

MINUTES

AMITY BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: 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: Julie Altman, Diane Crocco, John Grasso, Jr.

Staff Members Present: Charles Britton, Richard Dellinger, Kathleen Fuller Cutler, Kevin Keller, Jack Levine, Marianne Lippard, Terry Lumas, Marie McPadden, Paul Mengold, Michael Nast, Mary Raiola, Jim Saisa

Also Present: Patrick Dudley; other members of the Public

A regular meeting of the Amity Regional Board of Education was held on Monday, December 9, 2013, at 6:30 p.m., in the cafeteria at Amity Regional High School.

1. **Call to Order:** William Blake called the meeting to order at 6:44 p.m.
2. **Pledge of Allegiance** was recited by those present.
3. **Student/Staff Recognition**
The Board recognized outstanding students and teachers. Special Education teachers Lynn Edwards and Vicki Fielosh acknowledged Matt Schmidt, Nicholas Bencivengo and Julia Wilde, student volunteers involved in helping with the summer program Side Kicks. The Side Kicks program addresses IEP goals and objectives. Dr. Dellinger spoke of the excellent work of Bethany music teachers Rob Fragione and Brennan Orié. Mr. Nast noted that the High School was designated as a School of Distinction by the State Department of Education.
4. **Student Report**
Patrick Dudley, student government representative at the High School, reported that the start of midterms has been moved back two days due to the snow. The midterms will now take place from January 23rd through January 28th. The schedule will be subject to change, depending on the weather. Patrick reported that Student Government will be running a clothing drive to benefit the Birmingham Group, which helps victims of domestic violence. The clothing is being collected by the entrance to the High School. Link Crew is organizing an event called Cocoa and Cram to help freshman students prepare for midterms. Freshmen can enjoy treats and get help preparing for their exams as well as learn strategies for studying for midterms. Students also are working to raise money to support the American Cancer Society. An event is being planned to take place on

January 31st. A visit by former NBA star Chris Herren is planned to take place soon.

Motion to change the order of the agenda to move Item #9 to Item #6 (Ms. Cohen, 2d Ms. Gedansky).

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed.

5. Approval of Minutes

a. Regular BOE Meeting, December 9, 2013

Motion to approve the minutes from December 9, 2013 as presented (Mr. Hurley, 2d Mr. Browe).

Discussion: Ms. Cohen noted two changes; one on page 2 and one on page 6.

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed.

b. Special BOE Meeting, December 19, 2013

Motion to approve the minutes from December 19, 2013 as presented (Mr. Hurley, 2d Ms. Cohen).

Vote in favor: Patricia Cardozo, Sue Cohen, Steven DeMaio, Rita Gedansky, Thomas Hurley, Tracey Lane Russo, James Stirling

Vote opposed: none

Abstain: Christopher Browe, James Horwitz

Motion passed.

6. Discussion and Possible Action on Audited Financial Statements

a. Review of Audited Financial Statements by Auditors

John Bauer, C.P.A., a partner from Mahoney Sabol & Company, LLP of Glastonbury, and Amanda Backhaus, C.P.A., provided a report on the audit. Ms. Backhaus noted that the District received an unmodified clean report on all opinion areas. There was one non-material instance of non-compliance involving a late filing. The filing was completed on time, but there was a late submission in this instance. There was no need for a letter showing areas for improvement as everything is operating very smoothly.

Mr. Hurley questioned the impact of new accounting rules. Ms. Backhaus said that the audit was performed in keeping with these changes.

Ms. Backhaus noted that the audit of the District showed good financial practices are in place. Of the audits she has worked on recently, it stood out.

Mr. Stirling thanked Mr. Levine and Ms. Lumas for their excellent work.

