

**NEW TRIER TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 203  
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**January 19, 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 Tuesday, January 19, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.

**Members Present**

Ms. Cathy Albrecht, President  
Mr. Keith Dronen  
Ms. Carol Ducommun  
Ms. Jean Hahn  
Mr. Brad McLane

**Administrators Present**

Dr. Paul Sally, Superintendent  
Mr. Christopher Johnson, Associate Superintendent for Finance & Operations  
Dr. Joanne Panopoulos, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education  
Mr. Peter Tragos, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction  
Mrs. Denise Dubravec, Principal – Winnetka Campus  
Mr. Paul Waechtler, Principal – Northfield Campus

**Members Present Via Phone**

Dr. Marc Glucksman, Vice President  
Mr. Greg Robitaille

**Also Present**

Ms. Niki Dizon, Director of Communications; Mr. Michael Marassa, Chief Technology Officer; Dr. Renee Zoladz, Director of Human Resources; Ms. Jen McDonough, Applied Arts Department Faculty and New Trier High School Educational Association President; Mr. Augie Fontanetta, Athletic Director; Mr. Andy Butler, Kinetic Wellness Department Chair; Mr. Dave Conway, Director of Physical Plant 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 January 19, 2021 of the Board of Education to order at 5:31 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus. Ms. Albrecht then stated that a full, in-person meeting is not practical or prudent due to the Governor’s declared disaster.

Roll call was taken, and all members were present except for Dr. Glucksman and Mr. Robitaille.

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 of the District or legal counsel for the District, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee or against legal counsel for the District to determine its validity; the placement of individual students in special education programs and other matters relating to individual students; 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; and discussion of minutes of meetings lawfully closed, whether for purposes of approval by the body of the minutes or semi-annual review of the minutes as mandated by Section 2.06. Ms. Hahn seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. Ducommun, Ms. Hahn, Mr. McLane, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

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 January 19, 2021 of the Board of Education to order at 6:37 p.m. Ms. Albrecht confirmed that Dr. Glucksman and Mr. Robitaille, who participated via telephone, could hear her. Roll call was taken, and all members were present.

### **IV. Minutes**

Ms. Albrecht asked for any comments or adjustments on the minutes of the Special Meeting of December 1, 2020 (open and closed session) and Regular Meeting of December 14, 2020 (open and closed session). There were requests for changes by Ms. Hahn and Ms. Ducommun that were incorporated. Ms. Hahn moved, and Mr. McLane seconded the motion, that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of December 1, 2020 (open and closed session) and the Regular Meeting of December 14, 2020 (open and closed session). Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. Hahn, Mr. McLane, Mr. Robitaille, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Ducommun, Dr. Glucksman, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

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 Ms. Niki Dizon, Director of Communications. There were five requests for public comment. Ms. Albrecht reminded commenters to keep their remarks to three minutes each in accordance with Board Policy 2-230. Ms. Albrecht noted that given the number of those who wished to speak, the allotted thirty minutes would be enough.

1. Mr. Brad Charchut, a parent and member of the executive board of the Booster Club, thanked the Board for considering the proposal for the improvement of the athletic facilities. He shared the purpose of the Booster Club and the projects they have supported in the past. He went on to share further comments in support of the renovations for the east side of the Winnetka campus.
2. Ms. Jenna Birdsell, Ms. Caroline Finnigan, Mr. Liam Donohoe and Mr. Jesse Shapiro, students, shared their support of the east side renovations of the Winnetka campus. They also shared their experience as athletes and highlighted the parts of the project that they thought would be most beneficial to students.
3. Ms. Teri Rodgers, Social Studies department faculty and Head Girls Basketball Coach, shared comments in support of the east side renovations at the Winnetka campus. She focused on several details that she sees as advantages to the proposed project.
4. Mr. Ted Dabrowski, parent, and representative of Open New Trier shared several points and requests regarding the reopening of school.
5. Ms. Susie Halpin, parent, shared comments regarding the intent to push toward reopening.

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

#### **A. Update 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:

- The first week after Winter Break, attendance was lower than normal for the campus, but this week, attendance has returned to the mid-20 percent range. The belief is that some people were quarantining after travel over break.
- Soon the campus will move to the two-track model and the anticipation is that attendance will be close to 50%. Work is being done in classrooms, lunch spaces and free periods in preparation.
- End of Semester experiences are taking place this week, with the last day of first semester next Monday and the start of second semester on Tuesday.
- Mr. Waechtler highlighted Student Council who took the initiative and created a presentation to honor Martin Luther King. It has been shared with advisers and will be connected to Black History Month in February.
- There is a lot of work taking place to prepare for the Class of 2025. Virtual Academic Life Night took place last Tuesday and is available online to families who may not have been able to attend.
- Chairs and Coordinators are working on level placements, which will be sent out later this month.

- Incoming freshmen will select courses in February. Prior to that, All About the Electives, will take place next Wednesday to provide information specific to these departments.

