

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Meeting

November 16, 2020

Update on Reopening and Operational Plan for 2020-2021

Following the Board's directive earlier this month to reopen New Trier for in-person instruction, the District successfully returned to the 25% hybrid model on November 10 and began its full COVID-19 saliva screening program the same week. Superintendent Paul Sally and other administrators presented an update on the District's reopening, the screening program, and plans moving forward.

During the eight days of in-person instruction in October and November so far under the 25% hybrid model, student attendance averaged approximately 22.5% at the Northfield Campus and 17.5% at the Winnetka Campus. Attendance below the capacity threshold is expected - and has been the experience of other schools that have reopened - for a number of reasons including student quarantines, typical absences, and family decisions to stay remote. These attendance numbers can help inform decisions about bringing more students on campus.

COVID-19 Saliva Screening Program

The week of November 9 marked a transition from the pilot COVID-19 Screening Program to full implementation. The District tested nearly 2,000 samples, with 15 presumptive positives for a positivity rate for all screened samples of 0.76%. A key purpose of the screening is to allow the District to prevent previously undetected carriers of COVID-19 from coming on campus and also to help prevent those who are unknowingly infected from spreading COVID-19 to their family, friends, and community. The District's program uses RT-LAMP technology, a well-researched RNA amplification process that is more sensitive than rapid tests that rely on antigen detection. While New Trier's screening is considered non-diagnostic because samples are collected at home and tested in a lab outside of a medical facility, this type of screening has been validated and used worldwide for its accuracy and sensitivity.

The participation rate for those who came on campus was 86% of students and 74% of staff. Sally said that is a good rate for the program's first week as students and staff got signed up, picked up kits, and got used to the times and days to drop off samples. However, he said the target is at least 90%, and the District is looking at ways to increase participation.

District COVID-19 Dashboard and Reopening Ladder

When the District established its Reopening Ladder and Operational Plan at the beginning of the school year, much was still unknown about the risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools. In the months since, the experience of schools in New Trier's area and across the country has shown that in-school transmission risk is minimal to none if strong mitigation measures are in place. Those measures include mask wearing, reduced capacity to allow for social distancing, frequent cleaning and handwashing, and enhanced ventilation and air filtration. In addition, New Trier is the first area school to provide weekly COVID-19 screening, which adds another layer of mitigation.

Given the evolving information and successful mitigation measures at New Trier and other schools, the District's Reopening Advisory Board (RAB) began discussions last week to establish a new COVID-19 Dashboard and Reopening Ladder. One important goal is to be clear on the dashboard about what actions will be taken when thresholds are not met. Some important metrics in addition to community metrics include: District PPE supply, student/staff compliance with mitigation measures, student/staff quarantine levels, staffing levels, COVID-19 screening participation rate and positivity rate, and COVID-19 transmission and outbreaks.

[New Trier Faculty Teaching New Trier Students](#)

Sally emphasized that the goal of both the District and the Faculty Association is to have New Trier teachers teaching New Trier students. The District's teachers have developed relationships, excellent curricula, and have spent years in many cases shaping the academic and extracurricular programs that make New Trier unique.

Renee Zoladz, Director of Human Resources, explained that some teachers with significant health issues or who care for those who are vulnerable to COVID-19 have been granted medical accommodations to teach remotely. Other teachers whose own children are in schools that have gone all-remote have worked with the District to come into school a few days a week while juggling child care. On a given day, 78% of teachers are teaching in school.

The Faculty Association continues to work with the District on solutions for more teachers to attend in person, such as supervised rooms for their elementary school-aged children to virtually attend their own schools on both campuses. It is important to work on creative solutions together, Zoladz said, given the investment New Trier has made in its teachers and their investment in students and knowledge and expertise in New Trier's curricula. Zoladz also noted that there is a teacher and substitute shortage in the state, and that finding high-quality teachers able to come to New Trier to work in person right now would be difficult to impossible as well as disruptive to classes and students.

After extensive discussion, the Board decided to schedule a special meeting next week to review another week of data on the District's 25% hybrid model as well as feedback from the Reopening Advisory Board. The full Board presentation can be found [here](#).

New Trier Urges Safety During Thanksgiving and Upcoming Holidays

Superintendent Paul Sally urged the New Trier community to celebrate upcoming holidays and breaks safely to help prevent the continued spread of COVID-19, which in turn can help keep New Trier open for in-person instruction.

State and federal health officials say the best way to keep safe this Thanksgiving, when the state and country are seeing the highest COVID-19 numbers to date, is to celebrate only with members of your own household. They suggest virtual gatherings with extended family and friends and creative ways to alter traditions, such as dropping off favorite dishes at each other's doorsteps and then eating together via video from the safety of everyone's own homes.

While gatherings with those outside your household are discouraged, the Centers for Disease Control has offered some tips to increase safety if you do celebrate with others, including:

- Wear a mask at all times except when eating and drinking
- Stay at least 6 feet away from others who do not live with you
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Bring your own food, drinks, plates, cups, and utensils
- Eat your meal outside if possible
- Limit the number of guests
- Set expectations with guests/hosts ahead of time
- Open windows if you are celebrating indoors and limit time with others indoors

Other News from the November 16 Meeting:

- The Board approved the District's tax levy for 2020. The levy funds the second half of the 2020-21 school year and the first half of the 2021-22 school year, and the revenue it generates funds New Trier's broad curriculum, student services, and extracurricular programs that are the cornerstone of New Trier's reputation for excellence. The District's ability to increase its tax extension is limited by the Property Tax Extension Limitation Act to the Consumer Price Index or 5%, whichever is less. The 2019 CPI was 2.3% and was used in the calculation of the tax extension (exclusive of new property). With this levy, the New Trier portion of the property tax bill is expected to rise by 2.3% on average for property owners. The levy memo 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://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/>