

MINUTES

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

AMITY BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Patricia Cardozo

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

Also Present: Linda Anderson, Joseph Antaya, Thomas Falcigno, Jessica Ferraiolo, Katherine Handler, Jim Hash, Leticia Hasham, Kim Heal, Marc Iwanicki, Ann Martonia, Marc Robbins, Howard Sherman, Garrett Stack, Alexander Tzezos, Michael Vitale; other members of the Public

A regular meeting of the Amity Regional Board of Education was held on Monday, March 11, 2013 at 6:30 p.m. in the cafeteria of Amity Regional High School.

1. **Call to Order:** William Blake called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.
2. **Pledge of Allegiance** was recited by those present.
3. **Recognition of 2013 Superintendent's Award Winners**
Dr. Brady said that six outstanding students received the 2013 Superintendent's Award and will be recognized tonight. They will be further recognized at a banquet. The students have varied interests; one would like to become a pastry chef, while another is interested in fire science. Dr. Britton, Dr. Dellinger and Ms. Fuller Cutler talked about the accomplishments of the award winners at their respective schools.
The SCASA award recipients were (Bethany) Katherine Handler and Alexander Tzezos, (Orange) Jessica Ferraiolo and Joseph Antaya, and (Woodbridge) Tara Ramirez and Michael Vitale.
4. **Approval of Minutes**
 - a. Special BOE Meeting, February 25, 2013
Motion to approve the minutes as presented (Ms. Gedansky, 2d Ms. Cohen).
Vote in favor unanimous. **Motion passed.**
5. **Student Report**
Thomas Falcigno reported that tickets are on sale for the spring musical production, 'Sweeney Todd.' The show dates are April 5th, 6th, 12th and 13th and tickets can be purchased form the Theater Department. The Amity Spartans have been invited to a state math competition. Amity Robotics ranked third in a

competition on February 17th. Student Government would like to congratulate the athletes who competed in winter sports. Thomas also reported that students met with Congresswoman Rosa L. DeLauro on March 9th to discuss issues affecting them.

Mr. Blake noted that the District's search consultant met with students at the High School and remarked on the intelligence of the questions they asked. The Board appreciates the feedback.

6. Principal's Reports

High School Campus – Dr. Britton reported that the CAPT testing is going well and the recent snow storm didn't impact the testing schedule. He predicted that the students would do well. The administration is in the process of determining student numbers for courses during the next academic year. He expects to be able to get a good look at these numbers this week. This year, the High School will have 391 students graduate. The incoming class has 375 students. This figure was determined based on the number of students requesting an English course. The number doesn't include an additional 9 to twelve students expected to be added coming from Ezra Academy and other enrollments. As for the new classes, there are 41 students registered for Marine Biology and 19 for Physics and Engineering. There are many students interested in the Digital Photography courses, including 83 for the first year class, 32 for the second year and 11 for the third year. Dr. Britton noted that the staff reduction of 3.2 positions will not have a significant impact on class sizes. Dr. Britton noted that he has been doing some research into moving graduation off campus in the future. The last couple of graduation ceremonies have been indoors and that allows only a limited number of people to come. Many schools have graduation ceremonies off-campus. One possible off-site location considered was the Oakdale Theater in Wallingford. A survey showed support for this location. Unfortunately, there are different rates for the Oakdale and a Friday night event would cost \$7,000 more than what was budgeted for this year's graduation. Dr. Britton said that this might not be a problem if the weather cooperates this year.

Bethany Middle School Campus – Dr. Dellinger said that the CMTs are in progress. Nature's Classroom is up and running. Two Chinese guests will be visiting the building to see the school tomorrow. Career Day will take place at the end of the month and a wide variety of professions will be represented. Preparations are being made for next year's incoming class. The sixth graders will be visiting on April 3rd. Dr. Dellinger noted that he received notification that the students at Amity Middle School in Bethany did an outstanding job with the Governor's Reading Challenge.

Orange Middle School Campus – Ms. Fuller Cutler said that the students in Orange are also in the midst of taking the CMTs and the students and staff are doing a phenomenal job. This week, the sixth grade Parent's Night will take place. The transition to middle school is a big step for students and the

administration and staff are looking at ways to improve the transition. The sixth graders are invited to an assembly on April 19th. Ms. Fuller Cutler said that she also recently learned that the Middle School was one of the top performing schools in the Governor's Summer Reading Challenge.

