

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Regular Meeting

October 17, 2022

Critical Thinking Series: Math Department

New Trier math classrooms are places bustling with discussion and collaboration, where students take risks, learn through productive struggle, and develop problem-solving skills that serve them well beyond the study of mathematics.

Teachers and leaders in the Mathematics Department presented examples of how they build these skills in their classrooms, the latest in a series of department reports to the Board to demonstrate how teachers foster a culture of inquiry and critical thinking at New Trier.

Department Chair Mary Lappan and Department Coordinator Don Kim told the Board that the ways in which many parents - and teachers - may have learned math have changed dramatically in the past decades. Students no longer passively watch teachers work out problems on a chalkboard or memorize formulas in textbooks; instead, teachers focus on problem solving through student-led work, collaboration, and discussions guided by the teacher.

It is through this work that students learn to think critically about how a problem might be solved using different approaches, often by trying and failing before reaching a correct solution. These skills continue to develop throughout students' time at New Trier, with more than 95% of students electing to study math all four years.

The department develops curriculum aligned with standards from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics as a starting point. Overarching goals include teaching students to value mathematics, to become confident in their ability to do mathematics, to use technology effectively, and to communicate, reason, and problem-solve mathematically. While the focus is on math, these skills apply universally to learning.

The department is continually looking for new ways to introduce students to real-world applications of mathematics. One example of a new course introduced in recent years is Geometry, Design, and Construction, in which students use geometry concepts to create small and large design build projects in a class taught by both Mathematics and Applied Arts. The department also continues to incorporate technology into its curriculum, both through modeling and problem-solving apps and through particular courses such as computer science.

Click for the [Math Department Critical Thinking Series presentation](#).

[Freshman Success Helps Students with Transition to High School](#)

A new initiative for freshmen this school year focuses on preparing students for the academic, social, and emotional transition to high school and developing crucial skills and habits they will need for success throughout their time at New Trier and beyond.

The *Freshman Success* program builds upon a 2021-2022 initiative that taught freshmen executive functioning skills such as organization and time management during three lessons in study hall. *Freshman Success* expands the program into the classroom, where students learn about not only executive functioning strategies, but also responsible technology use, behavior and safety, stress management, and other mental health strategies.

Northfield Campus Assistant Principal Gail Gamrath told the Board that different academic and student services departments have taken on the priorities outlined in *Freshman Success* so they are integrated into a student's day.

For example, math and English teachers have spent time helping students learn to use a daily planner to keep track of their homework and upcoming tests, and they have taught strategies to break large assignments into manageable chunks.

Partnering with the Social Work Department, Kinetic Wellness teachers have shared six lessons on Stress Anxiety Management Strategies with their students in the first quarter. Social Studies and science classes along with the Library focused on technology strategies, from connecting to the school WiFi to using note-taking apps and Canvas to track and turn in assignments.

Adviser rooms, meanwhile, have been working with students on safety and behavior expectations in a high school environment that offers more freedom and choice than elementary and middle schools. Advisers are also helping students develop self-advocacy skills by instructing them on reaching out to teachers for help or using the Academic Assistance Center.

Northfield Campus Principal Paul Waechtler said freshman faculty leaders are pleased with the expansion of the program this year and will survey students to make adjustments for improvements in the future. Click for the [Freshman Success presentation](#).

New Course Proposals Include Different Options for English Senior Year

New Trier's English Department will revise its senior year elective options next school year to better prepare students for the college experience while assuring the courses students pick best fit their interests and learning needs, Assistant Superintendent Peter Tragos told the Board.

The revisions to the senior year English program were among new courses and course changes New Trier will introduce during the 2023-2024 school year. New courses include Urban Design and Development in Applied Arts, a leadership strand in Art Essentials, and an Introduction to Acting course at the Winnetka Campus.

The English Department has been analyzing its senior elective courses for the past few years, recognizing that seniors were putting in requests to switch English courses far more than any other year group. A survey of students found that students were choosing courses first by level, then by their own interest or sibling or teacher recommendations. In addition, the department noted that using traditional levels left students in Level 2, for example, with only two choices.

Noting that students are not tracked or leveled in college, the department revised the program to better reflect the college experience, changing course offerings for next year to three levels: 2 co-taught, 9, and 4. In addition to merging separate Level 2 and Level 3 sections in some courses, the department created one new course by combining those with similar content, merging Myth & Mind, Humanities, and Good and Evil into the new Cultural Crossroads in Literature. In addition, the senior English program now has a single theme: world literature.

In Applied Arts, the new Urban Design and Development course will offer an updated architecture and engineering pathway, replacing Civil Engineering. In Art Essentials, students who have taken Art Essentials 1 can take on a leadership role in the course by planning curriculum with the teacher and assisting in projects with peers.

The new Music & Theatre course, Introduction to Acting, will be open to sophomores, juniors, and seniors with little to no experience in acting. This provides students with another opportunity to explore acting outside of the sequential theatre classes beginning in the freshman year. Click for the [New Course Proposals memo](#).

Other News from the October 17 Meeting

- The Board approved a [basic school year calendar for 2023-2024](#) that includes the school year's start and end dates, school holidays including winter break and spring break, and graduation. Superintendent Paul Sally said it was important to give families these significant dates now for their planning. The Board will consider a full 2023-2024 calendar by March 2023 with other details such as institute days, other non-attendance days, parent-teacher conferences, and early dismissal/late start days.
- New Trier received a [clean audit from an independent auditing firm](#), which commended New Trier for achieving the highest level of accuracy and transparency in its financial reporting. The auditor noted that only about 50 of Illinois' 800 school districts create a financial report as comprehensive as New Trier's, and only about 25% of districts receive a clean audit with no findings to correct.
- New Trier's average class size remained steady at 22.1, with a slight increase in the number of small classes (14 or fewer students) to 5.4% and a decrease in the number of large classes (30 or more students, excluding non-traditional classroom settings such as Music or Kinetic Wellness) to 0.1%.

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>