

MINUTES

AMITY BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Julie Altman, William Blake, Christopher Browe, Patricia Cardozo, Sue Cohen, Diane Crocco, Steven DeMaio, Rita Gedansky, John A. Grasso, Jr., James Horwitz, Tracey Lane Russo, James Stirling

AMITY BOARD MEMBER ABSENT: Thomas Hurley

Staff Members Present: John Brady, Charles Britton, Kathleen Fuller Cutler, Richard Dellinger, Jack Levine, Marianne Lippard, Marie McPadden, Mary Raiola, Joe Robinson

Also Present: Thomas Falcigno, Members of the Public

A meeting of the Amity Regional Board of Education was held on Monday, November 12, 2012, at 6:30 p.m. in the Library Media Center at Amity Regional High School.

- 1. Call to Order:** William Blake called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance** was recited by those present.
- 3. Recognition of CAPSS Award Recipients**
Dr. Brady announced that a number of students are being recognized at tonight's meeting with awards from the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents. The awards recognize students for academic prowess, service to the community and school, and leadership.

The recipients included (Amity Middle School Bethany) Marina Amendola and John Ahern, (Amity Middle School Orange) Karianne Canfield and Hugh Potter, (Amity Regional High School) Sydney DeStefano, Katherine Simon, Julia Vitti, Zachary McKinstry, Max Ritchie and David Sampoli

- 4. Recognition of American Legion Boys State Leadership Participants**
Lawrence Czajkowski, commander of the American Legion Post #127, said that he was happy to be here tonight. One year ago, he spoke before the Board about what he saw as insufficient teaching of veterans' issues at the High School. He noted that his message is very different tonight. Guidance counselors were very successful in getting the word out about the American Legion Boys State Leadership. He had hoped to receive a few student applications for a spot at Connecticut Boys State and had budgeted for one student. He was very happy to receive six applications from great candidates and had to appoint a committee to decide who would be selected. The American Legion managed to get sponsors for the applicants. He added that out of 256 boys that went, two boys from Amity

were elected to represent the state in Washington. Commander Czajkowski noted that true leadership was shown.

The recipients were: Zachary Royal, Max Ritchie, David Sampoli, Zhang Liu, Jan Michael Bidon and Storm Boris

Mr. Blake congratulated the students on behalf of the Board.

The Board took a 10 minute break and continued the meeting at 7:05 p.m. directly outside the Library Media Center.

5. Demonstration of the NAO Robot

Teacher Kevin Berean of Amity Middle School in Bethany presented the NAO Robot with the help of a small group of students. The robot was made in France. He noted that Amity Middle School in Orange also successfully launched a social robotics program. Both schools have eight students involved in the program. Selection for the program involved a detailed process. Students were required to submit essays. The small robot talked and moved. The students want to learn whether the robot can do things like teach eighth grade math. Additional studies will involve gender bias, determining whether logic can be programmed, and examining body language and eye contact.

The Board returned to the Library Media Center at 7:18 p.m. to continue the meeting.

6. Approval of Minutes

a. Regular BOE Meeting, October 15, 2012

Motion to approve the minutes as presented (Ms. Gedansky, 2d Ms. Crocco).

Vote in favor: Julie Altman, Christopher Browe, Patricia Cardozo, Sue Cohen, Diane Crocco, Rita Gedansky, John Grasso, Jr., James Horwitz, Tracey Lane Russo, James Stirling

Vote opposed: none.

Abstain: Steven DeMaio

Motion passed.

7. Student Report

Thomas Falcigno said that a mock election was held at the High School and 1,200 people, both staff and students, participated. The Democrats swept to victory. A copy of the election results was distributed. The Homecoming Dance will take place on Friday, November 16th. Tickets to the dance were \$12.00. Students will be voting for the two most spirited students at the dance. Thomas noted that a Pep Rally would take place on Wednesday, November 22nd. Many skits are planned to take place at the event. The students have expressed interest in holding the Junior Prom at Grassy Hill Country Club in Orange. Thomas said that the Amity Music Program should be congratulated for Music in Motion, which was a very entertaining evening. Thomas also announced that a blood drive was held recently at the High School and 83 pints of blood were collected.

In addition, he noted that Amity hosted veterans at the school and it was a great day for learning. He noted that students were very intrigued by the veterans' presentation.

