

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Regular Meeting

September 20, 2021

New Trier to Launch New Website over Fall Break

A dynamic new home page, simpler navigation, and better search functionality are among the improvements users will see when New Trier launches its new website next month following Fall Break.

Leaders from the Technology and Communications departments told the Board about the work they have done for more than a year since the District selected Blackboard, a leader in K-12 website development and hosting, as its vendor for a new website project.

The District began its search for a new website vendor in December 2019, guided by the Community Engagement framework of the strategic plan, *New Trier 2030*. The District's current website is more than seven years old, and users have identified issues with navigation, search functionality, and inflexible back-end templates that are difficult for internal users to update.

Based on stakeholder feedback, the District set a list of priorities including integration of the District's calendar and other systems; a dynamic home page that tells the District's story through news stories, videos, graphics, and social media; easy navigation for all stakeholder groups; and streamlined content management. New Trier also wanted to improve accessibility for all users, adding automatic monitoring for ADA accessibility and a translation function.

A District committee scheduled demonstrations with several website vendors and ultimately chose Blackboard for its cost effectiveness and alignment with New Trier's priorities. For more than a year, the committee has been working with Blackboard to refine the website's design and technical specifications. In addition, District Technology, Communications, and Athletics staff have been consulting with departments on migrating information from the current website to the new website, assuring a seamless transition when the new website launches on October 12.

New Trier will begin preparing users for the rollover in the coming weeks with announcements on the current website and on social media, as well as through a short video walking users through the changes and features of the new website. More information can be found in the [New Website Presentation](#).

Critical Thinking Presentation Series Begins with Social Studies

In October 2020, the Board of Education adopted New Trier's *Critical Thinking and Civil Discourse Statement*, which commits to an open exchange of ideas "to develop critical thinkers who can navigate a complex world through civil discourse, respectful inquiry, engaged listening, and open consideration of multiple perspectives."

This school year, the District is presenting a series of reports to the Board to demonstrate how teachers foster a culture of inquiry and critical thinking using high-quality materials and lessons. The Social Studies Department began this series with examples of how they develop these skills in students across courses and levels.

Social Studies Department Chair Michael Christensen and Department Coordinator Dean Pinos explained that teachers work collaboratively in course committees to create curricula that develop skills and knowledge essential to each content area while also adhering to Board policy and state mandates. In Social Studies, overarching goals include developing historical thinking skills, helping students navigate complex historical situations and narratives, helping students develop critical thinking skills to engage deeply, analytically and civilly in sometimes controversial issues, and modeling good citizenship on a national and global level.

Teacher David Heineman walked the Board through a U.S. History lesson using primary sources from key players in the American Revolution. Heineman removes the dates, authors, and titles of articles written from 1764 through 1775 and has students arrange them by what they believe are the oldest to newest based on the changing language and opinions about the rights of British colonists. The lesson is meant to help students understand contextualization, chronological thinking, and continuity and change over time.

In World History and World Studies, teacher Laura Malia showed how a guiding question like “What are the forces that shape the political, religious, and philosophical traditions in ancient societies?” can connect students’ current life experience with those of ancient history. She then demonstrated how the same article about the influence of geography on culture in ancient societies could engage students in critical thinking across all course levels, modeling these skills by having students annotate the article or answer questions to contribute to small and large group discussions.

Teacher Aileen Geary told the Board how she and other teachers approach controversial issues through a series of steps, including assuming multiple perspectives, helping students understand context and generate their own questions, breaking down complex issues into discrete pieces, avoiding dismissing other perspectives, and making room for students to exercise their own judgment once they have engaged in the process.

A discussion of the examination of slavery in the New York Times’ 1619 Project, for example, includes source materials from multiple perspectives such as a senator and some historians who challenge the project’s thesis, along with material from the project itself. Students are asked how they define patriotism and the place of patriotism in history classes, and then make their own assessment of The 1619 Project citing the different perspectives they have read.

Christensen said the Social Studies Department is proud to create civil civic spaces that help students grow in critical thinking, clarity of thought and expression, open mindedness, and respect for facts and for other points of view. Click for the [Social Studies Presentation](#).

Board Approves FY2022 Budget

The Board approved a \$121 million operating budget for fiscal year 2022 that will fund the District’s deep and broad curriculum, robust extracurricular program, and individualized student support systems including the Adviser Program, Post-High School Counseling, and other academic and social-emotional services.

The budget is balanced and will continue the District's ability to fund its programs without the need for an operating rate referendum. The District last asked taxpayers to increase its operating rate in 2003, committing to not propose another tax rate referendum for five years. That commitment has now been extended more than 17 years, with no need for a referendum in the foreseeable future due to the District's strong fiscal stewardship.

The District is able to provide its students with continued award-winning opportunities thanks to the support of Township residents. Property taxes account for 92 percent of the District's revenue. This year's budget includes a 25 percent increase in federal revenue, largely due to COVID-19 reimbursement funds. The District anticipates fewer COVID-related expenses this year and will continue to seek reimbursement where possible.

The District's largest source of expenditures is salaries and benefits at 79 percent. Community members have consistently named attracting and maintaining a high-quality teaching staff as a top priority. District staff help provide opportunities for students not just in the classroom but in clubs, activities, sports, and performing arts. About 97 percent of teachers have a master's degree or higher, far exceeding the state average, and 80 percent of teachers have achieved Master Teacher or Leader Teacher status.

The budget also includes transfers of funds for the District's 15-Year Facilities Plan, which has included significant renovations at both campuses, and funding for the Winnetka Campus East Side Academic and Athletic Project, including estimated construction costs for the first phase of the project.

The District has won numerous awards for its fiscal management and transparency in reporting, including the 17th consecutive Certificate of Excellence Award in Financial Reporting and Certificate of Achievement Award in Financial Reporting from two separate government finance organizations. Click for the [2022 Budget Presentation](#).

Other News from the September 20 Meeting:

- Superintendent Paul Sally updated the Board on the District's ongoing safety and COVID-19 mitigation efforts, including Shield testing, masking, staying home when ill, contact tracing, and social distancing. New Trier has reported no in-school COVID transmission, and COVID cases among students and staff remain low, with high vaccination rates in both populations. Click for the [2021-2022 Operational Update](#).
- Associate Superintendent Chris Johnson told the Board the East Side Academic and Athletic Project remains on pace to break ground in December. The District's architecture firm and construction management company are coordinating final design details for upcoming bid packages. The District also is working to refine its cost estimate based on a more detailed set of plans and the latest labor and commodity costs, with an eye toward managing costs with alternate designs or materials in upcoming bid packages.
- The Board welcomed five foreign exchange students, who shared their excitement about New Trier via a video introduction. This year's class includes two students from Italy, two from Germany, and one from Spain. Assistant Principal Athena Arvanitis said the school was happy to resume its partnership with AFS following a COVID-related hiatus of the exchange program during the prior school year.

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/>