

Parent to Parent Advice for Students Studying the Arts at New Trier

What should students and parents know about the various arts as they help plan their student's schedule? We asked some parents of current and former New Trier students who took art, debate, music, theater and dance classes what they, and their kids, wish they'd known....

Although there are discipline specific comments, a recurring theme is letting parents knowing that many arts classes are "singletons" and meet just once a day, that many arts kids choose to, or their discipline requires taking multiple electives, that some upper-level classes require a 2 period commitment each day. The options can seem overwhelming, but information and planning can go a long way for the both committed young artist and the curious explorers wanting to try something new.

About Debate:

The parent of a nationally competitive debater emphasized the many advantages to doing debate regardless of whether you compete locally or nationally (or even if you don't choose to compete). That said she noted:

1-It is really helpful to take debate as a class, not only freshman year, but every year if you want to be nationally competitive. This takes up an elective every year, and is only offered one period. But if you want to compete locally and regionally, you don't need to do class every year.

2-The survey course that exposes you to all of the different types of debate is only offered Freshman year. After that you have to choose which form of debate you are interested in and take a class that focuses on that.

3-Going to debate camp is also a key to national success (for as much as 7 weeks, but can go anywhere from 1-7. The longer you go, the more you will learn).

4-In spite of what I said in 1 and 3, you can definitely get a LOT out of debate by doing it less seriously. However, just know that it will be harder to be nationally competitive.

5-To compete nationally, it requires travel, which means expense and time out of school. All were totally worth it, and there is money to help if you are in need, but it definitely is a financial and time commitment.

6-Different types of debate require different commitments and can offer different routes to success. Some will work better with sports and seasonal extracurriculars than others. For example, my comments above related mostly to Policy Debate, which maintains the same topic all year, so it is harder (not impossible) to jump in midway through the year. Others, like Public Forum, change topic every month, so they are easier to do even if you don't participate during one sports season

7-Coaches and debate community are awesome. By the time my son went to college, he had lots of really close friends all around the country. Amazing experience!

About Dance:

The parent of a graduated NT dancer noted that she did not understand early on that Dance Lab 1 and Dance Lab 2 are both double period classes and are both only offered the last two periods of the school day (8 and 9). Dance Lab is a mandatory class for Kinesis, considered the capstone dance ensemble. Girls Club and Tri-Ship and many other service clubs traditionally meet 9th period and therefore a dancer should know that if they hope to be in Kinesis Junior and/or Senior year, they cannot stay involved in something that meets (or take a class that is only offered) 8th or 9th period.

Another parent of a dancer felt the KW Health requirement was "explained in a very confusing way". Although the program of studies book explains KW1/Dance and Freshman Dance 2, she felt that better written explanations detailing the sequences and options for dance could be further improved in NT's written materials.

The parent of a very serious dancer noted that she learned that dancers taking an outside summer intensives, e.g., Joffrey, will find it difficult to enroll in the first session of NT's summer school as the majority of intensives start the first week of July. She noted that outside summer intensives are important to those planning on pursuing dance in college, and summer school is key for students

taking multiple arts classes during the school year. Therefore it is very difficult for a dancer is to attend NT summer school and do an intensive.

About Instrumental Music:

In music, students in jazz ensembles (except for guitarists) and bass, wind and percussion players in the orchestras must be enrolled in 2 ensembles, for example a wind ensemble and a jazz ensemble, or a band and an orchestra. A parent felt this needed to be more clearly spelled out and let families know that each student should try and map out their course load EARLY on.....in freshman year....so they can plan to complete all required courses (even more the case now with Civics as a state requirement). She said parents and students need to be prepared to take at least one summer course and/or one early bird class to accommodate all academic and state requirements and be in multiple ensembles.

About Visual Arts:

The parent of an art student noted that most Visual Arts classes are a one class commitment with no experience necessary. She emphasized art classes as a wonderful way to break up your New Trier day and provide profound release and expression.

That said, AP Art, open to Seniors only, is a double period class, and so like all double period or multiple class disciplines, it is a good thing to keep in mind for scheduling purposes. (Get that consumer ed and civics requirement fulfilled.)

This parent also suggested letting visual artists with any intent to pursue art in college should think to save favorite pieces for a portfolio along the way (anyone proud of what they create does that anyway), possibly in the format required. Art schools I believe require a self-portrait-something to keep in mind.

Regardless of whether Visual Arts in college is a major, minor or kept as a passion and hobby, a high school portfolio demonstrates a dedication to three/four years of visual arts and can be used as a supplement to demonstrate depth for admission to college.

About Choirs:

There are lots of options in choral music after freshman year. While of course the faculty encourages students to start choir freshman year, it is possible to join various choirs later on. The 3 day option to take choir opposite a science lab Freshman year a great option too. But students should know not to rule out choir because they cannot fit it in early on.

Although it effects fewer student, note that participants in Swing Choir must also be enrolled in either Choir-Opera or Concert Choir and so must plan ahead accordingly.

About Theater:

Many theater students plan on doing a 4 year acting sequence and start with Theater 1 freshman year. But parents and students should know that you can get involved in the theater classes even if you don't start freshman year.

Many theater students also do choirs and/or dance or other electives. Scheduling is always an issue.

While the school provides sample schedules, one parent of students taking multiple arts electives urges parents and students to sit down and draft a 4 year plan. This sounds daunting, but it can actually show that you have more flexibility to try arts electives than you imagined, especially if your student is willing to take summer school or do an early bird class at some point. This does not have to be a scary task, and it can always be revised as interests and circumstances change.