

**NEW TRIER TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 203  
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
September 20, 2021  
New Trier Township High School  
7 Happ Road, Room C234  
Northfield, IL 60093**

A **Regular Meeting** of the Board of Education of New Trier Township High School District 203, Cook County, Illinois was held at New Trier High School – Northfield Campus, 7 Happ Road, in Room C234 on Monday, September 20, 2021, at 6:30 p.m.

**Members Present**

Ms. Cathy Albrecht, President  
Ms. Kimberly Alcantara  
Mr. Avik Das  
Mr. Keith Dronen, Vice President  
Ms. Jean Hahn  
Ms. Sally Tomlinson

**Administrators Present**

Dr. Paul Sally, Superintendent  
Mr. Christopher Johnson, Associate Superintendent  
Mr. Peter Tragos, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction  
Mrs. Denise Dubravec, Principal – Winnetka Campus  
Dr. Joanne Panopoulos, Asst. Supt. for Special Ed. and Student Services  
Mr. Paul Waechtler, Principal – Northfield Campus

**Absent**

Mr. Brad McLane

**Also Present**

Dr. Michael Marassa, Chief Technology Officer; Dr. Renee Zoladz, Director of Human Resources; Ms. Niki Dizon, Director of Communications; Ms. Aileen Geary, Social Studies Department Faculty and New Trier High School Educational Association President; Mr. Boris Spektor, Web Developer; Ms. Lia Kass, Communications Specialist; Mr. Angel Villaluz, Director of Technology; Mr. Dean Pinos, Social Studies Department Coordinator; Ms. Michael Christensen, Social Studies Department Chair; Ms. Laura Malia, Social Studies Department Faculty; Mr. David Heineman, Social Studies Department Faculty; Mr. Myron Spiwak, Director of Business Services; Mr. Mike Hill, Technology Department; Mr. Eric Johnson, Technology Department; Ms. Lindsey Ruston, Board of Education Secretary; members of the press and community.

**BUSINESS MEETING**

**I. CALL TO ORDER – 5:30 p.m. – C234**

Ms. Albrecht called the Regular Meeting of September 20, 2021 of the Board of Education to order at 5:30 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus.

Roll call was taken, and all members were present except for Mr. McLane.

Ms. Albrecht asked for a motion to move to Closed Session. Mr. Dronen moved that the Board adjourn to closed session for the purpose of the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees, specific individuals who serve as independent contractors, or specific volunteers of the District or legal counsel for the District, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee, a specific individual who serves as an independent contractor, or a volunteer of the District or against legal counsel for the District to determine its validity; collective negotiating matters between the District and its employees or their representatives, or deliberations concerning salary schedules for one or more classes of employees; the purchase or lease of real property for the use of the District, including meetings held for the purpose of discussing whether a particular parcel should be acquired; security procedures, school building safety and security, and the use of personnel and equipment to respond to an actual, a threatened, or a reasonably potential danger to the safety of employees, students, staff, the public, or public property; and litigation, when an action against, affecting or on behalf of the particular District has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the District finds that an action is probable or imminent, in which case the basis for the finding shall be recorded and entered into the closed meeting minutes. Ms. Hahn seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Mr. Das, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Hahn, Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Alcantara, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

ABSENT: Mr. McLane

The motion passed.

## **II. CLOSED SESSION – 5:30 p.m. – A303**

## **III. BUSINESS MEETING – Open Session – 6:30 p.m. – C234**

Ms. Albrecht recalled the Regular Meeting of September 20, 2021, of the Board of Education to order at 6:45 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus. Roll call was taken, and all members were present except for Mr. McLane

## **IV. Minutes**

Ms. Albrecht asked for any comments or adjustments on the minutes of the Regular Meeting of August 23, 2021 (open and closed session) and the Special Meeting of September 8, 2021 (open and closed session). There was one request by Ms. Albrecht for a change to the open session minutes of August 23<sup>rd</sup>, which was incorporated. Mr. Das moved, and Ms. Hahn seconded the motion, that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of August 23, 2021 (open and closed session) and the Special Meeting of September 8, 2021 (open and closed session), as revised. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. Hahn, Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Das, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

ABSENT: Mr. McLane

The motion passed.

## **V. Communications**

Ms. Albrecht invited anyone from the audience who wished to address the Board to come forward and fill out a yellow communications request form and give it to Mr. Peter Tragos, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. There were two requests for public comment. Ms. Albrecht reminded those speaking to keep their comments to three minutes or less per Board Policy 2:230.

1. Mr. Mark Lestina, parent, shared comments about the annual general and activity fees, specifically for the 20-21 school year.
2. Ms. Jane Perrin, former parent, shared comments about her children's preparedness for the world outside of New Trier, specifically that they were not taught the real history of the United States.

## **VI. Special Orders of Business**

### **A. Report from Campus Principals and FOIA Report**

Mr. Paul Waechtler, Principal for the Northfield Campus, shared the following student events and program updates from that campus:

- Freshman Parent Adviser Nights took place in early September.
- Freshmen-Go-To-School Night (FGTSN) will be Thursday, October 7<sup>th</sup>. It is a late start blue day for freshmen as this will keep the campus on the blue/green schedule. FGTSN will be virtual and begin at 6:30 p.m. with students and parents attending each course. The Freshman Mixer will take place on Wednesday October 6<sup>th</sup>.
- There was an Extracurricular Assembly on several different days last week with an Activities Fair last Friday.
- Executive functioning lessons for students took place last week in study halls. Mr. Waechtler thanked Ms. Gail Gamrath, Assistant Principal at the Northfield Campus, Ms. Danah Ouimette, Student Support Coordinator, and Ms. Steph Moretta, Modern and Classical Languages Department Faculty and Academic Assistance Center Coordinator for their work on this. This is the final week and lessons have focused on how to use Trevian Tracker for time management, one's individual learning style, and how to prepare for a test. These three topics were items that former freshmen shared they needed help on.

