

# BOARD NOTES:

## March 9, 2021, Regular Board Meeting:

**Consent Agenda:** The Board approved the Consent Agenda, which included the minutes from the February 9<sup>th</sup> Regular Board Meeting, the February 22<sup>nd</sup> Special Board Meeting, and the monthly bills and salaries.

**Communications:** Superintendent Dr. Ed Stange shared three FOIA requests from: 1.) SmartProcure requesting information on purchase orders and vendors, 2.) ABC7 News collecting data on student attendance, and 3.) Mr. Joe Sutton requesting information regarding contracts for our communications systems.

**Old Business:** The Board discussed how to structure the new Board member orientation sessions, landing on creating an Open Meeting that would be streamed to the public, and using IASB Representative Ms. Dee Molinare as facilitator. The Board also discussed preparations for the next Strategic Plan, including timing, use of a facilitator, and reviewing the surveys to make sure we are asking the right questions. It was agreed that two Board members, Ms. Amanda Alpert Knight and Mr. Adelbert Spaan, would assist Dr. Stange in the selection of a skilled facilitator.

**Public Comment:** Dr. Stange read an email from community member Mrs. Bridget Kennedy stating her support for a full-day Kindergarten program that incorporated more creative play and Specials time.

**Board Open Discussion:** After a review of the quarterly newsletter's purpose, goals, and production, the Board agreed to move towards a biannual format, occurring winter and summer, starting with this summer's issue. Additionally, Board member Mr. Rory Welch clarified that Board members are allowed, as private citizens, to endorse current candidates up for election, but that those endorsements should not be interpreted as official positions held by the Board.

**Return To School Task Force Committee:** Dr. Stange began by explaining that New Trier does not publish their aggregated district data collected from incoming freshman testing, and apologized for mistakenly implying that he had access to that data at the last Board meeting. Dr. Stange went on to report:

- When there is ambiguity regarding contact tracing or other matters related to exposure, the District will continue to err on the side of caution and be generally more thorough than the CCDPH requires us to be.
- Extending the day after spring break could make quarantine orders more likely. We will continue to ensure that we are following all guidance.
- The Task Force discussed how/if to allow outside visitors during the school day, including remote students. Not only does the spring bring activities that usually require parent volunteers, such as Bike Safety Week and Field Day, but the District would also like to offer remote students opportunities to safely interact with their peers if they so wish. The group agreed that executing these opportunities should be explored.
- Including lunch in the day will require additional hand hygiene measures. The group discussed how best to make sure that all students have sanitized their hands before and after lunch without causing backups in the bathrooms and shortened eating times. After referring to professional advice, it was agreed that teaching the students how to correctly and thoroughly use hand sanitizer was the preferred method.
- While the general consensus was that Sunset Ridge does not need to use tents outside, as they have adequate existing covered space for outdoor learning, it was agreed that Middlefork could benefit from the use of tents not only for protection, but also to delineate learning spaces.
- The Task Force agreed that it is appropriate to open the playgrounds for outdoor recess with the understanding that proper hand sanitizing will take place before and after use.
- Allowing opportunities for students to take mask breaks should still be encouraged if needed.

Dr. Stange noted that safety guidance offered to schools changes often and without warning, but that we continue to meet and exceed all recommendations. District 29 will continue to work with the Cook County Department of Public Health on contact tracing. The Board discussed whether or not the new guidance allowing for 3 feet between students would enable us to use the large gyms for PE. Unfortunately, the current schedule does not allow for each class to have its own time in the gym. Dr. Stange reminded the Board that optional testing will be available to the community after spring break at New Trier's Northfield campus, and offered to gather information on weekly saliva testing to determine whether or not that type of program would be a fit for our district. The next meeting is April 12, 2021, at 3:30pm.

**Finance and Facilities Committee:** The Board approved a resolution to reappoint District 29 CSBO Mr. Tom Beerheide as Assistant Township School Treasurer for a period of two years, a position that assigns him the responsibility of overseeing the District's investments. After review, the Board also approved an amendment to the District staff's Flexible Spending and Dependent Care Plan, which allows the carryover of any unused benefits to the plan year ending 2022 as recently enacted by Congress. The next meeting is April 13, 2021, at 6pm.

**Education Committee:** Board member Mrs. Anne Peterson reported that Director of Student Services Ms. Emily Dunham walked the Board through the intricacies of our Student Services and Special Education programs, providing an audit that highlighted areas of strength and opportunities for growth and improvement. The next meeting is May 11, 2021, at 6pm.

