are necessary for freshmen.

Each subject would rotate providing students with personalized learning time during the second half of the block on specific blue/green days. Each of a student's classes would provide this time about once a month during the second semester, limiting any loss of direct instructional time in a particular subject area.

For example, during a blue/green pair when English classes are designated to provide personalized learning time, teachers would hold their regular class during the first half of the period. During the second half of the period, students could stay in class to seek help from their English teacher, see another teacher who is available during that time, make up a test, or schedule an appointment with student services or post-high school counseling.

The plan rotates, so a student might have a half-block available in social studies and math one week, and in an elective and English the next. Approximately five to six half blocks would be designated as personalized learning time in each subject during the second semester. While this will mean a small loss in direct instructional time in each subject, teachers have said this is manageable and will benefit students' overall learning and growth.

Students, staff, and families will receive more information about the personalized learning blocks in January, including an official calendar of days and subjects. The information also will be promoted with signage, on the website, and in other ways so students can keep track of their own personalized learning blocks. Click for more information on [personalized learning time](#).

Block Schedule Survey, Discussions to Inform 2022-2023 Schedule

New Trier's daily schedule for the 2022-2023 school year will be informed by both informal and formal evaluations of the current block schedule, according to Peter Tragos, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction.

Since this school year began, administrators have received feedback on the Blue/Green block schedule from students, parents, faculty and staff through a variety of formats, including email, phone conversations, staff and leadership meetings, staff listening sessions, and meetings with student and parent groups.

The District formally surveyed faculty and students in October, with teachers using student feedback to make adjustments at the classroom level. A schoolwide schedule committee also has used the survey data to propose modifications to this year's schedule, including personalized learning blocks for students in the second semester and use of early dismissal/late arrival days to help teachers manage their workflow.

New Trier is currently surveying parents, students, and staff about the schedule through a partnership with *K12 Insight*, a leading research and communications firm. The survey is still live and response rates have been strong, with 36% of students, 46% of staff, and 15% of parents responding so far. Please check your email and spam/junk folders for a message from *K12 Insight* for a link to complete the brief survey.

The District will make recommendations for the 2022-2023 schedule at the January Board meeting. It is likely that New Trier will stay on a block schedule next year, with some modifications to address the feedback of all groups on issues such as providing time to meet with teachers or get extra help, the length of each block, and other suggestions. Click for the [block schedule update](#).

Critical Thinking Series: Modern and Classical Languages

This school year, the District is presenting a series of reports to the Board to demonstrate how New Trier teachers foster a culture of inquiry and critical thinking using high-quality materials and lessons. Representatives from the Modern and Classical Languages Department shared how they use their curriculum to support lifelong language learning.

Department Chair Marissa Rubin explained that while grammar and conjugation are part of learning any language, methods relying solely on drills and memorization of phrases do not produce students who can converse or truly understand a language. At New Trier, MCL students work to understand written and spoken language, engage in meaningful interactions with someone from another culture, discuss issues from multiple perspectives, make cross-cultural and interdisciplinary connections, and continue their learning beyond high school.

New Trier offers seven languages: Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Japanese, Latin, and Spanish. Language learners can be categorized in levels including novice, intermediate, advanced, and superior. At the novice level, students focus on language acquisition through activities including reading and listening, repetition, high frequency vocabulary, and learning about cultural products and practices.

New Trier students spend much of their time at the intermediate level, where they can create with language, ask and answer simple questions on familiar topics, and conduct basic conversations. At this level, they perform real life communication and tasks, examine and discuss cultural perspectives, and learn an increased complexity of language.

Advanced learners focus on analysis and synthesis, using historical and contemporary resources, reading and speaking on complex and unfamiliar topics, and communicating with ease and confidence. Each year students have a chance to demonstrate their skills at a more advanced level by earning the state's Seal of Biliteracy. Nearly 200 students earned this distinction last year.

MCL teachers showed the Board examples of what lessons students might complete at each level of learning. Click for the [MCL critical thinking presentation](#).

East Side Construction Project Begins During Winter Break

Construction activities for the [Winnetka Campus East Side Academic and Athletic project](#) begin over Winter Break, necessitating some changes in campus logistics when students and staff return in January.

Associate Superintendent Chris Johnson updated the Board on preparations for the project, including abatement over break and demolition scheduled to start on Jan. 10.

