

AMITY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 5
Bethany Orange Woodbridge
25 Newton Road, Woodbridge, Connecticut 06525

Dr. Jennifer P. Byars
Superintendent of Schools

AMITY REGIONAL BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING AGENDA
Monday, September 11, 2023, 6:30 pm
25 Newton Road, Woodbridge, CT

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Paul Davis, Carla Eichler, Sean Hartshorn, Andrea Hubbard, Christina Levere-D'Addio, Dr. Carol Oladele, Patrick Reed, Dr. K. Sudhir, Amy Tirollo and Dr. Jennifer Turner, Donna Schuster
*arrived at 6:40 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Christopher Browe, Shannan Carlson

STUDENT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Samuel Bae and Sophia Messina

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT

Dr. Jennifer Byars, Theresa Lumas, Frank Purcaro, Thomas Brant, Stephen Martoni

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Davis called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Regular Meeting – August 21, 2023

MOTION BY Patrick Reed, SECOND BY Sean Hartshorn approve minutes as submitted for the August 21, 2023 Board of Education Regular Meeting.

VOTES IN FAVOR, 8 (Davis, Eichler, Hartshorn, Hubbard, Levere-D'Addio, Oladele, Reed, Turner)

ABSTAIN, 2 (Sudhir, Tirollo)

MOTION CARRIES

4. 3 A's (Academics, Arts, Athletics) AND POG (Portrait of the Graduate) FOCUS PRESENTATION

a. Link Crew

5. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON SPECIAL REQUEST FROM SOUTHERN

CONNECTICUT HEBREW ACADEMY, Rabbi Hecht, Headmaster

Presentation by Rabbi Hecht, headmaster from SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT HEBREW ACADEMY regarding the possible sale of Amity Region 5 land to the SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT HEBREW ACADEMY to accommodate their growing enrollment.

MOTION BY Donna Schuster, SECOND BY Christina Levere-D'Addio to move forward with the surveying of Amity land, at the cost of SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT HEBREW ACADEMY. Motion amended to include the language: Contingent upon providing certificates of insurance by the surveyor to the school for the property in question.

VOTES IN FAVOR, 11 (UNANIMOUS)

MOTION CARRIES

6. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF SECOND QUARTER 2023 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REVIEW OF AMITY PENSION FUND, SICK AND SEVERANCE ACCOUNT, AND OPEB

Presented by Christopher Kachmar from Fiducient Advisors

7. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON UPDATES TO THE OPEB INVESTMENT POLICY

Due to no changes being made, no action is necessary.

8. STUDENT REPORT

a. Monthly Report

High School report presented by Senior Samuel Bae and middle school report presented by Junior Sophia Messina

9. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Davis comments correspondence from the AEA President expressing concern over the use of specific teacher names during public comment during the August 2023 BOE meeting. Chairperson Davis urges the public to avoid the use of names as it is a privacy issue.

The Chair observed that a number of issues brought up during public comment were topics the Board learned about for the first time during public comment. He advises that the Board is working on the issues but that they will take time to fully resolve.

The Chair noted that the election is coming up for local positions including Amity BOE on November 13, 2023. Some of the candidates running would be new to the BOE, as such and by Policy, the Superintendent reaches out to invite those candidates to attend to the BOE meetings. This will allow those candidates an opportunity to experience the format of a BOE meeting.

Orange parent: Here to reinforce, reinform, and repeat strongest support for the DEI program at ARSD5. Draws attention to the two signs he brought with him. The first poster reads "Say DEI in Italian". The second poster reveals that DEI in Italian translates to "awareness". Speaker urges awareness for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Orange Parent: States she is here this evening to make two reasonable requests. Those requests are to know asap the dates and topics of 2023-2024 Spartan Seminars and any surveys and/or questionnaires that will be distributed to students. Speaker continues to note that she makes these requests so they she may know what her children are being asked to reveal to non-family members and what her children may be exposed to. She asks so that she may notify the appropriate powers that be that her children will be opting out. Speakers concludes by asking what the follow up has been to the promise to provide board representatives, to report to the public, in Spartan Seminar and other school gatherings.

Woodbridge parent: Poses a series of questions to the board regarding E hall pass. What if a student does not have a phone? What restrictions does the app have and how does it work on their personal device? What about laptop use for E hall pass? Speaker questions the decision to switch to Schoology from Google classroom. Speaker points out that Beecher Road still uses Google classroom. Speaker questions if there was a survey to gauge public opinion on the change to Google classroom. Speaker voices his opinion that academics need to be the primary focus of the district. Speaker voices his opinion that phones are an issue for students and questions what is being done to monitor the use of phones in the classroom.

Woodbridge parent: Speaker addressed Amity's Rankings falling from 28 to 39. Speaker asserts he still believes Amity is a great high school with excellent teaching staff. Speaker does think it's a fair question to ask, what's going on? Dismisses Covid as the answer because Covid affected the entire state. Speaker suggests you must look at what has recently changed at Amity high school to find the answer. Speaker suggests curriculum focus on DEI, ethnic studies, and school surveys has moved the focus away from academics. Speaker suggests, maybe it is time to consider if these changes are actually helping the AR5 district.

