

## **INFORMATION ITEM**

**Date:** November 12, 2018

**To:** Raymond E. Lechner, Ph.D.  
Superintendent

**From:** Mrs. Kelly Jackson  
Administrator for 5-8 Education

**Subject:** New Trier Township Eighth Grade Survey Report

### **Background Information**

Historically, during the second semester of freshman year, New Trier had traditionally participated in a survey evaluating perceptions of preparedness for the challenges of high school. Last year a team of township administrators worked to revise the survey for eighth graders. The focus was on gathering more useful information and aligning to the New Trier High School survey administered later in their school career. The new, New Trier Township Eighth Grade Survey was given across the township to eighth grade students, and focused primarily on connections made in school and preparedness in the area of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

915 eighth graders across the sender schools took the survey, 395 of which were eighth graders from WJHS. The survey was comprised of questions, asking students to comment on the challenges they faced, their feeling of preparation in academic skills areas, and their feeling of preparation in social emotional areas.

For the purposes of this report, we will first review trends that were seen across the township schools as agreed upon by township principals, and then look at Wilmette's responses in those same areas. All principals have access to data so we would be able to see discrepancies between the individual sender school data.

### **Township Trends**

#### *Challenges*

For this question, students were asked to mark aspects of middle school they found challenging from a list of 11 options including peer pressure, making friends, and homework. Across the township over half of students identified being challenged by balancing schoolwork and a social life, lack of sleep, and managing the homework load, with balancing schoolwork and a social life as the top answer at close to 60% marking this as a challenge.

The areas receiving the least amount of concern were peer pressure to use e-cigarettes (vape) and alcohol use.

#### *Academic Skills*

Students were asked to consider their school experiences and mark all areas listed according to one of four categories of preparation: Very Prepared, Prepared, Somewhat Prepared, and Not Prepared.

They were also able to mark N/A. For the purpose of this report, we combined the “Very Prepared” and “Adequately Prepared” categories as positive indicators of preparedness and the “Somewhat Prepared” and “Not Prepared” categories as negative indicators.

Across the township students marked positive feelings of preparedness in many areas, including technology, critical thinking, and research standing out at the top of the list with more than 80% of students saying they felt prepared in these areas.

Students marked feeling prepared at a lesser rate in the areas of time management and study skills. Each of these categories had below a 69% positive indicator of preparedness.

### *Social Emotional Skills*

In the same way students were asked about academic skills, they were asked to consider their school experiences in the social emotional or relational areas and mark all areas listed according to the four categories mentioned above.

Across the township students marked positive feelings of preparedness in many areas. More than 82% of students feeling positively prepared with having respectful relationships with others, understanding the perspectives and experiences of others, and making ethical, constructive choices. A close tie for fourth was advocating for yourself when you need help, and resisting peer pressure, both with 80% positive marks.

Receiving somewhat lower marks as feeling positively prepared, working on culturally diverse teams and having a sense of personal goals, both indicated over 70% of students felt positively prepared.

Across the township students overwhelmingly reported that they had positive connections with friends and adults in their school, and that they felt supported as they prepared for their transition to high school.

### **Wilmette Junior High**

In all of the aforementioned areas, Wilmette Junior High followed the trends seen at the township level.

### *Challenges*

In the area of challenges, the top three areas of challenge indicated by WJHS students were balancing schoolwork and a social life, lack of sleep, and managing the homework load. Slightly different from the township was WJHS students’ top challenge, which was lack of sleep as opposed to balancing schoolwork and a social life.

Just as the township trend indicated, WJHS students cited challenges associated with substance abuse and peer pressure at a significantly lesser rate than the other areas. To address the areas of challenge that students are indicating at WJHS, we will use our social-emotional curriculum and health curriculum, to help support students in developing ways to balance their schoolwork and their social life, and we will continue to communicate to parents and students about the importance of sleep through our weekly messages and in our classes. Additionally, we will be looking at the

changes made recently to the before-school band and orchestra schedule to see if that has had a positive impact on the amount of sleep students are getting.

### *Academic Skills*

In this area, again, District 39 fell in line with the township trends. One area to note, however, is the area of technology where close to 90% of WJHS students indicated feeling positively prepared, with 60% of those students saying they felt “Very Prepared.” This is a direct result of the work that has been done across the 5-8 campus with respect to technology integration and preparation.

Similar to the township trends, students marked feeling positively prepared at a rate of over 60% in the areas of time management and study skills, however, these received the lowest marks for preparedness, and will be areas that we examine more closely moving forward.

To address student feelings of lower preparedness in the areas of time management and study skills, we will continue to utilize our Second Step curriculum and executive functioning practices to give students skills to address these areas. Additionally, through improvements in how we intervene for students in WIN classes, we will look to better pinpoint specific areas of need for individual students, and build a plan that better addresses those needs.

### *Social Emotional Skills*

In all areas asked under social-emotional skills, students across the township marked positive preparedness at a rate of over 70%. Students in Wilmette marked positive preparedness at a higher percentage than the township average in all areas except in the area of personal goals, and overcoming setbacks and challenges. Wilmette showed over 73% positive preparedness in all areas mentioned on the survey.

While at the township level, the lowest areas of positive preparedness were setting goals and working with culturally diverse teams, in Wilmette the lowest areas were setting personal goals and overcoming setbacks.

We are interested in recent data from Mindsets, Essential Skills, and Habits (MESH) surveys that were taken to assess competencies and help understand students’ strengths and areas needing support to help students succeed in college, career and life. Additionally, through our work with ongoing strategic initiatives in the areas of climate and culture, personalized learning, and progress reporting, we will be addressing goal setting and better ways to overcome setbacks.

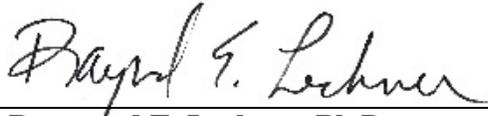
### *Adult Connections*

One area of specific focus for students and staff across the 5-8 campus highlighted by the survey is in the area of adult connections. Students at WJHS indicated that almost 80% of them had an adult in the school that they can trust. At first glance, this number is an outstanding percentage, but through discussion, and research, we know that a higher number of adult connections will help to proactively improve the climate and culture of the school, address student feelings of inclusion in the school community, and can help prevent issues such as bullying or social conflict. Through our Inclusivity teams at both HMS and WJHS, we have set a goal of improving the percentage this year, and building in ways to continue to improve that percentage over time so our students report connections at 100%.

**Summary**

This first year of administration of the New Trier Township Eighth Grade Survey provided good baseline data with respect to trends across the township, and how Wilmette Junior High students align with township trends. We will continue to work to address areas of challenge for students both academically and social-emotionally, and look forward to providing information next year as to the results of those efforts.

**Recommended for presentation  
to the Board of Education**



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**Raymond E. Lechner, Ph.D.  
Superintendent**