

# Marie Murphy students participate in mock board meeting



*MarieMurphy: Students from Marie Murphy in Wilmette participate in a mock school board meeting on Feb. 16 in the Wilmette Village Board room. Hilary Anderson/22nd Century Media*

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Kenneth Dolin learned more than he imagined possible from a recent school project.

The Marie Murphy eighth-grader put in a great deal of research, time and work into preparing for an event that would give him insight into how local government operates.

Dolin was one of 11 Marie Murphy students who participated in the six-week program, sponsored by the Wilmette League of Women Voters and the Student and Government Leaders program. It enabled the students not to just study first-hand the workings of local government but also to examine the issues facing the community. They then participated in a mock public school board meeting, held on Feb. 16 in the Wilmette Village Hall Board Room. The event was televised on local cable station Wilmette Community Television (Channel 6).

Their topic, "Sell or Renovate Avoca Center," was one the Avoca District 37 School Board discussed last fall with the community but reached no decision. Students used some notes and information from that board meeting but had to do additional research on their own.

Students were mentored throughout the program by members of the School Board, district administration and staff.

Students Dorothy Adams, of Northfield, and William Lim began the mock board meeting by giving an overview of the internal and external conditions at Avoca Center along with the size of the facility. Photos enhanced their comments.

Dolin followed. He partnered with Brian Lee who served as the school district's "business manager" of the evening.

They gave the history of the Center and discussed enrollment trends, costs of renovating various parts of the building, heating and snow removal costs.

The mock board meeting then opened for discussion among the other board members in attendance.

Miguel Mekiel Saquibuddin suggested board members should first carefully consider what might be the advantages of renovating the existing Avoca Center structure.

There seemed to be more interest in the effects on the community of tearing down or selling the structure.

“What would the district do if we sell the Avoca Center and the enrollment increases?” Isaac Thurston, of Glenview, said.

“If the district sells the Center, what will it do with the money it receives?” Aaron Larriosa, of Glenview, said. “How will it affect local taxes?”

Emma Taylor, of Winnetka, served as president of the mock board and fielded questions.

Simone Salles, of Glenview, raised the question regarding whether the district would sell the property to only one developer.

“If it is sold to build homes, how do we know only 12 will be built on the property?” she said.

The questions continued.

After the mock meeting, the students gave their thoughts on the program.

“I thought it was a great learning experience,” Josephine Yoshitani said. “I feel more educated about how things are done in my school. Glad I took part in it.”

Salles liked the way members of the League of Women Voters came to their school and explained how board meetings and local governments work.

“We had the opportunity to go to Wilmette Junior High and actually meet some of the people from Wilmette’s Inter-Governmental Relations,” Salles said. “That was interesting.”

“I liked the discussion about the issues concerning whether it was good to renovate or sell the Avoca Center,” Taylor said. “It was fun but made us think.”

Nancy Stewart, Marie Murphy teacher and sponsor of the Student Government program, stated that the students came in with very little knowledge of how a local government works and soon learned how important those decision are.

“The students did an outstanding job,” she said. “They took this project seriously and learned more than they ever anticipated.”

Parents agreed the students did a good job.

“I liked the way the students played the roles of board members and stakeholders rather than students,” said Perron Thurston, parent and former Marie Murphy teacher. “I hope it helps them learn the value of civic engagement, learning about the issues and individuals’ platforms. I further hope this program will encourage them to vote when they become 18 years old and stay involved in their communities.”

“This is a fantastic program for students to become engaged and passionate about government locally and beyond,” said Gail Thomason, president of the Wilmette League of Women Voters.