Mrs. Denise Dubravec, Principal for the Winnetka Campus, shared the following student events and program updates from that campus:

- She shared slides that reflect the District's goals of connecting and reconnecting students with the school, one another and with programs. Pictures included:
  - The New Trier Parents' Association (NTPA) hosted breakfast for students in grades 11 and 12. There was a barbeque for sophomores hosted by the NTPA prior to school starting.
  - Students attending the football game against Stevenson.

- Lagniappe which is taking place this week. Mrs. Dubravec noted that Lagniappe has over 100 students, 25 in leadership positions on the board, 30 cast members, 30 band members and 19 on crew.
- Robin Magnusson, Instructional Assistant – Special Education, along with outside volunteers spent the summer planting mum seeds in preparation for this fall. Transition Program students are selling the mums. The first Annual Mum Sale will be on Tuesday, September 21 along Trevian Way from 10-11 a.m. and 12:30-1:30 p.m. Pre-sale orders could also be placed online. This brought together the ONE STOP Trev Shop, the Educational and Life Skills (ELS) Program, teachers, and instructional assistants as part of Sofi’s Greenhouse.
- The Brew Crew has a coffee stand at the Winnetka campus and gives students a chance to connect with adults.
- Ms. Katie Kritek, Kinetic Wellness Department Faculty and Dance Coordinator, sent out a video teaching dance steps in preparation for homecoming activities.

Mrs. Dubravec went on to share about the student exchange program and welcomed five exchange students to New Trier this fall. They are also part of the Newbies group. Ms. Athena Arvanitis, Assistant Principal, put together a video to introduce the new students, learn more about their background and how their year is going. There are two students from Italy: Ms. Alessia Pia Dinatale and Ms. Agata Zunino. Two students from Germany: Ms. Jennifer Gleichmann and Mr. Lennart Panzer with one student from Spain: Mr. Juan Dominguez Perez. Ms. Albrecht and Mrs. Dubravec thanked Ms. Arvanitis for her work with these students and their host families.

Mr. Tragos provided an update on the block schedule. This included informal anecdotal feedback from department leaders, teachers and students that will be used in the evaluation of the block schedule. He shared from department leaders and faculty about the opportunities for building relationships and getting to know students along with opportunities for multiple learning activities. They also noted the adjustment to routines of a longer period and not seeing students daily along with the pace of instruction and homework. Some have noted it is a challenge to meet with students either outside of class or for other kinds of services. Mr. Tragos met with student council to gather feedback and shared themes they spoke about such as adjusting to the homework load and how to manage their own time in a block schedule. They shared their appreciation for the flexibility of not preparing for all classes each night. Students also appreciate when their teachers ask how this could be better and are eager to share examples. They noted that what could be different is having a regular break in each block along with more transitions and activities within a block. Next steps include undertaking a collaborative evaluation process that includes staff, students, and parents as well as placing students and faculty together in focus groups to talk with one another. A more formal process in this evaluation will take place by surveying staff, students, and parents.

Mr. Johnson gave the FOIA report, noting that there were four requests since the last Board meeting, all are closed. Two requests included information related to curricular materials and the other two were for information regarding reading lists.

## **B. 2021-2022 School Year Operational Update**

Dr. Sally presented an update on the 2021-2022 school year operation. There are two main goals this year which include student and staff safety and sustained in-person learning. Covid rates in the school are low and rates in the community are moderating. This information is watched very closely with the Covid Response and Community Wellness Team (CRCW) that meets every other week or as needed. Dr. Sally shared a list of mitigations, noting that the District will revisit tightening and loosening them as conditions and guidance change. He went on to provide a graphic of the mitigation efforts and the District’s approach to each. Vaccination rate, masking and staying home when symptomatic are the foundation of the mitigation efforts. He shared other efforts and their current mitigation levels. At this point, Dr. Sally noted, that the District has been navigating the year successfully, but cautioned that low numbers now should not be taken for granted. The District is ready to shift and tighten or loosen mitigations as the school and community metrics allow.

Dr. Sally provided information on Shield testing and the number of tests conducted. Unvaccinated students who are participating in extracurricular activities are required to test. The District is considering providing times before school to increase testing as it would like to have more data. It is also working with Shield to ensure they can handle an increase in volume as needed. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Michael Marassa, Chief Technology Officer, and their teams are working constantly on Shield to make sure it is going well. Mr. Johnson shared the Shield testing is off to a good start and is a welcoming atmosphere for students. The District is also going to pilot using the BinaxNOW test in the

nurses' office. If a person presents with symptoms during the school day, they will be able to go to the nurses' office and have the test done with results in 15 minutes.

Dr. Sally then encouraged people to access the District's Covid Dashboard which contains information on local and staff zip codes, positivity rate as well as new case rate, Shield testing data and longitudinal data on how many students and staff are in quarantine or have Covid.

Finally, Dr. Sally stressed the importance of maintaining learning during quarantine. Numbers of cases and quarantined students has been low. Teachers have done a magnificent job individualizing the help and support that each student needs. The District will continue to monitor in case numbers begin to increase. For those who are out, there is a high level of communication with the adviser, case manager and parents. There are robust Canvas courses along with a simple checklist process that teachers and students use to make sure students are supported and are able to transition back easily. He then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Alcantara inquired as to when during the school day students are allowed to do the Shield PCR test. Mr. Johnson replied that testing occurs Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Students have been asked to come on the day that aligns with their last name, though they can come any day. Hours are just prior to the first lunch period until after the last lunch period. Ms. Alcantara then inquired if it was possible to open additional windows of time such as before school. Mr. Johnson noted that was also the feedback from the committee. The District is working with its provider to either move the window up to the start of the day or extend it. Passport Health is the agency assigned by the state to work with the District.

Ms. Albrecht reminded everyone that the Shield test is a PCR one and it requires an authorized person to administer it. Mr. Johnson noted that it provides a diagnostic result, but a third party is needed to supervise. It must also be done on the premises. Ms. Albrecht inquired further about the third party, with Mr. Johnson responding that they are in charge of staffing, payroll, and scheduling.

