

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

**February 23, 2026
New Trier Township High School
7 Happ Road, Room C234
Northfield, IL 60093**

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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, February 23, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.

Members Present

Ms. Kimberly Alcantara
Mr. Avik Das
Ms. Jean Hahn, President
Mr. Joo Serk Lee
Ms. Courtney McDonough
Ms. Sally Pofcher
Ms. Sally Tomlinson, Vice President

Administrators Present

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

Also Present

Ms. Niki Dizon, Chief Communications Officer; Dr. Nashwa Mekky, Chief Human Resources Officer; Mr. Michael Marassa, Chief Technology Officer; Ms. Angie Woodul, New Trier Extension Program Assistant and New Trier Educational Support Professionals President; Ms. Katja Steen, Modern and Classical Languages Department Faculty; Ms. Ana del Ray, Modern and Classical Languages Department Faculty; Ms. Steph Gamauf, Modern and Classical Languages Department Faculty; Ms. Mercedes Lopez, Modern and Classical Languages Department Faculty; and Mr. Mike Hill, Technology Department; Mr. Eric Johnson, Technology Department; Mr. Jeff Bailey, Technology Department; Ms. Lindsey Ruston, Board of Education Secretary; and members of the press and community.

BUSINESS MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER – 5:00 p.m. – C234

Ms. Hahn called the Regular Meeting of February 23, 2026 of the Board of Education to order at 5:01 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus. Roll call was taken, and all members were present, except for Ms. Alcantara and Mr. Das. Ms. Hahn asked for a motion to move to Closed Session. Ms. McDonough 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 and collective negotiating matters between the District and its employees or their representatives, or deliberations concerning salary schedules for one or more classes of employees. Mr. Lee seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Mr. Lee, Ms. McDonough, Ms. Pofcher, Ms. Tomlinson, Ms. Hahn

NAY: none

ABSENT: Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Das

The motion passed.

II. CLOSED SESSION – 5:30 p.m. – A201A

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

Ms. Hahn called the Regular Meeting of February 23, 2026 of the Board of Education to order at 6:36 p.m. in room C234 at the Northfield campus. Roll call was taken, and all members were present.

IV. Minutes and Reports

***A. Regular Meeting of January 26, 2026 (open and closed session)**

The first order of business was to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 26, 2026 (open and closed session). There were no requests for changes to the minutes. Ms. Tomlinson moved, and Mr. Lee seconded the motion, that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the January 26, 2026 (open and closed session). Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

AYE: Ms. McDonough, Ms. Pofcher, Ms. Tomlinson, Mr. Lee, Ms. Hahn

NAY:

ABSTAIN: Ms. Alcantara, Mr. Das

The motion passed.

B. Report from Campus Principals, Assistant Superintendents, and FOIA Report

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

- Incoming freshman conferences took place at each public school as well as at New Trier for students attending private schools. Student and parents discussed registration for next year and have questions answered. Mr. Waechtler thanked the over 100 faculty volunteers who served as registration counselors as well as Ms. Lori Worth, Eighth Grade Transition Coordinator and Mr. Dan Paustian, Associate Principal at the Northfield campus, for their work.
- The campus hosted the Metropolitan Math Club Conference as math department faculty, Ms. Aimee Hart, sits on their executive board. The club members consist of kindergarten teachers all the way to college professors. They received great support from Technology, Security, Physical Plant Services and Student Ambassadors. There were approximately 130 math educators from Chicagoland and beyond who attended a variety of sessions.
- All female athletes were invited to celebrate National Girls & Women in Sports Day on February 4th with breakfast. It was very well attended by students and coaches. Ms. Sue Ellen Haak, Adviser Chair, did a great job with a speech about the evolution of female athletics at New Trier. It was a great way to celebrate New Trier's female athletes.
- Mr. Randy Ribay the author of *Patron Saints of Nothing* as well as other books visited the campus on February 4th. All freshmen read the book in their respective classes. They attended either a morning or afternoon presentation by Mr. Ribay. He also facilitated an English department meeting and parent book club. He taught high school English for 16 years before becoming a full-time author.

