

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Regular Meeting

February 16, 2021

Board Approves Winnetka Campus Academic and Athletic Project

New Trier will break ground this December on a project to renovate and replace aging buildings on the East Side of the Winnetka Campus with new athletic and academic spaces that will expand student opportunities for generations to come without the need for a referendum.

Following more than a year-long study, the Board approved a plan to replace the 1928 Gates Gymnasium and 1925 Boiler Plant - both inflexible spaces with high maintenance costs that do not adequately meet student needs - with a new multipurpose facility within the boundaries of Essex Road and Trevian Way. The project is scheduled to be completed by the opening of the 2023-2024 school year.

When finished the new facility will benefit every student through Kinetic Wellness classes and the new academic spaces as well as the thousands of student-athletes in New Trier's Athletics program and the community through New Trier Extension classes. Highlights of the project include:

- **New Academic Spaces:** 12 new classroom spaces, which would both replace inadequate spaces on the East Side of the campus and keep classroom counts level in the long term as small, outdated classrooms are renovated and expanded into larger classrooms during the ongoing modernization of North and Tower Buildings
- **New Competition, Auxiliary Gyms and Indoor Track:** New multi-use competition gym with flexible, welcoming, and ADA-accessible space, new auxiliary gyms, and a 6-lane, 160-meter track to support the Kinetic Wellness and Athletics programs
- **New Weight and Strength/Conditioning Facilities:** Unified and expanded strength and conditioning and weight space, used by KW classes, Athletics and New Trier Extension
- **New Climbing Wall and High Ropes Course:** A new climbing wall and high ropes course, providing additional space for this popular student program
- **Improved Security and Accessibility:** Two new welcoming, accessible and secure entrances for students and visitors, enhanced student supervision, building isolation and fire sprinklers, and better connections to the rest of the campus
- **Improved Maintenance and Energy Efficiency:** Replaces two of the most dilapidated and antiquated buildings with new spaces that are more efficient to maintain and operate; District will seek LEED certification for the new facility

The project will maintain the same amount of parking at the Winnetka Campus and a design aesthetic consistent with the rest of the campus. The full Athletic and KW program will continue to be offered during construction.

The estimated cost of the project is approximately \$75 million, which includes all direct and indirect costs and a 10% contingency. Associate Superintendent Chris Johnson explained that the majority of the project will be funded by alternate revenue bond proceeds with annual debt service payments of approximately \$3.1 million from the existing District revenue sources. The District also will use \$14.5 million from bond proceeds through the debt service extension base portion of the existing tax levy and \$8-12 million from district reserves. This funding model, which has been used at many peer schools for similar projects, will allow the District to take advantage of historically low interest rates and maintain its strong financial position.

The Facilities Steering Committee and Finance Committee oversaw the development of the potential plans. Stakeholder groups including the Booster Club, neighbors of the Winnetka Campus, the New Trier Parents' Association, coaches, students, and faculty also offered input. A page dedicated to project updates will be featured on the New Trier website.

The full presentation can be found [here](#).

District Presents 2021-2022 Schedule Options, Survey Results

New Trier is recommending moving to a rotating Blue/Green block schedule for the 2021-2022 school year in an effort to expand the depth of learning opportunities, reduce student stress, and provide a consistent schedule that works in any environment - hybrid, remote, or fully in person - if needed.

Northfield Campus Principal Paul Waechtler shared the results of parent, student, and staff surveys regarding three schedule options: the traditional nine-period schedule, a rotating Blue/Green block schedule, and a blended block/traditional schedule.

Even before the pandemic, New Trier had begun studying different schedule options as a goal in its strategic plan, *New Trier 2030*. The traditional schedule of nine 40-minute periods every day with the potential for homework in every class each night had been identified as playing a significant role in student stress. Teachers also were looking for ways to provide more depth of discussion and learning than possible in 40-minute periods. A schedule committee looked at ways to address these issues while still providing students with the same course selection options as a traditional schedule.

The survey showed a clear preference from students and parents for the rotating Blue/Green block schedule, in which classes would meet every other day for 80-minute periods. Staff members were almost evenly split between preferring the rotating Blue/Green block schedule and the traditional nine-period daily schedule.

Waechtler said the school has been working with departments that had concerns with the block schedule, including Science and Special Education. For Science, which now employs a double period on lab days, the block schedule would have science meet every day - with two days of a full block for labs and three days of a half-block (40 minutes) for classroom-based learning. Those half blocks would allow flexibility for students with IEPs to attend resource seminars, for all students to make up tests or meet with a teacher or peers, and for elective and other departments to offer 3-day-a-week classes opposite the science half-blocks.