To contrast that, Ms. Tomlinson noted that one can get a Binax test in the nurse's office if one feels symptoms to know that they can still attend school. Mr. Johnson responded that the District will be piloting this, tests have not been received yet, but the District is certified to have them. Mr. Johnson is hoping to have the tests either this week or next, he also went on to explain how students who felt sick would go to the nurse's office and sent for a PCR. With Binax, results are received in 15 minutes, and they can return to class. Ms. Alcantara inquired if, in this instance, a student would be referred for a PCR test as well. Dr. Sally replied that while encouraged to do a PCR, students would not be required to do so as it is not guidance from the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). Ms. Alcantara then noted that Binax is a screening tool, not diagnostic, which Mr. Johnson replied that although it is not a PCR diagnostic test, since it is done under the supervision of a nurse, the result is valid for the District's purposes. Dr. Sally and Mr. Johnson clarified that a Binax would be administered if a student feels a little under the weather but could return to class. If a student feels they are not able to return to class, parents would be contacted to come pick up their child. The Binax tool is useful for borderline cases where a student wants to simply get checked out and return to class.

Ms. Hahn commented about supporting students while they are out during an absence, and her sense, from discussion at the Covid Reentry and Community Wellness Team (CRCWT), is that this is what teachers always do. Currently, the District is seeing a low number of absences and Ms. Hahn wanted to confirm that this is not an undue burden on teachers to help the few who are out. She inquired if processes are in place, should numbers increase, to support those students who are absent does not become burdensome on teachers. Dr. Sally replied that currently this is going well, noting that the rhythm with a block schedule is different, but teachers are doing it well. The District cares a great deal about what the burden might end up being and discussions have been ongoing about other options that it has to support students should there be a surge of those who need to stay home. After additional comments, Dr. Sally concluded that the District is aware and thinking about it.

### **C. New Website Update**

Ms. Dizon presented on the new website, noting it will be launched on October 12<sup>th</sup>. The process began in December 2019 guided by the strategic plan and the community engagement portion of it. The website was due for a refresh and issues were reviewed that had been brought forward by stakeholders. In July 2020, after much review from different committees and stakeholders, the decision was made to engage with Blackboard. They are a leader in the K-12 space for website design, support, and hosting. Since then, a small group from the Technology, Communications and Athletics departments have met regularly to move this along. Two of the leaders from the small group, Mr. Angel

Villaluz, Director of Technology and Ms. Lia Kass, Communications Specialist, shared more about the process. Ms. Kass shared that findings from community engagement surveys resulted in goals to improve communication and information sharing as well as stakeholder engagement. Most importantly, was a platform that could better tell New Trier's story and convey the District's brand. The industry standard is to redesign every three to five years based on technology and design practice improvements; the current website is seven years old.

Mr. Villaluz went on to share that the partnership between the Technology and Communications departments focused on the state of content management systems in schools and how they have changed to allow for greater use of multi and social media that the District could incorporate. Many of these systems are moving into the Cloud and the Technology Department has engaged in an ongoing process to move its data management systems as well as others into the Cloud to better leverage companies who provide security at a greater scale as well as managing updates.

Ms. Kass spoke about the design goals and the District's needs that were shared with Blackboard. Next, Mr. Villaluz went through the event management and calendar consolidation, noting that multiple calendaring systems create problems. The solution was to work with Athletics who heavily use the rSchool system for their scheduling process and expand that district-wide where there is one source for events which will flow into the new website.

Mr. Villaluz summarized the timeline, noting that four to five vendors were researched. Blackboard was selected after this research which included feedback from peer districts in Illinois as well as nationally. From fall of 2020 to spring of 2021, the team engaged in a custom design process. Then between spring and fall of 2021, the team met with stakeholders to review content for migration. The website will launch on October 12<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Kass provided brief details about the website while displaying examples from it. Mr. Villaluz then shared details about the calendar on the site. The two covered other areas of the website such as critical stakeholder links, social media, facts and figures about New Trier and the new search feature. Mr. Marassa added that the new website will be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Another feature is the translate button which will allow non-English speakers to be able to view the website in their native language. Mr. Villaluz then walked through a typical department page.

Ms. Dizon shared next steps in the public relations campaign of launching the website which include information on the current website to prepare people for the switchover, on social media as well as a walkthrough video of the new features. Ms. Dizon noted it is user friendly and intuitive while not being drastically different than the current website in terms of categorization. Mr. Marassa thanked the committee members from the Technology, Athletics and Communications departments.

Mr. Dronen noted his excitement for the new search functionality. Ms. Dizon responded that Mr. Boris Spektor, Web Developer, and the team have spent time with departments ensuring that outdated documents are not transferred to the new site.

Ms. Tomlinson shared that she loved that more graphics and engaging content will be integrated into our website. She asked for clarification from Mr. Villaluz, noting that he mentioned the interface will be easier for different departments to update items. She wanted to ensure that someone will be overseeing the overall look and that the feel of the website remains consistent. Mr. Villaluz noted this is a strength of Blackboard as there are templates that departments will follow. He went on to share further comments, noting there is the ability to provide rules and common settings while also having the ability to expand and innovate by presenting information in a creative way. Ms. Dizon shared that the "apps" are the building blocks of each page which provides consistency.

Ms. Hahn inquired if there will be technical support for parents, to which Mr. Marassa responded that the enterprise applications team, led by Ms. Niha Janagama, will support parents. Ms. Hahn asked for confirmation that this transition to a Cloud-based system provides more security to the website, which Mr. Villaluz affirmed and going on to share additional details, ultimately noting that by partnering with these companies, it permits the technology department to off-load some of the risk and management, allowing them to focus more on student-driven initiatives.

Ms. Albrecht thanked the team, noting that the process began at a very difficult time, in the spring of 2020. She thanked them for remaining focused on it. Mr. Villaluz noted that this is Mr. Spektor's fifth website migration. He has maintained the current website through all of the rapid changes related to Covid, while learning about and

working on the new one. Ms. Albrecht thanked Mr. Spektor for his work. Ms. Dizon thanked the team for their day-to-day work on the project.

