

To: Board of Education
From: Paul Sally, Superintendent
Re: 2024-2025 Work in Culture, Climate, Equity, Belonging, and Civil Discourse
Date: 10/21/2024

Introduction

When the Board of Education approved our strategic plan, New Trier 2030, in January of 2019, they established Culture, Climate, and Equity as one of the focus areas for the District. Our work in this area has two main goals: (1) to ensure that every student feels like they belong at New Trier and (2) to ensure every student is learning about perspectives different from their own. Each year, the annual plan has established goals in this area, and the administration has presented updates to the work multiple times each year. Before detailing our current initiatives and structure, a review of the timeline of major milestones will help capture the evolution of this work at New Trier.

New Trier 2030: Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging History and Timeline

January 2019 - The Board adopted New Trier 2030 with Culture, Climate, and Equity as one of the six framework areas. The description, core values, and goals are shown below.

③ Culture, Climate, and Equity

All people at New Trier must be welcomed, respected, supported, and valued so students can learn effectively, develop deeper understanding of the complex issues they face, and become empowered to contribute to the school community. This is possible when staff and students learn from and reflect on their own and others' diverse lived experiences.



Core Values

- We believe an equitable, safe, inclusive, and welcoming climate is not only necessary for students to learn and supports student growth, but is ethically in alignment with our mission.
- We believe that an equitable, safe, inclusive, and welcoming climate:
 - » creates the conditions that allow individuals to reach their full potential.
 - » is built upon respect and the appreciation of differences.
 - » holds individuals accountable for their actions and creates access to justice.
- We believe that all students, no matter their race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, innate abilities, or academic levels, have the right to equitable opportunities to pursue their interests and have the right to a rigorous and rich curricula and inspiring instruction that promotes intellectual growth, exploration, and risk-taking
- We believe what makes our school better for the most vulnerable students makes the school better for all students.

Goals

- To create a culture of equity that appreciates and celebrates differences across the school by exploring individual identities and the identities of others.
- To create a culture in which students define their identities more holistically beyond academic achievement and level placement.
- To create a culture that reduces stress and teaches students the strategies to effectively manage the stress they experience.
- To create learning environments and curricula that encourage empathy, create interpersonal connections, embrace diverse identities, and explore multiple perspectives.
- To create an environment in which each individual's needs are met and in which every person feels they belong.
- To identify and promote those parts of our culture that enhance learning and a sense of belonging, such as our dedication to service, compassion, critical thinking, and empathy.

Annual Plan 2019-2020 - As we started the strategic plan, we established a one-fifth equity liaison release position held by Ms. Pat Savage-Williams who was the Special Education

Coordinator at that time. The work that year was driven by the fact that our surveys showed that groups such as our students of color and students who identify as LGBTQIA+ felt marginalized in our school and had not had the same experience as other students. In addition to professional development opportunities and the expansion of student affinity groups, the focus of the year was to have each department establish student-oriented equity goals. Representatives from each department met periodically to share the goals that were being developed in their department with others.

March 2020 - On March 13, 2020, we closed school due to COVID and went to remote learning for the remainder of the year.

June 2020 - At our June 2020 Board meeting, many community members sent in public comments following George Floyd's death in May 2020. The meetings at that time were on Zoom and public comments were submitted and read by us. Most comments asked the District to prioritize our work in Culture, Climate, and Equity. We continued to hear from our community and alumni in the coming months, and in response, we created a set of summer 2020 committees to focus on specific aspects of our equity work, including hiring, curriculum, student voice, professional development, and restorative practices.

July/August 2020 - At the July 2020 Board meeting, I presented some of the outcomes of the committee work mentioned above. Those recommendations were then integrated into the Annual Plan for 2020-2021. In that plan we see the roots of much of the work that continues today: hiring of a diverse and exceptional staff, moving to a restorative practices philosophy for discipline, evaluating departmental curriculum to increase the representation of multiple voices, expanding professional development offerings, examining changes to the single gender adviser system, and increasing the use of student voice in determining how to make our school more inclusive. All of these components had been present in some form in our work, but this moment was important in explicitly naming these areas as goals for the District. It was also important in that the focus of our work was moving away from a singular event such as the All-School Seminar Day that focused on the struggle for racial civil rights toward a comprehensive approach to directly impact the day-to-day experience for our students.

Annual Plan 2020-2021 - The Board officially approved the 2020-2021 Annual Plan in October, which was delayed due to managing our COVID response. As part of the approval, the administration presented our Critical Thinking and Civil Discourse statement. The statement supported our commitment to ensuring students are exposed to perspectives different from their own, which is an important part of building an inclusive climate. The Board received several updates on the progress of our work in Culture, Climate, and Equity throughout that year.

