

Letter catches eye of NT administration

Former student criticizes school's approach to LGBTQ+ issues
by May Paddor

Over the summer, former student Nick Collins posted a "New Trier LGBTQ+ Open Letter Signatures" Google form on Facebook to get signatures to send to the administration about homophobia in the student body.

Collins, a senior at Brookline High School in Brookline, MA, wrote the letter after talking to a friend at New Trier. "They exemplified what was wrong with New Trier and I just realized that change needs to be made. I'm kind of fed up with what I experienced there."

She believes Brookline High School has a more open and active LGBTQ+ community. "They have a day where LGBTQ+ students go up and share their stories about coming out to the whole school. They encourage conversation in classes and administration support," she said.

The Winnetka campus principal Denise Dubravec was emailed the letter after it got 150+ signatures. "It saddens me to think that a student would not have a good experience at New Trier," she said. "I immediately wanted to reach out to her to understand her story and her experiences to understand what she went through and figure out what is it that I don't know."

According to surveys the student body takes every two years, LGBTQ+ students face the most risk for struggling

with the school environment.

Dubravec plans to take action. She said, "Moving forward, this continues to be at the forefront of how we can support all students and this particular group of students who feel that it's not a safe environment. We want everyone to be aware and be a little more mindful on what is happening in our classrooms."

In her letter, Nick addressed her experiences on the track team. Athletic Director, Augie Fontanetta, said, "In terms of actions, we're always talking to our coaching staff about how we can improve the program for all the students involved. We want our kids to have a great experience in the athletic programs. We want it to be an extension of the New Trier Motto and classroom."

Collins hoped to start more conversation in the classroom. "In my classes [at New Trier], we would talk about race or something in the government, but we never talked about other social issues, especially about the LGBTQ+ community. There's a lot of room for discussion. In my school, they added LGBTQ+ literature to our English curriculum," she said.

Committed to Action Sponsor Rachel Hess agrees that conversation is a crucial part of change. "I think one of the biggest things is to listen to our students in club and to anonymously share their stories or the stories of friends and family, so we can be aware of those personal experiences. It's always more powerful to hear from students than adults," she said.

There are already plans being put into action to spread awareness for acceptance of all students. "Nick and I talked about working with

the sponsors to see if we can get a group of students together to do a form of conversations." Dubravec said. "I'm going to try to get a form together that we can exchange information, ideas and thoughts about their experiences at New Tier."

Along with creating a panel, some teachers have taken initiative and included a preferred pronoun section of their student information sheets. Collins said, "I'm trans and I use she or hers and that's a big issue because I look very masculine. I wish we had some sort of nonverbal sheet, like New Trier because it's so scary to come out to an entire class, and you never really know your environment."

These forms can help introduce a stronger understanding between teachers and students. Hess said, "To me, it's always an honor when a student shares that kind of information. The student, to a certain extent, is outing themselves, and there has to be that follow up conversation of whether or not they want to be referred to as that pronoun in front of their peers."

As the school year progresses, students can expect to see more awareness. "At the end of October with the staff, we are doing some professional development on the topic of bias: bias on gender, bias on race, bias on sexuality—and how we transition that to the kids," Dubravec said.

Even though students aren't directly a part of those meetings, it's important to keep the conversation going. Hess said, "That's one of the best things the letter can do. Keep the conversation going."

Northfield Building Named After Jan Borja

by Claudia Levens

On Wednesday, Sept. 6, the Northfield campus's B building was officially renamed in honor of New Trier's former principal Jan Borja. The 'Borja Building' name unveiling took place outside the entrance of the B building around 4 pm. and was followed by a ceremony in the student commons.

"This is something we've been ready to do for a while," said Northfield Principal Dr. Waechtler. New Trier's policy is that a building can only be named after any faculty or staff member associated with the school 5 years after they've retired or left, so as soon as those five years had come to a close Waechtler and others who'd worked closely with her gathered support and submitted a proposal to the New Trier naming committee.

By May of this year, the School Board unanimously voted to rename the building in honor of Borja—notably, the first one at New Trier to be named after a woman.

Superintendent Paul Sally began the event by giving introductory remarks, and then Borja's daughter, son, and husband revealed the sign that would be placed above the building. In the commons, current Northfield principal Paul Waechtler, assistant principal Gail Gamrath, and Borja's daughter all gave speeches.

The B building contains many of the things that Borja loved and influenced throughout her time at New Trier. It houses the principal's office, the advisor chair's offices, and the Northfield building's language department—all positions Borja held during her time at New Trier.

Initially hired as the German and Spanish teacher in 1970, she



Superintendent Paul Sally dedicates Jan Borja building | NT Facebook

eventually transitioned to freshman and sophomore advisor chair, then to department chair of the modern and classical languages department, and finally to the principal of the Northfield Campus—the first one since the campus's reopening. Borja retired after 40 years at New Trier in 2011. In 2012 she passed away after battling cancer.

