

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, Thomas Hurley, Tracey Lane Russo, James Stirling

AMITY BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: none

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

Also Present: Les Burns, Thomas Falcigno, Phil Grande, Kevin Houlihan, Jim Leahy, James Zeoli

A special meeting of the Amity Regional Board of Education was held on Monday, February 25, 2013 at 6:30 p.m. in the Media Center of Amity Middle School, Orange Campus.

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. **Approval of Minutes**
 - a. Regular BOE Meeting, January 14, 2013
Motion to approve the minutes as presented (Mr. Hurley, 2d Ms. Cardozo).
Vote in favor unanimous. ***Motion passed.***
 - b. Special BOE Meeting, February 4, 2013
Motion to approve the minutes as presented (Ms. Cohen, 2d Mr. Hurley).
Vote in favor unanimous. ***Motion passed.***
4. **Public Comment**

Les Burns a Woodbridge resident, said that he has been an active supporter of the idea of building an artificial turf field at the High School. He reiterated his support for the new field, noting that he believes it is time to make this field a reality. Amity will have the ability to host various sports tournaments. Many towns in our area have more than one such field. These communities view the money as well spent, as their athletes are less likely to be injured and an artificial field is durable and can withstand continuous use. This is a worthy investment.

Phil Grande of Orange, a former member of the Board, said that the town of Orange needs more time to review the budget. He said that one slide within the

budget presentation compared Amity to other towns. He claimed that it was an inaccurate representation of the information.

Dr. Brady said that the slide that Mr. Grande is referring to is there to truly reflect the information and the source used was the State Department of Education website. It is an “apples to apples” comparison and Amity is spending less than the elementary districts are in the three towns. Amity has excellent outcomes and the elementary districts are seeing good outcomes as well.

Kevin Houlihan, chairman of the Orange Board of Finance, said that he understood that no action was taken earlier this evening when the Amity Finance Committee met to discuss the proposed budget. He has concerns because the economic climate hasn't improved much. The town of Orange is looking at a tax increase of 6 to 9 percent. He asked the Board to consider delaying some program enhancements and additions.

Jim Leahy, vice chairman of the Orange Board of Finance, noted that he has an issue with the per pupil increases, shown on page 40 of the Superintendent's Proposed 2013-2014 Budget. With respect to the artificial turf field, there must be ways to generate revenue to help sell this idea.

5. Student Report

Kathleen Fuller Cutler welcomed everyone to Amity Middle School in Orange and invited them to join her for a tour of the building following the meeting. She introduced Hugh Potter and Katie Grande, who both provided updates on the happenings at the school. Students and staff are participating in a book challenge to read 1,000 books, with incentives to reach the goal. The Connecticut Mastery Tests will begin soon and review of DRP skills is ongoing. This week, the band will be performing at each elementary school. Some event dates have been changed due to the blizzard. Basketball season is officially over at the middle school. On March 14th, parents of sixth graders are invited to learn more about the transition to the middle school. For an upcoming event, the students are seeking the support of anyone who would be willing to shave their head to support cancer.

6. Discussion and Possible Action on 2013-2014 School Calendar

Dr. Brady pointed out that there is one error on the calendar that the Board reviewed. The first day for teachers would be August 29th, not August 28th. He pointed out that this calendar was designed keeping in mind that the town of Orange needs to have a great deal of building upgrade work completed over the summer. School begins after Labor Day.

One of the goals was to ensure that students would be finished with school before the end of June. This calendar reduces the February vacation to just two days off. Five snow days have been built into the calendar. The last day of school would be June 21st. The consensus from the parents was that the school year should not

go on until the last week of June. Bethany expressed interest in extending further into June. Dr. Brady pointed out that if the other school districts decided not to go into the last week of June, Bethany would support that.

Discussion:

Mr. Hurley said that, going forward, it would seem to make sense to make the change to February.

Dr. Brady said that the change made to February is a compromise. It would be hard to do away with February vacation altogether.

Ms. Cardozo noted that the circumstances this year were unusual.

Dr. Brady noted that there is an additional day that can be eliminated if necessary, but that decision could be made in the fall.

Mr. Blake said that it is a challenge to balance the needs of everyone. Families make vacation plans for April and yet there are a large number of parents who want school to end before the last week in June. He questioned whether there was any data to support either April or June.

Dr. Brady said that he didn't hear from anyone who said to keep April vacation and move school days into the last week of June.

