REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 7

Newbury Library Media Center
Board of Education Meeting
March 12, 2025 – 6:00 p.m.
APPROVED 3.26.25

PRESENT: Chair Ms. Molly Sexton Read (B), Vice-Chair Mr. Robert Jerram (NH), Ms. Deborah Bell (N), Ms. Kim Crone (N), Ms. Terri Kenneson (C), Ms. Lisa Fragale (C), Ms. Mary Duran (B) Superintendent Steven K. LePage, Director of Finance & Operations Mr. James Gaskins, Secretary / Treasurer Mr. Noel Gauthier (NH), HS Principal Gary Franklin, MS Principal Ryan Cornelius, and Student Representatives Amaya Washington and Owen Langer. **Absent**: None.

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Sexton Read called the Regular Board of Education meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

PUBLIC PORTION: None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION by Ms. Fragale, seconded by Ms. Crone, to **APPROVE** the February 26th, 2025 Regular Board Meeting Minutes as amended. **AYE**: Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Ms. Bell, Mr. Gauthier, Ms. Kenneson, Ms. Crone, Ms. Fragale, Ms. Duran. **NAY:** None. **ABSTAIN:** None. **MOTION PASSED**.

MOTION by Ms. Kenneson, seconded by Ms. Bell, to **APPROVE** the March 5th, 2025 Budget Workshop Meeting Minutes as presented. **AYE:** Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Ms. Bell, Mr. Gauthier, Ms. Kenneson, Ms. Crone, Ms. Fragale, Ms. Duran**. NAY:** None. **ABSTAIN:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS- Amaya Washington and Owen Langer

Amaya Washington started off the Student Representative Report by informing the Board that SATs are right around the corner for the Junior class. NHS and Student council members are participating in Read Across America this Friday. The program allows the high school students to travel to the elementary schools in surrounding towns and read to the students. She also gave an update about the Wellness Room; furniture list and paint chips have been made for the room all students and staff involved are hoping to have a final decision to be made in the near future to complete the room project.

Owen Langer then picked up the conversation by agreeing the Wellness Room is just one of the many exciting things happening in the High School right now. He explained how our swim team is currently 1st seed and that State Opens are scheduled for Saturday March 15th 2025. Another upcoming event is the Culinary Cook Off which is currently scheduled for April 3rd. The Culinary Cook Off is an opportunity for both staff and students alike to sign up and create a dish from around the world and then vote on the best dish. He closed out his report by stating how college choices should be posted by this time the following week.

PRINCIPAL REPORT- MS Principal Ryan Cornelius and HS Principal Gary Franklin

Mr. Cornelius began the conversation by explaining that students today are not like what they were years ago. The stress and anxiety present in the classes these days is very concerning and the counselors feel that the most, as they are the go to staff aside from teachers. Addiction amongst teenagers is also a terrible epidemic that schools are facing as the youth has access to items like vapes, cigarettes, and other nicotine related items. The mental health of our students is a daily concern. He then stated that sometimes school staff such as teachers and the counselors of

the school are the only resource students struggling may have. He touched on how not only are the counselors we currently have are great for the student body, but that they provide flexibility in his own personal schedule so he is available to handle other tasks.

Mr. Franklin then interjected and agreed with Mr. Cornelius. He stated that they (the counselors) coordinate a magnitude of projects including: senior seminars, monitoring credit counts for the graduating class, assisting with 504 students, college and FAFSA application assistance, college application reports, writing recommendation letters, mental health support, and miscellaneous administrative work. The counselors are currently handling daily intervention with students and assisting to resolve issues before they need to be brought higher up in the administration line. He then stated how within some time the school will be losing several teachers who are not only great education providers but are highly certified. He then switched gears and gave an update about NEASK, stating that we are on the tail end and that they are very satisfied with what we are providing to them. If the school was to make any staffing changes, he would then have to provide a report for them with expected outcomes of said staffing changes and the reasoning for changes in staff to NEASK.

Mr. Cornelius emphasized that he wants to best utilize the staff to provide the best support we can to our students. He and Mr. Franklin have been mindful with their budgets and feel comfortable leaving the staff numbers where they currently stand, as staff across the board is extremely hands on with the up and coming students to best prepare them for high school.

Mr. Jerram then questioned the overlap in guidance counselors and the mental health counselors may have. Mr. Cornelius responded to Mr. Jerram's question by explaining that on any given day the counselors have approximately 70 students funnel through the office and the guidance counselors help diagnose the students and are that first initial quick response before recommending additional help. Schools have seen an uptick in suicidal ideations, self-harm, and anxiety. He believes that having the adequate staff can help the kids who need help. He then stated that the school could most likely function with five counselors instead of the current six, but believes the student would be the ones to feel the impact and potentially suffer.