Annual Plan 2021-2022 - One of the major shifts that happened during the 2021-2022 school year was our adoption of "belonging" as the way we named our focus, stemming from some work we did with Dr. Floyd Cobb, the author of "Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity." Another new initiative that year was implementing our monthly observances. Our Equity Liaisons at the time, Tim Hayes, Pat Savage-Williams, and Kiran Subhani, developed the idea

for these observances and had a very successful first year of implementation. The remainder of the initiatives advanced the work from the previous summer and year.

Annual Plan 2022-2023 - Knowing that we needed to dedicate more time to our work in Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging, we increased the amount of release time for this work from 1/5th to one person to a total of 6/5th divided between three people. The increase in release time for these initiatives allowed the work to move forward and become embedded in the school much more rapidly than before. Ongoing initiatives such as the monthly observances, departmental goals, student affinity groups, and restorative practices were able to make significant strides forward. In addition, this was the first year of implementing the Mixed-gender Adviser Room pilot with freshmen having had a choice to sign up for either single gender or mixed gender. We also started our initiative to connect more directly with our sender schools on this work. Those efforts resulted in a summer 2023 institute where a set of over 100 staff from New Trier and all sender schools spent most of the day learning and sharing ideas for how to effectively ensure we are doing all we can to help students feel like they belong.

Annual Plan 2023-2024 - In 2023-2024 we committed to continuing the great work done over the last few years while preparing for a significant transition with the retirement of Pat Savage-Williams at the end of the year. At the start of the year, we had planned for a student and staff survey as well as student and staff focus groups, to help us identify where we needed to focus our work on for the future. Ideas were already on the table in terms of expanding student and staff voices in the initiatives, and better defining the roles and responsibilities of the people involved.

The work had begun, but the dynamic of that work shifted significantly with the events of October 7th. Through the many conversations that occurred with students, staff, and the community throughout the year, it became clear that we needed to more explicitly support our Jewish students, families, and staff in our work on Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging - they did not feel as if their identity had been included. It also became clear that our Arab and Muslim students and families needed more explicit recognition and support as well. We already had student affinity spaces for these groups, but that was not sufficient.

In summary, the events of the year emphasized the importance of the original ideas of ensuring that multiple voices were involved in these discussions and better defining roles and responsibilities. These two ideas became the driving principles in developing our 2024-2025 Annual Plan.

A New Structure for Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging

The history above is important because it demonstrates the ways that New Trier has made significant progress over the last 5 years and illustrates how the work is always evolving. Monday's presentation will focus on the new structures we have in place, the roles and responsibilities of various groups, the expansion of the voices and identities directly involved in the work, and how the accomplishments of the past few years are being carried forward.

The direction of our work is driven by our strategic plan, New Trier 2030, approved in January 2019 and each Annual Plan, the last of which was approved in July 2024 for the 2024-2025 school year. The Annual Plan provides direction for the work each year which builds off of previous successes. This year, the central part of the plan was to establish a Staff Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging Council (CCEB) and better define the various roles and responsibilities of people involved in the work. To help you understand the process we went through between last spring and today, I have provided a short overview.

Planning - Last spring, the administration renewed or created job descriptions for the Equity Liaison role, the Staff CCEB Council, and Student Affinity Group Sponsors. Those job descriptions are attached at the end of this memo. The administrator who supervises these roles is Dr. Chimille Tillery, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, who partners with other administrators in oversight of these roles.

Hiring - The Equity Liaison role needed to be filled first due to the retirement of one of our former Equity Liaisons and the interest of the other two liaisons to continue to contribute to our Equity work in a different manner. Out of that process we hired Ms. Kristan Kenney and Alex Zilka, both of whom have extensive experience in working with Equity issues inside and outside the classroom. They will be two of the main presenters at Monday's meeting.

The next step last spring was to hire the members of the Staff CCEB Council. There was a great deal of interest across the school with over 30 applicants. The staff members selected were: Maricor Chang - Library, Rhonda Geater - Security, Idalia Guitierrez - MCL, Kim Hafron - MCL, Sarah Kropski - Music and Theatre, Tom Lau - Art, Jessie Malamuth - English, Nic Meyer - Music, Shawn Mitchum - MCL, Amy Offenbach - Social Work, Grace Phillips - English, Darius Sanchez - Science, Hannah Spevak - Social Work, and Venera Stabinsky - MCL.

Kick-Off - You will hear more details on Monday, but the leaders of the council, Chimille, Denise, Alex, and Kristan, worked over the summer to create a comprehensive plan to develop the CCEB as a strong and connected working group, provide foundational professional development, and sketch out an initial plan for the work the group will take on over the year. The CCEB first met in August, before school started, to start developing norms, building relationships, and lay out the scope of the work for the year. Since then, they have met three times including a ½ day retreat. As you will hear, their work is a combination of professional development and giving feedback to help develop some of our initiatives. In those meetings, they reviewed the initial monthly observances, the formation of the staff affinity groups, and started a review of departmental equity goals. They will continue to contribute to this year's initiatives and help us develop the 2025-2026 Annual Plan goals in the spring.

