

BOARD BRIEFS

News from the New Trier Township High School District 203

Board of Education Regular Meeting

May 17, 2021

District Provides Updates on End of School Year, 2021-2022 Planning

As the state opens up more opportunities for gatherings, New Trier has been wrapping up the 2020-2021 school year with a number of student performances and celebrations as the District continues to plan for full in-person learning for the 2021-2022 school year.

Winnetka Campus Principal Denise Dubravec shared photos of a number of recent events, including outdoor dance and music programs, senior Carnivale, a food truck fundraiser for Habitat for Humanity, and the opening of the [One Stop Trev Shop](#), a school spirit store with job training, entrepreneurship, and retail production opportunities for students. Upcoming events include the return of Springfest at the Northfield Campus, senior adviser breakfasts, and Commencement at Soldier Field on Sunday, May 30.

Student in-person attendance has been at the highest levels seen this school year, with more than half of students overall choosing to attend daily in-person classes and nearly $\frac{2}{3}$ of freshmen attending in person each day.

The school year will culminate in all-remote end-of-semester assessments on June 4, 7, and 8, a Grading Day on June 9 (no school for students), and an all-remote Trevian Day on June 10, during which students will attend all of their classes remotely via Zoom. The [calendar for the final weeks of school](#) is posted on the District website.

New Trier has been collecting information on COVID-19 vaccinations for 2021-2022 planning. More than 88 percent of New Trier staff members have reported that they are vaccinated, and the school estimates that at least half of students 16 and older are fully vaccinated. New Trier recently offered two clinics for those 12 and older and will have administered well over 20,000 vaccines at its Northfield Campus by June. Vaccination records should be sent to healthservices@nthsh.net.

With vaccinations increasing and COVID-19 cases decreasing locally and across the state, New Trier is planning for full in-person learning, 5 days a week, next school year. The CDC recently clarified that schools should continue to require masks for all for the remainder of this school year, and New Trier will follow that guidance. For the 2021-2022 school year, the school will follow mitigation guidance from the Illinois Department of Public Health and Illinois State Board of Education. That guidance is still developing. There may be limited medical exemptions for remote learning next year, but those will

be individually tailored based on specific criteria, and parents and students should not expect streaming of classrooms.

New Trier is offering professional development opportunities for teaching in a block schedule, with teachers providing multiple activities and learning breaks during longer periods of time. Teachers are prepared to meet students where they are in terms of curriculum, adjusting to address individual student needs after more than a year of non-traditional learning.

The school also is committed to easing the transition back to a more traditional school year for students, staff, and families in a spirit of reconnecting, reclaiming, and reinventing the New Trier community. Activities to support this transition include parent programming, summer get-togethers for incoming 9th and 10th grade students, and work on social-emotional learning.

Click to read the full [2020-2021 update](#) and [2021-2022 planning presentation](#).

School Rankings: An Inaccurate Measure of School Quality and Impact

Since 1998, high school rankings have become big business for some national publications. Lists declaring the “Best High Schools in America” began with an index developed by then-*Washington Post* writer Jay Mathews, who used a singular metric - the number of Advanced Placement (AP) tests administered at a given school - to rank schools on a simplistic, misguided scale.

Peter Tragos, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, told the Board that while the rankings system has evolved somewhat in the decades since, its inaccuracy and inability to judge any true measure of school quality persist. Now the most popular rankings are published each year in *U.S. News and World Report*. New Trier recently ranked #14 in Illinois and #322 in the country on this list, which can lead to frustrating questions about whether the school’s reputation has “slipped.”

Tragos explained why New Trier ranks where it does on this list, how it outperforms schools that are ranked higher, and, most importantly, how the school is as strong as ever in preparing students for their post-high school goals.

The *U.S. News and World Report* rankings are based on a formula whose areas are titled College Readiness (30%), College Curriculum Breadth (10%), Math and Reading Proficiency (20%), Math and Reading Performance (20%), Underserved Student Performance (10%), and Graduation Rate (10%). The only measure the publication uses to determine both “College Readiness” and “College Curriculum Breadth” - accounting for 40% of the ranking - is AP courses.

