

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Regular Meeting

May 20, 2024

Student Voice: Freshmen Share Stories of Transition to New Trier

Five freshman students preparing to end their first year at New Trier shared stories about how they made the transition to high school and built friendships this year by taking advantage of the many opportunities the school has to offer.

The Board of Education has heard about the student experience from every year group, and the freshmen made the final student voice presentation of the year. Northfield Campus Principal Paul Waechtler said he asked the students to think about the freshman-only campus' values of transition, community, and identity/exploration when considering their experience.

Isabel Passen told the Board that she felt welcomed from the first day of school, when she was greeted by balloons, smiling staff members, and the drumline playing. She decided to stay true to her interests by deferring a language for a year and pursuing multiple performing arts classes. She has found a community in her dance classes, musicals and plays, and by participating in fun community-building events like football games and the advisory olympics.

Lennart Vaughan began building his community of friends before school started by participating in summer camps including football and strength and conditioning. He has enjoyed meeting new people from different sender schools in his adviser room and in activities like ski club. He encouraged incoming freshmen to take classes that meet their interests and take advantage of New Trier's many extracurricular activities, from clubs and sports to intramurals.

Charlotte Wenzke went all in on New Trier's extracurricular program, joining a club for every day of the week - and sometimes more than one! She said that she loves her classes and finds fun in keeping busy after school, competing in clubs like math team and DECA, cooking in bon appetit club, or boosting school spirit in pep club. She followed her very active siblings' advice in taking advantage of activities at New Trier, and she encourages new students to do the same.

Deg Whalen also took the advice of older siblings in choosing classes and interests at New Trier. He said he couldn't wait to take Creative Cuisine after seeing photos of the dishes his sister cooked in the class. He has found a community in clubs like Tri-Ship and Black and Brown Club, as well as in varsity lacrosse. He advises incoming freshmen to ask teachers for help when they need it and take advantage of resources like the Academic Assistance Center.

Romy Parekh shared those same sentiments, crediting helpful teachers and a freshman-only campus for making her transition to high school smooth. She has made good friends in her mixed gender adviser room, in clubs like DECA, and on the softball team. Parekh said incoming students should not be afraid to ask teachers for help and should try any opportunity that seems interesting to them.

As the student year group presentations ended for the year, Board members said they look forward to incorporating more student voices into their decision-making in the coming year.

[Superintendent Paul Sally to Retire June 2025; Board Hires Search Firm to Assist in Finding Successor](#)

Dr. Paul Sally, who was instrumental in creating and advancing New Trier's comprehensive strategic plan, overseeing important facilities improvements, and leading the District through the COVID-19 pandemic, announced he will retire at the end of the 2024-2025 school year after eight years as superintendent and 31 years at New Trier.

"I cannot think of a better place to work, and I am honored that I will retire in the place that nurtured me as a new educator three decades ago," Sally said. "I am excited for the year ahead and the important work we need to continue together. New Trier is a wonderful school with amazing students and families and a staff that is second to none."

Sally and the Board first began discussing his retirement two years ago, and they mutually agreed to extend his contract to the end of the 2024-2025 school year so he could see through important strategic planning initiatives and give the Board time to seek his successor. At the time of his retirement, Sally will have spent 31 years at New Trier - 15 as a math teacher and 16 as an administrator.

Board President Jean Hahn said the Board has "big shoes to fill" and listed some of the District's many accomplishments under Sally's leadership in addition to his work in his first year as superintendent creating the District's comprehensive strategic plan, *New Trier 2030*. Other accomplishments Hahn cited include his "creative and compassionate" leadership during COVID-19, extensive safety and facilities improvements at both campuses, the creation of Graduating Class Teams to support students, and ongoing efforts to ensure that New Trier is a welcoming place where everyone feels they belong.

"I could go on and on – and I will when Paul actually leaves us – but for now I am confident that I can speak for the Board when I say that we are deeply appreciative of the positive impact your kindness, compassion, and genuine care have had on the New Trier community, and we are so very grateful to work with you for another year," Hahn said.

The Board approved a contract with the executive search firm Hazard, Young, Attea and Associates (HYA) to assist in its efforts to hire the District's next superintendent. HYA will lead a national search and engage with the New Trier community to identify the skills and dispositions it seeks in the next superintendent.

[Update on Future Programming Committee Work](#)

One of the primary goals of New Trier's strategic plan, [New Trier 2030](#), is to ensure that students are well-prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future. A schoolwide Future Programming Committee formed in December 2023 to consider how to achieve this goal, and Assistant Superintendent Peter Tragos and committee members updated the Board on its work this school year.

The committee was charged with envisioning how to provide students with more flexible and individualized opportunities to access support, enrichment, and career exploration and to differentiate themselves from others in highly competitive college and career pursuits. Over six meetings, 56 teachers, administrators, and Board representatives built an understanding of the rapidly changing skills employers seek and innovations in schools and education.

Subcommittees further explored particular areas of focus. These included thinking differently about equating learning with "seat time," or time spent in traditional classrooms, and considering how New Trier's structures and systems might promote or limit equitable access to courses and programs. Committee member and math teacher Jon Lepeska said the committee read research and engaged in discussions with experts on college and career-connected learning.

The District also sought feedback from parents, students, and staff, who were not on the committee through a partnership with Hanover Research, which conducted an online survey and will run focus groups this month.

Post-High School Counseling Department Chair Jill Cervantes said some concepts that emerged from the committee include offering courses that are less than 200 minutes a week, offering a term between semesters for students to explore interests and enrichment opportunities, more flexible learning structures (e.g. blended learning, virtual learning, semester electives, half-block courses, and more), integrated studies incorporating community work, internships, mentorships, and other experiential learning, and career or personal pathways.

For the next phase of the District's work, a smaller steering committee will map out a plan for 2024-25. The leaders of this work will analyze survey and focus group results, write proposals and timelines, give presentations, and implement a plan for the 2025-26 and 2026-27 school years, culinary teacher and committee member Jen McDonough told the Board. Click for the [Future Programming presentation](#).

Other News from the May 20 Meeting

- Assistant Superintendent Joanne Panopoulos gave the Board an overview of the results of New Trier's Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI), a survey that gives students, staff, and parents the opportunity to answer questions about school climate. The state of Illinois requires every school district to conduct a survey of learning conditions each year, and student participation rates are included in the state's School Report Card. The survey assesses perceptions of the school environment in 38 areas within five domains: safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership and efficacy. Scores above 3.5 are considered positive, 2.5 to 3.5 neutral, and below 2.5 negative. In a three-year trend, New Trier has seen consistently positive responses, with few neutral and no negative trends. Safety and physical security shows the

strongest positive data among all groups surveyed. While the school is pleased with the results, Panopoulos said there are areas where staff and student/parent perceptions differ enough to explore more. Click for the [CSCI presentation](#).

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/>*

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