

**NEW TRIER TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 203  
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
October 16, 2023  
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, October 16, 2023, at 6:30 p.m.

**Members Present**

Ms. Kimberly Alcantara  
Mr. Avik Das  
Mr. Keith Dronen, President  
Ms. Jean Hahn, Vice President  
Ms. Courtney McDonough  
Ms. Sally Pofcher  
Ms. Sally Tomlinson

**Administrators Present**

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

**Also Present**

Ms. Niki Dizon, Director of Communications; Dr. Michael Marassa, Chief Technology Officer; Mr. Myron Spiwak, Director of Business Services; Mr. Jon Lepeska, Math Department Faculty and Education Association President; Mr. Pete Collins, Kinetic Wellness Department Coordinator; Mr. John Gridley, Science Department Faculty; Mr. Kevin Kansler, Business Education Department Chair; Mr. Jason English, Science Department Chair; Mr. Jeff Bailey, Technology Department; Mr. Eric Johnson, Technology Department; Mr. Mike Hill, Technology Department; Ms. Lindsey Ruston, Board of Education Secretary; members of the press and community.

**BUSINESS MEETING**

**I. CALL TO ORDER – 5:15 p.m. – C234**

Mr. Dronen called the Regular Meeting of October 16, 2023, of the Board of Education to order at 5:15 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus. Roll call was taken, and all members were present, except for Ms. Pofcher. Mr. Dronen asked for a motion to move to Closed Session. Mr. Das moved that the Board of Education 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; student disciplinary cases; the placement of individual students in special education programs and other matters relating to individual students; 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. Tomlinson seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

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

NAY: none

ABSENT: Ms. Pofcher

The motion passed.

**II. CLOSED SESSION – 5:15 p.m. – A201A**

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

Mr. Dronen called the Regular Meeting of October 16, 2023, of the Board of Education to order at 6:37 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus. Roll call was taken, and all members were present.

Before continuing the meeting, Dr. Sally shared the following:

“Today we had an Institute Day for staff and teachers which had many excellent professional learning topics. To start the day, I brought the staff together to talk about the evolving situation in the Middle East and how we can support our staff, students and families. I want to share some of my remarks with the Board.

In some way almost everyone has been impacted by these events, but it is important to remember that we have many students, families, and staff members that have been personally and significantly affected through the impact on family and friends. Our path through this is to pull together to support our students, families, and staff.

With the depth of emotion people are feeling, it can be hard to talk about what is happening in Israel and Gaza for fear of upsetting colleagues and students who we truly care about. I understand that, I feel that. However, our humanity turns us to the suffering of innocent civilians in this conflict and allows us to recognize both the anger and outrage of Israeli citizens and the serious plight of the Palestinian people. Being a school, it makes us even more likely to focus on the children who are suffering, and all of the innocent young lives being lost in the war. Not just in the war - this weekend in the Chicago area, a six-year-old boy was stabbed and killed solely because he was Muslim. A senseless loss of life.

If we do not recognize and honor everyone’s humanity, it opens the door to violence and hatred. Here in our own community, we know that so many people are living with heightened fear for themselves, their families, and their friends - fear of being a target of bias, hate, even violence simply because of their identity. We must do all we can to continue to make our school feel safe and welcoming for everyone.

Our student affinity groups have been meeting and we will continue to provide them time and space as needed. Our students really appreciate these groups, but they also want to know they matter to each of the adults they see in the school. They want to feel seen for who they are and what they are experiencing. Our students are in many, many different places because of their knowledge of the conflict, their identity, and just because they’re teenagers. It is the strong relationships with students that are at the foundation of our positive classroom and school climate that will help us and has helped us to meet students’ needs in this time.

One concrete way we can support our students is to intervene if we see or hear any antisemitic or Islamophobic language or actions. This means not just in the classroom, but in the lunchroom, in the hallways, in clubs, and on playing fields. All staff have a role in making our school feel safe for everyone. Please intervene - our students notice when we don’t and when we don’t intervene, they surely feel like they do not matter.

Tomorrow we will have an announcement for students during adviser room and will provide time for individual reflection about where they are and what they need from their adviser and the school. This is a complex and difficult time for all and the way that we will get through it is by supporting each other and being the caring and supportive community that we are. Thank you.”

Mr. Dronen thanked Dr. Sally and began with the first order of business.

#### **IV. Minutes and Reports**

##### **\*A. Regular Meeting of September 18, 2023 (open session)**

Mr. Dronen asked for any comments or adjustments on the minutes of the Regular Meeting of September 18, 2023 (open session). There were no requests for changes to the minutes. Ms. Alcantara moved, and Ms. Hahn seconded the motion that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of September 18, 2023 (open session). Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. McDonough, Ms. Pofcher, Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Alcantara, Ms. Hahn, Mr. Dronen

NAY: none

ABSTAIN: Mr. Das

The motion passed.

