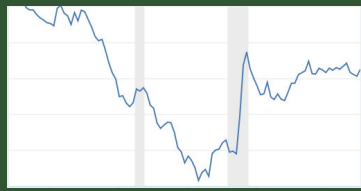
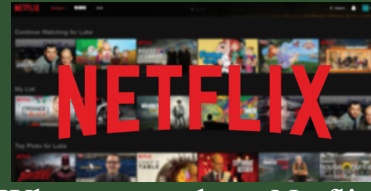


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## Black History Month sheds light on race at NT

### 2030 strategic plan reiterates necessity for dialogue on race

by Nadia Jaikaran

With Black History Month being honored throughout the month of February, a racist post and several incidents of graffiti in recent years prompted a need to revisit how the school encourages conversation.

For African American students at New Trier, the experience tends to be one of acceptance, but with limits.

Junior Summer Gaines-Wheeler has become used to being one of the few people of color in the school.

"While I don't feel like a total outcast, I definitely don't fit in as the typical New Trier student," said Gaines-Wheeler.

This feeling of not quite fitting in is echoed by many students of color here, and while some feel isolated, others have come to appreciate the difference they bring to the school.

Junior Brian Joseph said he feels different from his peers on a daily basis.

"I embrace this difference and choose to feel proud of it rather than resent it. I am who I am, and neither I nor anyone else can change that. I believe that everyone, no matter [the] ethnic background, should embrace and be proud of who they are," said Joseph.

The school has been striving to create ways to help break down barriers of race and social issues between students. Joseph acknowledged school programs to combat race and identity issues.

Others feel that on the North Shore, race is not an issue that is relevant or one that directly impacts their lives. For Joseph, the school reflects this attitude and doesn't seem as if it's addressing current African-American issues.

"It would be generally formative for the school to discuss those issues, specifically the use of derogatory words. I believe that it would be beneficial to hear from students like myself, or any other African-Americans regarding these words' history and the impact that they have on people of color. My goal for this would not be for embarrassment or shame, but for education and understanding," said Joseph.

Assistant Superintendent for Student Services Dr. Timothy Hayes agreed that the school must discuss racial issues in America.

Hayes, along with Superintendent Paul Sally and Assistant Superintendent Peter Tragos, wants to include more culture, climate, and equity planning into the 2030 strategic plan.

"It's important we talk about it. I just don't think that we can be doing a good job educating you if we didn't. It takes more than a Seminar Day. It takes the kinds of conversations that

you're experiencing in class every day," said Hayes.

Joseph echoed the importance for more in-depth discussions than what is currently done in school. "The administration has made the attempt to emphasize the importance of minorities through programs such as Seminar Day and the Identity Project, both of which I think are wonderful ideas in theory, though in practice they did not work so well," said Joseph.

Seminar Day ran for two consecutive years before being stopped when a small but vocal community group raised opposition and Martin Luther King Day was restored as a day off from school.

Teachers and students have been questioning the decision to discontinue the special day dedicated to conversations about race and social issues.

"Many community members spoke out saying that they 'didn't want to make their children feel bad' or even that 'racism doesn't exist on the North Shore.' I can tell you that from firsthand experience, it indeed does. I think that we need to bring back seminar day, in a redesigned way to help my peers truly understand the experiences that other minorities have been through, not just at New Trier but throughout history," Joseph said.

Hayes explained that the absence of the assembly was due to the calendar changes while touching

on potential new Seminar Day ideas.

"For three years we had this altered calendar and one of the things that we did was we took out all of these single day-off holidays that we had. We're looking at doing a seminar day in 2020 [on] what is true and how adolescents navigate it," said Hayes.

While a day dedicated to a single issue seems to be in the works, it may not focus on the issue of race, but on the idea of truth and facts in a "post-truth" world.

According to Gaines-Wheeler, the school has not addressed current African American issues, and she believes more needs to be done here to address the issues that have come up over the last several years.

Regarding the incidents of racist graffiti, Gaines-Wheeler said, "I don't feel that New Trier took enough time to [reflect on] what occurred and how it affected us. I know some people were given apologies and that may be the only thing they can do, but either way, words hurt. Students make jokes about race and use derogatory words while singing a song or conversing, but it's still not okay."

To combat the racist graffiti, the administration rid each bathroom of all markings, derogatory or not, according to Hayes.

"[The administration] spent the summer making sure that every bathroom was graffiti-free," Hayes said. "It really started to make us think about what students see when

they're moving through their day and that we should have zero tolerance for any graffiti."

Some students, however, feel that the school is not confronting these issues head-on.

