

## BOARD BRIEFS

*News from the New Trier Township High School District 203  
Board of Education Regular Meeting  
January 18, 2022*

### New Trier Academic Profile Offers Snapshot of Class of 2021

The Class of 2021 took advantage of the depth and breadth of New Trier's curriculum to explore their interests in high school and chart individual pathways after graduation.

Peter Tragos, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, presented the Board with the academic profile for the Class of 2021. The report counters some misconceptions about New Trier's level system and shows how New Trier prepares students exceptionally well for their post-graduate plans.

New Trier offers core academic classes at different levels - 2 (college preparatory), 3 (honors) or 4 (high honors) to best suit the individual learning needs of every student. The majority of students in the Class of 2021 – about 90 percent – took core academic courses at a combination of different levels during their time at New Trier. Tragos said that year after year, the Class Profile dispels the myth that students stay in one level of classes in every subject for all four years. For example, only 32 students (3.6%) took only level 4 classes throughout high school. Tragos noted that this statistic speaks to the flexibility of the level system in meeting the needs of each student in different subject areas.

New Trier recommends that students take 4 to 5 core academic courses each year. For the Class of 2021, 59% of students took 19 or more core academic courses, and 11.6% took more than 20 of these courses. In addition, 59.6% of students took between 2 and 4 elective courses, while 24.5% took between 4.5 and 8 electives, more than one a year. More than 92% of freshmen took an elective course.

Tragos noted that the Class of 2021 spent almost half of their junior year and all of senior year learning under evolving COVID guidance, and COVID also affected college admissions nationwide. Colleges across the country saw a spike in applications as large numbers of them went test-optional, leading to a decrease in acceptance rates, particularly at highly selective schools. Nationally, only 43% of college applicants submitted an ACT/SAT score in 2021, down from 77% in 2020. At New Trier, about 60% of the Class of 2021 submitted an ACT/SAT score.

Despite the COVID challenges, the vast majority of the Class of 2021 planned to attend college immediately after graduation, enrolling in 227 different colleges and universities. Tragos credited the Post-High School Counseling Department for their knowledge, expertise, and continuity in working with colleges and universities who know New Trier and its students and highly regard the school. Click for the [Class of 2021 Profile](#).

### Update on 2022-2023 Block Schedule

New Trier will operate on an eight-period block schedule during the 2022-2023 school year, with modifications to address some of the feedback from students, staff, and teachers about this year's schedule.

Peter Tragos, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, updated the Board about the formal and informal ways in which the Block Schedule Committee has gathered input through focus groups, listening sessions, student groups, leadership meetings, and a districtwide survey. This process began in August 2021 and continues as the District works to present a proposed daily schedule to the Board in February that still operates in a block format but offers solutions to some issues raised with the current schedule.

In December, the District partnered with K12 Insight to survey all students, staff, and parents/guardians about New Trier's daily schedule, with strong participation from all groups. Tragos said survey respondents found that the current block schedule provides a manageable student workload, offers enough time for teaching and learning, and gives students the opportunity to take the set of core and elective classes they desire.

Challenges identified in the survey include difficulty in scheduling meetings between teachers and students, time to make up missed work, balancing schoolwork across Blue and Green days, and time for teachers and staff to collaborate with each other. Overall, all constituent groups believed that the current block schedule could be improved with modifications.

Tragos said the District is considering changes for next year including whether to add an "Anchor Day" each week in which all classes meet for shorter periods, whether to change the length of the 85-minute block, and how to build in time for students to meet with teachers, access student services, and make up tests and for staff to collaborate.

The "Anchor Day," likely on Mondays, would give teachers the chance to meet with students three times during the week and would allow Blue and Green Days to be consistent from week to week. However, concerns include homework load with all classes meeting on the same day, the inability to schedule early dismissal/late start days around weekends, and the impact on commuters and part-time teachers.

The Board affirmed the District's plans to move forward with an eight-period block schedule for next year so the registration process can begin, and Tragos said he and Superintendent Paul Sally would present a proposed daily bell schedule for 2022-2023 at next month's meeting. Click for the [Block Schedule Memo](#).

