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TO: Paul Sally, Superintendent
FROM: Timothy Hayes, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
RE: New Trier 2030 Equity Goals Initiative Update
DATE: September 16, 2019

Introduction

During the 2018-2019 School Year, I delivered a series of reports that showed a consistent trend that students in our school are having different experiences based upon their racial and gender identities, sexual orientation, and special education status. Those reports included data from the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, and Extracurricular Data collection. The Board and Administration noted these inconsistencies and wanted to ensure that, through the strategic plan, the district was working toward creating a greater equity of experience for our students. Our work in equity strives for fairness in both expectations and opportunities for success for all students and staff no matter their race, cultural background, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, religious belief, or other forms of identity.

One of the main inconsistencies noted in last year's presentations was in the areas of safety and belonging. We know that to learn effectively students must feel safe at school, connected to peers and adults, and accepted as unique individuals. Data from the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory showed that students who racially identify as Black/African American or Other at the Winnetka Campus had lower median scores in the dimensions of Sense of Physical Safety, Support for Learning, Social and Civic Learning, Respect for Diversity, Social Support from Students, and School Connectedness/Engagement. On the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, students who identified as Black or Other and those identifying as LGBTQ were more likely to say that they had been bullied and had missed school due to feeling unsafe. From the Extracurricular Participation Data, we saw that students who do not identify as white or Asian and those who have an individualized education plan are less likely to have participated in extracurricular offerings.

In addition to this survey data shared with the Board last year, our African American students report hearing the N-word used by students in many places in the school, and other groups report hearing similarly racist language related to their race, religion, or ethnicity. As part of our response to these reports, we implemented a lesson about the history of the N-word to make sure students understood the origins and past uses of the word and why the word is not acceptable in our school. The final piece of data I will mention comes from our alumni surveys. Our alumni report that the area for which they feel least prepared is dealing with the diversity in the colleges they attend.

The work to address the discrepancies that we see falls under two framework areas in New Trier 2030: Student Personal Growth, Engagement, and Well-being and Culture, Climate, and Equity. The 2019-2020 annual plan begins to address those discrepancies through a specific strategy:

Establish and implement, through departments and program leaders, an equity goal in each area that is focused on the specific issues and context of those departments and programs.

Why not be Color Blind?

As an example, one of the principles we embrace is that being racially “color blind” does not lead to achieving our equity goals of serving individual needs and helping all students feel part of our school community. For some, this may seem to contradict Martin Luther King’s famous quote that he dreamed of a world where his own children would “one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” We believe that to achieve Dr. King’s dream students must first be seen as complete individuals and we must acknowledge that who they are and their identity often impact the experiences that they have.

What is often overlooked when citing Dr. King’s quote is what precedes that moment in his speech. He spends several paragraphs detailing the ways in which race matters in the lives of Americans. Strikingly, he cites many of the same issues that we struggle with today: poverty, voting rights, equal access to services, and the relationship between the police and communities of color. He begins each statement with the phrase, “We cannot be satisfied as long as....” To be color blind is to pretend that these issues do not exist or do not impact people of color.

In addition, King was not addressing what it means to feel like you belong and are recognized for who you are. Belonging does not happen when others do not see you or recognize important parts of your identity. [Melody Hobson](#) speaks directly to this concept in her 2014 TED Talk, “Color blind or color brave?” She suggests that if we are color brave, we have the opportunity to connect with other people in ways that allow us to form genuine, compassionate relationships. Being color brave - actually seeing others’ identities fully, including their racial identities - allows students to more fully be themselves. This benefits not only Students of Color but also our White students by giving them the opportunity to understand themselves and others more completely.

Role of the Equity Goals Committee

The aim of the Equity Goals Committee is to align the school’s efforts on this strategy and be the conduit through which areas of the school are held accountable for equity work at New Trier. Each department has assigned one or more members to serve as representatives on the committee. These representatives attend monthly meetings, report on progress in their area, research and provide support for work on that goal, and coordinate with other members of the team to ensure that department and area goals align and support the shared vision of an equitable educational experience for all students. Meetings are scheduled for the week prior to department meetings to facilitate coordination and communication between the committee and each department.

Working Equity Definition

The first task for the Equity Goals Committee was to create a working definition for equity in an educational setting. The committee drafted and revised a definition that captures the complexity of equity in an educational setting and defines the scope of New Trier’s efforts. That definition is as follows:

Educational equity strives for *fairness* in both expectations and opportunities for success for all students and staff. A school engaged in equity:

- acknowledges that students begin with different resources;
- seeks to meet students’ individual needs;
- counters the stereotypes students experience that
 - limit their access to opportunities,
 - diminish their sense of acceptance and belonging, or
 - lower their academic expectations; and
- confronts systems of advantage and disadvantage based on race, cultural background, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, religious belief, and other forms of identity.