Mr. Jerram and Ms. Sexton Read followed Mr. Cornelius's response with thanking him and Mr. Franklin for the information they have provided as it is needed for the Board to make educated decisions.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Superintendent LePage started his report by thanking the Board members for their years of volunteering and appreciates them all. He also thanked the principals for working together, no matter how tough the topic may be, but continuing to have the same goal and passion to keep this district great. He 100% stands behind his principals and couldn't ask for a better team. He then began his update on the budget report and has ultimately made the difficult decision to reduce a position in the Administrative Offices. This position cut would reduce the budget by approximately $80K. He then proposed the idea of a bonus approximately $5,000.00- $10,000.00 for any staff member in the offices willing to retire early, anyone interested would need to meet with him by Wednesday March 19th , then to be approved by the Board of Education. This tactic would then decrease the salary portion of the budget significantly, without affecting the student's education. He then transitioned the conversation to the New Hartford transportation contract and is very happy with the proposed bid. He urged the Board to move forward with the most recent provided bid from DATTCO, as it saves the district approximately $40K. He noted that the bus companies are currently in the process of updating their camera systems in the buses to provide clearer video and access to provide quicker video recordings if needed for any student incident safeties. Overall, with the proposed position reduction and transportation bid the budget will have had roughly $120K in savings.

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

Following Superintendent LePage's report Mr. Gaskins also recommended that the Board move forward with the current proposed bid for New Hartford's transportation. He then gave a brief overview of the Building Committee meeting and urged the Board to move forward with approving the bid for the Vo-Ag Roof project. He then notified the Board of the Health Certification for 2025-2026.

OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Sexton Read started the discussion by stating that she is happy to see that the budget number keeps decreasing and that the assessment is at 3% and that being below 4% is very good improvement. The last thing she wants to do is start pulling "strings" without educated and informed discussion that could potentially cause any negative ripples. She emphasized that Mr. Cornelius and Mr. Franklin provided great information about what our districts counselors do, as their positions necessity were questioned in a previous meeting by First Selectman, Dan Jerram of New Hartford. She also noted that she does not want the proposed early retirement bonuses to cause any pressure or come across negatively by the staff as that is not the intent. She is aware of potential staff in the soon to retire category are the heart and souls of their departments.

Ms. Kenneson followed this discussion by notifying the Board that the Share / Ed Advance budget should be available for their review Monday March 17th. Ms. Bell then joined the discussion and shared how although they have gained multiple grants, Judy's grant is currently at risk.

NEW BUSINESS

Brief discussion to ensure the Board has 1st readings for the Series 2000 Policies to continue the ongoing project of updating of the policies for the school's handbook, prepared for the meeting scheduled for March 26th, 2025.

MOTION by Ms. Fragale, seconded by Ms. Kenneson, to **CERTIFY** that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of JULY 1, 2025 through JUNE 30, 2026. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to: school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups. **AYE:** Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Ms. Bell, Mr. Gauthier, Ms. Kenneson, Ms. Crone, Ms. Fragale, Ms. Duran**. NAY:** None. **ABSTAIN:** None**. MOTION PASSED.**

MOTION by Ms. Kenneson, seconded by Ms. Duran, to **CERTIFY** that the Regional School District No. 7 Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An "event" is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practice, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The "regular school day" is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. "Location" means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food and beverage sales. **AYE: :** Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Ms. Bell, Mr. Gauthier, Ms. Kenneson, Ms. Crone, Ms. Fragale, Ms. Duran**. NAY**: None. **ABSTAIN:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

MOTION by Mr. Jerram, seconded by Ms. Bell, to **WAIVE AND WITHDRAW** from the bidding / RFP process and **to AUTHORIZE** the Superintendent and or designee to negotiate with the current contractor for a new contract, as it is

in the best interests of the district. **AYE:** Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Ms. Bell, Mr. Gauthier, Ms. Kenneson, Ms. Crone, Ms. Fragale, Ms. Duran**. NAY:** None**. ABSTAIN:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**
MOTION by Ms. Kenneson, seconded by Ms. Fragale, to **APPROVE** the new 5-year contract with DATTCO for the provision of transportation services for New Hartford students, as presented to the Board by the Superintendent and subject to any further necessary contract review. **AYE:** Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Ms. Bell, Mr. Gauthier, Ms. Kenneson, Ms. Crone, Ms. Fragale, Ms. Duran**. NAY:** None. **ABSTAIN:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

MOTION by Ms. Kenneson, seconded by Ms. Duran, to **ACCEPT t**he bid from Armor-tite Construction Corporation for the sum of $611,000.00 (base bid) and $15,000.00 for Alternate 2, for the provision of roofing services for the Agricultural Education Roof Replacement, State Project No. 207-0032 RR. **AYE:** Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Ms. Bell, Mr. Gauthier, Ms. Kenneson, Ms. Crone, Ms. Fragale, Ms. Duran**. NAY:** None. **ABSTAIN:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

MOTION by Ms. Duran, seconded by Ms. Fragale, **to AUTHORIZE** the Superintendent to execute a contract with Armor-tite Construction Corporation for State Project No. 207-0032 RR, pending any necessary further vetting of qualifications and review**. AYE:** Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Ms. Bell, Mr. Gauthier, Ms. Kenneson, Ms. Crone, Ms. Fragale, Ms. Duran**. NAY:** None. **ABSTAIN:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

CORRESPONDENCE
None.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC TO SPEAK ON AGENDA ITEMS
None.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Ms. Bell, seconded by Ms. Kenneson, to **ADJOURN** at 7:35 p.m. **AYE**: Ms. Sexton Read, Mr. Jerram, Ms. Kenneson, Ms. Bell, Ms. Crone, Mr. Gauthier, Ms. Fragale, Ms. Duran. **NAY:** None. **ABSTAIN:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

The next BOE Meeting is scheduled for March 19th 2025 in Colebrook.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Vacila
Board Clerk