

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Special Meeting

October 13, 2020

Board Approves Saliva-Based COVID-19 Screening for Students, Staff

New Trier will provide voluntary weekly COVID-19 saliva screening for students and staff under a process that can return same-day results. One goal of the testing is to reduce community transmission, which could allow for more uninterrupted in-person instruction at New Trier.

The Board approved a contract with SafeGuard Screening, LLC to provide weekly RT-LAMP surveillance screening, which lets participants collect samples at home and return them to the school for lab screening. The school will offer the screening free of charge to families and staff.

Associate Superintendent Chris Johnson said the screening does not take the place of school's health and safety measures such as mask wearing, social distancing, and enhanced cleaning. Instead, it is an additional tool that can help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the community by identifying individuals who may have COVID-19 before they show symptoms and potentially transmit the virus to others.

The screening tool is non-diagnostic, meaning those with a presumptive positive must have it confirmed through a PCR test from their doctor or state testing center. However, SafeGuard Screening reports that it has not had any false positives to date.

New Trier chose SafeGuard Screening after reviewing screening options from the University of Illinois and other commercial providers. SafeGuard was able to commit to getting screening up and running by next month and had the lowest cost of \$11 per sample. The screening was adapted by Dr. Ed Campbell and is already in use at his school district, LaGrange 102.

New Trier conducted a pilot using samples from selected students and staff during the week of October 5. That pilot went smoothly, with same-day results and no presumptive positive tests.

Students and staff who opt in for screening will receive several sample tubes and instructions for collecting saliva samples at home, which is a quick process that involves spitting into the tube and then putting it into a bag and sanitizing the bag. The tubes will have bar codes to protect each participant's confidentiality while allowing school health personnel to follow up with presumptive positive cases.

Next steps include determining the best testing schedule, procedures for sample drop offs at each campus, distribution of supplies, and communication materials for families and staff. The District also must decide whether to offer the screening to all students and staff or only those who have opted for in-person work, instruction, and activities. The overall cost is estimated between \$561,000 and \$1.26 million, depending on which option is chosen, the duration of the screening program, and the participation rate. The full Board presentation can be found [here](#).

Superintendent Provides Update on Pause in Hybrid Learning

Superintendent Paul Sally updated the Board on the metrics that led New Trier to pause 25 percent hybrid instruction this week and called for the community to work together to drive down COVID-19 rates without shaming individuals for contracting the easily spread virus.

Sally noted that the pause came from an increase in overall cases per 100,000 in both New Trier Township and the larger area where staff live - and not from a single incident or gathering.

“We did not pause because a set of kids have COVID,” Sally said. “This is much bigger than any social gathering.”

Sally said that while all community members should avoid large gatherings and practice common-sense safety measures such as mask wearing and social distancing, all indications are that New Trier families are doing the right thing when they find out students have COVID-19: reporting the cases, quarantining, and assisting in contact tracing to limit the spread. He said it is counterproductive for community members to blame each other for rising numbers.

“I want all of us to do our best, but let’s all of us support each other and not let our anger and frustration get the best of us,” Sally said.

As of Tuesday the metrics in both the Township and staff ZIP codes were still increasing. The District and the [Reopening Advisory Board](#) will continue to watch the numbers throughout the week to see if it will be possible to resume hybrid instruction next week, and families and staff will be notified as soon as a decision is made. Sally added that he was hopeful that the weekly saliva screening, when implemented, may help the District minimize the need for pauses like this in the future.

Despite the disappointment over the need to pause hybrid learning, Sally added, New Trier continues its commitment to keeping a path open to in-person learning.

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.

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