#### **D. Critical Thinking and Civil Discourse: Teaching Social Studies and History**

Mr. Tragos began the presentation on Critical Thinking and Civil Discourse: Teaching Social Studies and History. This is the first presentation in a teaching and learning series that will occur over the course of the 2021-2022 school year. Mr. Tragos shared the *Critical Thinking & Civil Discourse* statement that was adopted at the October 22, 2020 Board of Education meeting. He went on to share how the statement came to be. Mr. Tragos discussed why the District is making these presentations, noting that at a time where teaching history is making national news and sparking debate, it is important to demonstrate how it is taught at New Trier. We want to inform the Board and community about how the District teaches students to think critically, as a way to be transparent about what it teaches, demonstrate how the District engages students with authentic, high-quality instructional materials and how our teachers engage students in the thinking and debates of the discipline, both historical and current, while demonstrating how it fosters a culture of inquiry where civil discourse and critical thinking are the norm. Mr. Tragos provided background as well as an overview on curriculum development and objectives. He tied curriculum development and objectives to several different Board policies as well. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) mandates units of study for all public schools and curricula, which he shared specifically for social studies and history. Finally, the role of the teacher is critical in all of this and the space for learning they create. Mr. Tragos shared how this capacity is built among teachers in various ways through professional development.

Five teachers were in attendance to walk through their lesson plan to demonstrate how critical thinking and civil discourse come alive in the classroom. Mr. Tragos shared the five main topics of the presentation. He noted that critical thinking and civil discourse are the foundations of learning, not only in social studies, but across all disciplines. This comes through in many alumni surveys, noting that they are well prepared for life outside of New Trier when it comes to critical thinking. He went on to introduce Ms. Michael Christensen, Department Chair; Ms. Aileen Geary, Teacher; Mr. David Heineman, Teacher; Ms. Laura Malia, Teacher and Mr. Dean Pinos, Department Coordinator. Mr. Pinos began by thanking the Board for the opportunity to share the benefits and power of a social studies education. He noted that social studies includes the sub disciplines of geography, psychology, economics, and sociology with each having their own disciplinary thinking skills. The focus this evening was on history. Historical thinking skills are the tools that historians use to decipher and interpret history. He shared these tools along with the Habits of Mind or the values that teachers try to instill in students to help them better understand their role as an interpreter of history. Mr. Pinos noted that the lessons that would be heard are driven by the teacher and created by them and course committees who collaborate on this process. Teachers are at the forefront of creating curriculum that meets the needs of students regardless of their level.

Mr. Pinos then introduced Mr. Heineman. He noted that historians think in certain ways, which he shared and went on to note that they are not necessarily intuitive for students. Mr. Heineman highlighted a lesson he uses on the American Revolution in his two-level U.S. History class. It helps students develop their thinking with a number of the historical habits of mind, particularly contextualization, chronological thinking, and continuity and change over time. He noted that teachers need to set up moments where students have to engage themselves in more complex thinking. Mr. Heineman then began to walk through the lesson and provided the goals he had for his students during it.

Next, Ms. Malia shared how she selects particular articles for her class and how they fit in with her unit curriculum. For this, she focused on the World History curriculum as well as World Studies using Mr. Kevin Reilly's "*Cities and Civilization*" article. She went on to share how she would choose a particular article for the Geography and Culture unit and shared the unit's guiding question. Ms. Malia went on to share about the article itself and the reasons why it was selected. She also shared the lesson content and discussion, noting that connections are made whether ancient or modern to the student themselves. She then walked through how she uses the same article in different level classes.

Ms. Geary then spoke on teaching controversial issues, noting that as the habits of mind and skills necessary to the study of history or social sciences, teachers can then help students apply those skills to current controversial issues. After further comments, she noted that when a controversial topic is going to be discussed, it begins with a variety of assumptions and steps. The first is to assume there are multiple perspectives in the room, next is to help students understand the context and have them generate their own genuine questions, they will then use the skills of the discipline to break complex issues down into discrete pieces. Another step is to avoid dismissing others and seeking to understand why a person sees the situation as they do. The final step is to make room for students to exercise their own judgment once they have engaged in the process. Ms. Geary then provided a current example and shared how

students would work through it using critiques from various historians. She also shared a type of culminating activity that students may do. Ms. Geary noted that she tries to tie controversial issues to particular curricular goals as a way to have students take these skills and practice them to help make sense of the world.

Ms. Christensen then focused on thinking about how teachers help students practice these disciplines and habits of mind. She referenced the department's philosophy, noting it ties directly to the *Critical Thinking & Civil Discourse* statement. The goal is to "develop critical thinkers who can navigate a complex world through civil discourse" while giving them the tools to engage in the world. Ms. Christensen then spoke to creating a hopeful space in the classroom as a social studies teacher. The hope is that students experience a civil and civic space, one that is a community of learners who are working together to build something together. Ms. Christensen hopes students have that experience that is meaningful to them and it connects them to others. They then take that out into the world and create these kinds of spaces when they go elsewhere. Mr. Tragos thanked the group for their presentation and then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Hahn began by thanking the group for their presentation as well as for their work with students. To Ms. Hahn's mind, the implementation and integration of the District's commitment to developing students critical thinking and civil discourse skills is one of the most exciting things that the District is doing. She noted that these are the skills that students will need to master to lead fulfilling and impactful lives and she looks forward to seeing it across all the disciplines. Ms. Hahn then spoke to the controversial issues and how the hope is that everything goes according to plan in the classroom. She inquired what is in place to support students who might take an unpopular position or help them work thorough an unintentional harm if discussions do not go as planned. Ms. Christensen responded that controversial issues are discussed in class, but not on the first day of school. The conversations happen in relationships in classrooms that have been developed for a long time. She noted that teachers work towards developing connections in class that make those conversations safe. Another piece, Ms. Christensen shared, is some have a sense that classrooms can erupt like the comments section in a newspaper. However, she likens classrooms to the editorial page where the conversations are rooted in bigger questions, rather than personal belief and attack. The discussion is framed around historical thinking or the thinking in the discipline. Ms. Christensen noted that it can happen where a student says something harmful and that is when the relationship between the student and teacher is relied upon and a conversation is had between the two. Mr. Tragos also responded to Ms. Hahn in terms of when a lesson is not executed as planned. It is not from malintent, but rather from some intention that is received differently. Mr. Tragos noted that he works with department leaders and when this happens, a conversation is had between the department leader and teacher to work through it. After further comments, Mr. Tragos noted that this leads to professional learning, which elevates everyone's skills. Dr. Sally added that the work within course committees as well as the work with Ms. Christensen and Mr. Pinos is important and those conversations can be helpful when a lesson does not go as planned.

