

**Pelham School Board
Special School Board Meeting
December 7, 2020
Pelham Elementary School
6:00 pm**

In Attendance:

School Board Members: Megan Larson, Chair, Debbie Ryan, Vice-Chair, Troy Bressette, Darlene Greenwood (virtual due to Covid-19), and David Wilkerson (virtual due to Covid-19)

Superintendent: Chip McGee

Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessments: Sarah Marandos

Student Representative: Joe Wholey

Absent: Business Administrator Deb Mahoney

1. Call to Order:

Chair Megan Larson called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm, followed by The Pledge of Allegiance. Ms. Larson asked Mr. Wilkerson and Ms. Greenwood if each was alone, and they responded, 'yes.'

a. Public Input:

None

2. Main Issues:

Pandemic Response:

Superintendent Chip McGee thanked the School Board for having a Special School Board Meeting to discuss the District's response to the pandemic. Dr. McGee took a moment to thank the families that provided feedback to him and the school nurses for their meticulous work and keeping him up to date. He also thanked the support staff for keeping the day-to-day operations of the schools going. And finally, Dr. McGee thanked the Administration for helping him put together tonight's response to the pandemic.

Dr. McGee recommended to the School Board that the District continue with the remote programming through at least Monday, January 4, 2021. Dr. McGee made the recommendation based on the District's top priority of safety for the staff and students. Dr. McGee suggested that the School Board meet again on Monday, December 28, 2020, to look at the data and decide whether to change the January 4, 2021 return date. Dr. McGee mentioned that the PEA conducted a survey over the weekend to provide him with information to make the pandemic response decision. Dr. McGee thanked the PEA, parents, and the community who have provided him with feedback that allowed him to make the decision.

Dr. McGee mentioned the seven key implications:

- a. The school buildings and the SAU office would remain open.
- b. The District would continue to have Pre-School.
- c. The District would continue to provide in-school Special Education services on a case-by-case basis.
- d. All in-school staff members must come to work to ensure consistent expectations unless they have an approved leave or an approved exception. This expectation would start on December 14, 2020.
- e. PES Principal Jessica VanVranken and her team are investigating holding in-school kindergarten sessions during this period.
- f. The Family Choice survey will roll out at PHS on Friday, December 11. Parents and students will have until December 18 to complete the online survey.

51 g. PHS Principal Dawn Mead and Athletic Director Todd Kress are developing a pandemic response to athletics.
52 Dr. McGee noted that he instructed Ms. Mead and Mr. Kress to develop the plan, assuming the School Board
53 would vote to pass the Pandemic Response Plan. Dr. McGee added that presenting the pandemic response
54 plan for athletics would not have been appropriate before the Board voted on the Pandemic Response Plan.
55

56 **Reason for Pandemic Response Plan:**

57 Dr. McGee thanked the Salem School District for sharing their metrics, and he also thanked DHHS. He commented
58 that there are two sets of categories. The first category is the Level of Community Transmission, and the second
59 category is the Level of School Impact.
60

61 a. **Level of Community Transmission:**

62 Dr. McGee reviewed the Level of Community Transmission with the School Board.

- 63 i. The Covid-19 PCR test positivity as a 7-day average was 3.8% on November 18, 4.8% on December 1, and
64 7.7% on December 7. 7.7% is considered moderate.
- 65 ii. The number of new infections per 100,000 population prior 14 days was 240.4 on November 18, 441.6 on
66 December 1, and 508.4 on December 7. 508.4 is considered substantial.
- 67 iii. The number of new hospitalizations per 100,000 people over the previous 14 days was 1.4 on November
68 18, 1.4 on December 1, and 0.5 on December 7. 0.5 is considered minimal. The DHHS of New Hampshire
69 considers Pelham's amount of new hospitalizations as 'Substantial,' and Harvard Global Health Institute
70 views Pelham at the 'Tipping Point.'

