

MINUTES

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

AMITY BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: none.

Staff Members Present: John Brady, Charles Britton, Kathleen Fuller Cutler, Thomas Falcigno, Kevin Keller, Jack Levine, Marianne Lippard, Terry Lumas, Marie McPadden, Rocco Palmieri, Mary Raiola, Jim Saisa

A special meeting of the Amity Regional Board of Education was held on Monday, February 4, 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 6:30 p.m.
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance** was recited by those present.
- 3. Presentation of the Superintendent's Proposed 2013-2014 Budget**
Dr. Brady began his presentation by pointing to a picture representing a school spirit campaign undertaken at Amity that showcased the diverse student body that the District serves. He noted that it is important when considering the budget that everyone remains fully aware of the population served at Amity. In order to continue to meet the needs of the students, it is important to continually strive to enhance the educational experience offered in the District.

Dr. Brady noted that the administration has pursued numerous savings and efficiencies that have saved the District a significant amount of money. Unfortunately, he noted that the District has exhausted most of the non-educational savings that are available. He noted that he will be meeting with the Orange Board of Finance at 1:45 p.m. on Friday, February 8th to discuss the budget again.

The Superintendent announced that Amity High School was rated #4 of 191 high schools in the state and the Amity district was recently rated #5 out of 165 districts in the State, and yet, this year the District is facing state mandates that it hasn't faced. Tonight he will offer details of a preliminary budget with modest enhancements. The administration feels that this is a reasonable budget.

He noted that the return on an investment in education is considerable. Realtors are often asked if properties are in the Amity district. Most recently, Amity sophomores outperformed all others in the DRG (District Reference Group) at the

advanced level of the CAPT (Connecticut Academic Performance Test). AP results had Amity ranked #5 in the State for 2012 and #2 in the DRG despite a 22 percent increase in test participation. He noted that this achievement is worth noting because there were concerns that with more students taking these tests, the scores would go down, but instead Amity saw scores increase.

A look at CMT results shows strong patterns of growth. Dr. Brady noted that in middle schools it is not uncommon to see a dip in the performance on the CMT, but this isn't the case at Amity.

Dr. Brady noted that the District continues to focus on the success of all students. Amity students scored well on the Comprehensive Technical Education Assessment, including #1 in the State in Computer Information Systems and in Video Production.

Over 95 percent of the Class of 2012 took the SAT exam, scoring well above the State average. Twelve students were accepted to Ivy League institutions; 226 were accepted to the Most Selective institutions; and 360 were accepted to Highly Competitive institutions ranked by Barron's College Guide. There is an expectation that Amity graduates will go on to four-year colleges, mostly private, out-of-state colleges.

Dr. Brady added that Amity students also have an impressive list of accomplishments in the arts, including a variety of awards in painting, ceramics, photography, music, and theater. An Amity senior received recognition as Best Female Lead in the State for her performance in Legally Blonde. Unified Theater has also been started at Amity.

In athletics, strong performances were seen in many sports. The Girls' Softball team from 2012 managed to become C.I.A.C. State Champions. Boys' Cross Country, Girls' Swimming & Diving, Boys' Track & Field, Baseball, Boys' Tennis, Boys' Indoor Track and Field, Golf, and others achieved recognition.

Amity was recognized by Connecticut Magazine as one of the most highly efficient school districts in the State. The District has managed to save a substantial amount of money by pursuing energy savings and other avenues to direct money toward educating students. Dr. Brady noted that each year, the administration has been successful in finding areas to cut spending. Dr. Brady noted that Amity's efforts to achieve efficiencies got the attention of Governor Malloy, who recognized the District for converting the High School from fuel oil to natural gas. Air quality is a high priority in the District and United Illuminating even nominated the District for an award.

Dr. Brady said that there are a number of factors are driving the budget. Surpluses have helped in past years, but this year, a significant surplus isn't predicted. A school construction grant is running out. There is a reduction

related to a special education grant. This year, teachers got no salary increase, but next year they are due to get a step increase. Medical and dental insurance is budgeted to increase by approximately \$403,000. Underfunded and unfunded State and Federal mandates will impact the budget by over \$250,000.

The budget includes a request to fund a Varsity Girls' Ice Hockey team at a cost of \$55,543. Amity has been on a cooperative team, but there are now 21 girls who would like to play the sport. According to the by-laws of the Southern Connecticut Conference, any member of a cooperative team (Amity-Cheshire-North Haven Girls' Hockey) that has an individual school representative of 15 or more student athletes must leave the cooperative program and play as a single member school. This would also align the District with Title IX legislation. The District could choose to eliminate Boys' Ice Hockey, but Dr. Brady said that he recommends adding Girls' Ice Hockey.

Other factors affecting the budget include alignment with the Common Core, technology improvements, and adding a digital lab at the High School. Dr. Brady noted that the Facilities Committee supported a number of requests by Facilities Director Jim Saisa. STEM program materials, World Language offerings, increased security guard hours, new courses and Plan testing account for \$97,000 in program enhancements.