*Motion to accept the 2013-2014 school calendar (Mr. Hurley, 2d Ms. Gedansky).
Vote in favor unanimous. **Motion passed.***

**7. Discussion and Possible Action on Bringing Costs Associated with
Installation of an Artificial Turf Field to Referendum**

Mr. Blake said that there is information within the Board packet concerning this. Dr. Brady said that he has nothing further to explain, as this topic has been discussed previously. The many benefits of an artificial turf field have been addressed. There is support for this.

Discussion:

Mr. Stirling noted that the Finance Committee voted to move the referendum forward, but the decision wasn't unanimous.

Move to direct the Superintendent of Schools be authorized to move forward with the artificial turf field project by seeking an updated estimate for such a project and engaging the Board's Investment Advisor and Bond Counsel to prepare the necessary Board resolutions. Such resolutions shall be brought to the Amity Finance Committee for their recommendation and the Amity Board of Education for their approval (Ms. Cardozo, 2d Ms. Crocco).

Dr. Brady said that he doesn't believe the resolutions will be ready for the March meeting. The resolutions would be ready for the April meeting, at the earliest. He recommended the referendum be held in September. The surface couldn't be ready for next fall anyway.

Ms. Russo questioned what would happen to sports that use the field during construction.

Dr. Brady said that football is the only sport that is played on the current field.

Mr. Stirling questioned the cost to taxpayers if the towns don't approve the field.

Dr. Brady said the cost would be \$2,500. Mr. Levine said that he doesn't believe the District would be charged if the voters don't approve the project.

Orange First Selectman Jim Zeoli recommended having voting from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Dr. Brady said that he has been surprised to see less voter participation in the morning.

Mr. Stirling said that he would not vote in favor of this tonight. Although he is aware that there are Board members who feel that this issue should be brought to the voters, this sentiment isn't unanimous. He is concerned because the District had an education budget with less than a one percent increase that did not pass in one of the towns last year. This sent a strong message.

Ms. Russo questioned what the minimum cost of maintaining the current field would be.

Dr. Brady said that the cost is \$13,080, not including the cost of re-sodding, which is an additional \$15,000.

Ms. Russo asked if the referendum could be done this year, with the goal of saving the money of re-sodding.

Dr. Brady said that re-sodding takes place every year.

Vote in favor: Julie Altman, Christopher Browe, Patricia Cardozo, Sue Cohen, Diane Crocco, Steven DeMaio, Rita Gedansky, John A. Grasso, Jr., James Horwitz, Thomas Hurley

Vote opposed: James Stirling

Abstain: Tracey Lane Russo

Motion passed.

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

It was noted that this budget will be discussed in Orange this Wednesday at the Board of Finance meeting. Mr. Stirling noted that the Amity Finance Committee refrained from voting, deciding instead to wait for the meeting in Orange to be held. This will be helpful for achieving a unanimous vote. The Board can vote on March 11th.

Move to delay action on the Superintendent's Proposed 2013-2014 Operating Budget until March 11th (Mr. Hurley, 2d Mr. DeMaio).

Discussion:

Mr. Browe said that the Board should allow time for the meeting in Orange to take place.

Mr. Blake noted that Woodbridge and Bethany are also having meetings, and might like consideration as well.

Ms. Russo said that the Orange taxpayers did not vote in support of the last budget. Dr. Brady will have discussion with the towns.

Ms. Cohen said that the presentations to the towns should take place before the Board makes a decision.

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed.

9. Information on Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (S-BAC) Test Items in Math and English/Language Arts

Dr. Brady said that these assessments are replacing the CMT. Students are not accustomed to these types of assessments.

Dr. McPadden noted this is a whole different way of looking at assessments. The assessments incorporate standards and what the student needs to know. This is a major shift in thinking in the development of assessments. The students are being taught test taking skills that they can apply when using the computer. Reading on a computer screen can be very different. Sometimes the students don't know that they can go back when using a computer.

Dr. Brady noted that ratings for teachers and administrators will be based on how the students are performing. This is not all bad news, because we are confident that Amity students will achieve at the expected levels.

10. Update on Long Range Planning Study

- a. Discussion and Possible Action to Authorize the Administration to Conduct a Study at AMSB to Determine Capacity for Grade Six Programming

Dr. Brady said that the administration has been asked to conduct a study at Amity Middle School in Bethany to determine whether there is sufficient space for sixth grade students to be moved there.

Discussion:

Mr. Blake said that this would be looked at as a change in contractual relationship. This is also a potential source of revenue.

Mr. Hurley said that there would be a benefit to reducing some fixed costs. He would be concerned if the District couldn't define those costs and the other towns had to take on those expenses.

Dr. Brady said that he hasn't heard from the other two towns about this.

Ms. Cardozo questioned the cost in terms of time and money.