"I feel as if the administration tries to hide New Trier's bad side, they only want us to be seen as the 'best' high school or perfect high school, but when racist things happen in our school, they want to bury it and not really confront the issue," said junior Mekah Brown.

While many students can agree that the school has issues to overcome, a majority of students interviewed believed that the school provides a safe, nurturing environment.

"I am proud to be a student at New Trier. I am lucky to have the opportunity to attend this school and I am in no way different, ideologically, than any of my peers. I would consider myself to be a pretty typical New Trier junior," said Joseph.

Gaines-Wheeler added that for her, Black History Month is to be celebrated all year.

"I appreciate everything about being an African American. I take pride in who I am and have nothing to be ashamed of. I was taught from a very young age that no matter my race, I'm beautiful and can do anything I put my mind to."

## Dating Booklet questioned over LGBTQ+ inclusivity

### Sophomore health class project aims to teach healthy relationships

by Hannah Sussman

Over the course of the sophomore health curriculum, students focus on healthy relationships, with many KW teachers using the "Dating Booklet," an assignment to help illustrate positive relationships.

Andy Horne, the coordinator for sophomore health, finds that the booklet helps him and other teachers to get students to effectively think through their relationships.

"We get them to think about what they would do on these dates, how would they look, what should someone wear, who is your ideal partner," Horne explained.

Despite its positive intentions, for some students, especially within the LGBTQ+ community, the Dating Booklet is a far more challenging project.

Matt Stuczynski, a head sponsor of CTA, notes that for a member of the LGBTQ+ community, the booklet forces them to either out themselves or construct a false narrative to conceal their identity.

Stuczynski pointed out, "often when the topic of homosexuality or other sexual orientations come up, the health curriculum has then treated

those kids as the 'other.'"

Stuczynski explained, "I think [the dating booklet] could be very difficult, I would even say traumatic. It puts in their face that you're not normal, because the norm is assumed to be you're dating and you're dating an opposite sex person."

Sophomore Annie Thornton, an openly gay student, emphasizes the weight of covering up one's identity.

"It's depressing having to act straight or act like you are in a straight relationship. It's depressing because you know that's not who you are. It just makes you feel like being gay is weird or strange," said Thornton.

Thornton reflected that had she been assigned the Dating Booklet in the past, it would have only made her experience more difficult: "It probably would have confused things more, it would have made me anxious and less willing to come out."

To Amy Offenbach, a social worker leading several LGBTQ+ group meetings, the prospect of writing about an identity that is not your own is something all students will experience.

Offenbach pointed out, "we all are put into positions where we have to at some point try to relate to a life situation that doesn't pertain to us. I don't necessarily think the problem is that you are trying to come up with an idea that doesn't pertain to you."

Horne agreed, "even if you're not interested in dating, there is a good chance you will be in the future."

Senior Elza Wu agreed with



The booklet is a personalized project made for health class detailing students' ideal dating experience

| Winter

Offenbach and said she used the booklet as an experimental learning device.

"I didn't really feel like it was that important to be in a relationship, but after doing it [the Dating Booklet] and doing research on how other people think about it I can be like, 'oh this person has different view point from me, I should respect them.'"

While some students are able to separate themselves from the project, others feel uncomfortable with the subjects the dating book pries at, regardless of sexual preference.

Sophomore Jordan Andrews considers the booklet to be an unwarranted search of students' personal lives.

"Dating is one of those intimate things that doesn't have to be regulated by the school," Andrews

argued, and continued, "I don't think it is necessary for a teacher at our school to know our sexual preferences."

Sophomore Lyla Friedman agreed, "I feel uncomfortable opening up with something so personal to a teacher."

Some students, however, have found the booklet to be useful, in part because of its personal content.

Senior Katie Maatman primarily used the skills she learned from the dating booklet in her junior year when she started dating her current boyfriend.

"If I saw or noticed something that wasn't great I knew it was a warning," Maatman said.

While the overall health curriculum has undoubtedly helped to guide countless students, Thornton

and others note the ever present need for growth within our curriculum.

"They are doing a lot more than other schools, and I do applaud them for that, but there is always room for improvement," Thornton concluded.

Horne echoed this notion saying, "I want to make this [the Dating Booklet] better, if it can be better, and maybe we have to scrap certain parts of it."

Stuczynski has found that within meetings, "health class comes up all the time, it's one of the most common complaints where they [students] feel least comfortable and singled out as being different."

Stuczynski explained, "even here at New Trier where things are relatively good, and things are relatively comfortable and supportive for gay kids, it's still hard."