

# the NEW TRIER NEWS



Guthrie

## Testing accommodations four times national average

### Affluent districts are more likely to abuse accommodations

by Ezra Wallach

According to documents posted on New Trier's website, 226 of 935, or 24 percent, of Juniors taking April's school wide ACT received some sort of accommodation for the test, a number confirmed by administrative staff.

If that number seems high, it's because it is. According to a study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), in 2012, only 2 percent of all standardized test takers took an exam with an accommodation, and 5 percent of high school juniors took the ACT with one. At an average high school in America, it would take 20 students to find one receiving an accommodation on the ACT or SAT; at New Trier, it would take just 4.

This isn't necessarily because more New Trier students receive special education services or an Individualized Education Program (IEP). In fact, New Trier is right on par with the rest of the country: according to the Illinois School Board of Education's (ISBE) annual school report, 15 percent of New Trier's students receive special education services, just a bit above the national

average of 13 percent.

According to a study done by the GAO, 74 percent of accommodations for standardized tests nationwide are for extended time while others can be for extra breaks, English translations, physical handicaps, among others.

Highland Park and Lake Forest had similar numbers receiving accommodations—around 17 percent in 2012—according to state data, numbers that have presumably risen since then, like New Trier's.

New Trier is somewhat of an outlier in the results of these tests; NT students in 2016 averaged around a 28 on the ACT, one of the highest averages of any non-selective public high school in the nation.

"Extended time really helps me, and I've had an IEP for a while," said an anonymous New Trier Junior. "I think it's fair for me and a lot of other people who really need these accommodations to help them succeed."

Both the SAT and the ACT rely heavily on the school and the student to determine if an accommodation is appropriate. Both tests look for early diagnosis and frequent use of an IEP, but many students see accommodations given out to those who don't have that kind of history.

"I know so many of my friends get extra time who don't have ADHD," said another student. "Both of my sisters got it, and I know for



Some allege extended time benefits wealthy students disproportionately | AP

a fact they don't have any kind of disability. I even know someone who just went up to their parents junior year, asked for it, and then got it."

A number of kids feeling the academic pressure at New Trier seek an Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis to give them an advantage on the ACT when private tutoring isn't enough. Contrary to less affluent areas, parents are very aware of accommodation opportunities and the school is well equipped at getting them for their children after a diagnosis.

ADHD remains over-diagnosed throughout the United States. The Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC) claims on their website that only 5 percent of children really have ADHD according to medical studies, but many psychiatrists believe that over 15 percent of American adolescents are diagnosed.

Students with ADHD are typically treated with stimulant drugs that are said to equal the playing field. When these students get extended time on top of their Adderall, some claim it can give them an advantage over those without ADHD in the first place.

"A lot of times in class it's hard for me to focus, but once I get the standardized test I'm going to

pay attention because that is really important," said another Junior. "I don't use extra time for any other test at New Trier and it can really help a lot for people taking the ACT."

Diagnoses can be as simple as just prescribing Adderall or Ritalin to a child before waiting to see if it improves school performance. The problem is that amphetamine drugs have been proven to increase academic performance for all adolescents when given an appropriate dosage; those without the disorder are just more vulnerable to the drug's serious side effects.

Faking ADHD is also easier than many think. According to a study done by Professor David Berry at the University of Kentucky, a group of students with ADHD and a group of students who were told to fake ADHD were presented to a psychiatrist who did not know which kids truly had been diagnosed. Neuropsychological tests were not able to differentiate between those with ADHD and those faking it.

"I have definitely seen New Trier students try to come into my office and fake ADHD," said Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist Dr. Alfreda Grosrenaud.

Continued on page 2

## Admin considering changes to advisery after three year review

### First formal review of advisery system since 1965

by May Paddor

The School Board heard results of a three year long review of the advisery system on April 16.

According to the Adviser Program Study Board Memo, the Adviser Program has not been formally evaluated since 1965. This prompted a study to begin in 2015 to provide more research on how the Program is affecting students, parents and staff members.

The Executive Summary of the Adviser Program Evaluation reported the results of The Hanover research survey, which was administrated to students, parents and staff from 2015 to 2017.

Board of Education President Greg Robitaille said, "[Adviseries] should be conducted in a manner to provide the maximum support to each individual student. What form that takes or what changes should be considered versus how it is currently structured is what we have asked our staff and administration to review and recommend to the board."

Assistant Superintendent for Student Services Timothy Hayes believes advisery is a cornerstone of the school.

"For students, it provides an advocate at New Trier who knows you and can help support your academic,

social, and emotional growth. For parents, it provides a single point of contact to help them navigate the complexity of our school. For staff members, it provides the opportunity to know students more completely and to have a comprehensive understanding of the whole school," he said.

The survey generally showed an upward trend of positive results from freshman year to junior year. These results showed that freshman and juniors are 59% and 64% satisfied with the adviser system, respectively.

The Board of Education also held focus groups where students, parents and staff could talk about their views on the adviser program.

"[The Adviser Program] has and continues to serve students and their families well. The Hanover Research report evidenced a high level of student/parent/Adviser satisfaction but also identified several areas for improvement that the Board will be focused on in the near future," said Robitaille.

Students generally felt their advisers help them grow. One student, during a focus group, said "my adviser won't do stuff for me. He'll tell me the steps I need to do in order to get something done."

"Advisery has taught me to get along with a lot of different people even if they're not in my group," said another student from the focus group.

One of the topics reviewed was gender-specific advisories. The Board of Education weighed the pros and cons of having gender-specific

adviseries.

The pros were that gender-specific adviseries have provided comfort to students and encouraged better discussion in gender-specific settings, especially since the school is mixed-gender.

An adviser in the focus group said, "I love it. The female experience is very different than the male experience."

The cons were that it could marginalize students, especially in the LGBTQ+ community. Another con was that gender-specific programs can be unrealistic and unproductive because our society isn't gender specific.

A student was reported saying, "we have [a] progressive curriculum [and] an outdated system that enforces a biological binary."

However, a future change is still uncertain. Hayes does not see a "clear consensus from students, staff, or parents who were surveyed and participated in focus groups."

"We recommended to the Board of Education that this should be a topic for the strategic planning process that New Trier will begin next year," he said.

The goal is to help every student. "I hope students gain a sense of self and of belonging to the broader NTHS community," said Robitaille. "I hope students feel advisery is a place they can reliably connect with fellow students and the Adviser to help NTHS feel like a more personalized, more manageable school."



Teens across the country have been caught juuling in high schools | AP

## FDA to curb teen Juul usage

### FDA claims Juuls target minors

by Jasmine Gonzalez

Last Apr. 24 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced a five-step plan to reduce the use of tobacco products, particularly Juuls and e-cigarettes, among teenagers.

The Youth Tobacco Prevention Plan is a five step initiative aimed at understanding and targeting the appeal that nicotine products, with an emphasis on vaping products such as those of the Juul brand, have on the nation's youth.

Although the plan targets general tobacco use, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of understanding the impact on vaping devices that have become a trendy way for teenagers to start smoking and do so discretely.

Juul products, like most e-cigarettes, were created as an alternative to traditional cigarettes with the intention of reducing the well known risks associated with smoking tobacco.

Despite this, most vaping devices still contain nicotine, making them just as addictive as regular cigarettes.

Additionally, being a relatively new trend, little research has been done to determine the specific effects that these products have on either people who already smoke or teenagers who begin nicotine usage through such products.

According to the FDA's website, "[Juul Labs] believe that vaping can have a positive impact when used by smokers, and can have a negative impact when used by nonsmokers."

Continued on page 2