

From the archives: The article below was originally published in the New Trier News October 6, 2017 issue. The election of Jacob Imber as student president, the first openly gay person to hold this position in New Trier history, was a landmark event in LGBTQIA+ progress at the school.

Imber becomes first openly gay student body president

Imber seeks to create stronger connection between students and administration

by Rebecca Lee

The 2017-18 school year has already made history with the election of New Trier's first ever openly gay student body president, Jacob Imber.

In spring of the 2016-17 school year, 70 percent of last year's sophomores and juniors turned out to vote for Student Alliance officers. In addition to Imber's election, junior Bill Yen was elected vice president, senior Sofia Mena was elected secretary, and senior Elena Cata was elected treasurer.

The newly elected officers worked over the summer planning events and preparing for the school year. "We have created a strong, comfortable, cohesive group with an enthusiastic and packed agenda," said David Noskin and Stacy Kolack, the faculty sponsors of Student Alliance.

Imber's presidency is not only a personal victory, but also a milestone for New Trier.

"It makes me proud to know that New Trier is a place where being gay



Imber plans for an upcoming event with other SA members. | McCauley

wouldn't impede upon someone's ability to serve in a leadership role. It also makes me hopeful for outside of New Trier, where people can see you for what you accomplish and what you do as a leader instead of for your sexuality or your religion or your gender," said Imber.

Senior Ilana Nazari, who worked with Imber for three years and served as secretary of Student Alliance last year, agreed.

"We're lucky to live somewhere

and to go to school somewhere where Jacob can be openly gay and he can be the president and nobody is making a fuss about it. It's a step in the right direction, and I think it shows that New Trier is even more progressive than some of us may realize."

Although this is a notable moment for New Trier, many of Imber's peers point out that he has distinguished himself based on his merit above all else.

"I don't think that being openly

gay defines Jacob's personality or his role in our student government. I see Jacob for all of his other amazing qualities first and then I acknowledge and respect the bravery he exhibits by being openly gay and representing our high school of 4,000 kids," said senior Elena Cata, who is this year's treasurer of Student Alliance.

Stephen Hajjar, a senior who is not a part of Student Alliance, agreed.

"I don't think much about him being the first openly gay student to become president. I respect him the same way I would respect any student body president, and it is a good thing that he can just be a student body president."

When he was campaigning, Imber avoided using his sexuality as a platform. "I am careful to not create a student government that revolves around the fact that the president is gay. I think that's counter-productive to what Student Alliance does. I only give it so much thought before moving on to the logistical parts of my job, like what I want to do, how I'll make that happen, and how I can make Student Alliance productive," explained Imber.

Nazari attested to Imber's ability as president. "I couldn't think of anybody better suited for this job, especially because of how well he connects with people. He talks to the staff, and he's well-connected within

the student body. He's very well-rounded," said Nazari.

In addition to his roles in Student Alliance, Imber has continually participated in school theater productions. He co-directed this year's Lagniappe-Potpourri alongside seniors Elena Cata and Teddy Fischer.

As a freshman, Imber served as president of Student Senate, the student government at the Northfield campus. As a sophomore and junior, he was the chair of the PR committee of Student Alliance.

"Students need a say in their own education, and student government is the most efficient way to do that. You can't just hope for change. You have to get involved in an administrative way that makes that change possible," said Imber.

Beyond the specific tasks that Student Alliance will take on this year, Imber and other members have expressed their commitment to advocating for students.

"I remind myself that not everyone at New Trier who is gay has the same positive experience that I did. So even though I have this position and I am gay, that doesn't mean that gay rights is a non-issue at New Trier," said Imber.

"As president, I want to make New Trier an accepting and open environment for everyone."

Remember all those who are not laughing

by Hope Talbot

"I'm not ashamed to be gay, because it made me a stronger person, but I am afraid of the ideas and hatred that are quietly brewing at New Trier."

These are the words of an anonymous gay student in a letter to the editor dated February 5, 1993.

In the age of legalized same-sex marriage and a seemingly progressive society, our world should exist without this undercurrent of homophobia--but have we really changed since this letter was submitted? Is the burden of being LGBTQIA+ really lighter?

While writing this, I couldn't help but think of a phenomenon I experienced while on JV Softball.

Oftentimes when my teammates were asked if they played a sport, they would say they didn't play anything or had a canned response at the ready if they were honest.