This year, we're going to have Danny Magic coming. Recognize several students and staff. The school is working to educate students about anti-defamation. The school will attend a special movie about Jackie Robinson. She invited the Board to join Amity in Action. Counselors from the High School are working to help eighth graders prepare to transition to the High School next year.

7. Public Comment

Ann Martonia said that we live in a culture of violence and change needs to happen. Violence has been glorified and repeated exposure leads to desensitization. She was saddened to learn that the spring musical at the High School is Sweeney Todd, which has themes of rape, murder, and cannibalism. We have a responsibility to protect our children from things that have a negative effect on developing minds. Better choices are needed.

Garrett Stack of Woodbridge, a retired principal and host of a program about Broadway, said that the story of Sweeney Todd goes back 150 years and is part of Gothic literature. It is fiction. It is a depiction and is considered one of the greatest masterpieces. A musical production such as this gives students the opportunity to demonstrate musical skills and a chance to come together to put on a magnificent piece of art.

Marc Robbins of Orange, a parent of a student involved in Amity Creative Theater, said that he is here tonight to speak on behalf of the students. This performance has great value as a dramatization combined with music from one of America's songwriters. In 2007, Johnny Depp received recognition for his performance. It is a treasured piece. Those involved in this musical are a dedicated group of teachers, directors, and student performers.

Leticia Hasham of Orange, a parent of a student at the High School, said art is in the eye of the beholder. She said that we need to keep in mind what we want our students thinking and dreaming about. A story depicting gruesome acts of violence isn't appropriate. She is tired of this being called art. We want to value and champion the ideals of goodness and beauty.

Mr. Hynes of Woodbridge said that he is very concerned about violence in our society and also about the role of art in teaching our children. This sort of play is actually therapeutic. Art doesn't always have to be pretty. We do live in a pretty evil world. Instead of criticizing the play, embrace it. Have people come see the play and talk afterwards. I embrace the play and hope people come to see it in that spirit.

Howard Sherman, a resident of Manhattan, has worked at theaters throughout the United States and graduated from Amity. He traveled here tonight from New York because he feels the need to speak out. There is no question that we were all deeply affected by what happened in Newtown. The theme of the story of Sweeney Todd is about the usefulness of revenge. The evil ends badly and only the virtuous survive. Sweeney Todd can create a learning opportunity. Yes, we could choose to do other works, but we are denying the opportunity to learn. We have to embrace what is current and create the right context. This protest comes when students are already in rehearsal. To make a change now would be a problem. This piece invites question and learning.

Kim Heal of Bethany said that her daughter is in the show and she just learned about some of the questionable content. The message is that vengeance leads to destruction. She isn't sure that this was the best choice, but sees both sides of this. We have a platform and careful consideration should be given to what we produce every year. This is an opportunity to promote what we stand for.

Linda Anderson of Orange said that she is the parent of two Amity graduates. Her sons were deeply involved in the music department. She has concerns about the production. She saw the play in London and New York. The production should be age appropriate. Everyone looks forward to this production and they bring their families. This needs to be considered in the future.

Marc Iwanicki of Orange, an Amity graduate, said that he learned a lot from helping out with the plays. A lot of work and passion goes into this. He asked that the cast be allowed to do this show.

Jim Hash said that this is a great school system. Clearly, a lot of time and effort has been put into this show. He is not necessarily a good judge of art, but feels that not all great art is appropriate for our children to see. He will accept that this is great art, but it is difficult to think we couldn't find a better, more appropriate piece of art. He believes a bad decision was made. It may be time for a policy on what is it we want to promote in our communities.

Mr. Blake thanked everyone for coming out to voice their comments, which were all very respectful.

8. Discussion and Possible Action on Superintendent's Proposed 2013-2014 Operating Budget

A revision to the proposed 2013-2014 Budget is detailed in a memo dated March 1, 2013 from Dr. Brady to members of the Amity Finance Committee and Amity Board of Education. Dr. Brady's proposal would reduce the increase in the budget from 2.64 percent to 2.49 percent. Dr. Brady noted that the District recently completed building projects funded through the Reserve Fund for Capital and Nonrecurring Expenditures fund, leaving an unspent balance of \$64,727. The unspent balance had been designated for the High School roof restoration, air

handler, generator and natural gas conversion. Since these funds are available, Dr. Brady recommended the funds be re-designated to pay debt service in 2013-2014, thereby reducing the budget.

