



The New Trier News

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Athletics challenge transgender students' rights

Student transgender rights and gender-conforming privacy clash in Illinois school districts

by Nora Crumley

For a transgender female gymnast in Palatine School District 211, being accepted means full access to athletic participation, including using the girls locker room.

Transgender students' rights to access and gender conforming students' rights to privacy seem to be in conflict.

Although not in national news, access to restrooms and locker rooms is an emerging topic at New Trier.

"Locker rooms are uncomfortable places for everyone" junior Marnina Hornstein said.

For some transgender students the discomfort increases: "Unfortunately, a transgender boy might face passing comments in the boys locker room," junior Will Wolf said. "Not a lot of boys would be

accepting; the locker room is not an ideal environment."

According to the New York Times, school district officials in Palatine, IL, have tried to accommodate the transgender student's request by creating several private changing spaces in the girls locker room.

While the Department of Education agreed with the school's creation of the private changing spaces, they disagreed with the school's requirement that the transgender girl be required to use one of the spaces.

In an article by the Chicago Tribune, John Knight, director of the LGBT and AIDS Projects at ACLU of Illinois said, "It's not voluntary, it's mandatory for her. It's one thing to say to all the girls, 'You can choose if you want some extra privacy,' but it's another thing to say, 'You, and you alone, must use them.' That sends a pretty strong signal to her that she's not accepted and the district does not see her as a girl."

An issue at the center of this debate is student privacy. According to Palatine's Superintendent, Daniel Cates, privacy for all students is their

highest concern. Cates expressed this view in a quote to the Chicago Tribune, "At some point, we have to balance the privacy rights of 12,000 students with other particular, individual needs of another group of students."

Access to the locker room is just one part to a more significant right to play sports with people of the gender with which students identify. The IHSA, the governing body for high school sports in Illinois, has created regulations regarding transgender students' participation in athletics.

These regulations require transgender students to identify themselves as such to a school administrator, provide medical documentation regarding their transgender status, including counseling, hormone treatment, and gender reassignment surgery, and the policy requires identification of "gender identity related advantages for approved participation."

One gender advantage would be if a transgender girl wished to compete on the Girls Track and Field team, as she may be faster than other runners.

The decision of whether or not

a transgender student can participate in IHSA athletics is determined by the IHSA. According to the IHSA policy, "The IHSA will establish a group of medical personnel to act in an advisory role when reviewing rulings."

"We have been called upon to think about this policy, but not to use it," New Trier's Athletic Director, Randy Oberembt, said.

Gender related advantages have been an issue in sports across all levels. At the 2009 World Championships for Women's Track and Field, Caster Semenya, a runner from South Africa, was "forced to undergo a series of gender verification tests" by the IAAF (International Association of Athletic Federations) after winning the 800 meter dash.

These concerns likely play into the IHSA's requirement that gender related advantages be considered as part of determining a transgender students' eligibility to play.

"Personally, I think it would be a bigger issue for female sports, but it is going to affect all sports and everyone included," New Trier Girls Track Coach Robert Spagnoli said.

In popular sports across the

world, there are differences in men's and women's performances. The fastest national time for a 50 yard freestyle swimming event for men is 21.37 seconds by Nathan Adrian. For the same event, female swimmer Dana Torres holds the record with a time of 24.07 seconds.

"For sports it is unfortunate because the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. They need to take in the situation of the fairness of the sport when determining if transgender students can play," Wolf said.

For now, New Trier and surrounding school districts have yet to put the IHSA policy regarding transgender students into use, but it is on the administration's radar. "We have to become more aware of the students who populate our institutions," Oberembt said.

One common theme is respect for individual differences. Lizzy Appleby, the Pride Youth Program Coordinator at Angles in Northfield expressed this opinion: "Not every person who's trans is the same, so their situation should not be treated as such."

Controversial MLK Day sought to spark discussion

Seminars provoked meaningful reflection and talks about race

by Helen Fagan

Students and teachers had mixed emotions anticipating Monday's seminars to commemorate Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Pat Savage-Williams, New Trier Special Education Coordinator and leader of MLK day planning, said the goal of this seminar day was to educate NT students about the life of Martin Luther King Jr. It was to "talk about race in a meaningful way, [for students to] talk about their race and what race means, and explore why people make assumptions about race," Savage-Williams said.

With this, Savage-Williams hoped New Trier students would gain a different perspective and be more conscious of racism in our community and society.

More importantly, she hoped it would motivate students to continue to talk about race, even if it's uncomfortable. "The way to change the world is to have these conversations," Savage-Williams said.