Ms. Tomlinson noted that her two children went off to college with amazing critical thinking skills, noting that a couple of the teachers in the presenting group were responsible for that. When the District asks students, postgraduate, to reflect on their experience at New Trier, she inquired if they are being specifically asked about critical thinking or if it is being teased out from other answers in the survey. Mr. Tragos replied that it is specifically asked. He went on to note that critical thinking is one area that is consistently ranked high in the surveys. Ms. Tomlinson shared her thanks.

Ms. Alcantara referenced Mr. Tragos' memo, specifically instruction on topics such as black history in America, LGBTQ issues and Asian American history and civil rights. She inquired as to the way these are explored and acknowledged as lived experiences and histories throughout the curriculum. Ms. Geary responded that while having the state mandate units, it gives the impression that the information is presented in chunks. Ms. Geary shared that over the course of her career, it is a constant process of revision in order to tell a more holistic story with more voices included every year. She shared additional comments about her experience with this. Ms. Geary noted that students are also taught to look for gaps in the narrative. Dr. Sally added that the curriculum is authentic and organic, highlighting the powerful question such as those posed in "*Cities and Civilizations*" that was shared earlier.

Mr. Das noted that he was honored to see this talented group of teachers who are dedicated and convey a great deal of passion for the craft which is then poured into students. His hope is that these teachers remain courageous and committed to that kind of approach. He shared comments regarding putting politics in the classroom, noting there is often pushback that teachers should keep it out of the classroom. He inquired where politics was being put in the classroom, noting he did not see that this occurs. Ms. Christensen replied that politics is everywhere, noting there are two ways to deal with that, one is to acknowledge it by realizing that the sources used within the classroom contain

some politics, but students are taught to recognize it. The other piece is the goal to be in spaces that have the political view of looking for other political views by seeing and experiencing them. Ms. Christensen suggested thinking of it as a participatory and engaged political view.

Mr. Dronen noted it was an excellent and informative presentation. He hoped that community members will be able to view the presentation, inquiring of Dr. Sally if it will be posted to the website, which Dr. Sally confirmed. Mr. Dronen shared that when he was in school, social science and history was a regurgitation of facts including a limited perspective without a focus on critical thinking skills. He encouraged the group to continue to keep up the good work.

Ms. Albrecht added her gratitude as well. She noted that the key to “fulfilling the charge is the cultivation of a school environment in which all students feel welcome and free to explore a wide range of ideas” which is what was expressed during the presentation. Ms. Albrecht shared that there is an art to cultivating this and inquired how one’s helps their colleagues, who may be struggling to develop this art. Ms. Christensen spoke highly of the department’s course committees, noting that when a new teacher comes into a course, they enter into a group of people who have been teaching the course for a long time and have resources and support for them. While that is a formal way, there is also the informal way of talking with a colleague. Mr. Tragos added that it is also comes from the work with department leaders. To develop this art takes time and practice by observing and hearing how others are doing it. He noted that some of it is developing a stronger sense of adolescent development and how they process information as well as how they manage things that might be contrary to what they believe. Patience is important when developing these dispositions. Therefore, Mr. Tragos notes, it comes from teachers recognizing that students are not fully formed along with asking questions in patient and honest ways. In responding to Mr. Das’ comments, Mr. Tragos noted that he knows this is working when a student shares that they knew where their teacher was coming from, but that they always felt respected and treated fairly. This comes from teachers asking questions thus making the classroom a place where students can explore ideas and develop these skills.

Ms. Albrecht referenced Ms. Tomlinson’s comments about the surveys, noting that throughout the years students continually mention the skills that they learned at New Trier, that have helped them in college and beyond, were critical thinking, writing, and self-advocacy. She thought it tremendous to have this be consistent from the survey. She, Dr. Sally and Mr. Tragos thanked the group again.

#### **E. Facilities Update: Winnetka Campus East Side Academic and Athletic Project**

Mr. Johnson presented an update on the Winnetka Campus East Side Academic and Athletic Project. He noted that design work is in progress and the team is completing Construction Documents that will be used for cost estimating. Also occurring is the final design detailing and coordinating for the October and November bid sets. The equipment and flooring selection and specifications for the athletic spaces were recently completed. An updated set of plans went from Wight to Pepper Construction last week that will be used to complete the cost estimate. An evaluation of alternates is on-going and will be discussed in October. The alternates are the way that the District works to manage the overall price of the project if bids come in higher than expected. An analysis of market conditions and commodity prices is also being conducted to see how they may impact the project. Mr. Johnson then walked through details regarding the two upcoming bid packages which will be brought to the Board in November and December.

Next, Mr. Johnson shared about Essex Road, noting that through the permitting process, it was discovered that the District owned that portion next to the Winnetka campus. It was deeded to the District in nine transactions in the early 1900s. Mr. Johnson stated that it is not in the best interest of the District to own an active road that has utility right of ways under it. The District’s options to use the road for other purposes is limited. In consultation with the Village and the District’s attorneys, the best course of action is to deed it back to the Village. They will maintain the road as they have already been doing. There is a separate voting item on the Consent Agenda for this transfer as the Village already voted in August. There will then be a short real estate closing where the District transfers the road back to them. Mr. Johnson then invited questions and comments.

Ms. Tomlinson noted the built-in contingency for the East Side Project, noting that steel pricing seems to be the big unknown. She inquired that once the November 2<sup>nd</sup> bids go out, if the District will have a stronger sense of how close it will be to bringing the project in on budget. Mr. Johnson shared there is still a significant contingency in the project. When the bids open, there will be a sense of where things are headed. The District will complete a new cost estimate which will help the District to understand how the design choices that were made have impacted the price as well as the overall economy. This will provide information prior to the bids going out and will allow for adjustments and discussions as needed with the Board, the Finance Committee, and the Facilities Steering Committee. Ms.