## **B. 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:

- He displayed pictures of decorations done by Pep Club and adviser rooms for Homecoming week. Students were also able to make neon buttons in the library.
- Over 750 students attended the Freshman Mixer. There was a DJ, inflatable games and snacks. Mr. Waechtler thanked Dr. Tim Hayes, Student Activities Coordinator, Mr. Mark Howard and Ms. Sue Ellen Haak, Class of 2027 Adviser Chairs for their work on the event.
- The following evening was Freshman Go-to-School Night. He thanked teachers for providing a wonderful atmosphere so parents could get a snapshot of what their student's day looks like as well as what learning looks like in the classroom.
- The annual EKG screening took place for freshmen through their Kinetic Wellness class. Mr. Waechtler shared that 641 students were screened. Four of them needed an Echo, with two of those being referred to Lurie Children's Hospital for follow-up. He mentioned that this is the last year for the foundation that funds this, and the school will work to see if there is another partnership that can be formed, but this may be the last year providing this service. It went well and he thanked Ms. Gail Gamrath, Associate Principal – Northfield campus, for organizing and the Kinetic Wellness teachers for making their classes available for this.

Mr. Chris Mitchell, Associate Principal for Student Services, shared the following student events and program updates from the Winnetka campus on behalf of Mrs. Denise Dubravec, Principal for the Winnetka Campus/Assistant Superintendent:

- The debate team hosted the Trevian National tournament with 70 teams from 12 states attending. Two senior students, Mr. Avi Shah and Mr. Magnus Lee, won nine debates, which put them in the finals, but they were edged out by a team from Texas for the win.
- The girls' tennis team have won conference, regional, and sectional championships. They are headed to state on Thursday.
- Some students from the German Club, including Ms. Abby Waechtler, put together a display on the traditions of Oktoberfest.
- Ms. Hilerre Kirsch worked with performing arts student leaders using the school's *Be Brave, Be Kind, Be Proud* motto and what it means to be a part of a community both in performing arts as well as the larger New Trier community.
- The boys' cross-country team were conference champions, with Mr. Ben Crane as the individual champion.
- The boys' golf team have won back-to-back state champions with three individual medalists from the group.
- The girls' field hockey team honored their head coach, Ms. Stephanie Nykaza, who has won multiple state championships. She is retiring after 35 years of service. She is a former student who returned to teach Kinetic Wellness and coach.
- Mr. Mitchell thanked Ms. Stacy Kolack, Student Activities Coordinator, and Dr. Hayes for their work on Homecoming. He displayed pictures from the Night Rally, which was glow themed. Physical Plant Services also did a lot of work for the entire week as well as for the event itself. Mr. Lepeska, Math Department Faculty and Association President, was shown competing in the dodge ball game.
- The Friday of Homecoming week included soccer, field hockey, and football games, all with wins. The dance was held Saturday evening with over 1,800 tickets sold.
- Reunion tours were held over the past month with Student Ambassadors providing the tours.
- Several staff have delivered professional development presentations. Dr. Chimille Tillery, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Ms. Michael Christensen, Social Studies Department Faculty, presented at the Illinois State Board of Education's Equity Symposium on *Implementing and Supporting AP African American Studies*. Three science teachers, Ms. Elaine Kollar, Ms. Laura Hessling, and Ms. Tracy Smith, were invited to present as featured speakers at the Northern Illinois Science Educators Conference.
- There are two New Trier Parent University events coming up. One is Student Resources that will take place next week and the other, about eating disorders, will take place in November. These presentations came from parent suggestions and were created in partnership with the New Trier Parents' Association. He provided further details on each presentation.
- Finally, Mr. Mitchell attended the Large High School Consortium meeting that was hosted by Carmel High School and Fishers High School which are north of Indianapolis, Indiana. Schools from six states make up the consortium and all have similar profiles to New Trier. The principals meet twice a year, and this was the first time that assistant and associate principals were invited. It is a great professional development opportunity and

provides time to delve into the intricacies of what it takes to run large schools, including their challenges. It also is a chance to see what other schools are doing. The group discussed connecting and belonging, multi-tiered systems of support, and attendance.

Dr. Sally then took a moment to acknowledge the principals, associate principals, and assistant principals as this week was Principals' Week with Thursday being Principals' Day. He thanked them for their connections with students and staff as well as their leadership at each building.

Mr. Tragos provided an update from Curriculum and Instruction. At the end of September, he, along with Dr. Sally, attended the Benchmarking Consortium of High Performing School. The theme for this meeting in Austin was Artificial Intelligence and Cyber Security, so Dr. Michael Marassa, Chief Technology Officer, also attended. The consortium was hosted by Eanes Independent School District, which is Westlake High School, though the district is K-12. Dr. Marassa presented on educational technology tools that New Trier is using but also on cybersecurity, which Mr. Tragos noted was informative and engaging. Guests and local resources or experts presented on various technology topics including augmented reality/virtual reality (AR/VR), Artificial Intelligence (AI) teaching and technology strategies, and cybersecurity. The group visited the new Apple Campus in Austin. This new facility will soon welcome 22,000 new employees. Consortium participants also learned from Apple executives and its education employees. They discussed AI, AR/VR, student identification and safety. Eanes has positive connections with the school community and professional community as parents of Eanes' students work at Apple and the school also has board members who work there. Mr. Tragos shared that teaching and learning with AI was a highlight for him. He also shared the idea of co-existing with AI and thinking about it as a thought partner and personal assistant. The next consortium will be in Manhattan Beach with New Trier hosting in September 2024.

