

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting

January 11, 2021

Board Reviews Plans for Potential East Side Academic and Athletic Project

A proposal to renovate and replace aging buildings on the East Side of the Winnetka Campus would create new athletic and academic spaces and expand opportunities for students without the need for a referendum, District officials told the Board as they presented initial drawings and cost estimates for a project that could be completed by the start of the 2023-2024 school year.

The District has been studying potential options for the 1928 Gates Gymnasium and 1925 Boiler Plant - both inflexible spaces with high maintenance costs that do not adequately meet student needs - for more than a year as part of its 15-Year Facilities Planning process. Parameters of that study included using district reserves and the existing tax levy to invest taxpayer dollars in a fiscally responsible way without asking for additional tax money through a referendum.

After considering five options ranging from minimal renovations to the replacement of all buildings on the East Side of the campus, the Facilities Steering Committee recommended presenting the Board with a potential project that would replace the Gates Gymnasium with a modern, multifunctional athletic space within the existing boundaries of Essex Road and Trevian Way; create a suite of new academic classrooms; build a new, six-lane indoor track to replace the small basement track now in use; and maintain the same amount of parking and a design aesthetic consistent with the rest of the campus. District officials explained the primary goals of the project include:

- Addressing inadequately sized, inflexible, and antiquated spaces built when the school had $\frac{1}{4}$ of the current students enrolled.
- Strengthening New Trier's academic, athletic, and wellness programs to meet the needs of current and future students.
- Allowing New Trier students to have comparable experiences and facilities to peer schools and maintaining the community's draw for families buying homes.
- Continuing the successful approach, design, and functionality that occurred on the West Side of the Winnetka Campus.
- Investing taxpayer funds in improving the student experience rather than maintenance costs.

Other benefits include better connections between the East Side and the rest of the campus, including a direct entrance to the pool, ADA accessibility, LEED-certified spaces with energy efficiency and more natural light, improved security, and an athletic facility that can easily convert for many different athletic and wellness activities, rather than the fixed options of the Gates Gymnasium. District officials reported that this one of the most heavily used and visited parts of the campus, and that improvements will benefit thousands of students and visitors each day. The full presentation, which includes initial drawings of potential new spaces, can be found [here](#).

The estimated cost of the project is approximately \$75 million, which includes all direct and indirect costs as well as a 10% construction contingency. The bulk of the project would be funded by bond proceeds with annual debt service payments of approximately \$3.1 million from the existing District tax levy. The District also would use \$14.5 million from bond proceeds through the debt service extension base portion of the existing tax levy and \$10 million from reserves. Elizabeth Hennessy, a financial advisor with Raymond James, told the Board that this funding model, which has been used at many peer schools for similar projects, would allow the District to maintain its strong financial position into the near future.

The Board's Facilities Steering Committee and Finance Committee have overseen the development of the potential plans. Stakeholder groups including the Booster Club, neighbors of the Winnetka Campus, the New Trier Parents' Association, coaches, students, faculty, and staff have also offered input.

The Board will continue its discussion of the potential project at its January 19 regular meeting, with a possible vote at its February meeting. If the Board approves moving forward, the project could break ground as early as the end of 2021 and be completed by the opening of the 2023-2024 school year. Athletic Director Augie Fontanetta said all New Trier sports would continue to offer their full programs during the construction period.

[Update on School Reopening: Mandatory Saliva Screening, Vaccines](#)

New Trier saw extremely high compliance as it shifted to mandatory COVID-19 saliva screening for students after winter break, with 95% of students on campus turning in a saliva sample that week, Superintendent Paul Sally told the Board.

Sally thanked families for their participation, acknowledging that it can be difficult to begin a new routine, particularly after a long break. He noted that the District has followed up with families who forgot their screening, and he expects the number to increase in the coming weeks.

The District sees no hurdles to moving to its Two-Track (50%) Hybrid Learning model at the start of second semester on January 26, Sally said. Under that model, students with last names A-K will attend full days in person every Tuesday and Wednesday, while students with last names L-Z will attend in person every Thursday and Friday.

Sally also said the District plans to analyze attendance patterns on both campuses for two weeks after the semester begins to see if in-person opportunities can be expanded even further. The maximum capacity on each campus under health guidelines is 50%, but on the Winnetka Campus in particular, the number of students opting to stay home could mean more chances for hybrid students to come to school.

The Superintendent also updated the Board on potential plans to use the Northfield Campus as a distribution point for the COVID-19 vaccine. New Trier has been working closely with Cook County and local school districts and villages to share resources and planning. School staff are included in the next phase of vaccine distribution, which could begin in February. Sally said the District will be looking for community volunteers to help with the effort locally and in greater Cook County.

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

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/>

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