Next Steps

If you look at the end of the Equity Liaison job description below, you will see the ambitious set of goals we have for this year. Each of these goals contributes to the two main objectives of our work mentioned at the beginning of the memo: (1) to ensure that every student feels like they belong at New Trier and (2) to ensure every student is learning about perspectives different

from their own. While the Equity Liaisons and the CCEB Council play an important role in guiding the work, we will only meet our goals in this area if every department and every staff member contributes. We know that what happens in each and every classroom, office, athletic, performing arts, and club space is what has the biggest impact on our students. To that end, in addition to departments setting equity goals, we offer an extensive professional development program with topics including civil discourse in the classroom, inclusive practices for students in special education, combating antisemitism, and introductory lessons to learn about Islam and better understand our Muslim students.

While our two overarching goals can be stated simply, every student must feel like they belong and every student must learn about perspectives different from their own, the work to make that happen at New Trier is quite complex. Every school's work in equity and belonging looks different depending on their demographics, and I believe the program we have put together is a model for high schools like ours. It is not perfect, and we have had our share of setbacks. However, the continued commitment from the community, the staff, our students, and the Board allows us to continually improve in pursuit of a better experience for all our students.

I am looking forward to the presentation and discussion on Monday.

JOB DESCRIPTION – RELEASE-TIME

Title: Equity Liaison
Assignment: School year (three positions for a total of five fifths; release time for each liaison determined based on candidate interest and program needs)

Initial appointment is for two years.

Location: Winnetka and Northfield Campuses
Reports to: Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Overview: Work as a team with the other Equity Liaisons to assist in the development, implementation and evaluation of New Trier 2030 Strategic Plan initiatives related to Culture, Climate, Equity and Belonging. Serve as a resource to administration and staff in responding to equity and belonging-related events that have an impact on students and staff members. Work under the direction of the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, who leads the district's equity work, and in partnership with the other Equity Liaisons and the two Strategic Plan Advisory Councils for Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging.

Qualifications:

1. Minimum five years' experience as a teacher at the secondary level or comparable experience.
2. Knowledge of best practices in supporting educational equity related to race, gender, gender identity, innate ability, sexual orientation, religion, and other forms of identity.
3. Demonstration of effective problem-solving skills, project management, and collaborative leadership dispositions.
4. Excellent communication and interpersonal skills with the ability to effectively engage and influence stakeholders at all levels.
5. Strong understanding of the District's strategic plan, New Trier 2030, and passionate commitment to and active engagement in advancing the district's goals in all facets of our Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging initiatives.
6. Ability to work in a constantly changing world, balancing multiple priorities and deadlines.
7. Ability to be receptive and open to multiple perspectives, including those that are different from one's personal beliefs.
8. Excellent communication and interpersonal skills with the ability to collaborate with all members of the Staff Strategic Plan Advisory Councils for Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging and the Student Strategic Plan Advisory Council for Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging.

Responsibilities:

1. Work in collaboration and under the direction of the Director of Curriculum and Instruction to develop, evaluate, and lead strategic planning initiatives detailed in each year's annual plan. The roles of each Equity Liaison will vary within these initiatives and be determined collaboratively. Examples for the 2024-25 school year are shown below.

2. Participate in Professional Development on equity related issues including ones to develop facilitation skills related to equity discussions.
3. Develop communication protocol between administration and equity liaisons to be used when events occur at the local, national, and world levels that impact our students and staff.
4. Participate in Campus and District Leadership teams when requested.
5. Present at Board and Staff Meetings as needed
6. Be available as a resource to assist staff in equity issues.
7. Participate in summer 2024 work to begin planning the work for the school year.
8. Assist in other equity related issues as needed.

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Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging Initiatives for the 2024-2025 School Year

The initiatives in our Annual Plan are rarely single year initiatives. Many of the initiatives below have been in progress for a number of years and a plan needs to be developed of what we want to accomplish within each initiative in any given year.

1. Lead students and staff in the development, review, and adaptation of current **Monthly Observance** materials and activities for each month. Collaborate with the student council, classrooms, related clubs, library, etc. when developing monthly materials and activities.
2. Partner with **Student Affinity Group members and sponsors** to ensure communication with administration and consistency of experiences and expectations across groups.
3. Co-lead with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction the two **Student and Staff Strategic Plan Advisory Councils on Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging**. With the Staff Council, plan listening sessions that are open to all staff to hear feedback and present progress on each initiative.
4. Work with department representatives on development, implementation and communication of **Department Equity Goals**
5. Collaborate with **Sender Schools** on township equity initiatives including a February 2025 Township Institute Day
6. Support our commitment to **hiring and retaining diverse and exceptional teachers**
7. Support our work on implementing **Civil Discourse and Critical Thinking** across the school.
8. Work with the leadership of the Northfield Campus on **specific freshman class initiatives**.
9. Work with the **Graduating Class Teams** to assist in determining a support plan for students from marginalized groups who may need additional support.
10. Assist in the development and leadership of **Staff Affinity groups**.
11. Work closely with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction to provide **equity-related professional development** for staff, including professional development for departments and leadership teams that align with the NT 2030 Strategic Plan.
12. Assist in implementation of **Restorative Practices** as needed.
13. Help to facilitate with administration a **Parent/Key Communicator Strategic Plan Advisory Group on Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging**. Assist in facilitating other parent groups as needed.

