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Hunterdon Vocational District Moves Closer Grant Approval For New Campus Construction

Project Means Ending Building Lease Payments, More Full-Time Programs And Space for 500 Additional Students

Flemington, N.J. – Hunterdon County’s Vocational School District (HCVSD) has announced that the school is a major step closer to building a new campus to meet high demand for learning that blends trades-based career paths with traditional academic instruction at the secondary level with the Department of Education’s recommendation to the legislature of a \$15 Million Securing Our Children’s Future grant for HCVSD..

Hunterdon County Commissioner Zach Rich, who serves as liaison to HCVSD, said, “The district’s Board and administration deserve congratulations for gaining one of the most significant grants Hunterdon County has ever received from the state. The school construction plan will enhance educational opportunities for our students, and that is the true bottom line.”

The funding is part of a \$220 million package announced Friday, May 28, by the state, stemming from the Securing Our Children’s Future Bond Act that New Jersey voters approved in November 2018. The Legislature is expected to approve the appropriation that includes \$15 million for HCVSD.

For all Career-Technical Education (CTE) schools in the state, plans hinge on a local funding match of 25 percent. The Board of County Commissioners approved the match earlier this year which helped to position HCVSD for grant approval. HCVSD Superintendent Dr. Todd G. Bonsall said the state’s investment is unprecedented, and critical, for CTE schools.

“Several studies have identified gaps in our region’s workforce, and Hunterdon County Vocational School District’s plan is tailored to meet those needs,” said Susan Soloway, director of the Board of County Commissioners. “Our commitment at the county level, heavily supported by this new funding from the state level, will drive necessary and worthy investment in Career-Technical Education.”

HCVSD Board President Elizabeth Martin added, “At HCVSD, we understand not only our region, but also our state and beyond, are approaching a period of unprecedented growth and economic development. The need for talented and highly skilled people will exceed our imagination, and we have the plans – and now the funding – to help meet that demand.”

HCVSD’s proposed 35,000-square-foot building would be constructed on the grounds of North Hunterdon High School and would leverage that location to meet core curriculum requirements. With no land acquisition costs, HCVSD can focus funds on establishing a modern facility with full-time programs in HVAC, manufacturing, construction and energy, leisure and hospitality, and the transportation, distribution and logistics sectors. The project would create space for up to 500 new students.

HCVSD serves about 475 students through 21 shared-time programs and one full-time program in animal science offered through Hunterdon County Polytech Career and Technical High School. Those programs operate across three campuses: Central, Bartles Corner and the Hunterdon County Educational Services Commission. The district also operates three full-time, science-based Academies housed in county high schools and an Adult and Continuing Education school.

The proposed new campus at North Hunterdon would accommodate the culinary program currently located at the Central Campus, with others relocating from Bartles to the Central Campus, so the district could end its lease agreement for the Bartles building. Most significant, the new campus would allow for the district's growth in terms of the 500 new students and four new, plus one expanded, career-focused programs.

Lawmakers have up to 60 days to review the proposed projects, but approval is expected because the application process was heavily detailed, comprehensive and vetted. HCVSD anticipates a two-year timeline for competitive bids and construction before the new facility could open for student use.

"The consolidation of the vocational program that will be achieved through the construction plan will not only benefit Hunterdon County students, but also will relieve the burden of the school district's present costly building lease at Bartles Corner," emphasized Hunterdon County Commissioner Matt Holt.

Bonsall also noted the expanded programming planned for the new building will help keep students from crossing county lines to seek similar training with other districts. That travel often is accompanied by expensive transportation costs.

In addition to classroom and workshop space for HVAC, welding, diesel technology, hospitality and tourism, the new building would feature a rooftop garden to be used as a culinary arts lab. The new building would be known as HCVSD-North Campus.

The unique partnership with North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District is a highly collaborative, host-site campus model unlike any in the state. It would allow students to take eight career major courses, two business/entrepreneurship courses, and two work-based learning courses – with the goal of more than doubling the current model's CTE instructional time.

"Our goal is to set our students up for success by not only maximizing their career and technical training, but also by giving them a foundational knowledge of how to start and run a successful business," Bonsall said. "We aren't just training future employees; we are training future employers."

"I am honored that Polytech and the Board of Commissioners chose North Hunterdon-Voorhees as a partner to expand educational opportunities for the students of Hunterdon County," said Jeffrey Bender, superintendent of the regional district. "This investment will provide our students with options previously unavailable and skills that are immediately marketable upon graduation."

HCVSD also will build on its strong relationship with Raritan Valley Community College to extend its current practice of aligning high school-level coursework with post-secondary requirements, giving students a chance to earn college credits. The Securing Our Children's Future Bond Act specifically called for such increased collaboration as a means to establish cohesive networks with regional outlooks.

"The Hunterdon County Chamber was proud to advocate and support this very important grant application for our future workforce here in Hunterdon County," said Chris Phelan, president of the Hunterdon County Chamber of Commerce. "There has never been a more critical time for investment in education here in Hunterdon County to serve our workforce pipeline for so many businesses and organizations."

Hunterdon County Polytech Career and Technical High School is the largest component of Hunterdon County Vocational School District (HCVSD). Polytech is the district's shared-time high school that prepares students for a seamless transition to college and career paths. HCVSD also operates an Adult and Continuing Education school and three science-based high school academies: the Biomedical Sciences Academy, the Computer Science and Applied Engineering Academy and the Environmental Sustainability and Engineering Academy. Learn more at www.hcvsd.org.

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All pupils will be given equal opportunity for enrollment in programs operated by the Hunterdon County Vocational School District regardless of race, creed, color, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, affectional or sexual orientation, gender, religion, disability, or socioeconomic status (34 C.F.R. Part 100, Appendix B, Section IV-A). No qualified handicapped person shall, on the basis of handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity which receives federal financial assistance, et seq (34 C.F.R. Part 104.4(a)(b)).