The budget provides the resources for contracted salaries and services, special education, utilities, unfunded and underfunded State mandates and modest program enhancements. Dr. Brady cut 3.2 full-time equivalent teaching positions at the High School and excluded from the proposal some items which were supported by the Board's Curriculum Committee.

Amity has had budget-to-budget increases of just over 1 percent on average for the past four years. With the current 2012-2013 budget, which increased expenditures only 0.47 percent, funds from the current budget could not be designated for next year's budget to help reduce member town allocations.

Move that the unspent balances in the Reserve Fund for Capital and Nonrecurring Expenditures of \$16,389.90 for the high school generator, \$21,419.51 for the high school roof restoration, \$12,533.78 for the high school air handler, and \$14,384.06 for the natural gas conversion be re-designated for payment of debt service in 2013-2014. Move that the Amity Board of Education approve the 2013-2014 Budget with total operating expenditures of \$44,698,660 and total member town allocations of \$43,480,258 (Mr. Grasso, 2d Ms. Gedansky).

Discussion:

Mr. Hurley noted that the proposal frees up money for another use, but does not reduce anything.

Mr. Blake said that Dr. Brady isn't proposing changing the total amount of the budget. He noted that the study of projected enrollment will be completed under the direction of the new superintendent.

Mr. Hurley said that the study needs to be done.

Dr. Brady said that he is expecting an end-of-the-year balance of \$81,000. He does not expect this figure to grow significantly, but maybe just enough to make some purchases at the end of the year. Some purchases could be made and the District could have funds available for next year. There are options. Dr. Brady said that the cost of the study could be as low as \$20,000 and up to \$60,000.

It was noted that it might make sense to reach out to the towns to see if they would rather do the study or return the money to the towns.

Mr. Browe questioned whether the study that Mr. Hurley was talking about would be different than the Bethany study and whether regionalization would be examined.

Dr. Brady said that a Request for Proposals would need to be reissued. The new superintendent should examine this.

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed.

Mr. Blake thanked everyone for their work to get to a reasonable budget

9. Information and Possible Action Regarding Study to Determine Feasibility of Providing Educational Accommodations to Grade 6 Students from Bethany

Dr. Brady noted that the town of Bethany approached him to determine whether or not Amity Middle School in their town could house their sixth graders. If the administration can determine that there will be space, then an in-depth study can be done. This is not being considered for fall 2013, but for the following year. The school population at the Middle School is declining slowly. If there isn't space currently, there will be soon. Having a larger school population at Amity Middle School in Bethany does make sense. This is a complicated matter because it deals with integrating the students, making them a part of the school community.

10. Announcements from the Board and Administration

Dr. Brady thanked the Board for moving the last few meetings into the cafeteria at the High School. The students have been using the Presentation Room for the robotics program and won't need the space much longer.

Copies of a newsletter about Amity were distributed to the Board. The newsletter was developed to send out into the three towns once a year to show what is going on at Amity. Dr. Brady noted that the newsletter can be used to help bridge the information gap. The goal is to distribute this to every household and business to show what the taxpayers money is being used for.

Mr. Blake said that the cost to print and distribute this is \$20,000.

Ms. Russo said that her first reaction is that the newsletter focuses more on Bethany and not Orange. This does not appear to be a balanced representation. Perhaps a page could be dedicated to each school. She does not agree with spending money on a mailing at this time.

Mr. Stirling noted that the Amity Finance Committee felt that if this money is available, the newsletter should go out.

Mr. Blake questioned whether revisions could be made.

Dr. Brady said that they could.

Mr. DeMaio said that this topic could be added to the next agenda to determine how to distribute this newsletter.

Dr. Brady said that the information about the budget might have to come out depending on when the Board makes a decision.

Mr. Blake questioned whether this could be completed and mailed within the next two weeks.

Ms. Russo said that she could support a public relations project. She would like to see if this could be produced electronically. This is too expensive and feels wrong.

Mr. Hurley said that this newsletter is very well designed, but we just finished talking about not having money for other items of importance. This doesn't seem like a good use of funds and it isn't in the budget for next year either.

Mr. Stirling questioned whether it could be tweaked and sent to The Patch.