Woodbridge Resident: Speaker states her belief that the BOE and Superintendent have fallen short of their responsibilities to the taxpayers over the last year. Speaker lists examples including POG, DEI, sexual education, and ethnic studies. The Chair addressed the speaker several times once she passed her time limit.

Woodbridge resident: A representative speaker and members of the Woodbridge DEI ADHOC committee speak in favor of the DEI work the BOE has initiated including: Safety and Belonging, Curriculum Inclusiveness and Cultivating relationships. Dissects the US Ranking as not fully reflecting the accomplishments of the ARSD nor our students. Applauds the Amity BOE's commitment to these principles.

Woodbridge resident: Speaker asks a series of questions: How do you evaluate staff performance? Are there any plans to improve our ranking? If so, what is the plan? What is the deadline for this plan? Do we have a goal to move our ranking up? Is our goal top 20, top 10, top 1? What's the goal? What's the deadline? How can we include the public in this process? How can we harness the public resources available in the community? The Chair addressed the speaker once he passed his time limit.

Orange parent: purposely moved to Orange seeking a town with at least 10% Asian population because her son is Chinese and representation matters. Speaker states that many families that are looking to move are looking for diversity. Speaker states that news articles state that school districts that are fighting against DEI do not look good to prospective home buyers. Speaker goes on to suggest that fighting over DEI is going to drive down property values. School ranking plays a significant role in home buyers' decision to move to towns. Speaker goes on to state that mental health should be a priority. Lifelong learners and skills are necessary to prepare students for an ever-changing job market. We need POG to help guide our students and teachers. Speaker concludes by suggesting that DEI is not the problem, in fact, it is the thing that is keeping us relevant. The whole world including Fortune 500 companies are including DEI in their business models.

Orange resident: Speaker references a team building activity that was demonstrated at the beginning of the meeting. He suggests that there are so many ways to approach a problem. He suggests the community was throwing balloons, solutions, in the air and the BOE had pins in their hands popping them at every chance. Speaker references the budget votes and the surplus in each town. Speaker urges the BOE to have some self-introspective and to look back at decisions, acknowledge that they were wrong, and do better. Speaker moves on to address E-hall pass, questions why are having a demonstration a month after its being used, and use of E-Hall pass and vape sensors are turning ARSD into a "Nanny state".

Orange parent: Speaker raises several questions in regard to E hall pass. Speaker asks how E hall pass works with specific attention to the download of a third-party app and what level of access does the app have on a personal device. What if a student does not have a phone? What monies, if any, does the school receive per download of the app? What assurances does the district make that the software is secure and cannot be hacked by a third party? What assurance does the district make that the software is not active at other times of the day? Does the data collected follow them to college on transcripts? Is the data shared for analytics? Speaker concludes by stating that parents have a right to protect their children's right to privacy.

Orange parent: Kudos to the students here who are exceptional representatives of ARSD. Speaker states that they are here tonight to show their support to the board, faculty, teachers. Speaker states that he believes the data will ultimately show that the work Amity is doing is in the right direction. Thanks everyone for taking the time to come out and speak. Tells a story of President Lincoln and relates the story to how we can all have civil discord even amongst disagreements.

Orange parent: Speaker addresses ranking of ARSD dropping 11 spots in 1 year. Speaker provides a timeline of Amity's dropping ranking and urges the board to do better. Speaker hopes that come November things will change.

Orange parent: Speaker urges the BOE to consider the removal of all DEI and CRT indoctrination from curriculum. Speaker requests that the correspondence be read at the BOE meetings with some form of response being offered by the BOE. Speaker urges transparency and offers appreciation for the minutes being posted online for public review. Speaker urges the BOE to answer the question, what is the definition of right and wrong. Speaker concludes by asking the BOE, why did you run for a seat if you did not have the children's very best interest in mind?

Woodbridge parent: Speaker suggests that the backlash against DEI in the Amity community is due to the fact that it focuses on a variety of minority groups versus what would be deemed the majority of Amity residents. Speaker urges the BOE to not be fearmongered by the hysteria of the majority that is afraid of losing their perceived power and control.

Amity Student: Describes their hobbies and announces that they are transgender. Suggests that members of the audience might view them differently now after announcing that they are transgender. Student addresses the work of "NO PLACE FOR HATE" at Amity and suggest that Amity is indeed a Place for Hate. Student announces that they have suffered a mental health crisis as a result of the hate they have faced at Amity.