Many students were excited for the seminars, as they agree that race is an issue that needs to be addressed. Sophomore Sophia Finerman said, "I feel like people don't really talk about it because it's an uncomfortable subject, we're used to being around people of the same race."

Other kids had different views. Sophomore Jessi Alt said the lack of diversity at New Trier needs to be addressed, but "I don't see a lot of bullying because of someone's race."

Some students would've rather had the day off of school, seeing an entire school day devoted to race as unnecessary. A junior, who requested not to be named, said "I would love to talk about it [race] in my English or history class, but I'm not sure that cutting a whole day out is a good idea. It's not productive."

Savage-Williams said the fact that New Trier is predominantly white makes the race conversation even more important.

"My friends always ask, 'Why do you do race work at New Trier, it's mostly white?' But if I don't talk about it, it's not going to get done at all. It's really important to have this conversation," said Savage-Williams.

The reason why New Trier held school on MLK day is due to the building renovations, as the district gave up most normally scheduled three-day weekends to allow for a longer summer and more efficient construction.

Savage-Williams said, "The construction company asked for as much of the summer as possible. But using MLK day as a regular attendance day just didn't feel right."

Savage-Williams wanted to make the day engaging for students and faculty alike. Teachers volunteered to lead different seminars about race that range from discussing white privilege to watching and analyzing the popular TV show "Black-ish."

The group of faculty members planning the event, led by Savage-Williams and Timothy Hayes, wanted to incorporate student-leaders into the seminars as well. "Kids will listen to kids. We're looking for students to share with their peers," said Savage-Williams.

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Wilkerson selected as keynote speaker

Author of nationally acclaimed book boasts impressive credentials

by Kate Holly

Author and Pulitzer Prize recipient, Isabel Wilkerson, was the featured presenter at the Winnetka campus Monday for the Martin Luther King Jr. Seminar Day.

New Trier's decision to hold classes on the holiday made waves throughout the school. While it was not the typical attendance day, students instead ran through four sessions including a presentation by one of the two featured speakers.

Pat Savage-Williams, New Trier Special Ed Coordinator and leader of professional development for staff on issues of equity and diversity, was one of the leaders in the planning of the seminar day.

The goals of the day were to "help students further develop a positive racial identity and a deeper understanding of other racial identities, and to understand the impact of systemic racism and how one can counteract its influence," said Savage-Williams.

One way of reaching these goals was by providing a special presentation by two influential speakers at both campuses. Ilyasah Shabazz, the daughter of Malcolm X, was at the Northfield campus, while Wilkerson presented at Winnetka.

The process of selecting the speakers was extensive. A committee comprised of members of New Trier staff and the student body was assembled to make the selections. Savage-Williams said, "We wanted the keynote speakers for MLK Day to be someone widely known who could speak to



Wilkerson | IsabelWilkerson.com

the issues of race-- both historically and currently."

Wilkerson is a nationally acclaimed author and journalist. She is the first black woman in the history of American journalism to win the Pulitzer Prize and the first African American to win for individual reporting.

She has worked as a Professor of Journalism at Emory University, Princeton University, and Boston University. Wilkerson was also a lecturer at Northwestern University, and she served as a board member of the National Arts in Journalism Program at Columbia University.

Her book, "The Warmth of Other Suns," is a New York Times best-seller. It tells the story of the Great Migration, following three African Americans and their journeys as they flee the south in the 20th century and head north and west to what is called the "New World."

In the early 1900s, 90% of all black Americans were living in the

South. After the Great Migration, nearly 47% were living outside the South, according to Wilkerson's book.

Around six million blacks left the south during that time. "The Great Migration is not purely about the numbers but about the lasting effects of so many people uprooting themselves and transporting their culture from an isolated region of the country to the big cities of the North and West," Wilkerson said.

"Warmth" won numerous awards and honors, including the 2010 National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction and the New York Times Notable Book of the Year in 2010. In 2011, President Obama selected "The Warmth of Other Suns" as one of the books for his summer reading during his vacation at Martha's Vineyard.

The Great Migration can be compared to other immigrant migrations in the sense that there is loss and sacrifice in the journey to a foreign land. However, the Great Migration is unique in that the African Americans were technically already American citizens, forced to leave their homes to claim their piece of the American Dream.

Wilkerson's journalism skills were amplified during her research for the novel. Over a period of 18 months, she conducted interviews with over 1,200 people before she found Ida Mae, George Starling, and Robert Foster, the three protagonists.

Wilkerson made several appearances on national television programs, including 60 Minutes on CBS and the Nightly News on NBC.