Dr. Brady said that the newsletter was designed using the same model that has been successful in Woodbridge about Beacher Road School.

Ms. Russo questioned whether the costs could be defrayed with advertising. She would support producing this in a less costly manner.

Ms. Altman questioned whether this can still be done, but funded differently. Some senior citizens will miss seeing this if it is only produced electronically.

Dr. Brady said that while this is a money issue, the members of the Amity Finance Committee did favor this expenditure.

11. Correspondence

No correspondence was discussed.

12. Superintendent's Report

a. Personnel Report

There was no discussion

b. **Chairman's Report**

a. Committee Reports

1. ACES – There was no report.
2. CAFE – There was no report.
3. Curriculum – There was no report.
4. Facilities – There was no report.
5. Finance

a. Discussion and Possible Action on Healthy Food Certification

Connecticut General Statutes requires that each local school board of education or governing authority for Connecticut public school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) must take action annually to certify whether all food items sold to students will or will not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. Dr. Brady noted that Amity opted out in the past due to the many restrictions. The schools still provide healthy meals, while allowing the students to sell treats like brownies from time to time to raise money.

Motion to authorize the Director of Finance and Administration to sign Form ED-099 indicating that Amity Regional School District No. 5 will not certify that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under our jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will not meet said standards during the period of July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014 (Ms. Cohen, 2d Ms. Crocco).

Discussion: Mr. Stirling asked Dr. Brady about whether fresh fruits and vegetables are served in the schools. Dr. Brady said that they are and with fruit, students purchasing lunch can choose between an apple, an orange or a banana each day. A Type A meal must have fruit. Mr. Hurley said that by opting out, students aren't getting a substandard meal, so there is no downside to approving the motion.

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed.

b. Discussion of Monthly Financial Statements

Dr. Brady noted that Mr. Levine managed to get the bill for the blizzard down from \$92,000 to \$65,000, but there is still a shortfall for snow removal. Funds from FEMA will be pursued. Mr. Hurley said that he would like to commend Mr. Levine for his negotiations to bring costs down for the District.

c. Director of Finance and Administration Approved Transfers Under \$3,000

There was no discussion.

d. Discussion and Possible Action on Budget Transfers of \$3,000 or More

Mr. Levine noted that this transfer just involves moving money into the right account.

Move to make the following budget transfer of \$15,000 to pay for special education transportation (Ms. Altman, 2d Mr. Hurley):

<u>Account Number</u>	<u>Account Name</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>
04-12-6130-5510	Private Transportation	\$15,000	
04-12-6110-5510	Public Transportation		\$15,000

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed.

6. Personnel

The deadline for applications for the superintendent's position is March 24, 2013. Mr. Hurley asked when the Board might meet again. Mr. Blake said that a meeting will probably be held in early April before the next regular meeting of the Board.

c. **Items for the Next Agenda**

Mr. Browe said that he would like more information on the selection process for theater performances at the High School.

Dr. Brady said that Mr. Kennedy is an artist; there isn't a formal process. The musical currently being rehearsed is the sixth most produced high school production in the nation. He believes that the concerns now being raised are linked to the tragedy in Newtown. No concerns were brought up early on. Mr. Browe said that it wouldn't hurt to have a committee to consider the selections. Ms. Russo said that she would like to see this topic addressed at the next meeting. Mr. Blake said that the Board could decide if this topic should go to the Policy Committee.

d. **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 p.m. (Mr. DeMaio, 2d Mr. Hurley).

Motion passed; meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Marianne Lippard, recording clerk
Rita Gedansky, secretary

References/Attachments:

Minutes: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 2/25/13
Finance Committee, 2/25/13

Reports: Personnel Report 3/11/13
Amity Regional School District No. 5, Revenues and Expenditures for FY
2012-2013
Amity Regional School District No. 5, Budget Transfers 2012-2013

Memos: John J. Brady to Members of the Amity Finance Committee and Amity
Board of Education (3/1/13) re: Proposed 2013-2014 Budget
John J. Brady to Members of the Board of Education (2/6/13) re: Staff
Reductions and Class Sizes
Jack B. Levine to John J. Brady (2/20/13) re: Healthy Food Certification
Statement for July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014
Jack B. Levine to John J. Brady (2/20/13) re: Budget Transfers of \$3,000
or More