Mr. Tragos shared that today was an Institute Day which had an AI theme. The District hosted keynote speaker, Mr. Alex Castrounis, founder and CEO of Why of AI. They are in the business of using AI for good. He spoke to the entire staff as well as led a breakout session.

Next, Mr. Tragos spoke about the School Report Card which will be published at the end of October. Though the District does not yet have official summative designation ratings, it spends significant time reviewing the data. This is part of New Trier's own annual analysis of performance metrics, which helps it celebrate successes and progress while also identifying areas for growth or improvement. Mr. Tragos shared that based on this data tracking analysis, a few key metrics are trending up and are positive. English Language Arts (ELA) and math proficiency showed improvement, after a drop in proficiency rates in 2022. The District was responsive, and in collaboration with department leaders in these areas, devised a plan to address student learning needs and design curriculum, instruction, and interventions to support student achievement and it yielded results. Scores are up in both ELA and math, trending closer to pre-COVID rates. The school's graduation rates, and 9th grade on track have been consistently high over time and remain so. These accountability measures are strong in student achievement and the result of purposeful planning by department leaders and teachers.

There are two areas of concern: attendance and English Language (EL) proficiency. Attendance is a known issue as last year's chronic absenteeism rate was 31%. It is a high priority for the District which has a multi-pronged plan to address the problem with policies and procedures. There will be more information on what the Graduating Class Teams (GCTs) are doing, however, anecdotally, they are having a positive impact on this. EL Progress to Proficiency are English Language Learners who, in a span of five years, develop proficiency in English. This is the first time this metric counts for the School Report Card. It is also the first time the school has had more than 20 students in this group. If a student group is less than 20, it does not count in the rating as the sample size is too small. The District is working to understand what the EL Progress means.

Dr. Johnson gave the FOIA report, noting that there have been four requests since the last Board meeting. Three were regarding special education placement, which are closed. One, regarding insurance, is still open.

## **V. Communications**

Mr. Dronen 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 was no request for public comment.

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

### **A. Class Size Report**

Mr. Tragos presented the class size report. He thanked Mr. Dan Weidner, Associate Principal for Academics and Administrative Services and Ms. Katherine Kapustiak, Application Support Specialist, for their help with this report. This report has been produced for many years and provides a wealth of historical data including showing how the District allocates its resources efficiently and responsibly and how this allocation meets students needs and interests. Staffing for the 23-24 school year was based on maintaining and meeting budget targets along with making strategic allocations while working to bring more courses within range, so there are fewer outliers of class sizes of 14 and below as well as 30 and above. Staffing targets were set using McKibben's demographic projection of 3,723 students. The official October 1<sup>st</sup> enrollment was 3,742 students, 19 more than projected. Mr. Tragos shared some highlights, noting that the average class size was 22.3 for the 23-24 school year. The past two years the average was 22.1. These numbers are all within the acceptable range for the District wants.

The first section of the report provides a high-level overview of the total number of students in the District, how they are broken out by program, and enrollments per department, among other data. Section two shows the range of class sizes by department including those outside our desired range. The percentage of large classes, 30 or more students, is quite small and has remained consistent with previous years. The percentage of small classes, 14 or fewer students, decreased to the fewest small class sizes in the last five years. Median class size data has been added as requested by faculty and faculty leaders. The median class size is 23 and it can also be seen by department as well.

Section three shows specifically which classes are out of our desired range. Mr. Tragos explained about singleton and doubleton courses, how they impact class sizes and how they demonstrate a student-centered approach to supporting student interests and needs. Ms. Pofcher inquired what "CT" means after Biology and Chemistry, to which Mr. Tragos replied it stands for co-taught, and those classes have a content teacher as well as a special education teacher in the room.

Section four provided information on non-classroom areas and student load per FTE. Mr. Tragos summarized his conclusions from the report and then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Tomlinson thanked Mr. Tragos for all the work that went into this report. She noted that New Trier does a good job using teacher retirements to offset declining enrollment and protect job stability. She inquired if, in smaller departments, Mr. Tragos is seeing increased challenges maintaining course offerings while also trying to preserve class size. She referenced an increase in students in Business Education classes, noting that 21 out of 35 classes have greater than 26 students. Being a small department, she believes they feel the effects more. Conversely, music and theatre have dropped over 100 students in the last couple of years. She inquired how this is being addressed. Mr. Tragos replied that the District is doing what it can through natural attrition, though he noted sometimes it does not work as efficiently in small departments like it does in larger ones. He went on to share additional details about this topic.