Woodbridge Resident: Speaker announces that, "for the record I'm very much against DEI". Speaker suggests that all members of the community want the same thing. The problem/question is, how we do it? Speaker states that they are against the "Erase the Face" identity. Speaker goes on to explain that she is opposed to DEI because it creates boxes that minorities are placed in unfairly. Speaker reiterates that those who are against DEI and those who are in favor of DEI actually want the same thing but have different approaches. Speaker goes on to explain that she is an immigrant who is grateful for the opportunity America offers and explains her fears that DEI creates a negative narrative for the very groups it aims to protect.

Woodbridge parent: Speaker addresses Swipe versus E hall pass, Schoology versus Google classroom, the disruption to Gmail usage. Speaker is concerned about the level of disruption, to the learning experience, this graduating class has been through. Speaker goes on to address the \$100 senior parking fee that she believes is far too great of a burden on a student.

Orange parent: Would like to encourage the board to avoid teaching to the test. Speaker urges learning should be about art, compassion and interdisciplinary style of education. Speaker urges when thinking about DEI think about the rock-hard science that a comfortable learning environment is good learning environment. That's what DEI is about. Urges the BOE to put out literature about why we believe in DEI and what it does. Give the community an opportunity to be educated on DEI and perhaps in a year's time change their opinions on the work being done at Amity.

10. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

a. Personnel Report

b. Superintendent Report

11. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON AMENDING LOCATION OF PUBLISHED 2023 BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETINGS

MOTION BY Patrick Reed, SECOND BY Sean Hartshorn to amend the location of published 2023 Board of Education Meetings.

VOTES IN FAVOR, 11 (UNANIMOUS)

MOTION CARRIES

12. CORRESPONDENCE – Report provided by Board Secretary Mr. Hartshorn

13. CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

a. Committee Reports

- 1. ACES
- 2. CABB
- 3. Communications
- 4. Curriculum
- 5. District Health and Safety
- 6. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Executive Committee
- 7. District Technology
 - a. Monthly Report
- 8. Facilities
 - a. Monthly Report
- 9. Finance
 - a. Discussion of Monthly Financial Statements
 - i. Special Education Update
 - b. Director of Finance and Administration Approved Transfers Under \$3,000
 - c. Discussion and Possible Action on Budget Transfers over \$3,000 and Change Orders

MOTION by Dr. Turner, SECOND by Dr. Sudhir to approve the following budget transfers:

To cover the cost of updating the District’s Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure (SPCC) Plan.

ACCOUNT NUMBER	ACCOUNT NAME	FROM	TO
03-14-2600-5420	Repair & Maintenance	\$4,250	
05-14-2600-5330	Professional & Technical Svcs		\$4,250

PLEASE POST

PLEASE POST

To cover outplaced tuition costs until the end of the school year in which a student turns 22.

ACCOUNT NUMBER	ACCOUNT NAME	FROM	TO
04-12-6110-5560	Tuition – Public Out	\$45,321	
04-12-6130-5560	Tuition – Private Out		\$45,321

VOTES IN FAVOR, 11 (UNANIMOUS)

MOTION CARRIES

MOTION by Andrea Hubbard, SECOND by Patrick Reed to approve \$2,121 transfer for two change orders for the lecture hall project. These change orders cover the cost of reframing speaker boxes and Saturday installation of the lecture hall chairs.

ACCOUNT NUMBER	ACCOUNT NAME	FROM	TO
00-15-0099-5899	Undesignated	\$2,121	
00-15-0055-5715	Improvement to Bldgs-Lecture Hall		\$2,121

MOTION by Andrea Hubbard, SECOND by Patrick Reed to expand the lighting funds designation to include outdoor lights at all three schools.

VOTES IN FAVOR, 11 (UNANIMOUS)

MOTION CARRIES

- d. Other
 - i. Audit Progress

MOTION by Sean Hartshorn SECOND by Christina Levere-D’Addio to enter executive session and to invite Dr. Byars. For item 10 Ms. Lumas and Mr. Purcaro are invited.

VOTES IN FAVOR, 11 (UNANIMOUS)

Board enters executive session at 8:57 p.m.

- 10. Personnel - Question and Answer session on contract negotiation processes (Executive Session)
- 14. DISCUSSION ON BOE SELF-EVALUATION AND SETTING 2023-2024 ACTION STEPS (Executive Session)

Board exits executive session at 10:10 p.m.

- 15. POSSIBLE ACTION ON BOE SELF-EVALUATION AND 2023-2024 ACTION STEPS
MOTION BY Carla Eichler, SECOND BY Dr. Turner to approve 2023-2024 Action steps.

PLEASE POST

PLEASE POST

VOTE IN FAVOR, 7 (Eichler, Tirollo, Reed, Davis, Hubbard, Dr. Sudhir, Dr. Turner)

VOTES OPPOSED, 0

ABSTAIN, 4 (Hartshorn, Dr. Oladele, Schuster, Levere-D'Addio)

MOTION CARRIES

16. NEW BUSINESS

- a. New Board Member Orientation – November 20, 2023, 6:30 p.m.

17. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA – Due to Chairperson by September 30, 2023

18. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned, without objection, at 10:26 p.m. by Chairman Davis.