Mr. DeMaio said that he wanted Thomas to know that he appreciates the job he does at the Board meetings. He noted that Thomas got caught in the crossfire of a controversial issue and handled himself very well.

8. Presentation on Programs and Services to Prevent/Respond to Use of Illicit Substances

Noting that the Board has recently had a number of discussions about student drug use, the administration felt it would be helpful to share with everyone the full range of services that the District provides to students.

Dr. Brady noted that efforts to teach about the dangers of alcohol and drugs, and reach out to at risk students, begins in 7th grade. He noted that the District has a robust guidance program. Dr. Britton was invited to give an overview of what is available to students. He noted that tonight's presentation would focus on preventative strategies and how the District works with students and families to help. Dr. Britton began the presentation and was joined by the associate and assistant principal.

Dr. Britton said that he appreciated the opportunity to talk about what is being done at the High School. In answer to the question as to whether or not there is a drug problem at the High School, he said that his answer would be 'yes.' He added that he would say that drugs are a problem at any public high school in the country. As for how big of a problem drugs are at Amity, Dr. Britton said that he would say that the problem involves a small minority of the 1,650 students. One of the concerns is alcohol. The High School is turning first to preventative and educational methods to curb the problem, and secondly to deterrent mechanisms.

Dr. Britton said that the associate principals came tonight to talk about all of the ways in which the High School is making sure that Amity is a safe place for students.

According to data collected last year, a total of 24 students were involved in alcohol or drug-related incidents at the High School. Of those incidents, three involved alcohol, eight involved paraphernalia and 13 involved drugs. Those students involved with drugs other than marijuana ended up in long-term treatment.

Assistant Principal Monica Kreuzer said that there have been a small number of drug/alcohol related incidents so far this year. Technology in the bathrooms is acting as a deterrent to smoking. There is also a School Resource Officer at the High School and two full-time and one part-time security guard to help in the hallways.

If a student is found to be under the influence, the first step is to have the student visit the school nurse. If a student requires immediate attention, a paramedic is called and a child's parents will also be called. Anyone who works with children is considered to be a mandated reporter.

A student can be searched if there is reasonable suspicion of drug use. Searches are performed in the presence of two people and involve emptying of pockets, searching under a hat or possibly looking inside shoes. Text messages can also reveal possible drug activity. Items that are prohibited by Board policy can be confiscated. Parents are contacted if their child is subject to a search.

Dr. Britton said that deterrents used at the High School include security guards and security cameras. Breathalyzers can be used and drug dogs have been brought in. Teachers are monitoring individuals.

A strong and comprehensive curriculum is also in place to educate students about problems of drug use. Len Marazzi, department chair of physical education and health, said the High School is attacking the problem of drug/alcohol use on all fronts. Every freshman student takes Health and Wellness and there is a unit dedicated to substance abuse. The dangers of drug use are presented. There is continued emphasis on the topic for sophomores and juniors. Physical and psychological addiction is discussed. Some students have been lulled into thinking that marijuana is perfectly healthy. Mr. Marazzi noted that marijuana is a gateway drug. Some students come from homes where parents want to pick the lesser evil and tell their children that it is okay to drink. The school emphasizes the idea that it's not okay to use any substance. Steroids are also discussed, along with LSD and other drugs. Mr. Marazzi noted that possession is discussed in class. His hope is that some of the kids in the class will hear the message.

He noted that at the High School, local agencies are used as resources so that the message doesn't come across as preaching. Among the agencies are the HIV and AIDS Project New Haven, CT Renaissance of Waterbury, Narcotics Anonymous, Rape Crisis of Milford, Valley Substance Abuse, Birmingham Group, and others. Young people are brought in to speak to students and talk about how they grew up here and how they ended up getting into drugs and what it did to their lives. He noted that the administration and faculty work extremely hard every day to provide students with a sound message.

Dr. Britton noted that despite the deterrents, the High School still has students with addiction issues. These students are valued as worthy of attention, but the school programs differently for them. The message he hopes to convey is that these students are wanted in school

Mr. Robert Schumann, director of counseling, said that the High School does have the resources to serve the school population. There are eight full-time

school counselors, three school psychologists and a career counselor. The team makes it known that they are available and they have a way of finding kids who need help. A student study team looks at attendance and school performance to look at areas of concern. The counseling staff can work with an older sibling and younger sibling.

Social workers also work as part of the team approach at Amity. Students are helped with issues such as low self-esteem. Home visits can be done to see what is going on in the home, if attendance is a problem.