In addition to spearheading the reopening of the Northfield Campus in 2001, Borja is also credited with integrating social emotional growth, anti bullying, and service learning programs into the Northfield campus's curriculum—including Names Day.

Borja is known not just for her numerous accomplishments at New Trier, but also for having a positive impact on the environment through her relationship-based leadership. "In working with faculty and staff, relationships were paramount to her," said Waechtler in regards to just one of her mantras, "it's all about relationships." This involved getting to know and understand the people she worked with in order to help them

and herself grow.

While teaching and learning were important to her, Borja also saw value in acknowledging how schools could really enrich students in multiple aspects of their lives. In fact, she's known for her famous hug lines where she would hug people as they would enter a meeting.

As the Northfield campus enters its 17th year since reopening, it's especially interesting to think of how New Trier has changed since its reopening. But also how the school has extended upon her ideas, carried on the traditions she started, and in this way, is very much the same.

It all boils back down to the motto plastered everywhere—on backs of t-shirts, at the tops of banners, etc: "to commit minds to inquiry, hearts to compassion, and lives to the service of humanity." A phrase she exemplified in every aspect of her leadership.

"It's nice to think" said Waechtler, "that her grandkids, who live in the area, will eventually go to New Trier and see her honored here on the building."

Teachers and Students Welcome New Building

by Jasmine Gonzalez



New building offers improved accommodations for department in the arts | Gonzalez

Although just about everyone in school has felt the effects of the ongoing construction project, which has now passed the two year mark, some departments and the students have faced overcome additional challenges.

The fine arts departments, namely the music and art departments, have been the most directly affected by the changes, with the demolition and complete reconstruction of the former Tech Arts building that used to house the majority of their classes.

Over the past two years, both teachers and students of the fine arts department made the move from a building in major need of renovation to various temporary spaces that were certainly less than ideal. Before construction, both departments were spread out over various locations in the t-wing. Teachers struggled to accommodate students in rooms that were often too small and sometimes simply unable to meet the needs of the classes in general.

Last year was probably one of the most difficult years as all of the classes officially moved into their temporary spaces.

Thomas Lau and Monique R. Boyd are both art teachers and have been at New Trier for ten and twenty seven years, respectively. As glass art teachers, they were hit particularly hard by the transition as some of their classes were held in the boiler/laundry room. The temporary space, which often reached temperatures of 115° F and suffered everything from questionable leakage to a fire that delayed classes, "was an absolute nightmare", according to Lau.

Both Lau and Boyd discussed the difficulties of attempting to conduct any sort of art class in such limited spaces that simply did not accommodate the students or teachers well.

Although she was initially worried that enrollment would drop due to these difficulties, Boyd praised the students for their resilience during the difficult transition and said, "the kids were troopers and went through it doing their best". Lau added, "while it wasn't the greatest space to transition through it did its job overall".

While no music classes were held in the laundry room, the situation was not much better for teachers or students. Before construction, the music department had already faced difficulties with small, outdated music rooms that lacked resources.

Matthew B. Temple, a music teacher who directs three concert bands and one jazz band, first observed the run-down conditions of the previous facilities were when he began teaching here eleven years ago. "When I got hired here, I knew that I was coming to a school that had this

incredible reputation, but the building definitely did not reflect that", he said.

Patricia A. Rohwer, a teacher and director of piano, band, and orchestra who has been at New Trier for nineteen years, agreed that the old building—not just the transition spaces—could no longer successfully accommodate the music department. In addition to space issues, Rohwer and Boyd both commented on the fact that the old building was not handicap-accessible. This was one of the biggest problem as it prevented injured students from attending classes and handicapped students from participating in just about any music or art classes at all.

The transition to the temporary spaces required that the music classes spend a year in makeshift classrooms scattered all over the building and mostly in the basement. While the old facilities lacked resources to meet the needs of the students, the temporary rooms came with another set of challenges, as they were not built for music class purposes at all, according to Temple.

Despite the many challenges they had to face, both teachers and students are in awe of the new spaces and supplies that they have received.

"Everyone always kept a very positive attitude that the space was temporary and I would count the days—hundreds of days—knowing that it would all be worth it," said Boyd.

Teachers from both departments expressed excitement to be in close proximity to their colleagues for the first time. The new rooms provide the perfect space for collaboration in the arts and the layout allows for the teachers to be able to make these connections.

The new music room in particular received various upgrades and even some new instruments for the percussionists, who struggled with the lack of space last year. With everything from new sound panels and an increase in space, the music programs are expected to continue growing.

However, there is still a lot of work to be done and a few more challenges for both teachers and students. "It hasn't been worth it... yet", joked Temple. According to him, with construction behind schedule, teachers had virtually no time to get move into and get organized before starting the new school year.

Overall, "the kids really love the new digs", said Lau. This should be expected as the new building was not only built to replace the old one, but was especially designed for the classes that are held there.

"These new areas really were designed for us and were absolutely worth all of the work that everybody put into it" said Rohwer