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

- She thanked Ms. Stephanie Kuzmanic, Athletics Coordinator, who organized the National Girls & Women in Sports Day at each campus.
- Kinesis recently took place and Mrs. Dubravec congratulated Dance Coordinator Ms. Katie Kritek on her work supporting not only the dancers, but those students who worked on lighting and other behind-the-scenes jobs.
- She also thanked Mr. Nic Meyer, Music Department Faculty, for his work on the Jazz Festival. For the past several years, he has also hosted a dinner session for women in music that students attend.
- The Dance Team placed eighth in the state – the highest in school history.
- For the first time in 20 years, New Trier Fencing placed first in the conference championship.
- Gale Resources is the leading provider of research and learning resources for libraries and they track schools' usage of these resources. New Trier is the top high school user in Illinois and 45th in the nation. It is an example of the work that the school's librarians are doing in helping teachers and students access resources. Ms. Pofcher asked for further clarification on this, to which Mrs. Dubravec and Dr. Tragos replied that it is a tool used to access information for research.
- Science Olympiad placed seventh in a competition at MIT.
- The Class of 2026's Winter Carnival recently took place and there was a magic show that occurred prior to the carnival.

- Ms. Gretchen Stauder, Post-High School Counseling Department Faculty, oversaw the Gap Fair, which was the only one in the state this year.
- In between the Girls' and Boys' basketball games, Mr. Chip Carpenter, Mr. Bob Spagnoli, Dr. Linda Yonke, and Dr. Richie Sherman were recognized and inducted into the Athletic Hall of Honor.
- The New Trier Special Olympics basketball team played Lake Forest recently in the main gym. Many adviser rooms came to watch and cheer on the team.
- Choir Opera will present Legally Blonde from March 4th – 7th.

Dr. Joanne Panopoulos, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services, informed the Board that the annual Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI), which gathers information and perceptions from staff, parents, and students about the school's learning conditions is open. Parents have been notified and students will begin to take it in adviser room. There will also be dedicated time for staff to take it; the survey closes on March 17th. The data will be reviewed in April and May and will be shared out to the Board and school. Ms. Tomlinson inquired what level of participation is anticipated, particularly amongst staff. Dr. Panopoulos replied that ideally it is 20% for staff and the state would like 95% for students.

Dr. Tragos then shared that earlier this month he and Dr. Chimille Tillery, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, attended the Superintendent's Consortium in Nashville. The Consortium includes six districts and is a professional learning community and network of peer schools with similar school communities, opportunities, and challenges. Typically, the group meets twice a year at one of the member districts, however, for their spring meeting, the group met for the AASA (The School Superintendents Association) which coincided with the National Conference on Education (NCE). After sharing further about their time together with the Consortium, Dr. Tragos noted that next year, there will be three new superintendents in the group. Dr. Tillery added that the group also discussed the importance of their roles as leaders and ensuring they are intentional and cognizant about cultivating a strong sense of community and belonging amongst all staff. The group was also encouraged to personally reflect on their individual leadership at the end of each school year as their ongoing commitment to continuous growth. Then Dr. Tragos and Dr. Tillery went on to share about the sessions they attended at the NCE. Ms. Hahn inquired if the Consortium anticipates aligning with the conference moving forward. He noted that the work of the AASA is not driving the work of the Consortium, but rather the NCE aligned to the work of the AASA, which Dr. Tragos further explained.

Dr. Johnson gave the FOIA report noting that there have been three requests since the last Board meeting. Topics included career training program, background checks, and curriculum contracts. All have been closed.

V. Communications

Ms. Hahn 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 no requests for public comment.

VI. Special Orders of Business

A. Annual Plan Mid-Year Progress Update

Dr. Tragos presented a mid-year progress update on the Annual Plan. This mid-year review is an opportunity to reflect on actions taken, look at early evidence of progress and identify adjustments needed for the second half of the school year. Dr. Tragos began with reminders about the 25-26 Annual Plan, noting its focus was to build on six years of progress made under Dr. Paul Sally's, former superintendent, tenure as well as the vision for New Trier 2030. That vision is to develop the skills and dispositions in every graduate to lead meaningful, compassionate, and impactful lives and doing so by focusing on five areas as annual goals. Dr. Tragos also provided what drives the District's "why" behind this work which is readiness for success at New Trier as well as readiness for success after New Trier and includes its ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. Finally, he shared the District's timeline for monitoring progress.

Next, Dr. Tragos shared the summaries and highlights of each of the five goals. He shared a progress summary, noting that the focus has been on building understanding and capacity, listening and learning from staff, reorienting the institution to the new Annual Plan, launching a few pilots, and establishing shared language, systems, and practices for long-term success and sustainability. The positive progress is attributed to administrative and faculty leadership which included over 125 people on various committees. Listening and learning from one another has led to a slower, more intentional pace of implementation which acknowledges while this is an important piece, it is not

the only focus of the institution as there are daily items that need to be tended to as well.

Dr. Tragos then went on to share each goal's key progress and actions, along with their respective status. He shared multiple next steps including maintaining momentum, building coherence and alignment among the five goals, adjusting and refining as needed, and communicating with stakeholders, while also taking a thoughtful, phased approach to implementation. The Train-the-Trainer model of professional development will continue as colleagues learn from one another. The Board will see updates from the various goal areas beginning in March through June. Planning for next year will begin shortly. Dr. Tragos then invited questions and comments from the Board.