## Update on East Side Academic and Athletic Project

Demolition work has begun on schedule for the East Side Academic and Athletic Project, which will replace the Gates Gymnasium and Boiler Plant buildings with a new facility that includes 12 new classroom spaces, a new multipurpose competition gym and auxiliary gyms, a six-lane indoor track, a new climbing wall and high ropes course, and improved maintenance and energy efficiency. The new building is set to open at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.

Associate Superintendent Chris Johnson updated the Board on the project, including the District's efforts to address budget challenges due to inflationary trends and supply chain issues across the country that were not present when the Board approved the project in February 2021. Johnson thanked parents and community members for their flexibility as the district works to improve traffic and access around the site.

Throughout the past year, the District, Pepper Construction, and Wight & Company have worked to address rising material and construction costs through design changes and alternates. Working together, the team was able to identify \$3.4 million in cost savings through

changes that will not compromise the quality of the facility or reduce its ability to serve the District's educational program, and helped offset other inflationary and supply chain increases.

The increase in inflation and material costs, however, will require an adjustment in the project's budget by 6% to \$79.5 million, Johnson said. This percentage is less than national construction and inflationary trends and can be met by using existing District resources such as reserves without asking for any additional contribution from taxpayers or impacting the District's strong financial outlook.

Following Johnson's presentation, the Board approved the final bid package for the project. The bids, totaling \$5,392,941, included 10 construction trades, with four to eight bids submitted for each major trade, indicating a competitive process. The District delayed the original bid package opening date to allow more time for companies to review specifications and submit bids, yielding several more bidders, including some who provided the winning low bids at a cost savings for the District. Click for the [East Side Project Presentation](#).

## COVID Mitigation Efforts Help Keep School Open Amid Surge

Superintendent Paul Sally gave an update on the District's ability to keep school open for the two weeks following Winter Break despite the national and local surge in COVID cases.

Sally said that while the District had staffing challenges with staff members out sick with COVID, even at the height of absences, 90% of classes were covered by the classroom teacher. Student attendance dipped to 82% on average during the week of January 3 but improved to 88% by the following week. The District also implemented the Illinois Department of Public Health/Illinois State Board of Education guidelines shortening the quarantine period for students diagnosed with COVID to return if symptoms have resolved.

New Trier asked all students and staff to take advantage of the in-school Shield saliva testing during the week of January 3, detecting 211 positive cases for a 5.17% positivity rate. Students in winter athletics and intramurals must test weekly to participate in those activities. During the second week after Winter Break, nearly 2,000 students and staff tested with 57 positive cases, a 2.97% positivity rate.

Sally praised teachers for their work supporting students who had to stay home with a COVID diagnosis, noting that the individualized approach has worked to keep students engaged and up to date in their classes. He noted that the decision to cancel final exams was made in the best interest of students to assure students could stay home without worrying about missing test preparation or exams. Teachers have been providing opportunities for students to improve their grades before the semester ends, and New Trier plans to hold second semester finals.

New Trier has been successful in keeping school and extracurricular activities operating in person consistently this year because of COVID mitigation factors that prevent the spread of COVID at school including enhanced ventilation, testing, and universal masking. The Board approved a recommendation to continue the school's current mitigation factors, including masking, as the District analyzes trends and public health guidance in response to COVID. Click for the [2021-2022 School Year Update](#).

## Other News from the January 18 Meeting:

- Associate Superintendent Chris Johnson provided an update on the refinancing of the Winnetka Campus West Side Project Bonds, which the Board previously approved in

October 2021. These are the outstanding voter-approved bonds for the construction that took place on the west side of the campus during a project that was completed in 2017. These bonds can now be refunded and reissued at a lower interest rate. Johnson explained that the District planned to move forward with the transaction later this month, and that any savings resulting from the refinancing would be a direct savings to the district taxpayers. He said he would provide an update with the results of the sale at the February meeting.

*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/>*

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