Tomlinson confirmed that there is still room to affect the second bid package, which Mr. Johnson confirmed and went on to shared additional details.

Mr. Dronen inquired if Mr. Johnson saw any scenario where there would be any benefit for New Trier maintaining ownership. While Mr. Johnson does not see a benefit, he did share a potential scenario that was discussed. He went on to share additional thoughts.

Ms. Albrecht noted that Pepper Construction will provide estimates. She noted that bid package three is 57.5% of the project and it is an ongoing judgement call given what is learned about pricing and what alternates may need to be used. Mr. Johnson replied that the District will work with the list carefully to make sure it balances the needs of students, building something the community can be proud and is long-lasting. The District wants to make sure it is investing taxpayer dollars wisely and meeting the budget. It will also be reviewed with various committees. Mr. Johnson shared final thoughts noting that at an upcoming meeting details will be shared as to what to anticipate once construction starts.

## **VII. Administrative Items**

### **A. Treasurer's Report for August 2021**

Mr. Johnson presented the Treasurer's Report for August 2021, the second month of the fiscal year. The fund balance for all accounts \$143,636,691. The District continues to see minimal interest revenue as expected, which Mr. Johnson shared in prior months as the investment opportunities available are not significant given the types that school districts are allowed to invest in.

Revenue is also low compared to a typical year due to a delay in property tax payments. Tax bills have been issued and are due October 1<sup>st</sup>. Significant property tax payments have been received in September, so the process is going well now, and dollars are coming to the District. The District is well positioned to handle this delay based on the fund balance and the liquidity the District has due to the poor investment environment. The community has provided good resources that the District can use to weather the delay in payments.

### **B. Financial Reports for August 2021**

Mr. Johnson presented the Financial Reports for August 2021. Operating revenue was \$2,690,106 for the first two months of the fiscal year, or 93.47% lower compared to \$41,000,000 at the same time last year. Property tax distributions were not made in July or August this year (although they have begun), while the District received nearly \$40M through August 2020.

Other local sources such as transportation revenue return to normal operations for FY22. The tentative budget for operating revenue is about 3% higher than it was last year. Any funds attributable to last year that were received by August 31, 2021 will be recognized in that year.

Operating expenditures were \$8,231,389 through August, or 22% higher compared to last year. The year-to-year variances for the first several months are immaterial based on the timing of purchases and equipment. Mr. Johnson does believe the District is seeing some expenses earlier as it had a full summer program and students returned at the start of the school year. The tentative budget for operating expenditures is slightly higher than last fiscal year. The auditors are in the final stages of their fieldwork and the District expects to present the final report at the October Board of Education meeting. Mr. Johnson then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Hahn had a question in light of the public comment heard earlier in the meeting. While Ms. Hahn would take issue with the comment that the District was not open last year, she inquired if any adjustments were made to fees. Mr. Johnson responded that the standard fees, which is the general fee, covers some of the expenses the commenter mentioned. The activity fee along with the New Trier Parents' Association fee were all standard. He went on to share that those fees offset a wide range of expenses. He gave the example that the athletic program still ran, just at a different time. They also offset a portion of the performing arts program and student activities, all of which took place in some capacity last year. As of January, or February, most students were in two days-a-week, doing lab activities among other activities. The fees offset a very small portion of the actual costs of these programs and were used for these purposes last year.

Ms. Albrecht inquired about what went into the Special Education Other Instruments that are expected to be lower this year than last. She noted that this was in the tentative budget and unaudited actuals. Mr. Johnson responded that Other Instruments are a combination of different items including payment to other government units, a District

contingency, plus Special Education costs for those students who are outplaced such as room and board as well as tuition for schools they may be attending if they are not at New Trier and of which the school is required to pay a portion of the costs. Mr. Myron Spiwak, Director of Business Services, added that this can fluctuate year-to-year depending on the number of outplaced students the District has. He shared there are other items that go into it, so it is not dollar-for-dollar every year. Mr. Johnson noted that he would take a closer look at the comparative revenue expenditure page under the Education Fund in more detail.

Dr. Sally noted that some fees were frozen, with Mr. Johnson adding that this was done in recognition of the unusual year. Typically, there is a cost-of-living type increase as the type of goods the District buys go up with the Consumer Price Index, but they were kept level last year. Dr. Sally reiterated that for fiscal year 21, most fees stayed level and for fiscal year 22, they also remained level. Mr. Johnson confirmed this, noting it is unusual for the District as they typically increase yearly.

### **\*C. Public Hearing: 2021-2022 Final Budget**

Ms. Albrecht called to order the public hearing on the 2021-2022 final budget at 8:54 p.m., which Mr. Johnson then presented on. He noted it is a balanced budget in the operating funds and is the result of the planning process that started last January with department leaders and administrators who provided input. Each year, the District must adopt the budget by September 30<sup>th</sup>. It is a spending plan for the year and is developed to accomplish the District's goals and objectives through strong fiscal stewardship. It directly supports the educational outcomes for students.

The budget supports a deep and broad curriculum and Mr. Johnson provided several facts regarding this, focusing on student course selection. It also supports a robust extracurricular program, with over 85% of students participating in one or more opportunities. Regarding athletics, 50% of students participate in one or more athletic teams and there are no cut opportunities each season. The budget also addresses the needs of individual students with the adviser program and special education. Addressing these needs were as important as ever as students transitioned back from learning at home with extra supports being provided this year.

Mr. Johnson provided a budget summary comparing fiscal year 2021's amended budget with 2022's final budget. The budget is balanced in operational funds exclusive of transfers. When transfers are included, the District does show fund balances being used. They are purposefully being used for projects the Board has previously approved including the Winnetka Campus East Side Academic and Athletic project and the other facilities renovations that have been completed in the past year.

Mr. Johnson provided budget highlights on the revenue side. Property taxes comprise 92% of revenue and the District's budget is balanced thanks to the support the community provides through their property taxes. The District last asked for an operating rate referendum in 2003, and at that point, made a five-year no referendum commitment, that has now stretched over 17 years past its original date, with no referendum in sight. State revenue is up slightly and categorized using the Evidence Based Funding methodology. Last year, the District was more conservative regarding its expectations with state revenue as the budget was planned during the pandemic. The state made its commitment last year to the District and will do so again this year. Federal revenue is up more significantly, largely due to Covid funds, as \$800,000 will arrive in the third and final Covid relief bill. Other expenses will be reimbursed through FEMA funds.