Ms. McDonough echoed Ms. Tomlinson's appreciative comments. She noted that hearing the report is a testament to the commitment of the District to provide excellent educational experiences for students and staff and to do so in a fiscally responsible way. Ms. McDonough then inquired how New Trier's class sizes compare to surrounding districts. Mr. Tragos replied that the school identified 26 peer schools and ranked them from highest to lowest class size. The Winnetka campus ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> while the Northfield campus ranked 15<sup>th</sup>. He felt New Trier's class sizes are very good when compared to other schools. Ms. McDonough then inquired as to the factors that are considered in making a classroom setting balanced. Mr. Tragos noted balancing is an enormous task and begins as soon as the schedule is finalized in late spring and continues almost until the first day of school. When there are several sections, the first pass is working to have as even numbers as possible across them. Then other factors are considered such as the number of students with IEPs or 504 plans, gender, and other student characteristics. He noted sometimes this works well, while other times, there are oddities for a variety of reasons. The school wants teachers to have balanced loads, so they have class sizes that are manageable.

Mr. Das inquired about the unit for teacher load. Mr. Tragos replied that it is the number of students that a teacher has based on their full-time FTE. He explained if a teacher is full-time (5 fifths) and has 100 students on their teacher load, it is safe to assume they have 20 students per class. Mr. Das then inquired how he could say that the teacher loads in the traditional classroom environments is a certain number. Mr. Tragos replied that he would take 22.3 times five to get an average teacher load. This would be for a full-time teacher who teaches five classes and does not have an adviser room. This is one way to estimate an average teacher load. Mr. Das then inquired if that is comparable to

the area. Mr. Tragos replied that teacher load varies widely based on what a teacher teaches. Depending on the course, level, and age of students, some courses have more students in them while others have less.

Ms. Hahn thanked Mr. Tragos for his report, noting that teacher load and class size was brought up during negotiations. However, behind every number is a story and experience for students and teachers. Ms. Hahn inquired if there is an effort to balance an individual teacher's load. Mr. Tragos replied that he works closely with department leaders who make decisions at a course level. Choices are made with leaders to have some balanced sections while choices are also made on types of courses, level, and year of student to allocate resources. Teacher loads are balanced as much as possible for all sections of a course. Department leaders will also work with teachers on their overall load. Work is done to even out sections based on the FTE, but also, at the department level, making decisions about what teachers will teach. He also acknowledged Ms. Hahn's comment that there is a story behind each of these numbers and the school recognizes that students have unique needs that are not visible in these numbers.

Ms. Hahn noted that at the elementary level, their board heard parent concerns consistently about class size. She noted that that concern is not heard at the board level at New Trier and inquired if administrators field questions or concerns from parents. Mr. Tragos shared that he has not had that question over the last several years. Dr. Sally added that part of the purpose of this report is to make sure that the school stays on top of class size. He went on to thank Mr. Tragos, his team, and department leaders for their work. Dr. Sally noted that this is only the classroom piece as there is a student services side of personnel where the District allocates resources as well. Combining these two complicates the puzzle of determining where our resources are most needed. He believes that the school is doing well responding to student needs both inside and outside the classroom. He noted that on the School Report Card, New Trier is doing well regarding the staff to student ratio, having one of the lowest ratios.

Ms. Alcantara echoed Ms. Hahn's point as she too served on a K-8 school board, noting that class sizes varied wildly, particularly at the K-4 level from year-to-year. She shared that to open the report and see the consistency and, in her opinion, appropriate average class size, year after year is great to look at as a board member.

Dr. Sally shared thoughts on the comment that there is a story behind each number and student. He shared that the complexity of students is increasing. He emphasized that the numbers may look good compared to other schools but that teachers are working very hard for the type of individual support and teaching that New Trier students experience across every discipline. The support for teachers from the Graduating Class Teams is taking some of the load off so faculty can focus on teaching the individual students in front of them.

## **B. New Course Proposals and Future Programming at New Trier**

Mr. Tragos presented the new course proposals (NCPs) and future programming at New Trier. He thanked Dr. Tillery and his administrative assistant, Ms. Beth Dirkes, for their work on the report. Mr. Tragos presented three course revision proposals. Throughout the process, all submissions were refined and not all proposals were recommended for approval. The final product presented to the Board is the result of thoughtful, collaborative work among teachers and department leaders. These were vetted through leadership teams and the administration with feedback that generates new iterations of the proposals. These courses provide opportunities for students to deepen their learning experiences. It is also an opportunity for faculty to bring fresh perspectives and new ideas to their departments. Mr. Tragos noted that there are few course revisions compared to previous years, which is part of a normal cycle of curriculum revisions, particularly as teachers adjust to and master the block schedule. Teachers are meeting student needs with these revisions as well as adapting to changes in education. These revisions will be up for Board approval at the November meeting.