Title: Strategic Plan Advisory Council Member for Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging (CCEB)
Location: Northfield or Winnetka
Compensation: Category I Stipend (8-12 positions)
Supervisor: Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Overview: New Trier will establish an Advisory Council to guide our Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging work starting in the 2024-25 school year. This Council will be led by the Director of Curriculum and Instruction and will be comprised of the Equity Liaisons (1 Equity Liaison will co-lead the council) and 8 -12 other members, who will receive stipends for their work. This is an advisory committee that will evaluate and give feedback on the district's culture, climate, equity, and belonging work and give input on the formation of the next year's annual plan initiatives. The committee will meet monthly, and the members will offer feedback on various aspects of our strategic plan initiatives through their participation in meetings and work outside meetings. Each member is expected to contribute directly to one or more initiatives in support of the Equity Liaisons. Initial appointment is for two years.

Qualifications:

1. New Trier faculty and / or support staff member.
2. Passionate and demonstrated commitment to advancing the district's equity and belonging goals related to race, gender, gender identity, innate ability, sexual orientation, religion, and other forms of identity.
3. Possess the ability to be receptive and open to multiple perspectives, including those that are different from one's personal beliefs.
4. Excellent communication and interpersonal skills with the ability to collaborate with all members of the council.
5. Ability to attend meetings before and/or after school.

Responsibilities:

1. Understand and give feedback to the Equity Liaisons and Administration on all aspects of the District's strategic plan goals, Annual Plan initiatives, and ongoing work in the Culture, Climate, Equity, and Belonging framework.
2. Assist directly in at least one aspect of our equity work, such as developing and/or reviewing materials for monthly observances and department equity goals.
3. Identify and promote the parts of our culture that enhance learning and a sense of belonging, such as our dedication to service, compassion, critical thinking, and empathy.
4. Attend monthly meetings to be held before and/or after school.
5. Facilitate two way communication with their department and other areas as needed.

6. Assist Equity Liaisons in preparing for presentations, including Board and Staff meetings.
7. Attend suggested and/or mandatory professional development.
8. Participate in summer 2024 work to be prepared to kick off the year.
9. Prioritize the needs and best interest of students.

Title: [INSERT NAME] Affinity Group Co-Sponsor
Location: Northfield OR Winnetka Campus
Compensation: Category I Stipend (prorated to start date)
Supervisor: Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Overview: The purpose is to provide an opportunity for students to receive support, in a safe environment, with others that share similar experiences or backgrounds. Research indicates students that have an opportunity to engage in a supportive environment at school show an increased ability to function and connect to the academic experience.

The Student Affinity Group sponsor facilitates the building of community amongst the members of the affinity group. The sponsor will host events, collaborate with other Affinity Group Sponsors to promote diversity, celebrate culture and heritage, raise awareness, and build community within the student group.

Qualifications:

1. New Trier faculty member.
2. Preference will be given to applicants who identify the same as the students in the affinity group and/or has personal experience with or knowledge of the needs of this population.
3. Commitment to consistently creating a brave, welcoming space and offering uplifting support to students, especially those grappling with negative experiences, fostering and modeling an environment of resilience and encouragement.
4. Demonstrates a commitment to New Trier's mission, values, and a sensitivity and care for students.
5. Has participated in or has a willingness to participate in New Trier equity professional development.

Responsibilities:

1. Collaborate with co-sponsor to plan and facilitate affinity group meetings. .
2. Support the student affinity group by promoting a collaborative, inclusive environment and build community within the student group.
3. Facilitate sharing of lived experiences, invite group celebration and support.
4. Assist students in processing difficult topics, issues, discussions, and provide resources.
5. Meet with student group on a weekly basis; sponsor attendance is mandatory at all meetings. Keep records of student attendance at all meetings.
6. Maintain effective and regular communication with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction about group meetings.

7. Assist in scheduling meetings with campus administration and students, one per semester and as needed.
8. Work collaboratively with other Student Affinity Group Sponsors to plan, promote and host events that support the mission of New Trier High School.
9. Attend mandatory sponsor training, possibly in the summer or start of the school year.

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