

Yearbook Statement

In the spring of 2019, as stories about racist photographs in college yearbooks made national news, New Trier High School faculty, staff, students, and administrators questioned whether similar images may exist in our school's 118-year history. In response, New Trier's Civics and Social Justice class, the Voices in Equity student group, and other student volunteers decided to examine New Trier yearbooks dating back to the school's founding as part of a class project. They discovered examples of early racist cartoons and jokes as well as photographs of students in blackface, of students and faculty in Native American headdresses and face paint, and of students in costumes meant to represent other cultures either in school productions or during dress-up days such as Halloween.

Yearbooks are only one snapshot of the history of an institution; they do not give the entire story of the past. However, reconciling the photographs, cartoons, and writings found in our yearbooks with our mission of inquiry, compassion, and service and our commitment to equity, inclusion, and safety for every student and staff member is difficult. Two contradictory themes emerge when we look at our past. First, we see acts of compassion and service that we hope our current students emulate. Second, we see students, staff, and the school abiding by harmful, foregone social norms. We hope that each generation learns from the one before it, and while we must do all we can to make our schools safe and inclusive every day, we know that even now our words and actions may not reflect the knowledge and understanding of future generations.

For our students and alumni whose identities are represented in these images, they are unnerving and alarming. We regret the fear, exclusion, and pain these images cause. Rather than removing or censoring these images, we will maintain them in our historical archives and attach this statement to those archival copies. It is important that we acknowledge this part of our past so that we are thoughtful of how we are representing our values for today and for future generations. We are and will continue to be committed to making New Trier High School a place where everyone feels safe, welcomed, and respected regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, or religion. Equity is deeply embedded in New Trier 2030, our strategic plan, and each year we will commit to concrete goals that will advance our efforts in areas such as climate, professional learning, systems and practices, curriculum, and student voice.

We wish to thank the students who spent hours reviewing more than 100 yearbooks and who presented their thoughtful work, along with their suggestions on how to acknowledge and learn from these images from our past. We look forward to continuing our work with students, staff, parents, community members, and alumni to make New Trier a safe and welcoming school with equitable opportunities for all.

Dr. Paul Sally, Superintendent, July 2020