

Amity Board of Education News

By Paul Davis, Amity BOE Chair
Chair's Report

Budget and Finance

At the February 12th meeting, the Amity Board of Education reviewed the Superintendent's Proposed Budget for 2024-2025. Per the Board's bylaw, the presentation included a review of the academic and extracurricular accomplishments from the past and current school year, and the anticipated financial needs of the district regarding facilities and the academic, athletics, and arts programs. Rooted in the BOWA Portrait of the Graduate, the proposed 2024-2025 budget is 4.58% higher than the current fiscal year budget. The increase is driven primarily by contractual obligations, which increased by 4.10%, health care costs, special education, and unfunded state mandates. The Superintendent's proposed budget includes additional staff to meet new state-mandated graduation requirements in Personal Finance and special education post-secondary transition services. The budget also adds two mathematics interventionists at the middle and high school level to support those students performing below grade level expectations in math. The proposed budget also includes long-term, 5-year financial plans to address needs in facilities, textbook acquisition, and technology maintenance. The current proposal is below both state and DRG (District Reference Group) B averages.

At that same meeting, the Board received the audit report from the 2022-2023 school year. The Board unanimously voted to credit the unexpended funds from last fiscal year to the current school year thereby reducing the District Towns' required allotment by a total of \$1,420,396.00. Applying these funds to offset the increase in the Amity budget is at the discretion of the Town Finance Committees. A special joint meeting of the Amity Finance Committee and the Board of Education will be held on February 26, 2024 to discuss the budget with a final approval vote by the Board scheduled for the March 11, 2024 regular meeting. The Board of Education will hold a Public District Budget Hearing on April 8, 2024 and a Referendum will be scheduled for May 7, 2024. Detailed budget information is available on the District website www.amityregion5.org/boe/budget.

Board Policy Updates

The February 12th Board meeting featured public comments about several of the Board's policies. Board of Education Policy 5131 – Student Conduct and Discipline was comprehensively reviewed and updated in March 2023. The policy outlines student conduct infractions and the purpose of progressive discipline. The Board's policy on On-Campus Recruitment (Policy 5145.14) was also a topic of public comment. This policy requires the Board to provide the same directory information and on-campus recruiting opportunities to representatives of the U.S. and CT armed forces as are offered to nonmilitary recruiters. Parents can opt their child(ren) out of sharing directory information with recruiters annually as part of the returning registration process.

The Board of Education unanimously approved two policy revisions at its February meeting. The policies on Suicide Prevention and Response and Memorials for Deceased Students/Staff were both updated to align with best practice recommendations from the National Association of School Psychologists and the Connecticut Center for School Safety and Crisis Preparation. The suicide prevention and response regulation was also updated.

Elected Officials Day

Amity hosted its second Elected Officials' Day on January 26, 2024 and February 2, 2024. Both days started with a tour of the middle schools, followed by a bus ride to the high school and a tour of ARHS. Student leaders were integral to both visits and guests were able to see collaborative workspaces, innovative programs, and areas we are looking to renovate. A Question-and-Answer session with District leadership was held over a lunch prepared by ARHS Advance Culinary students before returning to the middle schools. Nineteen elected officials from our Boards of Selectmen, Boards of Finance, Elementary Boards of Education, and State Legislature attended, along with the Superintendents of our three elementary districts.

Revised Middle School English Curriculum

The Board of Education adopted a fully revised English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum for grades 7 and 8 at its February meeting. The curriculum is rooted in the mandated Connecticut Core Standards for ELA and uses Reader's Workshop as the instructional model to teach those standards to students. Reader's Workshop helps students develop essential reading skills such as comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and critical thinking while at the same time provides opportunities for individualized instruction based on students' interests, abilities, and reading levels. Writing skills and basic grammar are woven through each reading unit. The curriculum development and professional learning in Reader's Workshop was started in 2020.

Amity Educators Secure State Mini Grants

The CSDE (Connecticut State Department of Education) launched the Connecticut Educator Support Funds Initiative: Helping our Teachers with Classroom Expenses which will allocate ARP ESSER funds to help Pre-K through grade 12 public school educators get up to \$1,000 for classroom initiative resources through DonorsChoose. Three Amity teachers have been awarded grants thus far through this program.

ARHS Course Selection for 2024-2025

The 2024-2025 Program of Studies has been fully updated and added to the school website. This document is full of helpful information on the courses we offer, graduation requirements, how to plan out a schedule for next year, and other helpful pointers for success in high school. The February 7, 2024, Spartan Seminar activity focused on course selection for students in grades 9-11. Students reviewed teacher recommendations and made initial selections for next year's classes. School counselors will be following up with students over the next month to make sure that everyone's course requests meet all of the graduation requirements and are setting students up for success in their classes next year as well as their college and career aspirations.

Amity Art Exhibition

The annual Bethany Exhibition was installed on February 2, 2024. This exhibition highlights works from our 7-12 graders in all different media. The reception is March 5, 2024 from 3:30-5:30pm, all are welcome. The exhibition will close on April 4, 2024.