On the expenditures side, salaries and benefits are the largest component of the budget, 66% and 13% respectively, comprising 79% of the operating budget. The District employs 383 full-time equivalencies (FTEs), teaching a wide variety of topics. According to community surveys, maintaining a high-quality teaching staff is a top priority. Mr. Johnson noted that 98% of teachers have a master's degree or higher, far exceeding the state average. A large percentage of New Trier teachers have achieved the District's Master Teacher or Teacher Leader status demonstrating their excellence both in the classroom and in leadership. Teachers are compensated to work 182 days, two days above the state average, providing extra instructional and professional development time. Employee benefits total 13% of the budget and include health insurance, 403b contributions, payroll taxes, and other District contributions. The largest component is health insurance. The District is a member of the NIHIP Cooperative. Mr. Johnson noted that there has been some acceleration of cost increase in insurance, which the District is working to manage and mitigate. Health and dental costs increased 3.9% for the fiscal year, returning to a trend of historically low renewal rates, which has averaged three percent for five years. Mr. Johnson noted that there was an unusual increase in FY21. The District's IMRF rate, which is the rate the District pays in pension for non-certified staff has decreased from 6.95% to 4.32%. This was due to the District's and Board's investment in paying down its pension obligation to that fund, which in turn, lowered the rate that the District pays. Mr. Johnson noted that Purchased

Services were projected to decrease 0.35%, while supplies and materials were also expected to decrease 16.16%. The reason for atypical variations in these two categories is due to significant Covid expenditures in prior years, so these categories are realigning.

Another budget highlight on the expenditures side is that capital outlay is expected to decrease slightly in operating funds. The renovations, maintenance and improvements allow the District to deliver the best education possible to students. The budget also includes funds for the conclusion of the 15-Year Plan Year 2 work over the summer. It also includes funds for a portion of the 15-Year Plan Year 3 work given when one fiscal year ends and the next one begins. Mr. Johnson shared the improvements to both campuses and noted that transfers totaled \$7.65 million to fund this work. The budget also includes funds for the Winnetka Campus East Side Academic and Athletic Project, including estimated construction expenses for the first phase of it. In the monthly financial reports, Mr. Johnson noted that Fund 62 has been broken out for capital projects to show separate accounting for the East Side Project to provide transparency for the funds the District is expending for it. The Other category includes Special Education tuition, room and board, which is expected to increase. The District expects fewer Covid-related expenses and will continue to seek out reimbursement where possible. Mr. Johnson noted that some extra costs and reductions from fiscal year 21 will remain for fiscal year 22 such as extra cleaning procedures that are still in place. However, the District is looking at a return to normal educational programming and aligning its resources and budget to support that return.

Finally, Mr. Johnson shared several awards the District has won for financial reporting from the Association for School Business Officials (ASBO) International, the government finance officers association as well as recognition from the state of Illinois.

Mr. Johnson thanked the administration, business office, department chairs, among others for helping to develop the budget. He thanked Mr. Spiwak for his leadership in this process. Mr. Johnson thanked the community for their support of New Trier. The budget demonstrates the community's commitment to the program offered by the District and the District's commitment to strong fiscal stewardship. He also thanked the Board for their work. Mr. Johnson then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Albrecht inquired if there were any public comments, of which there were none.

Ms. Hahn thanked Mr. Johnson for the narrative. She went on to reference the blip for fiscal year 21 with health costs and inquired if it was Covid-related or simply an unexplained one. Mr. Johnson responded that it is not Covid-related. He shared details, noting that in the past few years, there have been more significant, large claims either from an employee or dependent. Anecdotally, more people, who have more serious health conditions, are able to be treated with custom-designed medications which cost several hundred thousand dollars per year. It improves that person's quality of life and life expectancy and is required every year. School districts are seeing an increase number of people requiring that level of care, science and medicine have caught up, but it is very expensive.

Ms. Albrecht reiterated the awards the District has won, noting it has been seventeen consecutive years for certificates of excellence and achievement. She noted it is an important benefit to the community and thanked Mr. Johnson, Mr. Spiwak, and staff.

Ms. Hahn moved, and Mr. Das seconded the motion, that the Board moves to Adjourn the Public Hearing on the 2021-2022 Final Budget. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Das, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Hahn, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

ABSENT: Mr. McLane

The motion passed.

Mr. Johnson noted that the School District Budget Form would be passed around and is one of the rare documents that all Board members sign.

**\*D. 2021-2022 Final Budget Approval**

Mr. Dronen moved, and Mr. Das seconded the motion, that the Board of Education approves the Resolution to Adopt the Annual Budget for the 2021-2022 Fiscal Year and the School District Budget Form, as presented. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Das, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Hahn, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

ABSENT: Mr. McLane

The motion passed.

**\*E. Public Hearing: Resolution Authorizing Transfer of Funds from the Education Fund to the Operation and Maintenance Funds**

Ms. Albrecht called to order the public hearing on the resolution authorizing the transfer of funds from the Education Fund to the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Funds at 9:09 p.m. Mr. Spiwak noted that they are part of the budget that was just approved, but transfers between funds do require a public hearing. The District's intent with these transfers is to move money from the Operating Fund balances to the Capital Projects Fund. Most of the District's fund balances are in the Educational Fund, however, the Illinois School Code does not allow the District to transfer funds directly from the Ed Fund to the Capital Projects Fund, so it must be done in two steps. The first resolution is transferring just over \$10 million from the Ed Fund to the O&M Fund for Capital Projects. Just under \$3 million of that will stay in Fund 20, the O&M Fund as the District does incur Capital Expenditures in that Fund. The remaining \$7.6 million is the second resolution and that will be transferred from the O&M Fund to the Capital Projects Fund for the many capital expenditures the District has there. Mr. Spiwak invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Albrecht inquired if there were any public comments, of which there were none.