Our team ranged from ages 14-18, each player with intensely different backgrounds and views on the world, yet somehow we were close. While there was a definite sense of love and respect on the team, I couldn't help but pick up on social cue that playing softball was something to be subtle about.

While carpooling one night, we started talking about why we never wore our gear to school. It was embarrassing we all agreed, but why?

I began to realize the reason behind our omission of playing. It wasn't that our team had a losing streak or that it was no cut.

It was something deeper, more

ingrained. We were living under the weight of a stereotype of a "lesbian" sport and we all knew it. We always seemed to want to beat outsiders to the punchline to protect ourselves, and I was tired of it. I get it, people make jokes based on stereotypes to try to be funny, but I've seen how these jokes turn serious when the stereotype applies to someone.

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It's the people in the anonymous letters that internalize locker room talk, that live in constant fear of outing themselves if they say anything.

Administration has made a definite effort to create a more inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ people, with gender-neutral bathrooms and clubs like GSA.

While you can't standardize acceptance, I do feel that our generation is going in the right direction. There's a promising contrast on these pages thanks to the difference of just a few years, "loneliness and isolation" vs. Jacob Imber who was welcomed as the first openly gay SA president.

I'm not claiming to have all the answers, there may be some layers to homophobia that we can never solve. All I'm asking is that next time you hear a "gay" joke or stereotype, remember the people who aren't laughing.

From the archives: The article below was originally published in the New Trier News October 28, 2016 issue. The implementation of gender neutral bathrooms was a marked improvement in the accommodations for LGBTQIA+ students at New Trier.

Unisex single bathrooms pave way for change

Bathrooms allow alternative facilities for all students

by Amelia Lytle and Ben Morrissey

As the conversation about gender identity and safety becomes more prominent, New Trier students and faculty are embracing the new unisex single bathrooms in the school.

"It allows for students and adults to have an option. They now can have an option that is not far away from instruction," Winnetka Principal Denise Dubravec explained.

Single bathrooms existed near the Gaffney Auditorium, but with the new construction the administrators thought it was time for these bathrooms to extend to more accessible parts of the school.

"I can't speak for entire student body, but I wouldn't judge someone for using it."

These bathrooms now exist on the first and second floor near the entrance of the school, and are available for students, staff, and guests.

A main consideration when installing these bathrooms was for the safety of the students using them.

At Palatine High School, a

group of parents asked for the assimilation of unisex bathrooms to support people of all genders. There was a public dispute over a transgender students' access to bathrooms and locker rooms, which sparked the conversation across the nation.

The federal government pressured the district to allow the student access to the girls locker room.

"We stand committed to the basic principle that no student should be left out, treated differently, or stigmatized because of who they are," the group of parents wrote. "We also strongly believe that discrimination towards a group of students hurts the entire District 211 community."

Students had mixed feelings about using the new restrooms because of what others might think.

"I can't speak for entire student body, but I wouldn't judge someone for using it. The majority of the student body wouldn't bat an eye," senior Duncan Holzhall said.

Senior Austin Miranda explained that "there will not be any issues with face to face bullying when people see other people going into these bathrooms, but there will most likely be some gossip that will negatively impact people who use these bathrooms."

The unisex bathrooms are new and that has caused some concern over the potential reaction of students after seeing another student come out of the unisex bathroom.

Due to the separation of these bathrooms, a student may feel singled out by using them. However, many students said they would feel comfortable using the bathrooms and would not feel judged by others.

More unisex bathrooms are being built in public spaces and that has helped people be more comfortable with their existence.

Schools in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Illinois have created unisex bathrooms or single stall bathrooms as the Obama administration has called on public schools nationwide to allow transgender students access to the bathroom that matches their identity.

This nationwide awareness of transgender issues are causing changes to take place in schools across the country.

To accommodate the growing needs of students, schools of 2016 may be vastly different than the schools that exist even 20 years from now.

As unisex bathrooms become more common in public places such as Starbucks and Target, schools are following this lead and building more of these facilities to try to accommodate their student body.

Dubravec discussed how important it is to think about what kind of student body a school has and how having these bathrooms would affect a student's day to day life.

"I think they need to think about what works for their school. But for New Trier it is a great opportunity to allow students to have this option. They need to think about providing options and how it will allow for a safe environment," Dubravec said.

The reaction from the student body over the new unisex bathrooms is mostly positive. Students believe that a safer environment for students and more options for everyone will result from more unisex bathrooms.