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

- Science Olympiad has participated in two competitions. The varsity team took first place out of 73 teams at their first meet. Mrs. Dubravec thanked Mr. Alex Howe, Applied Arts department faculty and club sponsor, for his work involving students in this program.
- The Scholastic Bowl competed a few weeks ago in their first match. Both the varsity and junior varsity teams defeated Maine West.
- The North Suburban Area Conference for DECA was cancelled. Instead, the DECA sponsors coordinated and ran their first New Trier Area Conference virtually. Over 65 students participated along with ten alumni judges.
- Preparations are underway for the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Jazz Fest, which will be virtual. Students will facilitate synchronous sessions between clinicians and visitors.
- The New Trier Fine Arts Association hosted a food truck at Winnetka last week as a fundraiser. They had a great turnout and physical plant services assisted with the event.
- Kinesis is looking to perform a dance show on February 5<sup>th</sup> in the Gaffney. It would be in-person only for parents and logistics are still being worked on. They have been working with guest film maker and choreographer, Mr. Steven Blood, who is an alum. He is a professional dancer with the Missouri Contemporary Ballet and got his start in Menz Dance.
- The Class of 2021 celebration planning is underway. Mrs. Dubravec is working closely with the Grad Committee, Athletic Boosters, Senior Adviser Chairs and Senior Advisers to celebrate the seniors from now until May 30<sup>th</sup>. Mrs. Dubravec, Mr. Augie Fontanetta, Athletic Director, and the Athletic Boosters are planning a Baggio Tournament. It will be open to all seniors and will take place on Wednesday evenings. WNTH will hopefully broadcast live and there will also be virtual viewing so parents can watch from home. Other options for activities are also being discussed. An email went out to families confirming the May 30<sup>th</sup> date for the commencement ceremony. Details are still being discussed. This class is different than the class of 2020 as they have not been together this school year.

Mr. Johnson gave the FOIA report, noting that there were five requests since the last Board meeting, four are closed and one remains open regarding a past construction project. The four closed requests included one for information on collective negotiating matters, one for special education student statistics, a copy of a contract and another one related to a construction record.

### **B. Report on New Trier Reopening and Operational Plan for 2020-2021**

Dr. Sally reported on the New Trier Reopening and Operational Plan for 2020-2021. He began with Saliva Screening and the participation percentage of students and staff. The goal is to continue to make sure that everyone who has opted in is participating while also increasing the opt in number. Dr. Sally referenced that Mr. Waechter shared about attendance earlier, noting that the District had asked families to self-quarantine as needed after Winter Break. Numbers rebounded to where they were prior to break.

Next, Dr. Sally gave a brief vaccination update, noting that work continues with Cook County. There are still hurdles such as vaccine quantity and if distribution channels will be set for those in 1B, which includes school staff. He will keep the Board and community updated as more information is available.

Mr. Tragos shared about concluding first semester. He shared how the District has adapted to meet students' academic and social emotional (SEL) needs. This included curriculum content revisions, final exams revisions, grade system revision, expanded E-track and the increase to two tracks, academic and SEL supports as well as grey day support. Mr. Tragos noted further details about the grade system revision. He shared the question that was posed in an article in EdWeek, and that was if schools should be giving failing grades this year. This then begs the question of what grades should schools be giving and what grading systems should be used during a pandemic when some students are all remote, some are in school while others are hybrid. Not only has this been an issue at New Trier but is a dilemma nationwide. He shared the evidence of this impact on students. Students' low grades are more likely a symptom of pandemic stress or learning than an actual indicator of their academic ability or achievement. In many cases, these grades were not consistent with those earned pre-pandemic.

A group of department leaders and administrators were brought together to determine how to handle grades. The group unanimously decided that New Trier should not be giving failing grades this year and developed four principles to guide decision-making and mitigate the long-term consequences of the pandemic. In lieu of a D, F, or Incomplete, teachers will issue A through C-; or a PASS grade or, and this is new this year, they will issue a Credit Pending grade. Mr. Tragos spoke about the process, noting it is highly individualized and collaborative. He explained on a PASS grade as well as Credit Pending. Credit Pending allows a student to progress to second semester, providing a fresh opportunity to earn credit for the entire year during this semester. If a student is not able to progress to second semester, especially in sequential courses, where one semester builds on the other, support for the student would be provided immediately such as credit recovery options. Credit Pending is a temporary grade, which will need to be converted to a letter grade, a PASS grade or no credit which would not impact a student's grade point average. Local peer schools as well as those in the consortium that New Trier is a part of are doing this in similar ways. Mr. Tragos is working with department leaders to prepare for next year's curricular impact. Dr. Sally thanked Mr. Tragos and department leaders for their work on helping students during this difficult time. He noted the creativity and work is excellent and ongoing around how the school is supporting these students in second semester.

Ms. Ducommun inquired how this will be communicated to students and families. Mr. Tragos noted that an email will be sent this week. She then inquired if there would be someone available by phone to assist families. Mrs. Dubravec noted that Mr. Tragos will work with advisers so they can articulate this. Mr. Tragos also shared that department leaders will be available for explanation as well. Ms. Ducommun suggested that contact information be included in the email. Mr. Tragos also said a message will also be sent directly to students.