A few notes regarding this definition. First of all, it is a “working definition” meaning that the committee has agreed to revisit and potentially revise this definition to ensure that it accurately defines our efforts. Second, the committee felt it was important to include not only students but also staff in the definition. A school in which there is not equity for adults will struggle to create an equitable educational environment for students. Finally, the word “fairness” is italicized. This is to ensure that we remain mindful that fair does not necessarily mean equal. Some students will require more attention or resources to have the same opportunities and expectations as their classmates, since students begin with different resources and face a variety of challenges.

Creating Equity Goals

This strategy requires that each area and department establish an equity goal and determine action steps to achieve that goal. The specific goal for each area is unique but may impact similar groups of students. Last spring, the Equity Goals Committee established several guidelines for departments as they began work to define their goals. First, the committee agreed that departmental goals needed to be student-focused. They needed to relate to curriculum, instruction or the classroom environment and seek to positively impact the student experience. Second, goals should be specific and measurable. In the spring, each department and area will be required to report on their progress toward their goal. Finally, the committee felt that equity goals should take a “race and” approach. Clearly, race is one of the factors that influences the fact that students are having very different experiences with academic success, a sense of belonging, and feelings of safety in our school, but other forms of identity impact students in these ways as well. Departments can pursue equity work that addresses race and other forms of identity. For example, in the Special Education Department, ableism and working to ensure that students receive the support that they need to achieve success is an important focus of the department’s work.

As another example, the administration has established its goal as recruiting, hiring, and retaining a high-quality, racially diverse staff. Achieving this goal would benefit all students as it would provide high quality teachers for all students, our White students would have the opportunity to interact with adults of different racial identities, and our Students of Color would have the opportunity to see adults with similar racial identities in a variety of content areas and roles. Interacting with racially diverse people broadens students’ experiences and works to counteract stereotypes that they may be consciously or unconsciously held.

Each department or area has created a one-year goal for the 2019-2020 school year. Several have also considered how this one-year goal fits within a plan with a larger scope. In the spring, each department will assess their progress toward the goal and determine a goal and new action steps for the 2020-2021 school year. The table below provides a sample of departmental and area goals. For the purpose of this chart, I have summarized the goal to a few sentences.

Department	2019 - 2020 Draft Goal
The English Department will . . .	explore issues of equity in our society, and discuss our own experiences with equity work as professionals. The first year would be devoted to the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why is equity work a necessity in our area of instruction? ● How do students see themselves in our curriculum and through our instruction? ● How do we address issues of pejorative language that emerge from texts?

The Math Department will . . .	attend equity workshops and develop connections to lessons, such as highlighting People of Color who have contributed to the field of Mathematics.
The Modern and Classical Languages will . . .	participate in at least one equity-related professional development opportunity during the 2019-2020 school year, reflect on his/her equity work, and then discuss the following questions with their respective course teams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can our classroom environment be enhanced based on the equity work that you did this year? • How can our curriculum be improved based on the equity work that you did this year?
The Science Department will . . .	participate in professional development related to equity and develop connections such as highlighting the work of scientists who are also People of Color.
The Social Studies Department will . . .	read an equity-related text as a department and discuss productive methods for managing emotions, representing multiple points of view during discussions of race, develop a set of essential understandings of equity for their departmental work, and complete a curriculum inventory to create better consistency and alignment regarding the examination and multiple points of view of race and systemic racism.
The Adviser Program will . . .	acknowledge the power of language and provide equity training for all advisers within a three-year period to broaden and deepen the Adviser Program’s ability to address the complex issue of equity. Also, adviser chairs will develop a one-day equity workshop early in the school year to address the damaging impact of the n-word and other derogatory language.
The Athletics Program will . . .	collect data regarding student participation in New Trier Athletic programs by race, develop and implement strategies to increase participation by Students of Color, recruit and hire a diversity of coaches by gender and race, implement Title IX curriculum in SALT, create education programs focused on female athletes and promotion of women in sports. i.e. “Women in Sports Day”, and continue to evaluate and provide equitable facilities to male and female athletic programs.
The Performing Arts Program will . . .	expose students to professional artists of diverse racial, ethnic, gender and sexual identities by providing opportunities for them to engage in supplemental experiences such as working with guest artists or attending performances that are performed by and tell the stories of under-represented populations within our current student body.
The Student Activities Program will . . .	form a group of club sponsors to discuss our work in this area and create connections with the work in departments and at other schools. In addition, the Student Activities will examine the club

	recruitment process and to ask sponsors to examine why students may or may not feel a club is welcoming to them. What changes can they make to encourage participation by a greater diversity of students? Larger clubs can also collaborate with clubs engaged in equity-related topics to support their work.
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Conclusion

As the year proceeds and departments pursue the goals that they have set, the Equity Goals Committee will meet monthly in the week preceding department meetings to discuss any obstacles that have arisen, refine specific action steps, and share accomplishments. In the spring, each department will assess their progress and determine if they need to continue work on this year’s goal or establish a new goal for the 2020-2021 school year. At that time, I will present an update sharing their accomplishments and outlining the goals for next year.

I’m happy to answer any questions!