71
72 b. **Level of School Impact:**

73 Dr. McGee mentioned that the Level of School Impact is difficult to evaluate because most students have been
74 learning remotely. He noted that the District is unable to measure student absenteeism while students are learning
75 remotely. The data shows how many students and staff have been excluded as of December 7, 2020, and Year to
76 Date.

- 77 i. As of tonight's meeting, the year to date totals for student exclusions are 626, and the staff exclusions are
78 155. Currently, the School District would exclude 53 students and 21 teachers from in-school learning.
- 79 ii. Transmission within the schools was low on November 18.
- 80 iii. Student absenteeism was 5% on November 18.
- 81 iv. Staff capacity was strained medium on November 18, strained medium on December 1, and strained
82 medium on December 7.
83

84 Dr. McGee stated that eight students and seven staff tested positive for Covid-19 since the District pivoted to
85 remote learning, as of November 30, 2020. Because the District was in remote learning, the District did not have to
86 track and exclude other staff and students. Dr. McGee provided an example where a member of the food service
87 program had a positive case of Covid-19. Because nine members of the food service program were in close contact
88 with the employee, all ten employees have been excluded. Since ten of the fourteen employees have been
89 excluded, the food service program will not prepare meals starting this Wednesday and continuing until next week.
90

91 Dr. McGee mentioned that he was concerned with the community transmission and the domino effect Covid-19 is
92 having on the staff. He noted that if he just looked at the PMS and PHS staff, Dr. McGee believed that the District
93 would have in-school learning. But given numbers for community transmission and what happened with the food
94 service program, he cannot safely staff the schools.
95

96 c. **Reasons for Staff to Come into School:**

97 Dr. McGee provided his reason for requesting that staff come into school starting on December 14. He believes
98 that the District needs to be more fair and equitable to those coming in. He reminded everyone that the schools
99 are not fully closed. Students who are receiving services and the Pre-School students have in-school learning.

100 These students require staff to teach and the staff to operate the school that day.
101

102 The School Board discussed the plan presented by Dr. McGee. Mr. Bressette asked Dr. McGee to confirm that the
103 schools would be open if the District had the December 7 numbers. Dr. McGee confirmed that the schools would

104 be open if the District had the December 7 numbers. Dr. McGee mentioned the domino effect when a staff
105 member is diagnosed with a positive case of Covid-19. The employee needs to quarantine, and every staff member
106 that was in close contact with the employee also needs to quarantine. Dr. McGee used himself as an example and
107 how his case affected the SAU staff.

108
109 Mr. Bressette mentioned that the CDC changed its guidelines for quarantining, and the DHHS followed suit. He
110 asked how that factored into tonight's proposal. Dr. McGee said that that DHHS followed some parts of the CDC's
111 updated guidelines. The DHHS has decided to remain strict, and the Pelham School District has decided to continue
112 to follow the DHHS guidelines.

113
114 Mr. Bressette asked if the District or Karen McGlynn is looking at Pelham as a data subset. Dr. McGee mentioned
115 that he had a discussion with Ms. McGlynn and the school nurses. Dr. McGee pointed out that the Hillsborough
116 County data excludes Nashua because of their density. Ms. McGlynn informed Dr. McGee that Pelham is not
117 uniquely low. Pelham's numbers are down because of the number of residents within Pelham.

118
119 Dr. McGee mentioned that he had the numbers broken down regarding teachers, IA's, Administrators, custodians,
120 and food service workers excluded because of Covid-19. He was concerned that by showing the numbers, they
121 would appear small and might lead people into seeing patterns that were not real. Ms. Larson pointed out that if
122 one PHS student tests positive, that student would have already interacted with students in at least four different
123 classrooms.

124
125 Dr. McGee clarified his comment about requesting that staff return to the school buildings on December 14. He
126 said that the staff that teaches remote would remain remote, and the staff that teaches in-school would remain
127 teaching in-school. Dr. McGee said that Ms. VanVranken and her team would need to have their investigation
128 completed, as to whether kindergarten would be in-school or remote, within the next couple of days.