Mr. McLane shared his appreciation for how thoughtful, thorough, and comprehensive the plan is. He was also appreciative that Mr. Tragos looked at peer schools and the cohort. In terms of communication, he suggested it might be good to use the Community Engagement Committee or add this to the Frequently Asked Questions as other ways to reach students and parents.

Ms. Hahn inquired if there was any input from institutions of higher education as to what they hope is communicated through these grades. Mr. Tragos noted that Post-High School Counselors (PHSC) were integral in responding to the plan that was put together. Their connections with deans of admissions at colleges and universities supplied the input. Their input was instrumental around what a Pass meant and how it will be interpreted. There will be a note on transcripts that the 20-21 school year was a hybrid and remote learning environment. According to Ms. Jill Cervantes, PHSC Department Chair, colleges and universities are well prepared to see a variety of types of grades from schools.

Ms. Hahn then inquired about what happens to the expanded Track E once second semester begins and the District moves to two tracks. Dr. Sally noted that the four-day option will continue for those students who have been identified for it. In terms of overall counts, these students will be counted in both tracks. This could also be one strategy that is used to expand to the District's safe capacity.

Ms. Albrecht said it was good to see the opt in for the saliva testing increase among the staff as well as to see the data broken out. She then inquired if there has been or will be any guidance from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) regarding grading, to which Mr. Tragos replied there had not been any to date. Dr. Sally shared that it seemed as though they were leaving these decisions up to local districts, which is why the collaboration with local schools and the consortium schools is important.

Mr. Robitaille noted that it was good to see the saliva screening numbers increase for staff, while the mandatory screening for students is going well in terms of compliance. He continues to inquire why staff is not at 100% opt in as this group has complained about their concerns of an unsafe environment in the building. He requested that Dr. Sally and a Board Member meet with the associations' leaders to probe this issue. Before making the saliva screening mandatory for staff, he would like to try to understand at from association what they are dealing with and the reasons why they cannot get to 100% or perhaps there is a path to get to 100% and he would like to understand that. Ms. Albrecht agreed with Mr. Robitaille and shared further comments. Dr. Sally also thought it was a good idea, noting that the collaboration with the associations has been strong and he appreciates their efforts to help move this forward. He will reach out to association leaders to schedule a meeting.

Dr. Sally shared his excitement for the start of second semester as first was difficult for everybody. With the move into Tier 2 mitigation, the Illinois High School Association (IHSA) has shared plans that allows the District to begin practices for low contact winter sports tomorrow. This includes badminton, bowling, swimming, gymnastics,

competitive cheer, and dancing. The following week there will be a chance for contact days. Dr. Sally also looks forward to having more students in the building. The goal is to continue to make the student experience better throughout second semester. Mrs. Dubravec shared that whatever was permissible by IHSA for sports up until now, coaches have been doing that.

Mrs. Dubravec provided student feedback from a survey that Ms. Dizon helped create was sent via Canvas to students in grades 10 through 12. She shared the percentage of participants and their learning environment. She then shared the questions posed to students and the most common responses she received. Mrs. Dubravec will share the results with leaders and in turn with their departments. From this survey, work has begun to address the feedback on the Winnetka building access for free and lunch periods, students who have teachers who are remote and the safety of the building. Dr. Sally shared comments, particularly around the work done by the associations and teachers to figure out plans to be in school. There will be a significant increase in the number of teachers who are teaching in their classrooms starting next week. This is important as it was a commitment from early on – to have New Trier teachers teaching New Trier students. Mrs. Dubravec noted that 75-81% of classes were taught by teachers were in the building each day. Dr. Sally noted that there are some students for whom this is not the case.

Ms. Ducommun clarified that 75-81% of classrooms were staffed last week, which Dr. Sally confirmed. She then inquired of Mrs. Dubravec if the school might communicate better what the level of infections are among students. She shared her reasoning, to which Mrs. Dubravec responded that helping students to understand this piece could be valuable.

Ms. Ducommun inquired about the number of students who would be in the low risk/contact sports, to which Mrs. Dubravec responded about 400 students. Conversation continued between Dr. Sally, Ms. Ducommun, and Mrs. Dubravec about participation in athletics and if a student is remote or hybrid. Ms. Albrecht added that this may increase the number of remote students who now must participate in the saliva screening in order to come to campus for their sport. Ms. Hahn added that some of the off-season sports may have contact days as well, so that could expand the number of students who are on campus with their peers.

Ms. Hahn commented that if a student wants to meet with a teacher it is via Zoom regardless of if both are in the building. Mrs. Dubravec confirmed this, while also noting that some teachers have met one-on-one in person with students. Mrs. Dubravec noted that she wants to explore this feedback with departments to see if it would be a potential option for teachers and how it can be set up for students. Ms. Hahn said it was encouraging and thanked Mrs. Dubravec for her efforts on this.