Twelve teachers will be trained over the summer on how to weave the Common Core Standards into their teaching approach. Students must be ready for performance-based tests coming in 2015 that are very different than what they are accustomed to. There are special education requirements that must be funded.

New text books are needed that are aligned with the Common Core Standards. The Superintendent noted that the preliminary budget includes replacement computers for aging technology, repairs to dozens of lockers that don't close, and a digital media area for the High School. Program enhancements are planned in robotics and language. New courses in Physics and Engineering and Oceanography are planned. The budget also includes funds that would be used to administer the Plan test. A full-time security guard is also included in the budget.

The preliminary budget calls for an increase of 2.64 percent. Staff reductions of 3.2 faculty positions were included to come to that figure. He noted that the District runs an efficient operation, with per pupil expenditures for education costs only being less than the three towns as well as the State average.

Enrollment is shown on page 28 of the presentation. Dr. Brady noted that, statewide, Boards of Education tend to add to superintendents' requested budgets. A budget summary appears on page 31 of the presentation.

Dr. Brady said that Amity also has eight tuition students and is a relative bargain compared to private schools. The administrator to pupil ratio is the second lowest in the State.

Dr. Brady pointed out that this preliminary budget presentation can be accessed on-line.

Questions:

Mr. Hurley said that many Board members have seen much of this information already and some committees have met previously to discuss some of these budget requests.

Ms. Cohen said that she has concerns about staff reductions as they would affect class sizes.

Mr. Browe questioned what the average class size is.

Dr. Brady said that most classes are currently in the low 20s, but the District can put up to 28 students in a class. Classes can have as few as 11 students. Certain classes have limitations that restrict the number of students, such as culinary studies.

Mr. Stirling asked for more detail on the technology requests. He asked if some of this could be delayed.

Dr. Brady noted that replacement equipment would cost approximately \$185,000. Server virtualization is being put off at this point.

Mr. Stirling questioned whether the administration has a sense of where the ECS grants are going.

Dr. Brady said that the administration does not.

Mr. Stirling said that if the ECS grant decreases, there will be greater financial pressure.

Mr. DeMaio questioned whether this budget will work well for a new superintendent coming into the District.

Dr. Brady said that all administrative staff helped with this process. A new superintendent might look at this differently, but should not encounter any problems with this budget. There is flexibility. As far as the long-range planning study goes, he recommended the Board hold off until the new superintendent is hired. Ms. Raiola works very closely with the elementary schools in planning ahead.

Mr. Blake said that this budget doesn't anticipate an artificial field being approved. He noted that there are funds included for maintenance of the grass field.

Dr. Brady said that even if approved, the field won't be ready for the next fall season.

Mr. Stirling questioned the impact of hiring certified staff to fill retirement vacancies.

Dr. Brady said that there would be negative effects, such as increases in class size.

Mr. Horwitz said that he has concerns about faculty reductions. The quality of the faculty at Amity has allowed the District to excel. Last year's budget was very low compared with inflation. We need to be investing in our faculty and programs.

Mr. Hurley said that he would commend the administration for looking at staffing numbers. This appears to be a very appropriate number. He believes not replacing six retirements might be overdoing it. He feels that the reductions in this budget will not significantly impact education.

Ms. Russo said that she could not determine whether faculty cuts would be appropriate as it isn't clear where the cuts will be made. Once you eliminate a teaching position, it is hard to get back.

Ms. Altman said that she would also like some data on student/faculty ratios. Some AP classes are large.

Dr. Brady said that he will bring more information to the next meeting to examine the impact of these reductions.

Dr. Brady said that there is some evidence that disadvantaged learners benefit when class sizes are smaller. Students can do quite well in classes of 26, 27 and 28 students.

Ms. Altman questioned why the STEM Coordinator position was removed.

Dr. Brady said that there was no guarantee that the person would have the science background that is required. The committee supports complementary evaluators, which will broaden the number of instructional leaders.

A memo dated February 4, 2013 from Dr. Brady to the Amity Finance Committee and Amity Board of Education details revisions made to arrive at the current

budget proposal. Reading Content Leaders were also removed. Dr. Brady said that implementing the Common Core State Standards can be accomplished without these expenditures. A Software Implementation Specialist was also removed. Dr. Brady said that he would support putting the IT position back in the budget.

Ms. Cardozo said that the Software Implementation Specialist position would be very useful.

Dr. Brady said that when developing this budget, it was very concerned with coming up with a budget that would pass. The Orange taxpayers didn't pass a budget with a .47 percent increase.

Mr. Browe questioned why the baseball netting for foul balls was removed.

Dr. Brady said that it was simply a matter of priorities.

Mr. Browe said that there is a facilities improvement needed in the area of Girls' Softball that should be looked at.

Mr. Saisa said that he is aware of the problem that Mr. Browe is referring to and has an idea on how to address this need.

4. Public Comment

No members of the public addressed the Board.

5. Adjourn

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

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed; meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Marianne Lippard, recording clerk

Rita Gedansky, secretary