For Special Education, students assigned to Resource Seminar three times a week would have the same number of contact days, while other students could use the half-block opposite their science lecture days along with one other period to have Resource Seminar every day of the week.

All faculty would engage in summer professional development on best practices for keeping students engaged during longer blocks. Waechtler noted that engagement and the ability to move students through multiple types of activities will look much different in an in-person environment than it does in a hybrid or remote learning environment.

The rotating Blue/Green block embeds lunch in a class period instead of making lunch its own period, meaning students could still take the same number of courses as they did in a nine-period schedule except for the approximately 1% of students who have no lunch period. The school is looking at options for those students and to address the conflicts that occur for students taking capstone courses that may only be offered during a single period, particularly in Performing Arts. These conflicts may occur under any schedule configuration, Waechtler noted, and the school works with families every year to resolve issues.

The District will come back to the Board in March as it continues to refine and evaluate the rotating block schedule and potential staff professional development options including a weekly late start or additional paired late start/early dismissal days. The full board presentation can be found [here](#).

[Update on School Reopening: COVID Cases, Option for More Student Attendance, Saliva Screening, Travel Guidance](#)

New Trier is continuing to take strong precautions to allow in-person learning and activities to continue amid a spike in student COVID-19 cases, even while the school considers ways to allow more students to attend in-person learning, Superintendent Paul Sally told the Board.

[Covid Cases and Quarantines](#)

Earlier this month, New Trier saw a significant increase in the number of COVID-19 cases reported among students, mostly traced back to larger off-campus gatherings.

That led an increase in quarantines, particularly as sports resumed and the school needed to quarantine entire teams out of the utmost precaution.

While the case and quarantine rates are slowly dropping after that spike, Sally said the school will continue to stress the urgency of students staying home if they attend large gatherings, social distancing, mask wearing, and answering the Ruvna health screener honestly. Those who disregard mitigation efforts will face school and extracurricular consequences.

Parent Option for More In-Person Instruction

Following the District's move to allowing up to 50% capacity beginning with second semester, attendance has increased to about 40% at the Northfield Campus and as high as 30% at the Winnetka Campus, with a drop-off last week following increasing quarantines.

While the Northfield Campus is approaching capacity as it brings in more students, the Winnetka Campus has room for more students to attend daily. As a result, New Trier will offer parents of sophomores through seniors the opportunity to fill out a request form for their students to attend in-person classes 4 days a week (Tuesday-Friday) for the remainder of third quarter, which ends March 26. The school will consider those requests against capacity limits, and selected students will start attending 4 days a week on March 2.

A separate email will be sent to parents of sophomores through seniors later this week explaining how they can request the additional in-person days.

Saliva Screening Drop-Off Day Changes for Students in Athletics, Activities

Participation in New Trier's saliva screening program remains extremely strong, and District officials thanked students and parents for their commitment to the program.

Due to New Trier's high extracurricular participation and the current guidance to students in athletics and activities to drop off on Sunday, the District has found an imbalance in when samples are turned in - with 78% provided on Sunday/Monday alone. The program is more effective when samples are screened in a more distributed manner, particularly because COVID exposure on a weekend may not show up on a saliva test until later in the week.

To address this imbalance, New Trier will no longer require a separate extracurricular drop-off day. Instead, all students must drop off samples based on the first letter of their last names - A-K on Sunday/Monday and L-Z on Tuesday/Wednesday. The Monday and Wednesday drop-off deadlines will also be extended until noon. Parents will be notified of these changes in an email later this week, and they will be posted on the [saliva screening website](#).

Cook County Travel Guidance

New Trier continues to follow the Cook County Department of Public Health's guidance for travel. This guidance has been updated several times, including with a recent change that recommends a 10-day quarantine or a negative PCR test for students or their adult travel partners dated no sooner than 72 hours before a return to Cook County. Cook County is now aligned with [Chicago's Travel Order](#). Parents received an email earlier today on this new guidance. Public health officials continue to discourage non-essential travel.

A link to the full reopening presentation can be found [here](#).

Other News from the February 16 Meeting:

- The Board approved a recommendation that there be no increase in regular student fees for the 2021-2022 school year. Students pay general, activity, and Parents' Association fees totaling \$246, and those fees will remain the same in 2021-2022. The Board also approved a 5% increase in the optional student parking fee for seniors, based on the annual 5% increase charged to the District by the Village of Winnetka to lease those spaces.

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/>

Information about Board of Education members, upcoming meetings, agendas, minutes, and other documents are available at <http://www.newtrier.k12.il.us/boardofeducation/>