Mr. Lee thanked Dr. Tragos for his presentation, noting that the subtext of his next steps is to scale up and shared his appreciation for the thoughtfulness of that piece. Mr. Lee then noted that restorative practices were spoken about within the context of a culture of belonging and he asked for Dr. Tragos to explain further. Dr. Tragos shared that restorative practice is a protocol for when a student makes a mistake. They are usually done through the adviser system and while there are times when discipline is necessary, restorative practice is about repairing the harm that was done which also includes dialogue and reflection. The research is significant that this is the way in which students learn from their mistakes.

Ms. McDonough noted that goals one through four were marked as progressing as expected with goal five marked as progressing though some adjustments are needed. One of the things that Ms. McDonough values most about the District is its willingness and humility to acknowledge that adjustments do need to be made. She asked Dr. Tragos to share what made him make this determination for goal five. Dr. Tragos replied that it is the decision of those who are working on the goal which he further explained, noting it is about slowing it down but that it will still be achieved.

Ms. Tomlinson commented that one might think there are only five goals, but looking further at goal number one, there are three built into it. After further comments, she noted that if New Trier can continue to progress against goal number one, that will be a tremendous opportunity for students. Dr. Tragos shared his appreciation for the comments, noting resources are dedicated to that goal now as it is new and other goals are more established within the institution.

Ms. Pofcher noted there is a lot in motion and was particularly appreciative of Dr. Tragos' learn/refine and comfortable that if things are not having impact to narrow the focus to those that do and humbly assessing which ones really matter.

Ms. Hahn noted that the Board worked with Dr. Tragos at a high level, while he articulated very well at the granular level what it looks like when implemented. This, to her, is how a high functioning school district works. She thanked Dr. Tragos for his intentional work while adjusting as necessary. Mentioning the freshman pilot entitled Design Your Own New Trier Experience, Ms. Hahn inquired if it will be iterative, and if a student could add to it over the course of four years. Dr. Tragos replied that the pilot will continue for one more year with additional freshmen included. It is intended as a freshman program, with the next iterations leading to the way a student might design their experience through electives or through a pathway which may lead to an internship or a capstone. Ms. Hahn then inquired if it is something that becomes part of the portfolio, to which Dr. Tragos replied that it would be one part of it.

VII. Administrative Items

A. Treasurer's Report for January 2026

Dr. Johnson provided the Treasurer's Report for January 2026 and was pleased to report there were continued disbursement of property taxes. He and Dr. Tragos also met with Cook County Commissioner Scott Britton and Samantha Steele from the Board of Review hosted at Glenbrook. He thanked the elected officials and Glenbrook for hosting this important meeting where attendees received an update on the progress for disbursing taxes. While money is flowing, there are no detailed accounting of the disbursed funds. This makes it difficult to track what funds are remaining and other accounting details needed to close the fiscal year on June 30th. Dr. Johnson is optimistic, based on the reports provided to the District, that this work is well underway. Ms. Tomlinson inquired if the next tax bill will be delayed. Dr. Johnson replied that the bills have been issued and are due April 1st. Ms. Hahn also confirmed that the County is sending more regular emails communicating updates, which Dr. Johnson confirmed. Long-term investments continue to be paused and Dr. Johnson is awaiting needed information to reconcile the funds that the District has received but is optimistic that will be coming in future months.

Most funds are sitting in cash right now which is earning 3.7% and the District is pleased with the rate it is earning through the Illinois School District Liquid Asset Fund. The money that is in long-term investments is earning about 4.17%. Fund balance for all accounts \$136,433,000.

B. Financial Report for January 2026

Dr. Johnson then provided the Financial Report for January 2026. Operating revenue for the first seven months of the fiscal year was \$70 million or 4.76% lower compared to last year. Property tax distributions continued in January and are approaching last fiscal year's level. Revenue is lower in Other Local Sources as expected due to an accounting change made by the District with the allocation of Corporate Personal Property Replacement Tax (CPPRT) receipts. They are going to the Capital Projects Fund rather than to the Operating Fund, so it will cause a variance for a year as this report focuses on operating funds. The adopted budget for operating revenue is only slightly higher than last year. Operating expenditures through January were \$65,899,000 or 0.29% higher than last year. The District is optimistic that expenses will continue to stay close to the budget but also notes that several large payments were made earlier in the prior year which may be causing some of the timing issues that are being seen in the current report. Fund book balances for all accounts were \$140,297,000 as of January 31, 2026.