Mr. Tragos shared details about each of the major course revisions. The first is from the Applied Arts and Social Studies departments titled *Urban Design and Civic Engagement*. Urban Design is an existing course in Applied Arts. The proposed revision seeks to make this an interdisciplinary course by combining it with Civics in Social Studies. This course makes the natural connection between urban development and civic engagement, emphasizing urban planning, design, technology, sustainability, geography, sociology, economics, and culture. It will also use the instructional framework of Human Centered Design and will eventually be one of the courses in a Human Centered Design Pathway.

The second course is from the English department entitled *New Media Arts*. It is a revision to the current Freshman Media Production course. Enrollment in the current course has lagged for the last few years, and the proposed revisions seeks to revitalize the course by updating its digital media topics and technology to meet student interests

and skills. The course is designed in modules – either year-long or first or second semester. Students can take any configuration of that course and continue in the sequence of Media & Journalism.

The last proposal is a course level change for the Art department's *Leadership in Art Essentials*. It is an existing course that students have taken but now want to be leaders in the course. The change is moving it from an elective credit or 8-level and offering students a 9-level credit or honors-level credit. It requires much planning with the teacher outside of class as the student leaders act like a teacher assistant. This model can also be seen in the social studies and kinetic wellness departments. Mr. Tragos then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Tomlinson thanked Mr. Tragos for the semester-long modular class concept. She noted that last month, Mr. Tragos shared that 55% of students are taking four or five core courses. She shared it is nice to have smaller bites to try out electives. Mr. Tragos anticipates more of these kinds of offerings in the future as departments start to align to this.

Ms. Hahn added that it is great to see Civics being offered in more unique ways. She shared an anecdote about her children's former teacher who is now the media arts teacher at the junior high. Ms. Hahn also shared that not only is it great to offer these courses to students, but it also keeps it fresh and exciting for faculty.

Referencing the Urban Design and Civic Engagement course, Ms. Hahn noted that it could qualify as an applied art and a fine art. Mr. Tragos replied that it is yet to be determined if the course can meet both graduation requirements in one class. Ms. Hahn followed up that she thinks of the UC system that requires a year of fine arts and inquired if this is something that would qualify. She then inquired when this is communicated to students as some may need to fit in a fine arts course if they are applying to a UC school. Mr. Tragos replied that this would be discussed in four-year planning, however, the fine arts Ms. Hahn is referring to is very specific to the UC system and this course would not fulfill that requirement as this course looks like practical arts. Schools that students want to apply to often come up after ninth and tenth grades and students would work with their post-high school counselor to note the uniqueness of certain state systems. In terms of Art Essentials, Ms. Hahn noted that in the document it said that a student could apply to be an art major who took this. Ms. Hahn noted that New Trier does not have majors, which Mr. Tragos confirmed while also stating that major and minor credit is old language that needs to be edited out of the Program of Studies. He shared there was a time when majors were any courses that received weighted credit, levels 2, 3, 4, and 9. Any elective course that was level 8 was deemed a minor. Mr. Tragos clarified that it is weighted and unweighted credit.

Ms. Alcantara inquired about the Urban Design and Civic Engagement course to make sure the course will receive civics credit or if Illinois State Board of Education needs to approve it. Mr. Tragos replied that the District does not need ISBE approval. In working with department leaders, a final decision is needed as to whether a course can earn graduation requirement for both fine and practical arts as well as earn a civics credit, so meeting two requirements in one course. Ms. Alcantara liked that there was another opportunity for students to fulfill the civics requirement. Dr. Sally added that the way this is communicated is through the Program of Studies, which will start to be finalized in November. He noted that the course will qualify for civics credit, but the question remains if it will receive credit for both. Ms. Alcantara inquired at what levels the courses with revisions will be offered, to which Mr. Tragos replied levels 9 and 4.

Next, Ms. Alcantara inquired if the Leadership in Art Essentials is similar to the SILC (Senior Instructional Leadership Corps) program in terms of instructional leadership. Mr. Tragos replied that it is somewhat similar in that the students have a leadership position, but different as these students have already taken this class and are taking it again now as a leader and earning credit for that. A SILC student is like a teacher assistant but is a different type of leadership program. Leadership in Art Essentials is more similar to outdoor ed teacher assistants or kinetic wellness leaders as well as student leaders in civics and social justice.

Mr. Tragos then briefly presented on future programming at New Trier, particularly focusing on the strategic plan through the goals of the annual plan. The Best Programming Practices in the Block Schedule Committee was created last year to look at which programming, scheduling, systems, and structures are effective and ineffective for student learning and opportunities in a block schedule. The committee came away with many good ideas. A new committee is looking to design structures and programming for the next three to five to ten years. They will look at what students need and might do as well as what programming in schools looks like. Structures and programming are likely to be more flexible and individualized for student opportunities, experiences, and different uses of time. Future programming is also about achieving the vision of the strategic plan. Next steps include convening the new

committee, engaging all stakeholders including parents, students, and staff, as well as keeping the Board apprised of progress.