Next, Mr. Tragos shared information on Grey Day improvements. These improvements were made in response to feedback for the Hybrid Teaching and Learning survey from students, staff, and teachers. One question asked about Trevian Days, which were a weekly feature of the block schedule while Grey Days were dispersed sporadically. The feedback on Trevian Days was that the pace of the 35-minute, nine-period day was overwhelming and stressful. Students and staff advocated for more Grey Days. A committee was gathered, and they redesigned the days to be an enhanced Grey Day that had a focus on student support with more direct guidance on how to best meet the needs of students. The priorities of these days included responding to feedback, increasing opportunities for student supports and decreasing overall Zoom time. Mr. Tragos then shared Grey Day Guidelines that can be expected on these days during second semester. It is a dedicated student support day and the nine-period bell schedule structures the day. Teachers will prioritize meeting with students who need help with assignments. They will also be available during regular class time for meeting with students. Students can request meetings with teachers and can also access school-wide academic and SEL resources.

Grey Days are school days that teachers are setting up asynchronously, while prioritizing meeting with students. It is not meant to be a totally Zoom free day. The hope is that these days also continue to enhance student-teacher connections. It is also a way to formalize a somewhat informal process of students receiving help or asking questions which happens organically during a regular school day and is essential to learning. It is teacher initiated as well as student initiated, and parents are encouraged to ask their children about their plan for Grey Day. Parents can also partner with their child's adviser, teacher, or case manager for support with these days. Many local peer schools as well as consortium schools have days similar to New Trier's Grey Days. These days will be continuously evaluated and adjusted as needed. Finally, Mr. Tragos shared schoolwide academic and SEL supports for students. This information will also be on New Trier's website.

Mr. Robitaille applauded the efforts to improve Grey Days but inquired as to the reasoning of keeping these days

virtual instead of having some in-person. Mr. Tragos shared that by staying virtual it allows all students to access the supports and targets those students who want to and need to meet with their teachers and is best done remotely. Dr. Sally noted that the District is willing to consistently review if Grey Day is serving its intended purposes. This approach will be beneficial to many students. Feedback will be gathered to determine its effectiveness. Also, by having a Grey Day, it helps the District to get students through the saliva screening process. Mr. Robitaille shared his thoughts on Mr. Tragos' and Dr. Sally's comments, noting that a Grey Day is taking 20% of the week's hours off the table. He commented that the District is hearing from parents who want to maximize the amount of in-building opportunities that student have. Mr. Dronen inquired if it was logistically possible to push the testing back on Sunday and still get the results Sunday night. Dr. Sally responded, noting that athletics must turn in on Sunday for Monday practices. He does not believe there are insurmountable hurdles to saliva testing, but it would require working through some logistics. He went on to share additional comments. Ms. Hahn inquired of Mr. Robitaille if he was suggesting that a student who has scheduled a meeting with a teacher be in-person instead of via Zoom. Dr. Sally summarized the potential options, the first is having the student support but the building is open, the second is to continue the Trevian Day idea of a hybrid, nine-period day, and the final option is a full rotating block schedule.

Ms. Ducommun commented that the plan is creative and addresses the student needs, but she remains skeptical that those students who may fall into the D,F,I category may not have the skill set to organize this kind of day. She noted that she does not understand what level of accountability is present in this day and does not see the proposal helping with structure. She suggested perhaps forcing the periods to have some structure along with decreasing Zoom time. It may look like having students check in during even periods on one Monday and then doing so in their odd periods the following Monday. Mr. Tragos thanked Ms. Ducommun for the feedback, noting there is a high level of expectation on executive functioning, but asked that the District have a chance to hold itself accountable for this student support plan. Ms. Ducommun inquired when the Board can come back and revisit whether something needs to change. Mr. Tragos noted the February calendar and suggested there be at least three Grey Days before an evaluation takes place. It was concluded that the March Board Meeting would be a good deadline. Ms. Ducommun inquired what parameters would be used to understand, other than anecdotally, whether Grey Days are successful or not for a discussion at the March Board Meeting. Mr. Tragos replied that the criteria needs to be identified and would be shared in a Weekly Letter with the Board. He suggested asking students, faculty, and parents for feedback on the day. Ms. Ducommun noted that one could question if it is worth it to tweak the day for fourth quarter. It will be worthwhile in case the District finds itself in this mode next year, as this will be an opportunity to improve the days prior to that time. Dr. Sally said that after the first Grey Day, discussions will begin to take place about how to implement some of the suggested ideas. Ms. Hahn inquired how this would be communicated to students and parents and noted it would be good for the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) part of the website as there is a lot of uncertainty from parents about what the day should look like. She suggested one way to assess it is utilization and how the services are being accessed. Ms. Ducommun shared comments on this and discussion continued between her and Ms. Hahn. Mr. Tragos reviewed the communication plan. Ms. Ducommun and Mr. Tragos then discussed teachers prioritizing and incentivizing students. Mr. McLane noted his appreciation for Mr. Tragos' willingness to listen, engage and adapt.

Ms. Albrecht confirmed that the first Grey Day will be on February 1<sup>st</sup>. Ms. Albrecht and Mr. Tragos discussed what peer schools have been doing, along with the updates they have made. She agrees parent communication is important, as this is complicated. She encouraged feedback about the Grey Day as well as the move to two-tracks. Ms. Ducommun shared additional thoughts with Ms. Albrecht agreeing that new changes may be needed, and fourth quarter may perhaps need to be looked at differently.