The full Athletics and Kinetic Wellness program will operate during the project, which is scheduled to be completed by August 2023. Due to the closure of the campus locker rooms, students at Winnetka will not change into uniforms for KW classes starting after break.

When students and staff return from break, the Essex Road (East) entrance to the campus and adjacent sidewalks will be closed. Essex Road will remain open for traffic. Families will receive an email this week about pick-up and drop-off changes due to the closure of that entrance.

Johnson also updated the Board about a change in the project's demolition contractor. The original winning bidder pulled out of the project, and the District awarded the contract to the second lowest bidder. While this increases the cost of demolition from \$747,414 to \$1,142,000, Johnson said the bid is still below the original demolition budget and the overall budget for the second bid package. Click for the [facilities update](#).

The District's final event in the *December to Remember* series commemorating the Gates Gymnasium takes place this Thursday, Dec. 16 at 5:45 p.m. with the Athletic Department Hall of Honor Induction Ceremony and Alumni Night. The inductees will be honored in the Gates Gymnasium between the girls (5:45 p.m.) and boys varsity basketball games (7:30 p.m.) against Evanston High School, which will be the last official games played in the space.

More information can be found on the [December to Remember web page](#).

Technology Department to Begin Infrastructure Improvements

The New Trier Technology Department is beginning a series of infrastructure improvements over the next several months that will improve reliability, security, and internet access across the district.

Technology Department representatives told the Board that they continually assess and improve security, reliability, and performance as technology evolves. For example, recent

security improvements include two-factor authentication, VPN for remote access, firewall and content filtering, and staff testing against phishing, among other strategies.

The technology needed to support both campuses is complex and involves a number of backups of critical data systems and network infrastructure. Reliability and performance depend on a sophisticated system of fiber optic cabling, firewall, core switches, network switches, and wireless access points.

On any given day, 12,000 to 14,000 devices are attempting to connect to the New Trier environment. These include personal phones, laptops, and tablets along with printers, projectors, and desktop computers. On the Winnetka Campus in particular, this can prove challenging due to the size of the campus and the difficulty of providing technology in some older portions of the campus.

Upcoming projects include a wireless upgrade for 600 indoor access points meant to greatly improve wifi at both campuses, a districtwide network switch and cabling upgrade, and firewall improvements. These projects will be implemented between summer and winter of 2022. Click for the full [technology infrastructure presentation](#).

Other News from the December 13 Meeting:

- Joanne Panopoulos, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services, discussed a new state law that allows students to take excused absences for mental health. The law takes effect next month and lets students take up to five mental health days each school year without a doctor's note. Students will be able to make up any work missed during these excused absences. Panopoulos said New Trier's absence policy already allows parents to excuse students for mental health reasons, but this law clarifies that parents can and should cite mental health as a reason for a student's absence on the PowerSchool absence form.
- The Board approved the District's tax levy for 2021. The levy is the primary funding source for the District's 2022-2023 budget, and the revenue it generates funds New Trier's excellent faculty and staff, broad curriculum, student services, and extracurricular programs that are the cornerstone of New Trier's reputation for excellence. The District's ability to increase its tax extension is limited by the Property Tax Extension Limitation Act to the Consumer Price Index or 5%, whichever is less. The 2020 CPI was 1.4% and was used in the calculation of the tax extension. Click for the [tax levy presentation](#).
- Superintendent Paul Sally updated the Board on the recent increase in COVID-19 cases among students and staff and mitigation measures to assure that the District can continue to offer full in-person learning and activities. Families, students, and staff received an email last week outlining steps they can take to protect the community and school, including participating in weekly Shield testing at New Trier and wearing masks properly at all times. All students will be required to test for COVID-19 during KW class during the week of Jan. 3, and all athletes and participants in high-contact activities will be required to test weekly starting after Winter Break. Families will receive a reminder about these requirements later this week. Non-athletes may opt out of the post-break testing by filling out the form "Shield Test-No Consent Week of Jan. 3rd" under Forms in the [PowerSchool Parent Portal](#). In addition, Sally encouraged everyone who is eligible to get a booster shot. Given the recent approval of boosters for 16- and 17-year-olds, New Trier plans to run a booster shot clinic in January. More information will be provided after Winter Break.

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>