VIII. Consent Agenda

- Bill List for Period, January 1 – 31, 2026
- Personnel Report (Appointment, Change of Status, Leaves of Absence, Resignations, Retirements, Stipends - Appointments, Stipends - Separation and Stipends List for Winter 2026)
- Winnetka Campus North and Tower Building Construction Report #7
- Policy Revisions - Second Reading - PRESS 120
- New Trier Scholarship Trust Fund Allocation Approval
- Approval of Technology Computer Equipment Purchase

Ms. Hahn 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, January 1 - 31, 2026; Personnel Report (Appointment, Change of Status, Leaves of Absence, Resignations, Retirements, Stipends - Appointments, Stipends - Separation and Stipends List for Winter 2026); Winnetka Campus North and Tower Building Construction Report #7; Policy Revisions - Second Reading - PRESS 120; A maximum allocation of \$281,233 for scholarships for the 2026 graduation class; Approve the contract with Connection Inc. for equipment as presented and authorize the Deputy Superintendent to execute the agreement. Mr. Das seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote being taken, the members voted as follows:

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

NAY:

IX. Board Member Reports

Ms. Pofcher shared that the next **Community Engagement Committee** meeting will be on March 4th.

Mr. Das shared that the February 11th **TrueNorth Leadership Council** meeting was cancelled as these meetings are now only occurring when matters require meeting at this level.

Ms. Tomlinson shared about the **Parent Community Advisory Group** met and there was great engagement with the public and administration on what New Trier is doing in light of AI by helping to educate students on how to use it appropriately. Ms. Hahn added that it was a very positive conversation and that parents were appreciative of the great work being done around this. Ms. Tomlinson shared another highlight was a video of students sharing how they use AI in the classroom.

Ms. Hahn shared that the **New Trier Educational Foundation Liaison Committee** met last week with most of the focus on the Alumni Achievement Awards gala which is March 6th at the Renaissance Hotel in Northbrook. The Foundation is sponsoring an author visit at the Book Stall on February 25th as part of Lit Fest. Go Baby Go will take place at the Winnetka campus where students will outfit electric cars for kids with spina bifida.

Ms. Alcantara attended the **New Trier Fine Arts Association (NTFAA)** meeting on February 11th. A student scholar presented on a summer program they attended. Other reports followed including finance, marketing, and events. Ms.

Elizabeth Bennett, Music Department Chair, also presented to the group about the department's Piano Legacy Campaign which worked to replace the 100-year-old piano in the Gaffney Auditorium at Winnetka. The new piano will cost nearly \$250,000 and donations are being accepted through the Educational Foundation's Facebook page.

Ms. McDonough attended the **New Trier Parents Association (NTPA)** on February 3rd. The security team presented to the group and the parents on the Exec committee will pilot the Raptor Safe app which enables parents who frequently visit the campus to be pre-cleared to enter the building.

Mr. Lee shared information from the **Booster Club**, noting that the Booster Bash was very successful.

Mr. Lee also reported on the **Facilities Steering Committee**, noting that the recommendation to the Board will take place at the July 13th meeting with multiple workshops to engage with the community prior to that. Mr. Lee is excited about the early designs with preliminary findings indicating a need for some ADA improvements on both campuses. He also shared that there are a lot of unused lockers on both campuses as students simply do not use them anymore.

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

Dr. Tragos highlighted the following events:

- On February 28th, the Frosh-Soph play, *Junie B. Jones – Toothless Wonder*, will take place.
- Choir Opera will present *Legally Blonde* beginning on Wednesday, March 4th through Saturday, March 7th in the Gaffney.
- Third Quarter ends on March 13th followed by two late arrivals on March 16th and 17th for professional development time.
- The Board Recognition Program will take place on March 23rd followed by the Regular Board Meeting.

Ms. Hahn then inquired whether there were any requests for staff research or future agenda items, of which there was one. Ms. McDonough shared that she and others hear from students and families about the challenges they have experienced in trying to make schedule changes or level changes. She noted that the Board has heard about class sizes, classes being full, and difficulty with level changes, but also knows that the administration is committed to finding solutions. She would like a better understanding of the issue and where the stress points are with schedules. She inquired about which courses have the highest drop/add rates, how many course and level changes are requested, and how many of those were able to be fulfilled. Ms. McDonough would also like data around dropped classes in general. Dr. Tragos noted that work will begin on this request. Ms. Tomlinson inquired if everyone on the Board would receive this information, which Dr. Tragos confirmed.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Das moved, and Mr. Lee seconded the motion, to adjourn. Upon a voice vote being taken, all members indicated they were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lindsey Ruston, Secretary

Jean Hahn, President