Mr. Marazzi said that he applauds the Board for looking into this topic. Drugs are a national epidemic. Prescription abuse is a problem. No one is denying that we have a problem here, but big strides are being made. Amity was one of the first schools in the state to implement breathalyzers, which have been very effective. Another big danger to students in particular is texting and driving; simulators have helped. He welcomed the Board to attend any of the events, such as those with simulators. MADD periodically provides presentations of drinking and driving and they talk about losing loved ones. Throughout the year, there is a speaker series with younger people who are in recovery. Mr. Marazzi said that this is just a glimpse of his day-to-day work. He noted that he receives a lot of calls from parents concerned about their kids and wanting to talk. He also did a family group. He noted that kids may be suffering because they are growing up around these substances. He added that he met with two students that day who have gotten into recovery, noting that only a small percentage of kids in the school are having a lot of difficulty. This isn't a social service, this isn't a treatment center, but this is a school.

Dr. Britton summarized that the administration and faculty are working on a lot of different angles. He said he appreciated the chance to talk about this topic.

Discussion:

Ms. Russo asked if there is anything the school needs that it doesn't have.

Dr. Britton said that there is not. He noted that there are different problems each year. This year, the problem involves edible forms of marijuana. Anonymous calls are investigated.

Mr. Blake questioned whether students who ask for help are treated differently by their peers.

Mr. Marazzi said that there isn't too much discrimination. The staff watches that very carefully. He sees kids who come forward saying that their friend is in trouble

Mr. Browe said that he understands that breathalyzers are used on the way into school events, but wondered if they are employed when students are leaving events.

Mr. Marazzi said that use of the breathalyzer is available at the conclusion of events as well.

Mr. Stirling said that this was a very comprehensive report. He appreciates the towns' support for this. He noted that he occasionally has had questions about the drug problem at Amity.

Dr. Britton said that there is no one solution for this complex problem. Nobody has said that there isn't a drug problem at Amity, but it is no worse than what other schools have dealt with.

Mr. DeMaio questioned whether Student Government can look into student perceptions. He would like to explore how to empower kids and build on the current preventative measures in place.

Mr. Marazzi said that there are three sides to the story. There are rumors. Kids share information with their parents, but it's not always the facts. The problem at Amity isn't any worse than at any other school.

Dr. Brady said that a comprehensive survey was performed and he believes the administration has a good handle on what is going on.

Mr. Horwitz said that he would like to commend all the staff for the work that they're doing.

Ms. Altman said that she appreciates all that has been said. An effective job is being done, but most of the drug/alcohol related activity is in fact done outside the school setting and beyond our control. She questioned to what extent intervention in the community is contributing.

Dr. Britton said that the some students are a little bit farther down the road in terms of their involvement with substance abuse. Parental support is needed.

Mr. Blake said that he would like to thank Dr. Brady and the team. Some kids will only learn the hard way, but he is proud knowing that the administration and faculty at Amity treat all kids as worthy of respect.

9. Discussion and Possible Action on 2013 Board of Education Meeting Calendar

Mr. Blake noted that the Board is required to submit a calendar of Board of Education meetings. This calendar follows the same pattern used this year. *Motion to accept the calendar as presented* (Mr. Browe, 2d Mr. Stirling).

Discussion: It was noted that the February meeting will take place in Orange.
Vote in favor unanimous. ***Motion passed.***

10. Public Comment

Joseph Newman of Woodbridge said that he has two children attending school in the District and he is here to speak about Item #13 on the agenda. He is very concerned about the students possibly losing April vacation due to weather-related closures. Students involved with Music in Motion planned to go to Disney World in April. They would miss four days of school. Arrangements have been made for all grades at the High School. He would prefer to see days made up in February. He believes that the February vacation would be a better alternative, as the students who were supposed to travel to Disney will fall behind on a lot of school work.

Mr. Blake said that it was his understanding that April vacation was chosen for makeup days since February is in the midst of flu season and it helps to avoid the spread of sickness to have school closed at that time.

Dr. Brady said that he will have information to share when this topic comes up later in the meeting.

A High School student who plans to attend the band trip to Disney World during April vacation also said that she has concerns. More than 100 students will be traveling to Disney. Trips such as these take place every other year. She is worried about missing her AP classes. Missing that much school would be a problem for students participating in the trip. She understands the concerns about flu season, but students do not want to put more time and effort into planning their Disney trip if the vacation is going to be taken away.

