

## Equity Teams at New Trier, excerpt from January 2015 Board Meeting

### D. Equity Team Update

Mr. Tim Hayes, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services introduced Equity Team members Patricia Savage-Williams, Amy Offenbach, and Jackie Gnant to present information on who is part of the team and what they do. Ms. Savage-Williams is a co-facilitator of the Equity Team with Mr. Hayes which has been active in the school since 2008. Members of the team are faculty who participate in professional development to increase their understanding of equity and diversity in the school. The two professional development opportunities are SEED (Seeking Educational Equity & Diversity) and Beyond Diversity. SEED has been offered at New Trier for over 20 years to faculty and staff, one time per month for a two year program (one year is mandatory) on race, gender, sexual orientation and other factors that impact student achievement. Beyond Diversity is a two-day training that focuses on race with protocols on how to have difficult conversations to achieve understanding. These two programs seek to provide the resources for the school to address difficult social issues. The Equity Team goals are to 1) ensure that all students and staff are experiencing a safe and respectful learning environment; 2) ensure an equitable educational experience for all students; and 3) ensure that every student is prepared with the skills related to cultural competency necessary to live and work in a global economy. The Diversity Statement adopted in 2004 notes that "New Trier is committed to delivering a progressive educational and work environment for all students and staff in the areas of diversity and social justice and offering students a diverse set of experiences and perspectives that will better prepare them to successfully navigate the rapidly globalizing world community of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Ms. Savage-Williams suggests that New Trier is the first place that should be addressing equity as we are educating the leaders of tomorrow. "It is not intuitive and not easy and that is why we take the time to teach our faculty how to navigate in a diverse world." Equity issues are also addressed in department committees, student voices, clubs and the curriculum. Science teacher Jackie Gnant shared the numerous ways that Equity Team discussions have made her more sensitive to her students and their perspectives in order to more fully teach them the diverse perspectives in science, education, and the world. Amy Offenbach of the Social Work Department spoke of the benefits she has gained from the Equity Team in being able to have the courageous conversations with all students in her role as social worker. Mr. Hayes reviewed the Board's earlier request for planning a seminar day to honor Dr. King and noted the important role the Equity Team has in planning such events to teach students about multiple perspectives and empathy. Board discussion followed concerning the desire to know more about the committee's work and to encourage diversity among staff as well. Dr. Yonke noted the importance of the Equity Team professional development and its incorporation into teacher training. Mr. Fischer also added that an important addition to the conversations would be the inclusion of religion and free speech as reflected in the world news today. Mr. Hayes invited Board members to the next ECGC panel discussion which will be on stereotypes on January 27 at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Dolinko asked if there were mechanisms to assess the programs. Ms. Gnant noted that she will be assessing progress in her classes for the PERA research. Mr. Dolinko added he sensed that the sender schools were addressing tolerance in their programs and when students arrived at New Trier, these Equity Team programs are ready to take these issues and conversations to the next intellectual and maturity level. He appreciated the presentation and looked forward to similar reports in the future.