

Amity Board of Education News - September

By Paul Davis, Amity BOE Chair

Opening of the 2023-2024 School Year

The Amity Regional School District welcomed our students on August 28, 2023. The opening days in all three schools included the distribution of students' 1:1 devices, Spartan Seminar and Middle School Advisory ice breakers and team-building activities, and presentations on the BOWA Portrait of the Graduate. The bell schedules for those opening days allowed students to meet with all their classes before transitioning to our regular rotating and drop bell schedules. At ARHS, class meetings focused on the student-selected theme for the year of "Work Hard, Help Others." At the middle schools, class meetings talked about the art, academic, and athletic opportunities at Amity and encouraged students to make the most of their middle school experience.

School-year staff returned to our schools on August 22, 2023. The first two days of professional learning included workshops on Schoology in preparation for the full district-wide rollout this year as well as a Portrait of the Graduate (POG) activity that had teachers experience and reflect on the POG Learning Progressions. Teachers also engaged in training that included a review of the district's teacher evaluation plan, a review of the crisis and all hazards plan, and a variety of wellness activities. Convocation was held on August 24th and featured Suzanne Dailey, instructional coach in the Central Bucks School District, author of the book, *Teach Happier this School Year: 40 Weeks of Inspiration & Reflection*, and host of the *Teach Happier* weekly podcast. She joined the staff for an uplifting and informative keynote address that covered her ten most recommended strategies for being effective and present in the classroom while living a more fulfilled and well-balanced life.

The 9th grade Link Crew orientation program and cookout took place on August 25, 2023. Approximately 95% of the incoming 9th grade class attended the event, which was hosted by four faculty Link Crew advisors, 75 students who volunteered to serve as Link Crew leaders, several additional members of the faculty and staff who volunteered to run the cookout, and the financial support of the PTSO helped to make the cookout possible. The Link Crew faculty advisors hosted an evening program for the parents of incoming 9th graders on August 22, 2023 that was attended by a group of enthusiastic parents. The Board of Education received a presentation and activity from Link Crew advisors and leaders as part of our first 3 A's and POG Presentation during the September board meeting.

Facilities Improvements

Schools are not unlike our own homes and improvement to our buildings, grounds, and facilities is an on-going process. Unlike our elementary districts – in which the towns are responsible for the maintenance of the grounds and buildings – our regional school district and Board of Education assumes fully responsibility for the upkeep of our facilities. The summer is time to accomplish many of the needed repairs and updates. This summer was no exception and the following facilities improvements were made: resurfacing of the gym roofs at both middle schools including a new wall panel system to prevent future leaks and damage to the gym floors; renovation of the high school lecture hall into a modern presentation facility and board meeting room; repair of the front patio and sidewalks at the high school; repair of the back entrance at the high school; renovation of the modular classroom at the Bethany middle school to serve as the new district technology office; and installation of a new greenhouse at Amity Middle School Bethany bringing gardening clubs to both middle schools.

High School Library Media Center Renovations

In August, both the Amity Finance Committee and the Board of Education meeting voted to designate 2% of the unexpended funds from the 2022-2023 school year to the capital non-recurring account and to specifically designate those funds to the renovation of the Library Media Center at Amity Regional High School. The library media center has not been renovated since 1996. In 27 years, much has changed about the ways in which library media centers are used for study, research, and demonstrations of student learning and knowledge. The renovation would bring the school's hub of learning up to modern standards and provide students with an environment more similar to what they will be required to use in post-secondary institutions. The renovation of the library media center meets the criteria to apply for a percentage reimbursement of the cost of the project via the state's School Construction Grant program. Work on this major renovation started this month and we ambitiously anticipate completion of the project in the 2025-2026 school year.

Portrait of the Graduate

A Portrait of the Graduate outlines the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that students across all grade levels should have and reflect what our community values for our graduates. The Amity Regional School District is not unique in having a Portrait of the Graduate; of 26 comparable DRG (District Reference Group) schools; 20 have an articulated Portrait or Vision of a Graduate. The characteristics and dispositions identified in the Portrait of the Graduate do not replace rigorous academic content. Rather, the characteristics and dispositions work in tandem with high academic standards, transcending and connecting independent content areas.

The development of a BOWA Portrait of the Graduate addressed several of the recommendations from the 2019 New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Accreditation visit and subsequent report for Amity Regional High School. In developing the POG, it was critical that the Portrait of the Graduate reflect not just the Amity school district values, but the values of our three towns, including elementary parents and local employers, as well as representative from local post-secondary education institutions. To that end, surveys seeking input on the characteristics and attributes most critical for the post-secondary success of our graduates were administered to the following community groups: Amity Regional School District Teachers; Elementary Teachers (Bethany-Orange-Woodbridge); Parents (Grades preK-12); High School Students; Middle School Students; Local Business Leaders; and Post-Secondary Leaders (CT Colleges). Approximately 14,000 responses were provided.

A Portrait of the Graduate Committee was established in 2020-2021 to review the survey data. This Portrait of the Graduate (POG) Committee included teachers and administrators from all four school districts (Bethany, Orange, Woodbridge, and Amity), parents representing all three towns and all three school levels, community career and college representatives, and a member of the Amity Board of Education. A draft Portrait of the Graduate was completed in summer 2021 and throughout the 2021-2022 school year, feedback on the draft was solicited from teachers (elementary, middle, and high school), students, and parents. This feedback generated further revision resulting in the final BOWA Portrait of the Graduate. The BOWA POG identified 5 key characteristics for our graduates: Collaborator, Communicator, Empathizer; Planner; and Problem Solver. On August 15, 2022, the Amity Board of Education formally adopted the BOWA Portrait of the Graduate. During the 2022-2023 school year, a Learning Progressions Committee further defined and clarified how students might demonstrate

proficiency in these characteristics. This year, the district will be developing the manner in which students will demonstrate their proficiency on the POG in order to earn a mastery-based diploma credit.

Schoology

When the pandemic began in March 2020, the Amity Regional School District quickly transitioned to a full 1:1 device learning environment. This transition was at a pace much faster than our original Instructional Technology Plan. At that time, we implemented Google Classroom. While very easy to use, Google Classroom is not a true learning management platform. Lacking essential integration with other programs and having no true parent portal to access students' classes and assignments, we always anticipated a change.

In 2022-2023, Amity began its transition to Schoology – a proper learning management platform. While similar to Google Classroom, but with the ability to integrate with PowerSchool, Schoology better supports the complexity of secondary instruction and serves as a bridge to the learning management systems used by colleges and universities. Approximately 40 teachers throughout the district were initial implementors of Schoology. These early adopters received training throughout the past school year; worked with technology to improve integration; and developed both the plan and the supports to train their colleagues. Under these 40 initial implementors, approximately 1300 of our 2300 students had at least one class on the Schoology platform last year. In spring and summer 2023, all teachers received initial training in Schoology and the entire district has moved to the Schoology platform to start the 2023-2024 school year. Students have been provided with direct instruction on how to use Schoology and resources for parents were available at Back-to-School Nights. Parents who still need assistance in accessing their parent portals can contact their school's IT staff.