Mr. Blake noted that Amity is fortunate to have an outstanding Finance Department.

b. Discussion and Possible Action to Accept Annual Financial Report

*Motion to accept the Annual Financial Report (Mr. Stirling, 2d Mr. Hurley).
Vote in favor unanimous. Motion passed.*

c. Discussion and Possible Action to Return Funds to Member Towns

*Move to authorize the Superintendent of Schools to return the balance of \$398,285 from the fiscal year ended June 30, 2013, to the Member Towns, as follows: Town of Bethany - \$82,129; Town of Orange - \$197,760; Town of Woodbridge - \$118,396 (Mr. Stirling, 2d Mr. DeMaio).
Vote in favor unanimous. Motion passed.*

The Board took a short recess at 7:06 p.m. and returned to session at 7:22 p.m.

7. Update on Superintendent Search

Mr. Blake said that the Board is pleased to announce that Charles Dumais, principal of Newtown High School, will be the new superintendent. He will be a great fit for Amity. The Board is grateful to Mr. Nast for stepping in for the third time as interim superintendent. Mr. Dumais' anticipated start date is March 1st.

Motion to approve the appointment of Charles Dumais as superintendent (Mr. Hurley, 2d Ms. Gedansky).

Discussion: Ms. Cohen noted that five members of the Board traveled to Newtown. Mr. Dumais was extremely impressive. Mr. Hurley said that making this selection was very difficult. There were a lot of great candidates and he appreciated their interest. Mr. Blake asked if anyone had questions or comments on the authorization to enter into a contract. There were no questions or comments.

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed.

8. Public Comment

No members of the public addressed the Board.

9. Presentation and Discussion of Superintendent's Proposed 2014-2015 Budget

Mr. Nast congratulated the Board on their selection of the next superintendent. He noted that the budget was developed by the administrative team. He expects to work with the new superintendent as much as possible in the coming months.

The District is in solid financial shape. When he served as interim superintendent previously, the financial picture was quite different. He is happy that the focus tonight can be on student and teacher recognition and student success. He noted that the budget figures he presented previously were too high. The increase has been reduced to 3.10 percent.

Mr. Nast noted that the reason for a greater increase than in past years is due to the fact that the average budget increase for the last five years has been 1.24 percent. The District cannot maintain operations with that low of an increase this

year. Factoring in money that is being returned to the towns, the 3.10 percent increase would be lower. He noted that even in business, if you continued to operate at status quo, you'd be moving in reverse. We can't stay stagnant.

The basic salary increase amounts to \$620,573. Planning for special education costs presents a major challenge. Medical insurance costs have been higher than the projections.

Plans are to cut two certified staff positions (\$196,542). The goal is not to terminate employees, but to reconsider filling vacant positions. This would have to align with the goals of the new superintendent.

He noted two new expenses in the proposed budget: wages for a part-time security guard after hours at the High School (\$19,492) and a replacement phone system (\$46,000). Mr. Nast said that there is a great deal of activity at the High School in the late afternoon until about 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. A security guard has been hired to serve in this role for the time being. The phone system also needs to be replaced as the software for the District's phone system will not be supported after June 2014.

Mr. Nast noted that no new programs were added with this budget. He added that though the student population is down somewhat, there haven't been any major staff reductions. There are reasons for this course of action. Every student is now taking a biology lab. Chinese II and culinary arts have been added. Our students can potentially take eight classes per day. Though our student numbers are down, the activities and opportunities for students have increased. He isn't sure how the District has managed to maintain what is currently offered. The graduation rate at Amity is among the best in the State. All of the successes cost money

Some people have suggested that past budgets may have been too high given the surpluses. The girls' ice hockey team was expected to require more funds, but three students went to private schools and two students opted not to participate. Athletic Director Paul Mengold decided to continue with Amity's previous arrangement for girls' ice hockey, rather than forming a new team. The perception that the budget was padded with these types of expenses was untrue. Some of the money will come back to the District.

Budget drivers include Contracted Salaries (\$761,665), Medical Insurance (\$426,566) and Special Education Tuition and Transportation (\$488,196). Mr. Nast noted that rather than putting out money up front for special education costs that are unknown, we can have those funds to use as a contingency.

The average surplus over the last five years has been 1.2 percent. This isn't a bad number, but a fairly competitive number, given the size of the budget.

