

MINUTES

**AMITY BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Julie Altman, William Blake, Christopher Browe, Patricia Cardozo, Sue Cohen, Steven DeMaio, Rita Gedansky, James Horwitz, Thomas Hurley, Tracey Lane Russo, James Stirling

**AMITY BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Diane Crocco, John A. Grasso, Jr.,

**Also Present:** John Brady, Charles Britton, Sue Cohen, Kathleen Fuller Cutler, Richard Dellinger, Deb DeMeo, Kevin Keller, Jack Levine, Marianne Lippard, Terry Lumas, Paul Mengold, Rocco Palmieri, Mary Raiola, Jim Saisa, Sheila Wycinowski, James Zeoli

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A special meeting of the Amity Regional Board of Education was held on Wednesday, January 25, 2012, at 6:30 p.m. in the Presentation Room of District Offices.

1. **Call to Order:** Mr. Blake called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.
2. **Pledge of Allegiance** was recited by those present.
3. **Presentation and Discussion of Superintendent's Proposed 2012-2013 Budget**

Dr. Brady welcomed new Board members John A. Grasso, Jr., Christopher Browe and Tracey Lane Russo to the budget presentation, the first of such presentations that they will be a part of. He noted that this information was presented to the Amity Finance Committee on Monday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Dr. Brady asked the Board to consider this budget to be a work in progress. It is not a complete document at this point. There will be time between this presentation and the District hearing to make changes. There are a number of variables that the administration is in the process of determining.

He noted that developing a budget for the District is a painstaking process, beginning with requests from the administrative team and paring the budget down along the way. The goal throughout the process is to deliver the highest quality education for the money, while also taking into account economic conditions, Dr. Brady said. Work has been done to provide this balance.

There have been many accomplishments at Amity during the last year in the areas of academics, arts, and athletics. Dr. Brady noted that a new school website will be up soon showcasing the District in a more appealing format.

One of the goals at Amity has been to increase Advanced Placement offerings and also to see that students take and pass AP exams. Results have been shown in this area to the point where it can be said that this goal has been accomplished, the Superintendent said. The AP results show that Amity students ranked #6 in the state for 2011.

Highlighting other academic results, Dr. Brady noted that CMT results showed strong performances in both the seventh and eighth grade. The eighth grade had the highest percentage of students attaining goal or advanced stature in Amity history.

He added that CAPT tests results showed significant improvement. Amity is in DRG 2, along with Madison, Guilford, Monroe and a number of other towns, and the reading scores produced at Amity last year were #1 in the DRG. Math scores were #4 in the DRG, a significant improvement after Amity previously scored second to last in the reference group in 2010. Science scores were #6 in the DRG in 2011, a substantial achievement, after Amity students scored #14 in the DRG in 2010. Dr. Brady noted that the scores are important and a remediation program has helped. At the advanced level, Amity finished #2 in the DRG with 95 students attaining advanced status.

The District also has another INTEL finalist. One of Amity's students has achieved the honor. She is studying allergies and is one of only 40 INTEL finalists in the country.

With programs in automotive, manufacturing, computer design, computer programming, and more, Amity has something for everyone, Dr. Brady said. Last year, Amity was #1 in the state in Computer Information Systems and the Nutrition, Food Production and Sciences on the Comprehensive Technical Education Assessment. Overall, the District scored #7 on this assessment.

Ninety percent of the Class of 2011 continued on to higher education. A total of 1,085 college acceptances were offered to the Class of 2011; 34 percent were to the Most Selective or Highly Selective colleges, as listed by The Barron's College Guidebook.

In the arts, Dr. Brady noted that Amity students are performing extremely well at the High School and middle schools. Students are learning, performing, and enjoying themselves. In May, the musical *Legally Blonde* will be performed at the High School. There have been numerous awards for music, art and drama at Amity. Dr. Brady said that he has every expectation that the program will continue to grow.

Athletic programs at Amity also have been very successful, receiving recognition in a number of sports. Recently, Athletic Director Paul Mengold received national recognition for his work.

Dr. Brady noted that Amity is a caring, giving community. This sense of service is seen in all areas. One notable accomplishment in community service was a donation to the Petit Family Foundation, which was collected from proceeds of a production of *Bang, Bang You're Dead*.

In operations, Amity was one of 21 “benchmark” districts identified as fully efficient by the UCONN publication, *Connecticut Economy*, Winter 2010. The District also has undertaken green initiatives and an audit firm found the District’s financial operations adhered to “best practices” for the third consecutive year.

This year, there are a number of issues facing Amity. A major budget driver is the additional \$1 million tuition cost for seven students entering Amity with highly specialized needs. Another factor affecting the budget increase includes the elimination of \$101,000 in funding from the Federal Education Jobs Fund Program, the Superintendent said.

In order to keep pace with technology, some improvements are needed. Dr. Brady said that the District at this point should replace 105 computers and three servers.