Mr. Dronen inquired if there were any thoughts to changes or additions of foreign languages, to which Mr. Tragos replied not at the current time.

**\*C. School Calendar 2024-2025**

Dr. Sally presented, for approval, the major dates for the 2024-2025 school year. The District tries to establish these major dates as early as it can to help families plan. The dates include the start and end dates of school and the dates of major vacations. He noted that creating the calendar is a collaborative effort with a representative internal committee as well as with the District's sender school superintendents. Dr. Sally will present a full 24-25 calendar in March 2024.

Also, the District is working on the 2025-2026 school year calendar. In the past, New Trier had multiple years of calendars approved in advance for planning. The same collaborative process that Dr. Sally mentioned is happening with this calendar as well. At this meeting, the Board is just approving the 2024-2025 calendar and it will be posted on the website tomorrow. Dr. Sally invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Hahn noted that finals will again be before Winter Break and inquired if the semesters remain unbalanced. Dr. Sally replied that they are close to what the semesters are this year. Mr. Waechtler added that while off by one day compared to this year, it is almost identical. Dr. Sally shared that courses, course committees and teachers have adapted. He went on to say that continued feedback is something that can be gathered. After additional comments, he said that the school would stick with having finals prior to Winter Break for the next couple of years. Mr. Waechtler shared that the calendar committee discussed the imbalance with teachers noting they are getting better with it every year. Overall, from the committee, as well as looking back on surveys done during the west side construction project at Winnetka, starting earlier August was one of the least popular ideas. Ms. Tomlinson added that it impacts semester-long electives as the longer semester will have an additional unit.

Ms. Alcantara commented that one of the big drivers of having finals before Winter Break was the feedback from colleges saying they would like to receive the transcripts from seniors at that time. While this is important, Ms. Alcantara would be interested in feedback in about a year to see if it is making a difference. Dr. Sally shared that colleges receive the transcripts in early January compared to late January which is a significant decision period for them. The school also understands that getting feedback from staff, students, and parents on the calendar, while full of varying opinions, should be sought out.

Ms. Alcantara also suggested, as it gets closer to March with a completed calendar, that getting ahead of helping parents to understand why there might be a late arrival on a Thursday and Friday instead of an early dismissal on Friday and a late arrival on Monday would be useful. She encouraged communication around this ahead of time. As there has only been one pair so far, Dr. Sally said that the school will wait a bit and look at feedback prior to when the full calendar is released in March so the District is fully informed and then can communicate.

Mr. Dronen inquired if Dr. Sally met with the sender school superintendents in terms of coordination. Dr. Sally replied that the group does its best to align as much as possible. Start dates vary, however, major vacations are the most important. Dr. Sally shared additional information around differences that may be seen in the calendars.

Ms. Tomlinson moved, and Ms. Hahn seconded the motion, that the Board of Education approves 2024-2025 school year calendar as presented. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. Pofcher, Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Das, Ms. Hahn, Ms. McDonough, Mr. Dronen

NAY: none

The motion passed.

**VII. Administrative Items**

**A. Treasurer's Report for September 2023**

Dr. Johnson presented the Treasurer's Report for September 2023. Fund balances for all accounts are \$80,251,640. This is lower than typical for this time of year due to the late second installment property tax payments and the



planned fund balance usage for facilities. Dr. Johnson noted that tax bills were calculated and are online today, so the District expects revenue to start coming in over the next several weeks. Tax bills are due December 1<sup>st</sup> and the District continues to monitor its cash flow closely. Dr. Johnson noted that a bright spot continues to be significant earnings from interest income. Investments with PMA are at 4.75% and are only part of the account at \$16 million. There is \$29 million in cash, which is being left as is for liquidity as the District awaits property taxes. However, significant interest income is also being earned on this cash at a rate of 5.5%.

### **B. Financial Report for September 2023**

Dr. Johnson presented the Financial Report for September 2023. Operating revenue was \$4,600,000 for the first three months of the fiscal year, or 11% higher compared to last year. He noted that the comparison to last year was also when the school had a delay in property taxes. The adopted budget for operating revenue is 6.51% higher than last fiscal year.

Operating expenditures were \$18,600,000 through September, or 3.17% higher than last year's. Results were similar for the first quarter this year compared to last year, and the next several months will expose any trends where further analysis is needed. The adopted budget for operating expenditures is 5.61% higher than last year. Dr. Johnson invited questions or comments on either report.

### **\*C. 2023 Preliminary Tax Levy**

Dr. Johnson began the presentation on the 2023 preliminary tax levy. One of the most important functions that the Board does is to review and approve the tax levy.

Mr. Myron Spiwak, Director of Business Services, shared that the tax levy unofficially kicks off the budget cycle for FY25. The levy will be placed on display on October 17<sup>th</sup> and at the November 13<sup>th</sup> Board meeting, there will be a truth in taxation hearing and then adoption of the final levy. To calculate the levy, it is the actual tax extension received last year which is then increased by the lesser of 5% or CPI. For many years, CPI was always less, however, again this year, the lower number is five percent. The December 2022 CPI was 6.5% and by law the levy can only be extended to the maximum of 5%. On top of this, estimated new property is added. The levy will fund the second half of this school year and the first half of the 24-25 school year.