### **C. 2021-2022 Bell Schedule Discussion**

Dr. Sally began the presentation on the 2021-2022 Bell Schedule, noting that the hope is that next school year looks like a more typical year, but there are no guarantees. The District needs to be prepared for various situations that might develop. Part of that plan is to look at the bell schedule to understand the history and the reasoning as to why it has been done this way, along with the advantages and disadvantages. Then the school must look to what it has learned this year as it moves into the future.

Mr. Waechtler shared that a representative committee met in November and December to discuss various options for the bell schedule. The committee set five priorities that they wanted the bell schedule to accomplish, which were shared by Mr. Waechtler. Next, the committee looked at various bell schedule options and compared them. New Trier traditionally has had a nine-period day. The first schedule that was shared was the nine-period block being used this year, this has an embedded lunch and since that does not take up a period of the day like during a typical school year, there is an additional free period. He went over other benefits such as fewer courses on most days, as well as

challenges such as scheduling student services. Mr. Waechtler then shared the benefits and challenges of the traditional nine-period day, which New Trier staff and students are very familiar with. Another option is the eight-period rotating block, with four periods meeting each day for 80 minutes. Wednesday would be a late start day, so classes would be 70 minutes. This option would mean that some classes would meet two times a week but the following week they would meet three times. He shared the benefits and challenges of the eight-period rotating block schedule. Next was the blended eight-period block where classes meet three days and the other two days are a block schedule with an X block associated with them. Mr. Waechtler walked through the schedule from the perspective of a science teacher. He also shared that students who are taking a science class would have three unscheduled periods a week where they could meet with a teacher or make up a test. The current science schedule promotes this in a way that is beneficial to the entire school and the committee wanted to preserve this aspect. He went on to share the benefits and challenges. Lastly, Mr. Waechtler displayed a comparison chart so all schedules could be seen together along with the features that the committee has thought about such as contact days per week, contact minutes per week, science contact minutes per week, unscheduled time for students per week and extended learning periods per week. He summarized the thinking of the committee by noting that when they first started, there were those who quickly gravitated back towards the traditional nine-period day, while another set were inclined towards the rotating block. Over time and many discussions, the group thought the blended eight-period block would be best as it met many different needs while also offering good solutions.

Dr. Sally shared comments about the big picture of the various schedules. The blended eight-period block will decrease student stress, have consistent student/teacher contact, the ability to continue to explore extended learning opportunities as well as X Block opportunities for student programming and support along with professional development for faculty. This schedule has also required problem solving particularly around electives, where offerings would need to be enhanced so students could take two electives. Mr. Tragos noted enhancements would be needed in music, consumer education, civics, and KW for sophomores. Dr. Sally noted that one percent of students are in this category and went on to share further comments around this. He noted there are solutions available so as not to limit student choice. Transportation is another area that would need further problem solving. Hybrid learning based on state guidelines is another part and what this schedule may look like if the District is still in hybrid learning next school year. The District is also making sure it is working towards, and more information will be brought to the February meeting, a remote academy. Students could take classes with other remote students versus the hybrid model that the school currently has.

Next steps include the continuation of course selection, students, parents, and staff will be surveyed, and that feedback will be summarized for the Board leading to a February Board Meeting discussion and decision. Master schedule building will need to start and that is when a structure is needed. Dr. Sally then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Mr. Dronen noted that when he sat on All-School Forum, one of the students' top concerns was lack of free time during the school day. Looking at the four schedules, the current nine-period block offers the most minutes of free time. The blended eight-period block, one loses five minutes from the traditional nine-period schedule, but gains the X block, which is about 60 minutes one day per week. Dr. Sally responded that the weekly free time is about 175 minutes if the school implements X block as shown. Mr. Dronen inquired if the X block time could be distributed evenly throughout the week to increase free time a little bit each day. Dr. Sally shared the benefits of the X block time and why the larger amount of time on one day is needed. Mr. Dronen noted that the question then becomes if students have enough free time the other four days of the week when there is not X block. Dr. Sally responded that they would have their off-science period or part of their lunch, though the school would like them to take their lunch period to relax, some do use that time for other tasks.

Regarding students with special needs, Mr. Dronen noted that it looks as though the contact days drop from five days to four day a week. He inquired if this would also apply to students with special needs or if they would be on a separate schedule with their Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). Dr. Sally replied that students in Resource Seminar would go down to four contact days with their teacher per week. Students in Educational and Life Skills (ELS), Transition and other programs would be in these programs daily but may have a different structure on late start days. These students also participate in some general education courses so it would have to work around these courses in their schedules too.

Ms. Ducommun inquired in the comparison chart, where, under the current nine-period block, is the Monday time accounted for, to which Mr. Waechtler explained his calculations. He noted that Monday would be a typical school day and not a Trevian or Grey Day. Dr. Sally shared that the intention is not to have Grey Days in the schedule next

year. He also noted that the District is looking for familiarity for students, families, and teachers. Ms. Ducommun and Mr. Waechtler walked through another schedule. Dr. Sally shared further explanation with discussion continuing amongst Board Members and Dr. Sally.