Amity is also looking at increases for medical and dental insurance. The insurance consultant has said that a self-funded plan could offer significant savings, based on an analysis of claims over the last few years. Approximately \$268,000 may be available to create an insurance reserve account.

There are some options available that could help the District save money, Dr. Brady said. One proposal is to convert from fuel oil to natural gas at the High School. Dr. Brady said that he recommends pursuing this project using funds currently available. The heating cost could be cut in half if this change is made, although in 2012-2013 the savings won’t be apparent due to the expense of the conversion.

Negotiations with teachers resulted in a zero percent “hard freeze” wage. This means that there is no step, or general wage increase, for teachers for 2012-2013, saving approximately \$700,000. Dr. Brady thanked Deb DeMeo for helping to reach that agreement.

Statewide, the reports show that the average superintendent’s proposed budget involved an increase of 3.21 percent. Amity’s is now at 2.88 percent.

Enrollment is declining somewhat at this point, but no restructuring is needed right now. Dr. Brady recommended the Board initiate a study committee to look at enrollment projections.

The Superintendent noted that page 26 of the report shows the changes that the District is experiencing. The school population is higher in Orange in part because numbers in Woodbridge are declining. A summary of revenues by category appears on page 27 and 28.

***Discussion:***

Special education costs are increasing because there are a number of students entering Amity next year. Ms. Cohen questioned whether there are any special education students leaving the District.

Dr. Brady said that the increase discussed was a net increase, factoring in those students that are leaving as well as those coming into the District.

Regarding the money available for the insurance reserve account, Ms. Cohen questioned why the District gets that money. She thought that people who are sick get that money.

Dr. Brady noted that the Board and taxpayer may use that money. Self-funded insurance is a real possibility. There will be time to look at this in detail.

Several Board members questioned the financial impact tuition students have on the budget.

Dr. Brady said that tuition students are evaluated and can be added if the numbers are appropriate.

Mr. Hurley asked if the number of tuition students could be increased.

Ms. Altman questioned whether Amity has to transport tuition students.

Dr. Brady said that Amity has encouraged students at one school to check out Amity as an option. Amity does not have to transport these students; however, the parents can choose to bring their children to an Amity bus stop.

Ms. Altman questioned that with special education costs having such a large impact on the budget, should the Board be doing anything to get support.

Ms. Raiola said that Connecticut does things differently than other states. People are starting to look at the cost and who bears that cost.

Ms. Cohen asked if Amity is funded the same way as New Haven and Bridgeport.

Dr. Brady said that the District is. Amity will get \$465,000 back. It is returned in February and May.

Mr. Blake said that new students are coming from the feeder schools. Local communities will see a parallel decrease.

Dr. Brady noted that some of Amity's classes are at maximum size. A number of areas were considered for savings. A retirement incentive plan was explored, but there aren't enough teachers at Amity that are at retirement age. A computer teacher is retiring and will not be replaced. Another teacher will fill the vacancy by traveling between schools.

Ms. Russo asked about planned computer replacements.

Dr. Brady noted that replacement has been put off for two years now. Mr. Palmieri said that memory is more expensive for older computers than new computers.

Regarding the visitor bleachers, Dr. Brady said that Mr. Saisa got three quotes. The building official and fire marshal from Woodbridge examined the bleachers to check for safety. The bleachers need to be disposed of or Amity will be fined.

Ms. Cohen noted that she has concerns about the Facilities Five Year Capital Improvement Forecast/Preventative Maintenance. She does not want to see items pushed out that will cause greater expense in the future.

**4. Public Comment**

Orange First Selectman James Zeoli said that he wanted to be clear that he does not dislike Dr. Brady or Amity. A number of Amity students work on his farm and he enjoys the students and hears praise for Amity.

He attended the Amity Finance Committee on Monday night and two weeks ago. Things have changed and things are getting better. He has changed his position on the bleachers. He had questioned Dr. Brady about the bond for the roof and whether anything else was being added. Dr. Brady said nothing else was being added. He suggested putting the bleachers on the bond, rather than taking money set aside for the roof.

He said that last year he begged the Board not to roll money forward, but to send it back to the towns. Now there is a million dollar hole. He fully understands the demands of special needs.

Orange is self-insured. Looking into this change is a step in the right direction. The increases in Bethany and Orange are a big problem. There are competing needs. He wants to work with the Board. There are Orange residents receiving fuel assistance.

A lot of storefronts are being filled. Over 2,000 jobs are being added in the Marsh Hill Road area. Mr. Scinto is in negotiations for the Stew Leonard's property. Pez is increasing employees. The town of Orange is working hard.

**5. Adjourn**

*Motion to adjourn at 8:09 p.m. (Mr. Stirling, 2d Ms. Gedansky).  
Vote in favor unanimous; meeting adjourned.*

**Respectfully submitted,**

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**Marianne Lippard, recording clerk**