

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Special Board of Education Meetings

November 24 and December 1, 2020

Board Endorses Weekly In-Person Instruction for Second Semester

The New Trier Board of Education voted in favor of a plan to offer weekly in-person instruction to hybrid students starting in the second semester and to continue to safely increase the number of students on campus gradually by bringing in more struggling students during the remaining weeks of first semester.

The Board's directive came following two special meetings and discussion about the benefits and limitations of New Trier's one-track (25%) and two-track (50%) hybrid models; student, parent, and staff input on those models; results from the school's COVID-19 saliva screening program; expected spikes in COVID-19 cases following recent and upcoming holidays; the success of New Trier's mitigation measures; and a review of capacity and attendance rates at both campuses.

The Board approved Superintendent Paul Sally's recommendation to continue New Trier's one-track hybrid model through the first semester paired with an increase in the number of struggling students offered weekly in-person instruction over the remaining weeks of the semester. Parents have the chance to request additional support for students who are having significant difficulties with remote learning. More information on that process can be found [here](#).

With COVID-19 spikes anticipated around the holidays, many of New Trier's peer high schools and some sender elementary schools are taking adaptive pauses until mid-January. New Trier plans to continue to offer its one-track hybrid model throughout first semester. Second semester, which begins on January 26, offers a natural time of change for students and teachers, gets the school past the expected COVID-19 spikes, and lets the District collect more data on its COVID-19 screening program and internal metrics to make any needed adjustments.

Under the second semester plan, most classes would increase from 1-5 students to 6-12 students in person. Hybrid students will attend two full days of school every week. Board members made it clear that they want to provide more peer-to-peer and teacher-to-student opportunities to benefit students' mental health and learning and to improve hybrid instruction by offering more balance between remote and in-class students.

Participation in COVID-19 Saliva Screening Program

New Trier has experienced a smooth rollout and high participation in its COVID-19 saliva screening program for students and staff. In the first two full weeks of screening before Thanksgiving break, more than 4,000 students and staff members were screened, and the District was able to identify 24 presumptive positive cases.

Board members said they were pleased with the ability of the school to exclude presumptive positive cases from campus and are interested in getting closer to full participation from students and staff. During their December 14 meeting, the Board will further discuss making screening mandatory for all on-campus students and staff. The screening already is mandatory for students participating in extracurricular activities. The Board and Administration also discussed allowing all students registered for in-person instruction to screen weekly, regardless if they are scheduled to be on campus that week.

Families who have not yet signed up and plan to send students to in-person instruction should fill out the online [COVID-19 Screening Form](#). Current screening drop-off days, times, and locations along with an FAQ on the screening program are available on the [COVID-19 Screening web page](#).

[District COVID-19 Dashboard](#)

Given the evolving information about COVID-19 transmission in schools, successful mitigation measures at New Trier and peer districts, and the impact of saliva screening, the District's Reopening Advisory Board (RAB) reviewed additional COVID-19 metrics and thresholds to help the District to decide the level of in-person instruction it should offer.

Sally presented the Board with a new metrics table that includes internal metrics such as the weekly presumptive positivity rate on saliva screening and any cases of school transmission; quarantine metrics for staff/students; building metrics such as PPE availability, cleaning procedures, and mask compliance; capacity limits and health department guidance; and external metrics such as Township/area COVID-19 positivity rates and new cases per 100,000. The full memo, including the new metrics, can be found [here](#).

[Update on 15-Year Facilities Framework](#)

During the November 24 special meeting, Associate Superintendent Chris Johnson provided the Board with an update on the District's 15-Year Facilities Framework, including renovations completed this summer, planned work for the summer of 2021, and the continued study of options for the east side of the Winnetka Campus.

The District has been using a phased approach to facilities improvements that aligns improvements with the District's strategic plan, uses existing revenue sources, explores alternative funding such as bonds and fundraising, and does not require a taxpayer referendum in the foreseeable future. The framework balances priorities that include

renovating older classrooms on both campuses to meet current standards, addressing student needs in Athletics and Kinetic Wellness, enhancing school safety, increasing energy efficiency, and improving mechanical and building systems.

In the summer of 2020, the District completed a number of projects within the 15-Year Framework. At the Northfield Campus, the library was renovated to include a media center space and technology help desk, and the B Building roof was replaced. On the Winnetka Campus, the District continued renovations on the 3rd floor to create 7 classrooms that meet modern standards and replaced multiple roofs. Both campuses employed additional energy conservation measures and added security cameras.

Approved projects for the summer of 2021 include additional classroom renovations at the Winnetka Campus to create 4 new standard classrooms and 9 smaller classrooms, renovations to classrooms in the D Building and new gym partitions at the Northfield Campus, technology and furniture upgrades at the Northfield Campus, and concrete, roof, and window work.

Johnson said the Facilities Steering Committee and the District have continued to study the potential for a larger project on the east side of the Winnetka Campus to address aging and inadequate academic and athletic/KW facilities. This potential project would include replacing the almost 100-year-old student athletic facilities with modern spaces that support the needs of students and have significantly reduced maintenance costs. It also would include removing the 1920s boiler plant structure, which has aging steam boilers that have largely been decommissioned. Any potential project would include a no-referendum commitment, Johnson said, and the Finance Committee is looking at financial models for funding options using existing and available resources.

Next steps include a review of design options, engagement with Winnetka Campus neighbors, the village of Winnetka, and parents, students, and staff, a Board of Education discussion, and a potential decision. The full 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/>

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