

25 February 2025

Chairman Lombardi,

I attended the talk you delivered at my high school in November, a session during which questions on national politics were raised. The response you provided during that session was, without doubt, among the most thoughtful and well-considered answers encountered. The emphasis on local governance as a means to lower taxes and address practical concerns rather than engaging in divisive national or identity politics was particularly impressive. It is precisely this focus on pragmatic, citizen-centered policies that makes the recent actions so disappointing.

The letter signed by the Orange Republican Town Committee calling on the Amity School District to conform to a revoked national executive order stands in stark contrast to that message. A federal judge has ruled that the referenced executive order was unconstitutional in its vagueness and its invitation to discrimination. Such a ruling calls into question the foundation of the letter's demands and suggests that adhering to the order would undermine the very principles of constitutional governance that were so clearly articulated during your talk. Moreover, the argument that local education must be reformed to achieve "equality" by treating every student identically raises serious concerns. A truly equal approach would require eliminating tailored programs such as the SAILS initiative, Spartan Academy, and other accelerated learning opportunities that address the diverse needs of students. For instance, SAILS provides a science-based curriculum designed to foster independence and essential life skills for students on the autism spectrum. Similarly, Spartan Academy offers an alternative educational setting that supports those needing individualized help in specific subjects. Abolishing these programs in the name of uniformity would leave many students without the support they require and would neglect the exceptional potential of those who thrive under more challenging academic circumstances.

DEI is often misrepresented as a mechanism for preferential treatment, when in reality, it is a framework designed to ensure that every student has the resources they need to succeed. Diversity refers to recognizing and valuing differences in backgrounds, learning styles, and lived experiences. Equity ensures that students receive the specific resources and opportunities

necessary for them to thrive, not treating every student as though they have the same needs, but instead recognizing and addressing individual challenges. Inclusion ensures that every student feels a sense of belonging, creating an environment where academic and personal success are achievable for all. When implemented effectively, DEI initiatives do not lower academic standards or enforce ideological conformity. Instead, they create stronger school communities by ensuring that students from all backgrounds, whether they are neurodivergent, economically disadvantaged, or from underrepresented groups, have access to the same opportunities for success as their peers. Amity Regional High School has set a strong example in this regard, demonstrating that a commitment to DEI fosters both inclusivity and excellence rather than sacrificing one for the other. The assertion that “equity is not equality” has been repeatedly emphasized, yet reducing the concept of equality to the imposition of identical standards for all learners oversimplifies a complex issue. A particularly striking example of this flawed approach is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which sought to impose uniform benchmarks for every student in the name of fairness. Instead of fostering genuine academic improvement, it resulted in widespread teaching to the test, punitive measures against underperforming schools, and a neglect of critical thinking skills in favor of standardized assessments.

By setting rigid expectations without considering the individual needs of students, NCLB ultimately harmed the very populations it claimed to support. Schools serving disadvantaged communities were disproportionately penalized, and educators found themselves constrained by unrealistic expectations rather than given the resources to address the diverse challenges their students faced. If history has taught us anything, it is that treating all students identically does not equate to fairness; rather, fairness is achieved through policies that recognize and accommodate differences. Your statement about equity is especially harmful to disabled students. Equity in education does not mean engineering outcomes to manufacture equality, rather, it means ensuring that every student has access to the resources, opportunities, and support they need to succeed based on their unique circumstances. While equality suggests that all students should receive identical treatment, equity acknowledges that different students face different barriers to success and that fairness requires addressing those disparities rather than ignoring them. For example, a student with a learning disability may need additional time on tests, while a student from a low-income household may require access to subsidized meals or tutoring programs. Providing these supports is not about granting special privileges, it is about leveling the playing field so

that all students, regardless of background or ability, have a fair chance to reach their full potential. This principle is the foundation of programs like special education services, gifted and talented initiatives, and English language learner support, all of which exist to ensure that students are not left behind simply because their needs differ from the majority. Equity strengthens the education system as a whole by fostering an environment where every student is given the tools to succeed, rather than being limited by systemic obstacles beyond their control.

Rather than advocating for an outdated, legally dubious approach that disregards the successes of individualized learning models, the Orange Republican Town Committee should prioritize evidence-based educational policies that serve all students. This means:

1. Supporting local control over education. Instead of deferring to a rescinded federal order, the committee should work with local educators, parents, and students to develop policies that best serve the specific needs of Amity's student body.
2. Investing in tailored educational programs. Ensuring that programs like SAILS, Spartan Academy, and other specialized learning opportunities remain fully funded and accessible to students who need them.
3. Upholding Amity's commitment to DEI. Recognizing that the school district's DEI initiatives have contributed to improved student engagement, higher academic performance, and a more inclusive school environment. Instead of dismantling these programs, the committee should seek to expand and refine them based on measurable outcomes.
4. Engaging in constructive dialogue. If the committee has concerns about DEI or educational equity, rather than issuing broad demands that contradict legal precedent and educational research, they should invite educators, students, and policy experts to discuss ways to improve education for all.

The actions taken by the committee, as encapsulated in the letter, seem to advocate for a one-size-fits-all educational system. An approach that disregards the varied needs, strengths, and challenges of individual students. Education is not a rigid structure where a single standard can accommodate all learners; rather, it is a dynamic system that must adapt to the diverse circumstances of its students. A truly effective education policy recognizes that students come

from different backgrounds, learn in different ways, and require varying levels of support to reach their full potential. By pushing for uniformity under the guise of fairness, the committee risks undermining the very principles of high-quality education by disregarding the importance of differentiated instruction, specialized programs, and targeted interventions that help students succeed. Local governance should be committed to policies that reflect the complexity of educational needs rather than imposing rigid, simplistic standards that have historically led to failure. It is well-documented that such rigid approaches have resulted in lowered educational outcomes, excessive teaching to standardized tests, and a lack of meaningful support for students who do not fit neatly into a predefined mold. By failing to recognize these past missteps and instead advocating for policies that repeat these mistakes, the committee jeopardizes the future success of countless students who depend on a flexible and responsive educational system to meet their needs.

In light of these concerns, I urge a reconsideration of the letter's stance and a shift toward policies that genuinely support academic excellence and fairness. Ensuring that every student has access to a high-quality education does not mean reducing all students to the same standard; it means empowering them with the resources, opportunities, and support they need to thrive. This is not about political ideology, it is about educational effectiveness and the responsibility of our community leaders to prioritize student success over empty rhetoric. I hope the committee will reflect on these points and realign its focus to real, evidence-based solutions that address the complexities of modern education. Local governance should not serve as a tool for imposing top-down mandates that fail to serve students. It should be a force for principled, pragmatic, and student-centered policy-making that strengthens our schools and our community.

Sincerely,

Liam Roselle

Chairman

Amity Youth Democratic Caucus

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Liam Roselle', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.