Ms. Ducommun inquired how many music students are impacted if the blended eight-period block is selected. Dr. Sally responded that of current students, there are 40 total who are impacted and would need a solution with this schedule. Ten were civics students, ten were sophomores with two electives that were not theatre, and the remaining 20 were early bird KW or early bird Science. There would have been around 15-20 students who would need solutions using civics, early bird KW, among other choices. The District will make sure these are accessible to students.

Ms. Hahn appreciated the comment that the District is trying to keep some consistency and predictability for students and staff. She did note her concern that the blended eight-period block would not translate well to a hybrid mode of learning and is apprehensive that flexibility may be lost. Dr. Sally shared a possible conversion, if needed, depending on what the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) may require, which may not be known until sometime during the summer.

Ms. Hahn inquired which peer schools do a block schedule under normal circumstances and what it looks like. Mr. Waechtler responded that Glenbrook North is the most comparable school with a rotating block.

Ms. Albrecht noted that a lot of work has gone into this and it needs to continue to be vetted. She inquired about early bird science, which Dr. Sally explained. She shared additional comments regarding fine arts.

#### **D. 15-year Plan Update: Winnetka Campus East Side Academic and Athletic Study**

Mr. Johnson began the discussion on the 15-year Plan Update: Winnetka Campus East Side Academic and Athletic project, which started in fall of 2019 and has been reviewed in detail at the past several Board meetings. Mr. Johnson shared the agenda beginning with the project overview. It is an opportunity to address important academic, safety and maintenance issues for students, while addressing critical 15-year plan issues. He shared the findings and rationale of the study along with the site overview or project area. Renderings of the proposed renovations were displayed along with the current parts of the building. Mr. Johnson also shared the highlights of the project such as the indoor track, competition gym, weight area, auxiliary gym, and the option for additional academic space. The project timeline was displayed with a potential Board decision at the February Board Meeting. Post that, the design development phase begins, which is an important one in the architectural process. The renderings are taken, and the details of them become the focus. After sharing other comments, Mr. Johnson noted that the District would maintain a complete athletic program during the project. Several questions came out of the January 11<sup>th</sup> Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting that will be addressed through the upcoming design development phase. There will also be small group meetings with the architects and administrators, so Board members can have a chance to dig into more detail.

The focus this evening was on the financing part of the project. The District will use proposed funding sources that taxpayers have provided and will provide in the future that do not require a referendum to increase taxes beyond the typical inflationary increase. The financing plan that is guiding this project is working within the District's means, using best practices, maintaining flexibility for current and future Boards, benefiting from the current interest rate environment and bidding at the optimal time for construction. Mr. Johnson went on to share the three proposed funding sources, the first and largest are alternate revenue bonds. These are funds for work within the District's budget constraints, with \$50 million in bond proceeds and an estimated annual debt service payment of \$3.1 million. He shared other details related to this funding source. The next component is the Debt Service Extension Base (DSEB) and is a historical funding source that has been used effectively. It would generate \$14.5 million in bond proceeds with annual payments funded by the DSEB. He further explained this source as well, noting capacity remains for future 15-year plan projects. The third piece is the fund balance or reserves and it effectively uses the District's fund balance of between \$8 to \$12 million depending on the final cost of the project. There is historical precedence as the District used \$15 million for the Winnetka Campus West Side Project. There will also be continued fund balance available for the 15-year plan projects over the next five years. These three components tie together to create the \$75 million funding stream for the proposed project. Mr. Johnson then shared more information about the alternate revenue bonds, concluding that strong financial management and monitoring each year will continue in order to meet the District's 15-year plan, which this project is an important part of. Finally, he shared comments on the projection summary.

Next, Mr. Johnson introduced Ms. Liz Hennessey, the District's financial adviser from Raymond James. She has done a wonderful job over many different projects for the District and Mr. Johnson shared his appreciation for her advice as the District has gone through many permutations as it has tried to figure out what combination of funding methods is in its best interest. Ms. Hennessey spoke briefly about the bond market which has hit historically low interest rates. She then shared further information about the three proposed funding sources that Mr. Johnson spoke of earlier and how they were determined. She went on to share the two scenarios along with their specific details that the Finance Committee considered after narrowing them down from many other options. To conclude, Ms. Hennessey displayed a comparison chart of each option. She shared that the Finance Committee was leaning towards option one due to the 21 year pay-back versus a 26 year pay-back in option two and the lower interest cost associated with it. The only negative is that the District is using up a little more of its DSEB power by issuing \$14.5 million versus \$9.5 million. Ms. Hennessey shared the proposed financing schedule for alternate bonds based on option one. She then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Hahn inquired about how the alternate revenue bonds work, noting they have a built-in tax levy that is abated annually, so for the life of the loan, the Board would annually vote to abate. The only reason that the current or a future Board would not abate is to pay the debt service, which Mr. Hennessey responded that it would be very difficult and went on to further explain why. Mr. Johnson also shared comments around this. Ms. Ducommun noted that if something happened drastically with the state and the structure of how education is paid for, there would be the option to use some of the District's reserves to fund education and then pay the bonds out of the operating funds. Ms. Hennessey confirmed noting that the District has flexibility within this due to the strong fund balance and great financial management. She shared additional thoughts including what relief valves the District would have in a worst-case scenario. Ms. Ducommun noted that she would feel differently about this kind of plan if the District did not have the reserves that it does, which are very substantial. Even using some of that money to fund this project, there will still be a lot of money left so whatever comes with the state, the District will be able to fulfill its obligations.