Mr. Dronen moved, and Ms. Hahn seconded the motion, that the Board moves to Adjourn the Public Hearing on the Resolution Authorizing Transfer of Funds from the Education Fund to the Operations and Maintenance Fund. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Das, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Hahn, Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

ABSENT: Mr. McLane

The motion passed.

Ms. Albrecht noted that the Resolution will be approved as part of the Consent Agenda.

**VIII. Consent Agenda**

- Bill List for the Period, August 1 – 31, 2021
- Personnel Report (Appointments, Resignation, Retirements, Stipends – Appointment and Stipends - Separation)
- Board Policy Revisions – PRESS 107 – Second Reading
- Resolution Authorizing Transfer of Funds from the Education Fund to the Operations and Maintenance Fund
- Resolution Authorizing Transfer of Funds from the Operations and Maintenance Fund to the Capital Projects Fund
- Resolution Authorizing the Prompt Payment of Bills
- the Consolidated District Plan for FY 2022 for the following grants: Title II-Part A, Title IV-Part A, Title I, Part A, and IDEA, Part B Flow-Through
- Intergovernmental Agreement between the Board of Education of New Trier Township High School District No. 203 and the Village of Winnetka for the Transfer of Essex Road

Ms. Albrecht inquired if any members wanted to pull an item off the Consent Agenda, no one chose to do so. Ms. Alcantara moved that the Board of Education approve the Consent Agenda, which includes: Bill List for the Period, August 1 – 31, 2021, Personnel Report (Appointments, Resignation, Retirements, Stipends – Appointment and Stipends – Separation), Board Policy Revisions – PRESS 107 – Second Reading, Resolution Authorizing Transfer of

Funds from the Education Fund to the Operations and Maintenance Fund, Resolution Authorizing Transfer of Funds from the Operations and Maintenance Fund to the Capital Projects Fund, Resolution Authorizing the Prompt Payment of Bills, the Consolidated District Plan for FY 2022 for the following grants: Title II-Part A, Title IV-Part A, Title I, Part A, and IDEA, Part B Flow-Through, and Intergovernmental Agreement between the Board of Education of New Trier Township High School District No. 203 and the Village of Winnetka for the Transfer of Essex Road. Ms. Tomlinson seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Mr. Das, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Hahn, Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Alcantara, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

ABSENT: Mr. McLane

The motion passed.

## **IX. Board Member Reports**

Ms. Tomlinson shared information from the **New Trier Fine Arts Association (NTFAA)** meeting held on September 8<sup>th</sup>, noting they are primarily a fundraising board and their goal is to raise \$44,000 this year. First Thursdays fundraising has begun, and they are kicking off their annual appeal this month. Ms. Tomlinson noted she would provide Ms. Ruston with the dates of the First Thursdays, with the next one on October 7<sup>th</sup>.

Next, Ms. Tomlinson shared about NTFAA's fund giving which is evenly split between giving out grants at \$20,000, summer scholarships at \$16,000 and financial assistance at \$16,000. With Covid, they used Zoom to source artists from around the world, including England and South America, for workshops and events. The next grant application deadline is in January for staff who would like to take advantage of it.

The full performing arts schedule is on the website with Lagniappe taking place this week. The fall play is *Silent Sky* and more opportunities for crew have been created through leadership opportunities. An improv workshop at Northfield will be restarted. The Winter Concert, set for December 12<sup>th</sup>, will be the last one in the Gates Gym.

Ms. Alcantara attended the **New Trier Parents' Association (NTPA)** meeting on September 2<sup>nd</sup>. Questions and discussion centered around how to increase Covid testing in the student population, the Winnetka Campus East Side construction and Gates' demolition, and incoming juniors and their acclamation to Winnetka. Also discussed were upcoming NTPA activities for the fall such as staff appreciation day, exam snacks, A to Z directory as well as internal organizational housekeeping. Mrs. Dubravec and Mr. Waechtler each presented on various events taking place at their respective campuses. The next meeting is scheduled for October 7<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Dronen shared that the **Finance Committee** met on September 13<sup>th</sup> and a number of the items were discussed earlier in the meeting. Also discussed were the Winnetka Campus West Side Project refunding bonds. The District has \$55 million in par value from 2015 GO bonds callable December of next year. The District is looking at this to see if there are any cost savings available to it. Discussion also occurred about the cost to potentially move the Transition program off-site to a community-based location. He noted the Transition parents are supportive of this possibility as well.

Ms. Hahn shared that the **Reopening Advisory Board (RAB) 2.0/Covid Reentry and Community Wellness (CRCW) Team** reconvened and reconstituted many members while adding a few more students and having three dedicated parents. The group appreciates the twice monthly meetings as opposed to weekly. She noted it remains an invaluable tool as a sounding board with medical consultants as to where the virus stands as well as internal operations.

Ms. Hahn also shared about the **New Trier Educational Foundation's (NTEF)** golf outing. Ms. Tomlinson, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Albrecht, and Ms. Hahn attended on behalf of the Board. Ms. Tomlinson was on the winning golf team. Ms. Hahn shared it was a successful event and she would hear a recap of their earnings in an upcoming meeting.

## **X. Calendar of Events & Board Members' Requests for Staff Research and Future Agenda Items**

Dr. Sally highlighted the following:

- He thanked Ms. Tomlinson for mentioning the various performing arts events coming up. He is looking forward to seeing Lagniappe on Wednesday. If Board members would like to attend, there is a link in the Weekly Letter to get tickets.

- He noted the play that is right after the next Board meeting.
- There will be a Homecoming Rally on Thursday, September 30<sup>th</sup> with the game on October 1<sup>st</sup> followed by the dance on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- Freshman Go-to-School Night is on Thursday, October 7<sup>th</sup> with Friday, October 8<sup>th</sup> through Monday, October 11<sup>th</sup> being the school's Fall Break.

There were no requests for Staff Research and Future Agenda Items.

**XI. ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Hahn moved, and Mr. Das seconded the motion, to adjourn. Upon a voice vote being taken, all members indicated they were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Lindsey Ruston, Secretary

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Cathleen Albrecht, President