

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Regular Meeting

May 15, 2023

Board Welcomes Two New Members, Says Goodbye to Two Others

Two new members officially joined the Board of Education after winning last month's election, as two others left after ending their terms.

The Board welcomed Courtney McDonough and Sally Pofcher, who along with incumbent Board Vice President Jean Hahn were elected to three open seats for a four-year term on the Board.

McDonough, a former teacher and Child Life Specialist at UCSF Children's Hospital, spent the last 10 years as a Director of Education at Compass Health Center in Northbrook. A Winnetka resident, she has two children at New Trier and one at Washburne and has been an active volunteer in parent associations at all of her children's schools, including serving on the Class of 2025 NTPA Board.

Pofcher, currently CEO of Shutterfly, has served as a partner at McKinsey, CEO at PaperSource and Hanna Andersson, a partner at private equity firm L Catterton, and on the Boards of several businesses and youth services organizations. A Wilmette resident, she has two daughters who are New Trier graduates and one at Highcrest Middle School. Her New Trier volunteer work includes executive NTPA positions, serving on the Strategic Planning Committee, and volunteering with the Business Education program.

The new Board re-elected Keith Dronen to another term as Board President and Hahn to another term as Vice President.

Fellow Board members and administrators also thanked outgoing Board members Cathy Albrecht and Brad McLane for their years of service to New Trier. McLane, a Winnetka resident, was elected to the Board in 2019. Albrecht, a Wilmette resident, was first elected in 2015 and re-elected in 2019. She served as Board President from 2019 to 2022 and Vice President from 2018-2019.

New Trier Continues Work to Support Student Attendance

New Trier will use a number of tools next school year to improve student attendance, from developing an Attendance Handbook to providing additional support when students are at risk of becoming chronically absent, Assistant Superintendent Joanne Panopoulos told the Board.

A schoolwide Attendance Committee has met over the last few months to address an increase in chronic absenteeism at New Trier. The Illinois State Board of Education defines chronic

absenteeism as missing 10 percent or more of the school year. Students who are chronically absent miss a month of school by the end of the school year.

Last month, the school sent all families a letter about the importance of regular attendance, along with a chart of parent-excused absences for the year by class period. This letter, suggested by parent focus groups as well as the committee, was part of a first effort to raise awareness about the issue and build a partnership with parents.

The attendance plan for the 2023-2024 school year will emphasize that attendance is a schoolwide concern that requires a schoolwide solution, Assistant Principals Gail Gamrath and Scott Williams said. Critical components of that plan include student accountability, parent partnership, regular communication, supportive measures, an understanding of the impact of absences on the learning environment, and a tiered approach to intervene with students who are at risk of chronic absence.

The District plans to communicate with students and families about the attendance plan this June and follow with a specific Attendance Handbook that will be distributed to all families in August. New Trier also will spend the next months improving its internal attendance systems to make it easier for parents and students to correct errors and to assure accurate reporting. Click for the [attendance update presentation](#).

New Trier 2030: Strategic Plan Will Soon Enter Fifth Year

Despite facing multiple years affected by the COVID pandemic, New Trier has made significant progress on its strategic plan, *New Trier 2030*, as the District prepares for strategic goal-setting in the 2023-2024 school year.

The Board of Education approved *New Trier 2030* in January 2019 after a lengthy process involving input from students, staff, families, and community members. The Board also implemented an Annual Plan structure for assessing measurable progress toward strategic goals each school year.

Superintendent Paul Sally told the Board that the first three Annual Plans were significantly disrupted by the COVID pandemic and the amount of time and resources the school needed to spend on different learning systems and keeping students and staff safe and healthy. The 2022-2023 Annual Plan was the first since the adoption of *New Trier 2030* that did not have to address pandemic disruptions and solutions.

Even so, the District has made great strides toward the many goals identified in the plan, Sally said. Some examples include:

- Creation of the Characteristics of a New Trier Graduate and a Civil Discourse and Critical Thinking statement
- Systemic changes including standardizing an online system for coursework, moving to a block schedule, and having finals before winter break
- Growth of student mental health and support systems and creation of the Freshman Success program for all freshman students
- Equity initiatives including defining a culture of belonging and recognition of monthly national observances for different groups represented at New Trier

- Leadership training for students in the Be Brave, Be Kind, Be Proud model
- Greater communications outreach to alumni and families with younger children
- Facilities work including the East Side Academic and Athletic Project and the Glencoe Transition Center; and
- Recruiting, hiring and retaining diverse and exceptional staff

Sally stressed that these are only a few examples of many initiatives the school has undertaken to move forward on its strategic goals. The Board will give feedback on a draft of the Annual Plan for 2023-2024, with approval scheduled for July. Click for the [New Trier 2030 update](#).

Other News from the May 15 Meeting

- Sarah Struebing was approved as an Assistant Principal - Graduating Class Team, effective July 1. Struebing currently serves as Director of Student Activities at Niles West High School and was previously a music teacher at Wheeling High School. She received her bachelor's degree from Illinois Wesleyan University, a master's degree from VanderCook College of Music, and a master's degree from North Park University.
- Dr. Ghana Cooper was approved as Coordinator of the Social Work Department, beginning in the 2023-2024 school year. Cooper has been a faculty member in the Social Work Department for nine years and previously worked at Chicago Public Schools, Rich Central High School, and at Children's Memorial Hospital. She received her master's degree in Social Work from the University of Illinois at Chicago and a Doctorate of Ministry from McCormick Theological Seminary.
- Stephanie Kuzmanic was approved as Athletic Coordinator and Kinetic Wellness teacher, beginning in the 2023-2024 school year. Kuzmanic is director of women's basketball operations at Illinois State University and previously was a PE/health teacher at Leyden High School. She received her bachelor's degree from Carthage College and her master's degree from Olivet Nazarene University.
- Associate Superintendent Chris Johnson updated the Board on the East Side Academic and Athletic Project, which continues to be on track and on budget for a summer opening. Contractors have made incredible progress, with interior work making the spaces come to life. Click for in-progress photos from the [construction update](#).

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 <https://www.newtrier.k12.il.us/boardofeducation>