

NEW TRIER TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 203



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To: Board of Education
From: Dr. Paul Sally, Superintendent
Re: Initiation of a New Strategic Plan
Date: January 22, 2018

Paul J. Sally, Ed.D.
Superintendent

New Trier last completed a strategic plan in 2005. In the subsequent years, that plan has guided the work of the District, and New Trier has seen many positive changes in services to students, teaching and learning in the classroom, and best practices in all areas. In addition, the culture of the District has shifted as can be seen by the consistent use of the language and ideas embedded in that plan such as "the intrinsic value of learning" and "healthy, balanced life."

One of the goals set for me by the Board of Education when I was named Superintendent was to lead the implementation of a new strategic plan in concert with the Board, the staff, the students, and the community. With the completion of the Winnetka Campus construction project and recognizing the many changes that have happened in education, in the world, and in our community since 2005, now is the right time to look at the principles that should guide our work over the next ten years.

Perhaps the most obvious changes since 2005 are the advances in science and technology, but there are many more examples in all fields such as law, education, and social psychology. Our strategic plan must anticipate the future world that our students will face. What will careers and jobs look like in 2050 when our current students are in their prime years of working, contributing to the community, and potentially raising families? The answers to those questions will help guide the skills and dispositions we want to develop in our students. We need to project our motto, mission, and beliefs into that future time and ensure that we are meeting our obligation of preparing the students of our community for that future.

This discussion at the January 2018 Board of Education meeting represents the beginning of the strategic planning process. This memo presents: (1) a summary of the last strategic plan and lessons learned, and (2) a proposed process for launching our work with a timeline for the initial steps. All documents referred to in these sections are on BoardDocs.

Strategic Plan 2005-2010

On March 21, 2005 the Board of Education adopted the 2005-2010 New Trier Township High School District Strategic Plan. The plan was the result of work that started in October 2003 and was a collaborative effort between the community, students, staff, and the Board of Education. The end result was a document that had the following components:

- a mission statement,
- 11 belief statements expressing the District's fundamental values,
- five parameters, standards which the District would not compromise,

- four objectives representing a commitment to achieve specific, measurable results,
- six strategies representing initiatives that formed the basis of six “Action Teams”,
- 41 action plans developed by the Action Teams to meet the objectives while honoring the standards, belief statements, and mission, and
- two connecting themes that “meld initiatives from the six action teams.”

The two connecting themes were “students at the center of their active learning” and “parents and the community at the center of District two-way communication.” For implementation, the 41 plans were divided into three groups: 21 short-term plans (to be implemented in two years or less), 13 mid-range action plans (to be implemented by 2010), and 7 action plans that needed further research. Significant effort in the school was put behind the 21 short-term action plans. Many teachers and staff who were at New Trier in those years remember the incredible effort put forth to implement these short-term plans. In 2011, Dr. Linda Yonke reported to the Board the District’s progress in implementing the 41 initiatives and initiated a long-range planning process to follow the formal end of Strategic Planning. In that report, she noted that the driving force of our long-range planning was the same as the key purpose and outcome of our Strategic Plan: “[f]ocusing on all aspects of student growth (intellectual, personal, social, and emotional) improves the quality of the student’s educational experience and produces higher academic outcomes.”

Lessons Learned

My perspective on the last strategic plan is formed from my experience as a teacher and administrator during the heart of the implementation of the plan (2005-2010), as an administrator as we continued to improve programs and services guided by the plan (2011-2017), and as Superintendent looking to implement a new strategic plan.

Over the past five to six years, I have truly appreciated the ways in which the 2005-2010 strategic plan continues to impact the culture of the school. The core of this strategic plan is embedded in Board Policy (1-30, 3-10, 6-10, and 6-15). The titles of the six Strategies are often used to frame discussions on important issues. My lesson learned from these observations for the new strategic plan is that these components are strong; we certainly need to revisit them, but we do not need to reinvent them.

As implementation proceeded, the higher level Mission, Belief Statements, and Objectives were lost as annual or semi-annual guidance for the work in the school. The Strategies and Action Plans were explicit in decision making, while the higher level ideas were implicit in those discussions. My lesson learned from this observation is that the new strategic plan must be implemented in concert with an annual planning cycle that the Board is considering. In that cycle the Mission, Belief Statements, and Objectives in the new plan will stay central to our goals for each year.

As I look around the school today, I note that many of our leaders in the school were intimately involved in the last Strategic Plan. From this observation, I know the new strategic planning process must involve some of our younger faculty members to help them develop the leadership that the school will need in 10 years.

Finally, the implementation of 21 Action Plans in two years was unrealistic given the multitude of needs in a complex system such as New Trier. Diverting so much time into these efforts over a short period overloaded the system, especially given the day-to-day demands of teaching. My lesson learned from this observation is that *outcomes from the strategic planning process must be prioritized through the annual planning cycle so as to not overload the system.*

Process for Launching the New Strategic Planning Process

This proposed process will likely go under significant change as we engage a consultant. This draft presents the framework from which I am developing my thinking and I look forward to the Board Discussion.

Phase I Steps – Launch and Setting the Foundation

- 1) **Engage a Strategic Planning Consultant** (by February/March 2018 Board Meeting)
The plan will be driven by the Board, students, staff, and community, but it should be guided by a consultant with expertise in developing and implementing strategic plans. I have received recommendations from area superintendents and other sources.
- 2) **Organize a Core Committee** (by March/April 2018 Board Meeting)
This core committee will have representation from constituencies across the District. It will necessarily be a large group. I imagine the consultant will be key to provide guidelines for representation and size. The group will include parents, other community members, the Board of Education, Administrators, students, faculty members, and support staff members. This group will be the committee that guides the District through the process. One of the first tasks of the core committee is to consider what has changed since 2005 at New Trier, in education, in our community, and in the world.
- 3) **Engage Students, Staff, Board, and Community** (by June 2018 Board Meeting)
The proposed timing may be too aggressive. The goal of this step is to revisit, not reinvent, the mission, beliefs, parameters, and objectives from the last strategic plan, perhaps not using quite the same language. This step will entail a broad outreach. Perhaps a survey, but probably more effectively focus groups. The result of these focus groups will be processed by the core committee and reported out to the community and the Board of Education.

Phase II – Defining Themes and Identifying Gaps

The first goal of this phase is to develop the themes (formerly called strategies) that will frame the work. As mentioned above, the last strategic plan had six of these themes and they played an essential role in bringing cohesion to the plan and the work on the plan. The second goal of this phase is to identify gaps in the school related to each theme. To do that groups will need to describe the current state of the school for each theme and then describe what we would like to be able to say in the future about the school in terms of that theme. The gaps will be revealed through this analysis and provide the starting point for the next phase.

Phase III – Strategies for Closing the Gaps

In this phase, strategies are developed that will close the gaps identified above. The structure of this work will vary depending on the gap that has been identified. The outcome will be a long list of strategies that can be applied across multiple areas.

Phase IV - Prioritization

This phase is critical in ensuring we do not overwhelm the system. The strategies developed above, must be grouped and prioritized to provide the unified focus that will best impact change.

Phase V - Implementation, Annual Evaluation Cycle, and Goal Setting

As part of the annual planning cycle, the District will present the progress from the work of the previous year, and the Board and Administration can set new priorities for the next year.

I am excited to start a new strategic planning process. At the Board meeting, I will have a short presentation and then I am looking forward to the Board discussion.