In the area of self-insurance, this past year has been tough. We are told that what we are experiencing now happens every five years; we are hoping this is the year. It is too early to tell whether or not it was a good idea to change to self-insurance.

Mr. Nast noted that if there are questions that come up in the community, he would like to know about them so that he can address them. He noted that looking at the DRG is okay, but Amity isn't competing with 18 groups. The High School has been rated among the top five in the State. He noted that the teaching staff is very dedicated and dynamic and puts in a great deal of time. Amity's music program is excellent and the District is competitive in every sport.

Mr. Nast said that the budget eliminates \$91,000 for textbooks. He noted that today everything is digital and textbooks are no exception. This is an expense that we can hold off on for now.

Mr. Nast said that he has had a great deal of experience going to many high schools as part of a NEASC team and has seen numerous Blue Ribbon schools. He noted that the Amity Regional School District is second to none. We cannot afford to keep the status quo, as that would set the District back. The next step in this process would be to meet with the new superintendent.

The Budget Summary: Revenues by Category shows a \$572,770 variance for the Bethany allocation, \$245,855 for the Orange allocation and a \$313,762 variance for Woodbridge.

Discussion:

Mr. Stirling noted that during the meeting of the Amity Finance Committee earlier tonight, members expressed understanding of the financial challenges facing Amity, as they're experiencing similar financial challenges in their towns. There is some concern about the cost of health benefits, and perhaps a need to add more money to this area because it might be underfunded.

Mr. Hurley said that he believes if we have another bad year with the self-insurance, we will be in trouble. There appears to be a problem. The back office needs work. When he looks at this budget, he believes we are \$300,000 to \$400,000 short. This will be a problem. He is concerned about the OPEB Trust. We need to stop spending future money. He is worried that this budget is too low. We are chronically not funding things.

Mr. Blake questioned what Mr. Hurley is suggesting.

Mr. Hurley said that he is concerned about the 13 servers that the system is resting on. This is not up-to-date technology. This is not something that everybody in the community rallies around, but it is needed. At some point we'll be in trouble if we ignore this need.

Ms. Russo said that she would like to see a letter with a recommended amount for the Contingency Account for the self-funded insurance. She would also like to see more information and a recommendation regarding the server. We have been pushing things down the road. It would be helpful to have more information on these topics for future meetings.

Ms. Cardozo and Ms. Cohen asked for more information and a recommendation about the back office.

Mr. Nast said that there has been discussion about making the system “state of the art.”

Mr. Blake thanked Mr. Nast for his presentation. He will talk to Mr. Nast further and set up a meeting with the insurance consultant about an itemized list for the self-insurance. Information also will be gathered about creating a “state of the art” back office.

10. Superintendent’s Report

a. Personnel Report

Mr. Nast noted that the Personnel Report shows that Athletic Director Paul Mengold is retiring. Mr. Mengold has accumulated a long list of outstanding accomplishments; it will be very difficult to try to fill this position.

Mr. DeMaio said that it is a sad day for Amity when Mr. Mengold retires. Under his leadership, Amity has been very competitive in every sport. He thanked Mr. Mengold for all that he has brought to Amity.

b. Other

Mr. Nast reminded the Board that midterms were moved due to the recent snow days. He noted other calendar modifications.

Mr. Nast said that he met with an ad hoc committee in Bethany to discuss moving sixth graders to Amity Middle School in Bethany. He also spoke with school officials in Orange about a flooding problem and whether students from Orange could be accommodated at Amity. School officials in Orange decided on another plan.

Ms. Russo said that her daughters were affected by the problem in Orange and she appreciates the support offered. It has been tough the past few weeks.

11. Chairman’s Report

a. Committee Reports

1. ACES – Ms. Cohen noted that the guidelines for a unified calendar came out. She noted that a vacation was recommended in April, although she thought that a March vacation might be proposed. It isn’t easy to come up

with this type of calendar. It's not going to happen to quickly, because contracts have already been signed. The information can be emailed to everyone.

Mr. Nast said that we will have a calendar for our next meeting.