Mr. Spiwak noted that Cook County is governed by the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law (PTELL) or tax cap. The intent of the law is to control the growth of property taxes which is why the District is limited to the lesser of 5% or CPI. Mr. Spiwak noted the importance of the estimate of new property. If the District levied less than the actual amount of new property, it loses the tax revenue on the difference between the two figures. Therefore, the new property figure is ballooned as much as possible, so tax revenue is not lost. There is no issue in doing so as the tax cap law will restrict the total tax amount, regardless of the amount levied.

Mr. Spiwak shared the numbers that are proposed for this year. The new property amount for last year was \$67 million, which is higher than normal - the average new property over the past ten years is \$40 million. For a number of years, the District had estimated \$100 million in new property for levy purposes to ensure we did not lose tax revenue. For this levy, a new property value of \$125 million is being used. While we know due to the tax cap that the actual levy will be close to 5.4%, using the higher figure to capture all new property increase the levy to 6.91%. Dr. Johnson added that this is a reassessment year, so people are seeing that the value of their house may have gone up significantly. However, New Trier's portion will only go up by 5% across the township due to the tax cap. The bills related to this levy will go out in January or February and account for 55% of the total bill. The second portion will be billed next fall.

Next, Mr. Spiwak shared that the tax dollars support the strategic plan's annual goals, our continued commitment to excellence in education, a broad curriculum tailored to individual student interests and needs, strong student services and supports, and an extracurricular program that encourages high levels of student participation. He provided further details on each item as well. Mr. Johnson added that levy dollars also support competitive salaries to attract and retain top faculty and staff.

The District is proud to have a strong history of balanced budgets. After the 2003 referendum, the District committed to five years of no referendum, which has now been extended to 20 years. The school carefully manages its expenditures and has instituted cost containment to continue to align revenues with expenditures, particularly when the actual CPI is over the amount that can be levied. The levy also supports effectively enhancing and maintaining the District's facilities. The District also maintains appropriate reserves which allows it to fund operations between

tax payments as well as maintain its Aaa bond rating. The levy increase will help fund District expenses that have also increased. Dr. Johnson anticipates a balanced budget for next year. He also mentioned that the District is about to enter a new five-year planning cycle. It will look at the impact of inflation on expenditures, future facilities needs as well as increasing enrollment towards the end of the decade. This will allow the District to see, over the next five to ten years, how its resources will support its goals and where there may be some gaps.

Dr. Johnson thanked the community and the Board for their support. It takes the support of the entire community to sustain the level of excellence that previous generations of New Trier students have experienced. The school honors that commitment by being faithful stewards of the community's resources. Dr. Johnson then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Hahn noted that according to PTELL, the truth in taxation hearing is required if the District exceeds 5% in new properties. She went on to say that as a matter of practice the hearing is held, but the District is not technically required to hold it. Dr. Johnson replied that the District typically follows the hearing requirements even though it has not been required to. In the years, where there was a 1.4% levy ask and then levying for 0.5-1% for new property, that 2.4% number on an actual 1.4% levy did not require a hearing. However, the District is now levying at 5% and there is an additional 1.5% just to tax new property, technically the amount is over 5%, even though most homeowners will not experience it, therefore, the District is required to have the hearing next month. Ms. Hahn noted that as a matter of practice, these hearings are held as part of sound financial stewardship and being transparent with the community. Ms. Hahn noted that while the District runs a tight budgeting process, there are certain expenses that it cannot control, yet its revenues are capped. She went on to say that alternatively, the plan would be to look at programming and perhaps go for an operating referendum which was last done in 2003. It is something that is out there potentially, though not imminent. Dr. Johnson replied that one item that helps the District to balance its budget is that currently there is a natural dip in students. After additional comments, he also shared that the school is going through a period of many faculty retirements, so this aligns nicely with the dip in students. He went on to share other thoughts. Mr. Spiwak added that in several accounts on the levy only \$12,000 was entered as fund balances have been built up in them over the years. He shared that some amount must be levied in those categories or the District loses our ability to use them in future years. The levy amounts from those funds has been put into the education fund and will help to build the fund balance. The funds in the education fund can be used for a wide array of services and programs. The conversation continued with Dr. Johnson sharing that the District decides how it can allocate the money within the funds. The District talks about having a six- or seven-month fund balance in all accounts. Some accounts have more and by levying less in those it allows the District to get back to an even number of months in each fund.

Mr. Dronen commented on expenses and revenue, noting that last year, inflation was 7% and the District levied at 5% plus new property and this year, inflation is 6.5%. He noted that the issue, from a revenue standpoint, is where inflation will be in the future, which is anyone's guess. It is tracking lower by the calendar year, but year-over-year is a little bit higher. Dr. Johnson confirmed this and said the number is in the mid 3s. The final number will be available in January. In the District's 5-year projection, it is carrying a 3.1% number. Brief conversation continued between the two. Dr. Sally added details about the rapidly increasing healthcare costs as well.

