

The Foundation's Role in Making Technology Count at New Trier

*"Tell me and I forget,
Teach me and I may remember,
Involve me and I learn."
Benjamin Franklin*



Too often, schools view emerging technology as an end in itself. The motivation for acquiring it often has more to do with keeping current than recognizing that it can play more than a supplementary role in the life of the school. Its real purpose is not only to enhance the curriculum but broaden it as well. Through its use, teachers reshape their instructional styles and students their learning habits. Encouraging a fresh perspective about the power of technology helps make a school's culture more visionary, as faculties come to terms with the threatening urgency that "the rapidity of change has changed."

As new technology became increasingly more evident in American education in the late 1980s, New Trier began to move seriously into that world. The District's leadership recognized that information technology and the databases it was creating were going to be an essential component of a subtly realigning educational process. That resulted in Principal Ralph McGee organizing a faculty study committee with the charge to develop recommendations aimed at coordinating the growing computer presence at New Trier, including visual and audio systems in some classroom settings. At the suggestion of Don Rogan, the school's technology director, the committee determined that the school should develop a tech center that would serve as a lab where teachers from every department could explore how to implement the use of the new equipment.

Using the training facility at Hamburger University at the McDonald's corporate headquarters in Oak Brook, Illinois as its model, the committee recommended redesigning a large classroom on the third floor at the Winnetka Campus as the school's tech center. What resulted was a massive remodeling of space that included the installation of console and counter controls to operate the technology that transformed it into a state-of-the-art facility. Because it was about innovation, it was identified as the Educational Program Initiatives Center, or *EPI Center*. Its success was instant, as teachers began to align the new technology to student learning experiences.

Over the next two decades as technology continued to evolve, the *EPI Center* became outdated, making it a less specific-use space to one that was more multipurpose – staff development sessions, department meetings, and presentations to large groups of students. It became increasingly clear that the room needed upgrading if it was to recapture its original function as a place in the forefront for joining technology and teaching. Earlier this school year, a committee chaired by Chris Johnson, Director of Technology, tackled the task of developing a plan to remodel the *EPI Center*. Its work included a review of current research literature about the use of such spaces in other institutions, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the four innovative classrooms (funded by the New Trier Educational Foundation) presently in use at both campuses as models, and several visits to a similar tech-classroom at Northwestern University. The recommendations it submitted have resulted in a project plan and a budget that is presently being implemented by the School Board. The renewed *EPI Center* was dedicated and in service at the start of the 2013-2014 school year.

To cover the cost of remodeling, acquiring and installing the new furnishings and technology, the New Trier Educational Foundation partnered with the Board of Education with a grant of \$100,000 toward the \$300,000 budgeted for the project. The redesign and upgrades place a priority on supporting collaborative and innovative uses of the space. The new audio/video system, for example, supports interactive teaching and learning. Its centerpiece is a video wall consisting of 42-inch screen panels. A computer control system operated from a lectern provides a number of options (e.g., computer-based presentations including content from devices such as laptops, iPads, document cameras, or video sources as well as distance learning opportunities enabling contact with people and events from across the region and the world.)

The new *EPI Center* offers the promise of serving as a powerful catalytic resource, as students take a more active role in personalizing their own education and teachers assume new roles as knowledge *facilitators* rather than knowledge *transmitters*. Technology is an extraordinary tool that is changing the learning spectrum in myriad ways.

The *EPI Center* is a facility that will build on the three principles fundamental to New Trier: 1) engaging and challenging learning experiences, 2) providing opportunities for practice and application, and 3) recognizing that reflection on what happens in all aspects of the learning experience is an enhancement of that experience.

And so the circle joins, as the new facility seeks once again to create the type of environment that characterized the original *EPI Center*: to test and experiment with innovative teaching methods, collaborative learning, and technology and furnishing. These significant elements will guide future decisions about the comprehensive education New Trier will continue to provide.



L-R: Immediate Past Chairmen of the Foundation, Harry Secaras '81 (l) and Jim Marran (r), join Superintendent Linda Yonke at the fall 2013 Ribbon Cutting for the EPI Center.