Mr. Blake questioned whether the State would require us to reduce our school year.

Ms. Cohen noted that 180 days is the minimum. Regional school snow days were also discussed.

Mr. Nast said that the concept of a unified calendar was initiated by charter and magnet schools.

2. **CABE** – There was no report.
3. **Curriculum** - There is a Steering Committee meeting tomorrow.
4. **Facilities** – There was no report.
5. **Finance**
 - a. **Discussion of Monthly Financial Statements**
There was no discussion.
 - b. **Director of Finance and Administration Approved Transfers Under \$3,000**
There were no questions.
 - c. **Discussion and Possible Action on Budget Transfers of \$3,000 or More**
In a memo dated January 8, 2014 to Mr. Nast, Mr. Levine recommends a budget transfer for upgrading the District's technology infrastructure and computer equipment. The District was awarded a grant of \$186,568 through the efforts of Technology Education Specialist Lisa Lassen and District Technology Coordinator Shaun DeRosa. We need to transfer \$15,000 to Other Professional & Technical Services to pay for the labor to install the upgrade to the District's technology infrastructure. Labor costs cannot be paid by the grant funds. The funding of the labor costs will come from the unused technology budget of \$21,850 to replace Megabit network switches to Gigabit Switches. We had set these funds aside to pay for a long-range planning study; however, we are now asking to use these funds to pay for the labor costs to install the new technology infrastructure. We will use the remaining grant funding to purchase ChromeBooks needed for new online testing format.

Move to make the following budget transfer to pay Consolidated Computers, Inc. of Easton, Connecticut, as part of the total bid price, \$15,000 for labor costs (Mr. Hurley, 2d Ms. Cohen):

<u>Account Number</u>	<u>Account Name</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>
05-14-2350-5731	Equipment – Replacement	\$15,000	
05-14-2310-5330	Other Professional & Tech		\$15,000

Discussion: Mr. Levine said that the \$186,516 grant the District received requires Amity to pay \$15,000 in labor costs.

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed.

6. Policy

Mr. Hurley noted that the issue of waiving testing for seniors needs to be addressed. This should go to the Curriculum Committee to make sure that the current policy makes sense. Another item that should be considered by the Policy Committee is the need to change language to reflect the names of new tests being administered.

7. Personnel – Executive Session

This item was addressed under Item #7.

12. Items for the Next Agenda

Ms. Russo recommended that Board members read the Shriver Report, which addresses how women are underrepresented in science and math. The report is free and downloadable. It might be worth discussing at a future meeting.

Mr. Mengold said that he would like to thank everyone for 38 ½ years at Amity. It has been a wonderful ride and he has worked with thousands of great kids.

13. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:27 p.m. (Ms. Gedansky, 2d Ms. Cohen).

Motion passed; meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Marianne Lippard, recording clerk
Thomas Hurley, secretary

References/Attachments:

Minutes: Amity Finance Committee Meeting, 12/9/13

Reports: Amity Regional School District Number 5 Year-to-Date Budget Report, 1/6/14
Amity Regional School District Number 5 Communication with Those Charged with Governance, 6/30/13
Amity Regional School District Number 5 Basic Financial Statements, Supplementary Information, and Independent Auditor's Report, 6/30/13
Amity Regional School District Number 5 Federal and State Single Audit Reports, 6/30/13
Amity Regional School District Number 5 2014-2015 Superintendent's Proposed Budget, 1/13/14
Amity Regional School District Number 5 Personnel Report
Amity Regional School District Number 5 Budget Transfers 2013-2014
Amity Regional School District Number 5 Revenues and Expenditures for FY 2013-2014, 1/9/14

Memos: Jack B. Levine to Michael R. Nast (1/8/14) re: Budget Transfers of \$3,000 or More for Fiscal Year 2013-2014
Jack B. Levine to Michael R. Nast (1/8/14) re: Return Funds to Member Towns
Michael R. Nast to Members of the Amity Finance Committee and Amity Board of Education (1/10/14) re: Frequently Asked Budget Questions