

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 7
NEWBURY LIBRARY-MEDIA CENTER
BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES

March 6, 2024 – 6 p.m.

APPROVED 3.13.24

PRESENT: Chair Ms. Molly Sexton Read (B), Vice-Chair Mr. Robert Jerram (NH), Ms. Deborah Bell (N), Ms. Kim Crone (N), Ms. Mary Duran (B), Ms. Lisa Fragale(C), Ms. Theresa Kenneson (C), Superintendent Steven K. LePage, Director of Finance & Operations Mr. James Gaskins, Barkhamsted First Selectman Mr. Nicholas Lukiwsky, Barkhamsted Board of Finance Chairperson Mr. Richard Winn, Barkhamsted Selectman Mr. Mark Mahoney, New Hartford First Selectman Mr. Daniel Jerram, New Hartford Board of Finance Chairperson Ms. Kerry Guilfoyle, Colebrook First Selectman Mr. Brad Bremer, Colebrook Board of Finance Chairperson Mr. Duncan Wilber, Colebrook Board of Finance Ms. Kathleen Adams, Norfolk First Selectman Mr. Matthew Riiska, Norfolk Board of Finance Jeremiah Bickford.

Absent: Secretary/Treasurer Mr. Noel Gauthier (NH).

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Sexton Read called the Board of Education meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

Ms. Sexton Read opened with a summary of the 2024-2025 Proposed RSD#7 Budget and invited the town officials to provide their input and/or comments pertaining to the District's 2024-2025 Proposed Budget.

New Hartford First Selectman, Mr. Jerram questioned why on the staffing page of the budget, the SRO position is listed as 0. Ms. Sexton Read and Superintendent LePage explained it is moved to the Misc. Purchased Services- BOE account located under Prof/Technical Services in the budget. Ms. Sexton Read explained the SRO is a constable of Barkhamsted and RSD#7 reimburses Barkhamsted for his services. First Selectman Jerram thanked everyone at the meeting and explained he is a graduate of Regional School District No. 7. His area of concern was the staffing situation and the decline of the student population. First Selectman Jerram stated that over the last 5, 6 and 7 years, the student enrollment has decreased, yet the staffing population has had a minimal decrease. Superintendent LePage communicated that he appreciated Mr. Jerram asking this question. Superintendent LePage expressed that he had numerous conversations with his leadership team in reviewing all positions and confirming all positions are critical to the success of the students and the school. Superintendent LePage explained that he understands the ratio of students to teachers is a topic of concern. That being said, RSD#7 produces a great education and wonderful students leave this district well prepared for life after graduation. Superintendent LePage briefly explained the district lost a teacher through attrition and also reduced a World Language teacher for the 2024-2025 school year. The Library Media Specialist will be increased to 1.00 FTE, yet the 2022-2023 teacher in this position was only a .50 FTE. The current Library Media Specialist is currently a .60 FTE in Social Studies. Increasing this position to an FTE of 1.00 will decrease the Social Studies staffing. Superintendent LePage expressed he is researching with his team the outlook of the next 3, 4 and 5 years and how to plan for this declining enrollment yet still keep RSD#7's outstanding quality of education. Ms. Sexton Read communicated that last year, there was an increase in staff due to a specialized special education position. This increase was created to offset and deter the cost of the outplacement of students. She expressed that some of the inability to reduce staff is due to the requirements of the High School to offer the 25 credits, and these credits have to be in particular areas of education.

Colebrook Board of Finance Chair Duncan Wilber asked what other aspects are parts of the RSD#7 revenue, beside the Ag Ed tuitions. Mr. Wilber suggested an increase in the offerings of technical education similar to Oliver Wolcott Technical School, to try to increase enrollment and revenue. Ms. Sexton Read explained that the other revenue for RSD#7 incorporates Hartland students, due to RSD#7 being a "choice" High School for Hartland students. She expressed that the tech ed department has currently gone through

some changes to increase its offerings. It will attract more of RSD#7 students to stay at RSD#7, instead of leaving to attend other technical schools, which would increase enrollment. Ms. Sexton Read communicated that the plan is to increase the awareness and raise the profile of the Ag Ed program to attract more students to RSD#7 and to also encourage Hartland students to attend RSD#7.

New Harford Board of Finance Chair Kerry Guilfoyle asked if the Ag Ed tuition enrollment is at its maximum or is there room for more. Superintendent LePage responded that there is room for more, yet the challenge is the legislation of the “four-year average rule” that limits the Ag Ed enrollment. This rule states that the ascending district does not have to allow students to attend Ag Ed over the last four-year student average. This rule minimizes enrollment which then decreases tuition. Superintendent LePage is speaking with local legislation to try and change this “four-year average rule.” This rule is a challenge, limiting the number of students attending Ag Ed.

Barkhamsted Selectman Mr. Mark Mahoney communicated that it is an interesting avenue to maybe explore in the future in regards to expanding the offerings of tech ed and the trades education. Superintendent LePage expressed there are many challenges in regards to funding new programs and also the limiting pool of teachers certified in the trades, yet it is definitely worth the exploration.

Colebrook Board of Finance Chair Duncan Wilber asked the detail of the capital projects. Superintendent LePage listed the roof, the fire alarm system, new legislation mandated an assessment of the school’s indoor air quality so RSD#7 needs to evaluate the system, based on the new requirements. RSD#7 is trying to replace all carpeting with tile throughout the school. Discussion followed in regards to SAT scores and possible decreases in the assessments to towns by reviewing and looking at this budget to see where additional savings can be made.

Ms. Sexton Read and Superintendent LePage thanked all the town officials for taking the time come to this workshop. Ms. Sexton Read said anytime there are questions or concerns, please reach out to Superintendent LePage and/or Mr. James Gaskins.

Board Discussion on Proposed Budget

Ms. Sexton Read opened the floor to Board members for any questions, concerns, or clarification. Superintendent LePage begin the conversation stating the health insurance cost was decreased from 11.6% to a 10.95% increase. Superintendent LePage, after many discussions with the team, Mr. Gaskins and Ms. Molly Sexton Read, has decreased the excess cost budget reimbursement from the State from 82% to 71% to alleviate the fluctuation and risk associated with this State funding. Lastly, he shared that with a new attrition of another HS English Teacher, he is hoping to fill this position with a teacher with a BA Step 1 or Step II for savings. After all of these revisions, the proposed budget will change from 3.62% to 3.72%. Brief discussion followed.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Ms. Duran, seconded by Ms. Crone, to **ADJOURN** at 7:44 p.m. **AYE:** Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Ms. Bell, Ms. Crone, Ms. Duran, Ms. Fragale, Ms. Kenneson. **NAY:** None. **ABSTAIN:** None.
MOTION PASSED.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Barrett
Board Clerk