Ms. Hahn moved, and Mr. Das seconded the motion, that the Board of Education approves the 2023 Tentative Levy in the amount of \$127,594,860 and that a Public Hearing be held at the November 13, 2023 regularly scheduled Board Meeting. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Das, Ms. Hahn, Ms. McDonough, Ms. Pofcher, Mr. Dronen

NAY: none

The motion passed.

### **VIII. Consent Agenda**

- Bill List for Period, September 1 - 30, 2023
- Personnel Report (Appointments, Changes of Status, Resignation, Retirements, Stipends - Appointment and Administrator Contract)
- School Maintenance Project Grant Approval
- Resolution Authorizing Settlement of Altria Portion of Vaping Litigation

Mr. Dronen 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 Period, September 1 - 30, 2023; Personnel Report (Appointments, Changes of Status, Resignation, Retirements, Stipends – Appointment and Administrator Contract); Authorize the Illinois State Board of Education School Maintenance Project Grant application process in the amount of \$50,000 and reserve funds for the projects as required by the grant provisions; and the Resolution Authorizing Settlement of Altria Portion of Vaping Litigation. Ms. Hahn seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Das, Ms. Hahn, Ms. McDonough, Ms. Pofcher, Ms. Tomlinson, Mr. Dronen

NAY: none

The motion passed.

#### **IX. Board Member Reports**

Ms. Pofcher shared that the **Community Engagement Committee (CEC)** met. It was a great opportunity to hear how engaged the community members are who are a part of this committee.

Ms. Pofcher noted that the **Facilities Steering Committee** met and shared that the group is shifting perspective to thinking and planning ahead.

Mr. Das attended the **TrueNorth Leadership Council** meeting last week. It included a celebration of the completion of their phase one campus updates which were on time and within budget parameters. As part of their strategic plan, there is a significant effort to do assessments of core cooperative functions of each program and service area offered by TrueNorth. That will be reported back to the leadership council as well as to the member districts at some point. The next meeting is November 15<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Hahn shared that the **New Trier Educational Foundation (NTEF)** met on September 21<sup>st</sup>. They are working closely with Mr. Tragos and curriculum and instruction on the roll out of the Innovation Hub. Some time spent was at the University of Illinois, who is partnering with the District on this. NTEF is engaging in their own strategic planning and are using some faculty members to take a human-centered design approach to their planning. This year the NTEF will once again have their gala, which is one of their big fundraisers where they induct the Hall of Honorees. An announcement of honored alumni will be forthcoming. New Trier won the first School Spirit Showdown versus Evanston. There were 68 separate gifts given for a total of \$6,000. Ms. Hahn shared it was a fun way to spread the word in the community earlier than normal about the Foundation and the work they do. NTEF is looking to make this an annual tradition.

Mr. Dronen shared that last week he and Dr. Sally participated in the League of Women Voters of Wilmette State of the Village. The trustees, park district, village, as well as districts 37 and 39 were in attendance. Each shared about themselves and government cooperation was discussed. The event is hosted every two years.

Ms. Alcantara shared that the **New Trier Parents' Association (NTPA)** met on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. There were reports on the budget as well as from each of the classes, along with programs, membership, and communications. The next meeting will be on November 7<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Alcantara shared that there was a **Facilities Steering Committee** meeting on October 5<sup>th</sup> and the next meeting will be on November 1<sup>st</sup>. The meeting provided an overview of the status of various construction projects. The committee also got an overview of the District's architect and construction manager relationship and collaborations.

Ms. Tomlinson shared that the **Environmental Committee** will meet next month.

Ms. McDonough attended the **Booster Club** meeting on September 19<sup>th</sup>. Intramurals have started with golf filling up in one day. Spike League and Night League will begin shortly. Last year, they had 750 students participate and are expecting record numbers this year due to the new facilities. She shared how grateful she is that the school can provide these opportunities for students.

Ms. McDonough was not able to attend the **New Trier Fine Arts Association (NTFAA)**. She highlighted the good work they are doing to raise awareness in the community of the wonderful offerings that are available.

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

Dr. Sally highlighted the following events:

- He encouraged Board members to take a look at the performing arts calendar as there are many choral and instrumental performances in the next few weeks.
- The calendars have all the committee meetings on them.
- Parent Teacher Conferences are on November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- The next Board meeting is November 13<sup>th</sup>, which is the second Monday and is earlier than usual due to Thanksgiving.

Mr. Dronen inquired if the special board workshop meeting was included, with Dr. Sally replying it will be held on November 30<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Dronen inquired if there were any requests for staff research or future agenda items, of which there were none.

**XI. ADJOURNMENT**

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

---

Lindsey Ruston, Secretary

---

Keith Dronen, President