

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



May 9, 2022

Dear Amity Community:

With the failure of the 2022-2023 Amity Regional School District Budget to pass referendum, this is opportunity to address some of the most common concerns, misunderstandings, and questions that have been received in the last month. While not every individual issue might be addressed, by responding to the most common topics, clarification may be provided around many of the concerns that have been expressed about the proposed budget.

This letter to the community is the third sent between now and when the next date of referendum is set. The purpose of this letter is to address the reasons for the increases in staffing despite declining enrollments in the district.

Staffing increases are often presented and portrayed in general terms – such as “Amity added 3 full-time positions last year.” However, presenting staffing in such a simplistic way does not explain when or why staffing increases occur. Staffing increases – particularly under declining enrollment – can be better understood if the type and purpose of the staffing changes are considered. In the simplest of terms, we can consider staffing in 3 areas:

- Regular Education Staff – these are teachers who teach all students in content areas – such as math teachers, English teachers, science teachers, art teachers, social studies teachers, music teachers, etc. This also includes all principals and administrators who need to be certified to work in the district.
- Special Education Staff – these are the teachers, paraeducators, and administrators who work with students with identified disabilities. Mandated by law, all public schools must provide a free and appropriate education to all students with identified disabilities and special education staff meet those requirements.
- Non-Instructional Staff – these are members of the school community who do not teach our students but who are necessary to keep the operation of the school running. These positions include secretaries, custodians, nurses, security personnel, and instructional technology (IT).

If you look over the past 5 years (table below), you can see that changes in staffing have mostly been in 2 areas – special education and non-instructional staff.

Category	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23 proposed	Category total
Regular Ed Staff	0.1			-1.0	3.0	2.1
Special Ed Staff	1.0	2.9	1.0	1.0	2.0	7.9
Non-Instructional Staff		3.8	1.0	-1.0	2.2	6.0
Yearly Total	1.1	6.7	2.0	-1.0	7.2	16.0

To understand why there have been staffing increases in these areas, please consider the following changes that have been implemented in our schools in the recent years.

In 2019-2020, Amity installed “sally ports” in all three schools. These security vestibules contain visitors to our schools in a secure area through a double locked door system. They allow school buildings to be locked throughout the day and give security staff an opportunity to check identification prior to entry. In order to staff the security vestibule, additional security guards were added at each middle school – allowing one guard to be actively moving throughout the building while the other works the sally port. No additional staff was added at the high school.

At the start of the 2019-2020 school year, the district was in its 3rd year of a slow phase in of moving to 1:1 computers for students. At the start of that school year, we added one additional computer technician to assist in the management and maintenance of approximately 1,000 additional devices in the district. When school abruptly closed in March 2020, the district rapidly doubled the number of devices – allowing for the remote and hybrid learning that was required in 2020-2021 and significantly pushing up the timeline for a fully implementation of 1:1 computers for our students.

In summary – the increases in non-instructional staff have been primarily in school security and technology and in the 2022-2023 budget, there is a request for an additional computer technician to address cybersecurity, as well as management of the additional devices that were added last school year. There is also a request for an additional school security guard at the high school to bring the number of guards actively moving through the building back to the level we had prior to the installation of the security vestibules. This will allow for increased monitoring of restrooms, side entrances, and hallways.

The other area of increased staffing is in special education. The degree to which a disability impacts a student varies greatly, however, those students with the greatest impact often need the most special education services. These services include, but are not limited to, specialized instruction, speech and language therapies, physical and occupational therapy, job coaching, assistive technologies, special transportation, and transition support when leaving the Amity school system.

Often, school districts do not have all the supports that a child with profound disabilities needs, and the district has to pay to send the student to another school or district. These “out-of-district” placements, while meeting the needs of the student, are often expensive and take the student away from the community of their peers.

Over the years, Amity has been developing appropriate, specialized programs to meet the needs of our most disabled students within our school buildings and community. These specialized programs provide for students with cognitive disabilities, autism, emotional disabilities, and fragile medical conditions. These programs keep Amity students here – in Amity – and cost less than sending the students to an out of district placement. In 2018-2019, we added the Amity Transition Academy for our students ages 19-22 (we are legally required to educate students up to their 22nd birthday), in 2021-2022 we added the middle school Spartan Prep program, and in 2022-2023, we hope to expand Spartan Prep to the high school. These additional programs do add staff to the budget. However, despite the additional cost of the staff, the Amity programs still cost less than out of district placements. We estimate that the specialized Amity programs save approximately \$1.4 million annually in tuition and transportation that would be paid for out of district placements if these programs did not exist.