

Saving the New Trier West High School Campus:  
Changing the Way We Think  
Draft 204\*

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August 21, 2009

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\*This paper is being written slowly in a series of drafts as time permits. If you have any comments, please refer to the draft number and date at that time.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Two New Trier Campuses.

New Trier High School opened in 1901 on the East Campus in Winnetka, Illinois to serve several affluent communities on the North Shore. New Trier soon became one of the most respected high schools in the country. By 1960 the enrollment had climbed to over 3,900 students and promised to go much higher soon. By two referendums the New Trier School Board acquired the land and building funds for a second campus. The New Trier West Campus was opened as a separate four year high school in 1965, just in time for the peak enrollment of 6,554 in the early 1970's. During 1965 to 1980 New Trier West was a highly respected high school on a par with New Trier East in academics, athletics, and in the success rate of placing graduates in top colleges.

Soon the huge bulge in enrollment began to subside. By 1980 the enrollment on both campuses combined had dropped to 5,264. In 1980 the West Campus was converted to a freshman only campus for all the New Trier students, who then completed their final three years at the East Campus. In 1985, the West Campus was closed altogether as the combined enrollment dropped to 3,858, the maximum capacity of the East Campus.

## 1.2 The School Board Proposes Selling New Trier West

The New Trier School Board needed \$10–12 million for renovation and repair on the East Campus and they were very reluctant to go the the taxpayers for a tax increase. In 1987-88 the School Board president told residents that the demographer's report had assured them it is

*“highly unlikely that the district enrollment will ever exceed 3,800 students .”*

Since they would never again need two campuses, the School Board President said the Board must consider all options, including selling one of the main campuses. By the fall of 1987 the School Board proposed selling the West Campus to the National College of Education in Evanston for \$22 million. Half the proceeds would be used for necessary renovations on the East Campus, thereby avoiding asking the taxpayers for a tax increase, and the rest would be put in the bank for savings.

### 1.3 Why Not Sell New Trier West in 1987–1988?

- The New Trier School Board had received a demographer’s report which convinced them that only one campus would be needed in the future, and it was safe to sell *one* of the two schools (which meant selling West because no one in the district contemplated selling the traditional East Campus regardless of the arguments).
- The Board had the legal power to sell the New Trier West Campus if they determined that it was no longer needed.
- The Board had a ready buyer, National College of Education, for a purported purchase price of \$22 million.
- Of this price, the Board needed at least half for renovation on the East Campus, and there was no other convenient way to raise the money without the risk of going to the voters for tax increase.
- The Board had weathered community protests (mainly from western residents) in 1980 when the West Campus was closed as a four year school, and in 1985 when it was closed entirely. A substantial portion of the residents (particularly eastern residents) supported the Board, and saw no reason not to sell the West Campus if no longer needed, particularly to obtain funds to renovate the East Campus.
- Selling the West Campus would remove any further East-West conflict, which had begun in the 1960’s with the opening of West. All New Trier students to the traditional New Trier East Campus forever.

In September, 1987 it seemed that the New Trier Board could not fail to successfully complete this sale.

### 1.4 The Risk of Demographic Predictions.

The New Trier School Board apparently was not concerned that the total enrollment had exceeded 6,500 in the early 1970’s and even the demographer warned that long term projections are “*fraught with risk.*” The actual report [2] in November, 1986 by the demographer, John Kasarda, expressed much more caution about demographic predictions, particularly those beyond ten years, than stated in the public letter [5] by School Board President Corolla McMullen. Kasarda [2, p. 1] wrote,

“For a high school district such as New Trier, composed of mature, stable villages, enrollment projections for up to 10 years can be made with some confidence. After 10 years, greater risk emerges of unanticipated events invalidating even the most scientifically-based projections methods. Since no demographer has a crystal ball, talking about enrollment in the 21st century (with these students having not yet been born) must be clearly recognized as an exercise *fraught with risk*.”<sup>1</sup>

## **1.5 Everything Depended on Demography**

[FILL IN]

## **1.6 The Referendum on Selling New Trier West.**

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## **1.7 Actual Recent Enrollment**

It took less than two decades for the combined New Trier enrollment to exceed 4,000 students and it has remained above that figure since 2004–2005. The New Trier West Campus has been retained. It was rented to various tenants until 2001 when it was reopened as a freshman only campus. The use of West as a freshman campus has meant that that campus has about 1,000 students while the East Campus has just over 3,000 students.

## **1.8 Changing the Way We Think.**

A great conflict not only settles the differences over which the conflict is contested, but often changes our thinking in a fundamental way.

## **1.9 The Civil War.**

The American Civil War finally settled several divisive issues such as slavery and secession, and it fundamentally changed the ways Americans thought about their country. Before the Civil War they referred to their country in the plural as “*these* United States,” a voluntary union of individual states. After the war they referred in the singular to “*the* United States,” a single nation, united and indissoluble.

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<sup>1</sup>The italics are mine.

## 1.10 Reconciliation Between East and West

The opening of the New Trier Campus in 1965 opened many divisions between East and West. When New Trier Board proposed the sale of West in 1987-1988 many residents on the east side had never visited the West Campus or sent their children there. They were willing to take the New Trier Board's assurance that West would never be needed again and could be sold enough money to make repairs on the East Campus. The western residents had seen their children attend and graduate from the West Campus. They have been dismayed at the closures of West in 1980 and 1985. They were resolutely opposed to the sale which would foreclose forever either two smaller schools, or a freshman only campus (which indeed has been used from 2001 to the present in the face of unexpectedly large enrollments in the last decade).

The referendum of March, 1988 settled (probably forever) the issue of whether either campus should be sold for short term gain. With the reopening in 2001 of West as a freshman only campus, the parents of every student came to West to deliver their children, attend athletic and extracurricular activities and attend parent-teacher conferences. They admired the architecture and open lands of West. During the next three years they delivered their children to the East campus with its hundred year long tradition of academic excellence, and its impressive facade which had come to symbolize one of the most prominent schools of America. Today the residents do not think of *these* New Trier High Schools, as they might have in the 1980's, but rather as *the* New Trier High School, one unified school, spread over two pieces of real estate and two campuses.

**\*\*THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS ARE BEING WRITTEN AND WILL BE FILLED IN SOON.\*\***

- 2 The New Trier Board Considers Selling West**
- 3 The Demographer's Report**
- 4 A Buyer: National College of Education (NCE)**
  - 4.1 The National College of Education**
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- 9 A Drive for Signatures, Dec. 1987**
- 10 The Referendum Campaign, Jan.-Mar., 1988**
- 11 The Election and Aftermath, Mar. 1988**

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- [5] [McMullen, 1987]  
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- [6] [Enrollment, 2009]  
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