

The New Trier Way

While New Trier Township High School's stellar test scores and triumphs over the years have been well-documented, perhaps the real secret to its success are the little things the public never sees. Dr. Linda Yonke introduces her new column in *Quintessential New Trier*.

This spring at a New Trier varsity baseball game at Duke Childs Field in Winnetka, a parent introduced herself to me and began to tell me about her senior son. This invariably happens when I attend athletic events, concerts, plays or any activities associated with the school, and it is one of my favorite parts of being superintendent of New Trier District 203. This particular mother told me about her son's experiences not just in sports but also in his English classes, with his adviser, and with his science, history and math teachers. She wanted me to know that her son's years at New Trier were shaped by teachers who cared about him, who knew him well, who challenged him to work harder than he ever thought possible, and who inspired him to think and to learn.

New Trier's academic and athletic successes are well-documented; off-the-charts test scores, academic honors and state championships occur routinely. But there is much more to New Trier than the public sees — programs and accomplishments that are not as well known or understood. I would like to share some of these lesser-known aspects of New Trier with you in the coming months through this publication.

Perhaps the most common misperception about New Trier pertains to our enrollment of over 4,000 students, a number that brings with it some concern that we cannot possibly meet every student's needs. I hear prospective parents, in particular, express fear that their children will be lost in the crowd, and will never have a chance to join a team, participate in theater or aspire to a leadership position.

Several unique programs at New Trier help make our large school feel small. First and foremost, New Trier has an adviser program that is admired and replicated all over the country. As freshmen, students are placed in a single-gender but otherwise heterogeneous group, forming a cohort that meets for 25 minutes every day for four

years. Students are assigned one faculty adviser at the freshmen campus and one for grades 10-12, and that adviser serves as a link between the student, his teachers and his family. Advisees form a close bond, and future reunions and memories of New Trier frequently revolve around the adviser room experience. Advisers know their advisees well, and they work closely with the student's parents and teachers to make sure problems do not go unnoticed and that students find courses and activities to meet their needs. Contrary to the traditional high school guidance program with its 300-to-1 ratio of students to counselors, New Trier's 26-to-1 adviser-room ratio ensures that the students are guided by faculty members who know them and their families well.

In addition to its award-winning adviser system, New Trier has a number of programs and practices that ensure individual attention and intervention when needed. Students begin high school on the beautiful, freshman-only Northfield Campus where teachers, administrators and support staff understand and love 9th-graders and can provide for their unique developmental needs. Teacher Assistance Teams bring together advisers and teachers with support professionals to design interventions when a student is experiencing difficulty; the GAP program provides in-school tutoring and help with study skills. During junior and senior years, post-high school counselors provide advice and support during the college selection and application process. The Reading and Writing Center staff helps students decipher difficult texts and revise essays. Numerous academic support programs provide extra assistance in a timely and individualized way.

The Board of Education and staff are committed to providing extracurricular opportunities for every student. The number of students participating in one or more of the 35 athletic teams exceeded 3,000 last year (with students in more than one



Dr. Linda Yonke is the superintendent of New Trier Township High School District 203. She may be reached at yonkel@newtrier.k12.il.us or 847/446-7000.

sport counted each time). More boys are participating in sports now than participated when New Trier had two four-year schools in 1968 when the enrollment was over 6,000, and of course we have an equal number of girls' sports offered today. All major play productions are double-cast, providing added opportunities for student participation. More than 150 clubs meet student interests on both campuses. An extensive intramural program is sponsored by the school and the Booster Club and involves hundreds of students each year. Leadership opportunities exist in activities, sports, service clubs and student government on both campuses. And most importantly, small class sizes and a culture encouraging student-faculty interaction mean that teachers know their students well and provide support outside of class.

New Trier is truly a unique high school, providing individual attention within the context of a diverse and expansive curricular and extracurricular program. I look forward to sharing more about the students and the unique programs at New Trier in the coming months. 