While New Trier offers as many AP courses as any school in Illinois, its overall philosophy about AP is very different from many schools who allow and encourage freshmen and sophomores to take these courses to standardize their curriculum,

Tragos explained. New Trier does not allow freshmen and sophomores to take AP courses, instead believing that the best approach is to engage these younger students in courses that are broader in skill development and more developmentally appropriate than AP courses - which are designed to replicate a college curriculum. Even in the junior and senior years, New Trier's teacher-created offerings such as American Studies or Senior Writers Seminar are as rigorous as any AP class but allow for more flexibility in approach or topics covered.

Because fewer students at New Trier are pushed into the AP track, New Trier ranks 21st in the state for open enrollment schools in "College Readiness" on this list. However, demonstrating the flawed methodology for these rankings, New Trier ranks **first in the state among open enrollment schools on both Mathematics Proficiency and Reading Proficiency, based on SAT performance.** For as long as the state has required all juniors to take these standardized exams (the SAT, and the ACT before it), New Trier has earned Illinois' top composite scores among open enrollment schools.

In addition, Tragos noted that non-AP students at New Trier perform exceptionally well on the SAT and ACT. For the Class of 2019, the last to take a school-administered ACT, seniors who ended their New Trier experience in 3-level English or mathematics, never having taken an AP course in those subjects, had average ACT English scores of 28.0 and average ACT mathematics scores of 27.2. Further, more than 40 percent of those students scored in the top 10% of the country in each subject. Yet these students who finished in the top 10% in the country do not count in the *U.S. News and World Report* "College Readiness" score.

Tragos said that New Trier believes that ranking schools on any one test score or measure can never accurately portray their graduates' "college readiness", particularly if that measure does not put any value on elective and extracurricular experiences or student services that support students' social-emotional development.

New Trier will not change its curriculum or approach to AP courses simply to fare better on a flawed list such as this one, Tragos said. He said the school puts more weight behind its post-graduate surveys of New Trier students at 1 and 5 years out of high school, in which more than 90 percent of students report being well-prepared for college in areas such as writing, critical thinking, and homework.

Click to read the [full rankings memo](#).

[Superintendent Gives Update on *New Trier 2030* Strategic Planning](#)

Superintendent Paul Sally updated the Board on the District's progress toward its *New Trier 2030* strategic planning goals in preparation for a review and adoption of the 2021-2022 Annual Plan at the Board's June meeting.

Since the approval of the [New Trier 2030 strategic plan](#) in January 2019, the District has presented an Annual Plan each year with specific, measurable goals within six framework areas: Intellectual Engagement, Growth, and Readiness; Student Personal Growth, Engagement, and Well-being; Culture, Climate, and Equity; Leadership Throughout the School; Community Engagement, Partnership, and Governance; and Finance, Facilities, and Human Resources.

Sally noted that the District revised some goals in light of the effort directed toward responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, but that work has continued in all frameworks. Areas in which work has been completed and integrated into regular District planning include providing a consistent technological platform for student work, communicating with the community about District finances, connecting with families who have students younger than high-school age, and staff leadership development. Other areas of continued progress include development of defined *Characteristics of a New Trier Graduate*, equity goals, long-range facilities planning, and community partnerships.

He also previewed some areas of the 2021-2022 Annual Plan, which include both new goals in response to the pandemic and the continuation of existing goals. For example, social-emotional wellness/learning and equity continue to be key threads that inform many of the *New Trier 2030* frameworks but also have been highlighted in their importance during the pandemic. Another area of importance that will be included in the Annual Plan is Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), which is a way to identify students who need extra support and what types of support they need.

The adoption of a block schedule for 2021-2022 means the District will need to continue to support teachers with professional development in this area, support students with the transition, and gather feedback from students, staff, and parents.

Sally said the June presentation will include specific goals and metrics in each of these areas as the District moves forward with its strategic planning in what looks to be a more familiar year of teaching and learning.

Click to read the full [strategic planning 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://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/>