

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Regular Meeting

March 20, 2023

Creating a Culture of Belonging at New Trier

New Trier has taken important steps over the past several years toward creating a culture of belonging, and student voice continues to drive planning for the future, several students and staff leaders told the Board in an update on the District's strategic planning goals.

Culture, Climate, and Equity is one of six frameworks within the District's [strategic plan, New Trier 2030](#). Each year, the District creates an Annual Plan with measurable goals for each framework. Some of the goals implemented within the Culture, Climate, and Equity framework include monthly schoolwide observances to recognize the contributions of people from diverse backgrounds, expansion of student affinity groups, department curriculum and hiring goals, and equity work across all schools within the Township.

Students told the Board that this visible work makes them feel seen, heard, and valued within the school. Members of the Racial Affinity Coalition spoke about the importance of affinity groups, in which students with a shared identity come together to discuss their common experiences. They said these groups are empowering and give them a chance to speak freely about topics that are not often discussed at New Trier, such as news and events that affect underrepresented groups.

For the [monthly observances](#), the school celebrates national recognition months such as Disability Awareness Month and Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month with posters, digital displays, classroom toolkits, films, and lunch and learns. Student Council members said they have helped lead activities and create resources for the observances because it is important to create a culture of inclusivity at the school.

District Equity Liaison Pat Savage-Williams said many of New Trier's sender districts are engaged in similar work around culture, climate, and equity to assure that all students, staff, and visitors feel they belong. This summer, the Township districts are planning a Township Equity Summit to share current practices and resources.

The District's next steps include continuing hiring initiatives around an exceptional and diverse staff, including even more student voice about the District's goals, and continuing student and staff education around the Be Brave, Be Kind, Be Proud initiative. Click for the [Culture, Climate, and Equity presentation](#).

Board Approves 2023-2024 School Year Calendar

The Board approved a full calendar for the 2023-2024 school year, including institute days, other non-attendance days, parent-teacher conferences, and early dismissal/late start days.

In October, the District presented a basic calendar with start and end dates and holidays to assist families and staff with planning while the school continued to hold discussions around professional development time, final exams/end of semester experiences, and other calendar-related issues.

Highlights of the 2023-2024 calendar include:

- First semester final exams before winter break
- Returning to the traditional three days of final exams by subject
- Continuing parent-teacher conferences via a virtual format
- Providing approximately 60 hours of professional development time for teachers
- Moving more professional development days to late starts for students, providing uninterrupted time for teachers and extra days for students to sleep in

While the calendar cannot provide days off for every religious holiday, Superintendent Paul Sally said New Trier staff receive information throughout the year each year about the most common religious and cultural holidays celebrated in the community. Teachers work with students to accommodate absences and missed work during these important holidays. More information can be found on the [Commitment to Equity page](#). Click for the [2023-2024 school calendar](#).

New Trier's Approach to ChatGPT and Emerging Technologies

Technology is a powerful tool in the school environment, with the ability to disrupt or advance learning. New Trier's approach to emerging technology like ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence tools centers on how to harness these technologies for learning while teaching students to be critical thinkers and ethical decision-makers.

Open AI's ChatGPT has been in the news over the several months for its ability to generate coherent responses to a wide range of topics and tasks. Its ability to pull answers from a vast data set and quickly create answers in natural language has worried many educators, as students could use the tool to write essays or solve math problems with a few simple prompts.

Assistant Superintendent Peter Tragos said New Trier's approach to ChatGPT and its successors has been to not overreact or underreact. Instead, the school is addressing ChatGPT with both students and teachers to help them understand what the technology can and cannot do and how it can be used ethically in an educational setting.

New Trier's Instructional Technology team already has curated a number of high quality resources for teachers and department leaders, Chief Technology Officer Michael Marassa said. The school also has hosted two professional development webinars to discuss the technology led by Dr. Torrey Trust, Associate Professor of Learning Technology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

While ChatGPT can be a time saver for rudimentary tasks, it is often "confidently wrong" on tasks that require higher-order thinking, said Instructional Technology Specialists Eric Johnson and Pete Gutierrez. Students must understand that using it as a shortcut means they are not learning skills upon which they must build to succeed in higher level classes, college, or career.

New Trier's academic integrity policy already includes consequences for students who submit work that is not their own, Tragos said, and AI-generated essays or solutions fall under that policy. Click for the [ChatGPT presentation](#).

Other News from the March 20 Meeting

- Christopher Mitchell was approved by the Board of Education to be Associate Principal for Student Services beginning July 1, 2023. Mitchell currently serves as assistant principal for student services at Glenbard West High School. He previously was lead dean of students at St. Charles North High School and served as a biology teacher and coach at Oswego High School. Mitchell received his master's and bachelor's degrees from Aurora University in Aurora, Illinois.
- Gail Gamrath was announced as the Associate Principal for the Northfield Campus. She currently serves as the Northfield Campus Assistant Principal and was previously a Junior and Freshman Adviser Chair. Gamrath was hired at New Trier 29 years ago to start the Outdoor Education program and moved into leadership roles, including serving on the original team that opened the Northfield Campus in 2001. Gamrath received a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a master's degree from Northern Arizona University.
- New Trier Social Work Coordinator Daniel Paustian will become one of the school's Graduating Class Team Assistant Principals on July 1, 2023. Paustian, a New Trier alumnus, began his career at New Trier in 2013 as a social worker and also has served as an adviser and equity leader. He received his master's and bachelor's degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Assistant Superintendent Joanne Panopoulos gave an update on the work of a District attendance committee seeking solutions to improve student attendance. Panopoulos said that after receiving feedback from parents who had concerns about the District's attendance reporting systems and structure, the committee is conducting an audit of attendance logistics and will develop an action plan by the end of May.

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://nthsmediaspace.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>