11. Announcements from the Board and Administration

Dr. Brady announced that Jack Levine was elected to the board of the Connecticut Association of Business Officials (CASBO).

12. Correspondence

There was no discussion.

13. Superintendent's Report

- a. Personnel Report
There was no discussion.
- b. 2012-2013 Amity District Calendar – Winner of CABA Award of Excellence for Educational Communications
There was no discussion.
- c. 2012 Amity Region Facilities Report – Honorable Mention, CABA Award of Excellence for Educational Communications
There was no discussion.
- d. Due to Emergency Closings at This Point There Will Be No April Vacation

Dr. Brady said that he would like to provide clarification about the April vacation. At this point, two days of April vacation have been lost. The BOWA board voted on this calendar, deciding on February for makeup days because there was such uncertainty last year. Efforts have been made to communicate this information early and clearly. He would be willing to discuss alternatives with colleagues. He noted that March 22nd is a professional day that might be able to be converted to a school day. Clearing out the school during February vacation does help to reduce illness. He would like to come up with a plan to preserve the April vacation if possible. He will speak to the other superintendents and bring back recommendations to the Board.

Ms. Cohen said that it might be necessary to start school earlier next year.

Dr. Brady said that teachers have to work 185 days.

14. Chairman's Report

a. Committee Reports

1. ACES – There was no discussion.
2. CABE – There is an event on Friday and several Board members will be attending.
3. Curriculum – There was no discussion.
4. Facilities – Dr. Brady will be reviewing the budget recommendations.
5. Finance

a. Discussion and Possible Action on Natural Gas Procurement

Mr. Levine reported that a Request for Proposal was sent out. Four bids were submitted and two companies were interviewed. He was very pleased with the prices from Titan, which were about half of what the others were offering. Even with the same price, he would like to use Titan. The Amity Finance Committee authorized Dr. Brady to make a judgment that is in the best interest of the District.

Move that Titan Energy be authorized to seek out and recommend the most favorable contract for a natural gas supplier. Further, the Superintendent of Schools be authorized to enter into a one year or multi-year contract, not to exceed three years, with a natural gas supplier provided the Superintendent of Schools deems the terms of the contract to be in the best interest of the District (Mr. Browe, 2d Ms. Cohen).

Discussion: Mr. Stirling said that this was unanimously approved by the Amity Finance Committee.

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed.

b. Discussion of Monthly Financial Statements

It was noted that on page 6, Mr. Levine reported that the District is on target to hit the reserve balance. Claims are being looked at carefully. So far, he has been pleased.

- c. Director of Finance and Administration Approved Transfers Under \$3,000
Mr. Browe asked for a status report on the oil tank removal. Dr. Brady said that the tank was removed and there was no contamination.
- d. Update on Financial Operations
 1. Information on Fitch Ratings Reaffirming 'AA+' Rating
Dr. Brady noted that he was pleased with the rating.
 2. Information on Third Quarter 2012 Executive Summary Review of Amity Pension Fund, Sick and Severance Account, and OPEB Trust
Dr. Brady noted that this will be included in the budget recommendation.
 3. Status Report on Financial Audit
Mr. Blake noted that it appears the audit is going well. Mr. Levine said that it is not done yet, but it is on time and on target. He is pleased that the district is in good shape.
6. Policy – There was no discussion.
7. Personnel – There was no discussion.

15. Items for the Next Agenda

There will be a special meeting retreat at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, November 26, 2012, location to be determined.

16. Adjournment

*Motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:16 p.m. (Ms. Altman, 2d Ms. Gedansky).
Motion passed; meeting adjourned.*

Respectfully submitted,

Marianne Lippard, recording clerk
Rita Gedansky, secretary

References/Attachments:

Minutes: Finance Committee, 10/15/12
Board of Education Regular Meeting, 10/15/12

Reports: 3rd Quarter 2012 Executive Summary Review
Personnel Report
Amity Regional District #5 Revenues and Expenditures 2012-2013
Amity Regional District #5 Budget Transfers 2012-2013

Memos: Jack B. Levine to John J. Brady (11/5/12) re: Natural Gas Procurement
Jack B. Levine to John J. Brady (11/6/12) re: Fitch Ratings
Jeff Walsh to Jack Levine (11/5/12) re: Audit Status Report