129
130 Ms. Ryan asked Dr. McGee how the District was doing with technology hurdles. Dr. McGee mentioned that the first
131 hour-and-a-half today, the District did not have internet. He added that Interim Director of Technology Lee
132 Despres was here, and the District has 200 out of the 300 Chromebooks to distribute to the students, starting with
133 the sixth grade. Dr. McGee thanked the teacher's association for their help with the recent survey, and he read
134 some of the survey comments to the School Board.

135
136 Dr. McGee commented that sports are important, but they do not come before safety, teaching, and learning. He
137 added that he believed the District had enough information to decide on sports. Dr. McGee mentioned that he
138 intended to use tonight's plan as guidance for what to do with sports. Dr. McGee pointed out that Skills and Drills
139 are being done until December 14, and the season would start after January 4, 2021. He provided the Board with a
140 couple of options; the first was that the School Board have another Special Meeting or direct the Administration to
141 finalize the plans and keep the Board up-to-date on the pandemic response plan regarding sports.

142
143 Mr. Wilkerson wanted to know if one of the Professional Learning Committees (PLC's) had a meeting, would they
144 need to meet remotely. Dr. McGee stated that was the preferable way for the Professional Learning Committees
145 to meet. Mr. Wilkerson then asked if a social media post could spell out the School Board's plan. Dr. McGee agreed
146 and said that no matter the outcome, there would need to be a notification to the parents.

147
148 Mr. Wholey said that the comments he has heard from both students and staff were mainly about starting the
149 second semester. The second semester is scheduled to begin around January 25, and the plan is to go back to in-
150 school learning on January 4. Mr. Wholey questioned if it was possible to keep PHS remote until the end of the
151 first semester and start the second-semester in-school. Dr. McGee thanked Mr. Wholey for his question but stated
152 he could not support that plan. Dr. McGee mentioned that he does not believe waiting for a clean break is the
153 criteria during a pandemic. He expressed that his criteria are for the health and safety of the students and staff.

154
155 Ms. Larson stated that she did not feel comfortable waiting a few days for Ms. VanVranken and her team to
156 investigate having kindergarten return to in-school. At the same time, Ms. Larson mentioned, if the District were to

157 pivot back to remote learning, she would like a plan in place where kindergarten, first grade, and second grade
158 remain in-school. Dr. McGee commented that he could have a plan to present to the Board by the December 28
159 School Board meeting. Dr. McGee said that a reasonable timeframe to expect Ms. VanVranken's plan would be the
160 end-of-day on Wednesday.

161
162 Mr. Bressette asked about the 200 Chromebooks that the School District received. He wanted to know if any of the
163 Chromebooks would be going to the first graders. Dr. McGee said that step one was to provide the Chromebooks
164 to the sixth graders. The District would then receive back the Chromebooks that the sixth graders already have. At
165 that point, the District would decide what their next step is.

166
167 Ms. Ryan motioned that the Pelham School District remains in remote learning status until at least January 4 to
168 maintain our student and staff health and safety during the pandemic. Mr. Bressette seconded the motion. The
169 motion passed (5-0-0).

170
171 Ms. Ryan asked that the District have a plan for academic remediation that may be needed to make sure that the
172 educational material was learned. She added that the other piece is social-emotional support for students and
173 staff.

174
175 **Future Meetings:**

- 176 a. 12/16/2020 – 6:30 pm School Board Meeting @ PES Library
177 b. 1/6/2021 – 6:30 pm School Board Meeting @ PES Library

178
179 **3. Non-Public:**

180 No Non-Public Session

181
182 **4. Adjourn Meeting:**

183 Ms. Ryan made a motion to adjourn the public session at 7:21 pm. Mr. Bressette seconded the motion. The motion
184 passed (5-0-0).

185
186
187 Submitted by Matthew Sullivan