Mr. Dronen reiterated that Ms. Hennessey and Mr. Johnson noted earlier that with the historically low interest rates, now is the best time to borrow in the past couple of decades. Mr. Dronen inquired if he was correct that although the Fed has not indicated such, but if they were to start to increase rates, possibly even next year, the window could close quickly to secure cheap financing. Ms. Hennessey noted that the Fed has committed for the next 12 to 18 months to keep rates low until the economy recovers. Discussion continued between the two.

Dr. Glucksman thanked the team for their work including the Finance Committee and Facilities Steering Committee. To Ms. Ducommun's point, he noted that part of the whole plan is a one-time draw of \$10 million from the fund balance and the plan is put together well as far as the finances are concerned. Also, like Mr. Dronen said, this is the time due to the low interest rates.

Mr. Robitaille noted that he has been living this for months as part of the Finance Committee and is comfortable with it.

Mr. Dronen noted that \$15 million in reserves was used for the Winnetka Campus West Side Project and that there was no negative impact from using those reserves, which Dr. Sally confirmed. By committing to use \$8 to \$12 million in reserves for this project, the District does not expect to see any negative impact on the educational programming for students, which Dr. Sally and Mr. Johnson confirmed there would be no negative impact.

Ms. Albrecht noted the historically low interest rates and an eager construction market. She shared that later in the meeting bids are up for approval for the summer project. Those bids came in lower than expected, there was a large volume of bidders and overall, the District is slightly under budget. The timing is incredible and there is no referendum needed for this project. Ms. Albrecht noted that DSEB is a typical financing method for school districts. Mr. Johnson expanded on her comments about DSEB, noting that like property taxes, it is subject to a tax cap.

Ms. Albrecht thanked Ms. Hennessey for her presentation, while Mr. Johnson thanked Mr. Dave Conway, Director of Physical Plant Services, Mr. Butler, Kinetic Wellness Department Chair and Mr. Fontanetta for attending the meeting.

#### **E. Budget Assumptions and Parameters for FY22**

Mr. Johnson presented the budget assumptions and parameters for FY22, noting that this has been discussed with the Finance Committee. The District begins the budgeting process in January for the next fiscal year and school year.

This process begins with a review of projected revenue and expenditures for next year and subsequent years as part of the 5-year plan. It also involves reviewing staffing plans and enrollment projections. The District has a new demographer, Dr. McKibbon. The benefit to using Dr. McKibbon is that it is financially viable for the District to do each year, so there are up-to-date enrollment projections. There is the continued trend of a small decrease in the number of students enrolled. Enrollment is projected to decrease by 96 students next year and by 200 students over five years, which aligns nicely in many cases with planned staff retirements and helps the District manage its staffing effectively. Our demographer reports there is strong interest in moving into the District, which has seen with rising home prices, but less inventory is available. Dr. McKibbon was within three students this year and the District anticipates he will be accurate for next year as well.

On the revenue side, the District shows a typical Consumer Price Index (CPI) increase based on property taxes. Other local revenue is increasing more than typical as some pandemic funding sources are slated to return to normal such as student transportation. The District is using conservative state assumptions for the state funding portion of the budget. All revenue is projected to rise approximately 3.6%.

On the expenditure side, there are updates with contractual salary increases and adjustments to projected supplies and materials as well as other purchased services post pandemic. The District continues to see benefits of the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF) paydown of the pension liability that was completed over the past three years. The Board's and District's investment have paid off with a flat IMRF rate. The document shows that the District is projected to have a balanced budget going into next year. The Finance Committee will continue to monitor the budget process through the spring. This will be an on-going agenda item as the District moves into the next fiscal year. Mr. Johnson then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Ms. Albrecht noted that last year, there was a larger than expected increase in health insurance costs and inquired if the same is anticipated this year. Mr. Johnson responded that six percent is being carried now and preliminary numbers are under that, in the five percent range. This will continue to be monitored and Mr. Johnson is comforted to see the larger than typical increase is within the assumptions the District is carrying.

Ms. Ducommun was happy to see that the District was able to keep its Special Education tuition for those educated outside the District to 1.5%. Mr. Johnson responded that the District is holding 1.5% for now and in speaking with Dr. Joanne Panopoulos, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education, today, this will continue to be monitored throughout the spring as more information comes in about students who are outplaced that are graduating, those who are currently outplaced and could return to New Trier, and those coming into the District. Dr. Panopoulos, her team and the District's attorneys are reporting there is a lot of activity in this area, particularly during the pandemic.

Ms. Hahn moved, and Dr. Glucksman seconded the motion, that the Board of Education approves the budget calendar as presented and authorize the administration to begin the budgeting process. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

A YE: Mr. McLane, Mr. Robitaille, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Ducommun, Dr. Glucksman, Ms. Hahn, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

The motion passed.