**Policy Committee:** The next meeting is March 24, 2021, at 9am.

**IASB:** Ms. Knight reported on two notable House Bills that were recently approved by committee and moved to the chamber floor: 1.) HB 18, that changes the timeline for teacher evaluations from every two years to every three years and requires that the excellent or proficient rating is evaluated at least once every two years, and 2.) HB 21, that allows a school district to apply for a waiver to remove the cap on the number of days a retired teacher can substitute teach in the district without impacting the retirement status of that retired teacher. A House Bill to watch that was removed from the committee vote is HB 7, requiring consolidation of 25% of school districts throughout the state.

**PTO:** Dr. Stange reported that they have decided to hold one book fair for all grades through Barnes and Noble, allowing families to shop both online and in-person. As the intended date for their benefit arrives, they are very pleased with their ongoing fundraising efforts and count them as a great success, raising over \$40K! The next Parent Connections Committee will discuss gender identity and how the District supports students with Gender Identity Plans. Slating for next year's positions has begun.

**NSSED:** Board member Mr. Bill Hayes reported they are preparing for their new brand rollout as True North Education Co-Op 804, to begin this summer, and their efforts to bring more services directly to districts continue. They are in the process of analyzing how they might consolidate services in select districts, meeting the service needs of all their member districts, and budgeting for those needs. Their CFO recently resigned and they are looking to fill that position. They are discussing their anticipated deficit and how they might use fund balance to offset it. Dr. Stange reported that the member superintendents have been meeting to discuss how projected expenditures are going to be dispersed through the districts, as it is unknown what impact the co-op's enrollment deficit will have on member districts going forward.

**Northfield Park District:** Mr. Welch reported that they are committed to staying the course with their Dolphin Care program after spring break. No decisions have been made yet regarding welcoming Wesley Childcare back as an option when we extend our day. The Park District remains flexible and responsive, and we are grateful for their partnership.

**Village of Northfield:** No report.

**Foundation Fund:** No report.

**Administrative Reports:**

**Dr. Stange:** While we are still waiting for approximately 12 more families to respond to the third trimester enrollment survey, we can project that 93% of students at Middlefork and 96.9% of students at Sunset Ridge will be in-person. As we welcome more students to the in-person program, we are keeping them at 3 feet apart in classrooms, when possible, as per CCDPH guidelines. We are interviewing for a 7<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts position. So far there are 32 students registered for 2021/22 Kindergarten. The Board discussed moving away from the graduated Kindergarten schedule and towards a full day, noting that the recent survey results pointed to a desire for a longer day that included more opportunities for play-based learning and added Specials classes like Art and Music. Taking into consideration that most children have now had a fairly complete experience with pre-school or daycare before coming to Kindergarten, the Board agreed that a full day program was appropriate and instructed Principal Mrs. Jen Keidaisch to explore scheduling options.

**Mr. Beerheide:** Spring property taxes are starting to come in and \$4.2M out of the approximately \$6M the District receives at this time of year has been collected so far. Our appeal for FEMA funding offered to schools to cover COVID expenses should be heard soon, which will hopefully result in around \$52K. We will soon submit applications for the second round of CARES Act funding. If there is a third round, we will again apply.

**Mrs. Styzcen:** Supported by recent initiatives, we are diving into our digital resources in order to tighten our privacy measures. We are striving to be fully transparent when it comes to our technology contracts, and will not work with outside companies if they do not comply with new privacy guidelines. A new mandate regarding privacy measures is expected in July and we expect to be ready with procedures already in place.

**Dr. Sukenik and Mrs. Keidaisch:** In response to recent repeated “Zoom bombs” by what it suspected to be the same person, we have increased safeguards and are working with Northfield Police to prevent future incidents. Our Social Justice Committee is making great strides and are looking towards more engagement and development opportunities for staff that can help inform our Strategic Plan and SEL programs. Both schools are looking forward to welcoming more in-person students, and are working on developing effective lunch and recess protocols.

**Mr. Dreher:** The heating system in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade wing continues to be a problem. We have experts from not only the construction and architectural firms we used when the building was built, but also representatives from the manufacturers working on the problem and we are assured that a solution will be found with no cost to the district. Required radon testing took place at Middlefork and all levels were well below recommended rates. Unfortunately, the warmer weather has awoken a few bees in the Middlefork gym, and we are working with Orkin to address the problem early before it becomes worse. It is likely that there is a nest in the wall, and Orkin is using a powder-based solution that the insects will carry back to the hive in order to have a bigger impact. We are working with Northfield’s licensed arborist to see if some of our trees along the fence line can be saved without the expense of replanting.

**Recommendations:** The Board approved the Closed Session Minutes from February 9, 2021, the release of Closed Session Minutes and Destruction of Verbatim Recordings, and the resignation of Teaching Assistant Ms. Amy Oyer.

Official meeting minutes will be posted on the website following their approval at the April 13, 2021, Regular Board meeting.