Dr. Brady said that if the administration is authorized by the Board to conduct this study, much work will need to be done to complete the study in a timely manner.

Mr. Stirling said that the buildings in Bethany are outgrowing their usefulness. The town of Bethany might be interested in contracting for the space at Amity Middle School. Many voters would like to explore this before voting on new classrooms. Enrollment is decreasing in Bethany and this might be a solution.

Dr. Brady said that in having a middle school with just seventh and eighth graders, Amity is different. Approximately 90 to 95 percent of middle schools include grades six, seven, and eight.

Mr. Browe said that some parents would have concerns about having their children moved in sixth grade. This would be different if Amity were to make the change with all sixth graders in the District.

Mr. Blake said that the concerns raised by Mr. Browe would have to be addressed by the Bethany board. Similar concerns were raised about moving ninth graders to the High School and that transition went well.

Ms. Altman said that moving just the Bethany sixth graders would set the stage for possible bullying. Moving up all sixth graders would be different.

Dr. Brady said that the Bethany Board of Education doesn't appear to be backing this as a solution to their space needs.

Ms. Russo said that this doesn't seem like a permanent solution, but it would be good to determine what the per-pupil cost would be and how it would work. This information would be helpful to Bethany.

Mr. Hurley said that this study would be worthwhile and could be helpful to Bethany.

Ms. Cohen said that Bethany could hire a consultant to assist.

Dr. Brady said that the administration needs to define exactly what to study. The administration needs direction from this Board as to whether to explore this.

Mr. Blake said that it sounds as though Amity resources would only be used for a meeting to define the scope of the work.

Mr. Browe said that he isn't against helping other towns and having a meeting to define the scope of the work. He doesn't see that Amity has the manpower for more than that, as there is much work to do with the Common Core. Mr. Hurley's idea to seek tuition students was negatively received. Everyone is seeing this as a revenue source.

Dr. Brady said that there is a big difference between the full per pupil cost and the \$3,500 cost for an open choice student.

Motion to authorize Dr. Brady to conduct a study at AMSB to determine capacity for grade six programming and report his findings back to the Board (Ms. Russo, 2d Mr. DeMaio).

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed.

Dr. Brady said that he will having a meeting to clearly determine what Bethany wants and he will report his findings in March.

11. Announcements from the Board and Administration

There were no announcements.

12. Correspondence

No correspondence was discussed.

13. Superintendent's Report

a. Personnel Report

There was no discussion.

14. Chairman's Report

a. Committee Reports

1. ACES – There was no report.
2. CABB – There was no report.
3. Curriculum – There was no report.
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 was no discussion.

c. Update on Financial Operations

1. Information on Fourth Quarter 2012 Executive Summary Review of Amity Pension Fund, Sick and Severance Account, and OPEB Trust

It was noted that the report showed that the District did well for the Fourth Quarter.

Discussion:

Mr. Hurley asked Mr. Stirling to explain the self-funded insurance.

It was noted that claims were relatively low. This next year will include the full 12 months and money was prudently put into the budget. Mr. Stirling said that it is hoped that with careful planning large claims can be absorbed.

Mr. Hurley questioned how the District can be protected from large claims.

Mr. Stirling said that stop loss insurance was purchased to deal with catastrophic claims.

Dr. Brady said that the District's insurance consultant discussed the amount budgeted for next year and went into detail about this. We are comfortable with the numbers.

6. Policy – Mr. Hurley noted that there was a complaint from a parent. A student lost credit for a ceramics class. The problem was that the student handbook indicated the loss of credit rule regarding absences was pending Board approval. A handful of other students were affected and credit was restored.
7. Personnel – There was no meeting.

15. Items for the Next Agenda

Ms. Russo said that she would like to bring back the Principal Reports.

16. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:29 p.m. (Mr. Hurley, 2d Ms. Gedansky).

Motion passed; meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Marianne Lippard, recording clerk
Rita Gedansky, secretary

References/Attachments:

Minutes:

Finance Committee, 1/14/13
Board of Education Regular Meeting, 1/14/13
Board of Education Special Meeting, 2/4/13

Reports:

Amity Regional School District No. 5 Year-to-Date Budget Report
(2/5/13)
Amity Regional School District No. 5 Budget Transfers 2012-2013

Memos:

John J. Brady to Amity Finance Committee and Amity Board of Education
(2/1/13) re: Artificial Turf Field
John J. Brady to Board of Education (2/6/13) re: Staff Reductions and
Class Size

Misc.:

2013-2014 School Calendar, Version 2
Smarter Balanced Worksheets
FIA 4th Annual Client Conference Information