## **VII. Administrative Items**

### **A. Treasurer's Report for December 2020**

Mr. Johnson presented the Treasurer's Report for December 2020. There is a balance of \$100,264,000 for all accounts. Interest rates continue to drop for long- and short-term investments as prior pre-pandemic investments mature and are replaced by investments and cash holdings at lower rates. Currently, short-term investments are at 0.2% while long-term investments are at 1.33%. There is continued regular local, state, and federal disbursements with the revenue coming in a bit slower than last year, but still coming in in an orderly fashion. On the last page of the report is the cash balance graph, and one can see that the District is trending almost identical to last year in terms of historical cash balances.

### **B. Financial Reports for December 2020**

Mr. Johnson presented the Financial Reports for December 2020. Operating revenue was \$52,227,000 for the first six months of the fiscal year, or 3.65% lower compared to last year. Other Local Sources continue to trend lower than last year, primarily due to the decrease in funds received for the parent portion of pupil transportation, student fees,

and interest income. This decrease was expected, and the revenue is keeping pace with the budget for this category. The adopted budget for revenue is slightly higher than last fiscal year.

Operating expenditures were \$51,230,000 through December, or 0.28% lower than last year. They are tracking slightly behind, which is good. The overall expenditures are very similar to last year, the District is seeing significant reductions in Purchased Services, with an increase in Supplies and Materials, which was expected, but the two are offsetting one another in the budget. The adopted budget for operating expenditures is 2.58% higher than last fiscal year. The District anticipates seeing slight catch-up in future months as some programs resume such as athletics. Mr. Johnson then invited questions and comments on either report.

#### **\*C. 15 Year Plan Year 2 (Summer 2021) Bid Package 1 Approval**

Mr. Johnson then gave a brief overview on the 15 Year Plan Year 2 (Summer 2021) Bid Package 1 Approval. This is the second year of the 15 Year Plan improvements. He provided information on past projects. Upcoming projects include finishing the third floor in the North and Tower buildings at the Winnetka Campus, finish classrooms in the D Building at the Northfield campus, as well as various roofs, windows, and other critical maintenance needs. The bids came in slightly under budget and represent excellent coverage. Mr. Johnson shared further details about this coverage. He also noted that there were an atypical number of disqualified bids. Part of the review that Mr. Conway does with Pepper Construction is making sure each of the low bids can complete the work. The District is certain that those bids that are up for approval this evening can do so. Three bid packages will be held until next month's Board meeting, along with asbestos and the remaining items for this project.

Mr. McLane moved, and Dr. Glucksman seconded the motion, that the Board of Education approves the award of Prime Trade Agreements for the 2021 Renovation project to those bidders recommended by Pepper Construction and that the Board of Education also approves the allowance and budgetary amounts as specified Overall Project Cost Breakdown. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Mr. Robitaille, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Ducommun, Dr. Glucksman, Ms. Hahn, Mr. McLane, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

The motion passed.

### **VIII. Consent Agenda**

- Bill List for the Period, December 1 – 31, 2020
- Personnel Report (Appointment, Resignation and Retirements)
- That the Board agrees to the destruction of the Closed Session Meeting tapes of January 2019 through June 2019

Ms. Albrecht inquired if any members wanted to pull an item off the Consent Agenda, no one chose to do so. Ms. Ducommun moved that the Board of Education approve the Consent Agenda, which includes: Bill List for the Period, December 1 – 31, 2020, Personnel Report (Appointment, Resignation and Retirements), and that the Board agrees to the destruction of the Closed Session Meeting tapes of January 2019 through June 2019. Mr. Dronen seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Mr. Dronen, Ms. Ducommun, Dr. Glucksman, Ms. Hahn, Mr. McLane, Mr. Robitaille, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

The motion passed.

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

Mr. Dronen reported that the **NSSSED Leadership Council** met on January 13<sup>th</sup>. Their business officer has been meeting with each district's special education administrator in advance of the Joint Member District Forecast Meeting to answer any questions. This will be complete by the end of January. NSSSED, effective July 1<sup>st</sup>, will have a new name, True North Educational Cooperative 804. NSSSED sites move back to blended remote learning tomorrow.

The **Facilities Steering Committee** met on January 13<sup>th</sup> and most of the topics were covered earlier in the meeting.

Mr. McLane shared that Ms. Dizon reconvened the **Community Engagement Committee**. Many subjects were covered, and a lot of action is unfolding.

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

Dr. Sally highlighted the following:

- Second semester begins next week, and two tracks of students will be in. The District will work towards having 50% of students in attendance.
- Kinesis will perform on February 5<sup>th</sup> and Jazz on February 6<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Sally encouraged viewing the website for additional details.

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

Mr. Tragos shared that Mr. Nick Tangorra, Security Lead at the Winnetka Campus, brushed the snow off all cars parked in the east side lot. Board and Administrators thanked Mr. Tangorra for his generosity.

**XI. ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Ducommun moved, and Ms. Hahn seconded the motion, to adjourn. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. Ducommun, Dr. Glucksman, Ms. Hahn, Mr. McLane, Mr. Robitaille, Mr. Dronen, Ms. Albrecht

NAY: none

The motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Lindsey Ruston, Secretary

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Cathleen Albrecht, President