1 **Pelham School Board Meeting** 2 March 6, 2024 3 **Pelham Elementary School** 4 6:00 pm 5 6 In Attendance: 7 **School Board Members:** Troy Bressette, Chair; Thomas Gellar; Darlene Greenwood; John Russell; and David 8 Wilkerson 9 10 **Superintendent:** Chip McGee 11 12 **Assistant Superintendent:** Sarah Marandos 13 14 **Business Administrator:** Deb Mahoney 15 16 **Student Representative:** Mya Belanger 17 18 Absent: None 19 20 Also in Attendance: None 21 22 I. Public Session: 23 A. Call to Order: 24 Chair Troy Bressette called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm. 25 26 II. Non-Public Session: 27 Mr. Gellar made a motion to enter a non-public session under RSA 91-A:3 (II) (c) – reputation at 6:01 pm. Mr. 28 Wilkerson seconded the motion. The motion passed (5-0-0). 29 30 **Roll Call** 31 Mr. Bressette - Yes 32 Mr. Gellar - Yes 33 Ms. Greenwood - Yes 34 Mr. Russell - Yes 35 Mr. Wilkerson - Yes 36 37 III. Return to Public Session: 38 Chair Troy Bressette called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. 39 40 IV. Public Input @ 6:33 pm 41 Mr. Bressette thanked the residents who signed up for public input. He reviewed some of our guidelines surrounding 42 public input. 43 44 a. Lori Safford for Kristy Sorenson, 13 Chagnon Lane 45 46 Kristy Sorensen 47 13 Chagnon Lane 48 March 6, 2024 49

School Board Meeting Testimony

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Good evening. My name is Kristene Sorensen. I am the mother of four boys who all attend Pelham Public Schools. I have a Bachelor's in Biology and worked at a pediatric office for 17 years. I only left that position to stay home when my youngest son was born. Our family has been a part of this community since 2015, and currently, we have at least one child in each of the three schools. We love our schools and want a quality education and safe experience for all children.

55 Recently, my 7th grader was put into a difficult situation at school. He is 13 and right in the middle of puberty, a trying 56 time for any child. He was surprised and very uncomfortable encountering a girl in the boys' bathroom. I can only 57 imagine that using a urinal must be awkward in general, but to have to use one in front of someone of the opposite sex 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 workaround." Could you instead provide an alternative for this one student who is not comfortable in the girl's bathroom 68 that doesn't infringe on the rights of others?

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was out of the question for him. In addition, my son and his friend found a woman's pad in the boy's bathroom not long ago. When they went to the office, they were told, "It is just puberty, so don't worry about it." They reiterated, "But it is in the boys' bathroom!" And again, we were told, "It's just puberty." What kind of a response is that from school staff? I reached out to the Superintendent and Principal and was told that if my son was uncomfortable, they "had some ideas to work with him." Individual rights only extend to the point where they do not infringe on the rights of others. Biological males should have the expectation of privacy in their assigned bathroom. Why should one or even a handful of people's desires trump a large group's rights? As I have spoken with other families, it has become obvious that many others are also uncomfortable with this situation. I want to ask the School Board why a large number of boys would need "a

Biological males have the same rights as transgender males. A simple alternative would be a gender-neutral bathroom for anyone uncomfortable using the bathroom of their biological sex. Neither my son nor I want to make anyone feel uncomfortable or left out. Unfortunately, the mother of this child has posted threatening, accusatory remarks on Facebook, saying she will make sure anyone who speaks out on this matter will be sued and not able to feed their families. *Is that kind of intimidation acceptable in our town or our schools?*

Thank you for your time. I look forward to receiving your response.

b. Samuel Safford, 49 Old Gage Hill Road

Samuel J. Safford 49 Old Gage Hill Road March 6, 2024

Good evening; my name is Samuel Safford. As the only minority student who used a wheelchair at Pelham High School, almost everything about my high school experience was modified to fit my disability: my transportation, my method of writing, my lunch period, and specifically, where I used the restroom. I had a female IA so I couldn't use the same bathroom as the other guys; I had to use the one in the nurse's office.

Of course, as a teenager, I wished I could have walked back then so I could have used the bathroom of my choice, just like those in the trans community want to use the bathroom of the gender they desire. However, the truth is that trans men are women, and trans women are men. It's not fair to let your desire to transition to the opposite sex trample on the rights of others who conform to their biological sex.

I do understand that gender dysphoria is a real condition that people experience; I have struggled with it, and it led me down a destructive path of depression and self-medication as a young adult. However, just because your brain tells you that you were born into the wrong body, that doesn't make it true. Just like if I believed I could walk, it doesn't mean I can.

Kids aren't fully developed at age 13, so how can they possibly know who they are? Middle school is already awkward enough, so it's not right to make others feel more uncomfortable. It is harmful to allow a young person to obsess over their gender to the detriment of schoolwork, friendships, and extracurricular activities.

We are all fearfully and wonderfully made with the gender God assigned us at birth.

Thank you.

c. Debbie Kruzel for Diana Bolarinho-Cloutier, Russell Drive

108 Diana Bolarinho-Cloutier109 March 6, 2024110

School Board Testimony

As a School Board, it is your job to report significant school changes, and it is my right to know. Pelham Memorial School has been negligent in not informing all parents of a child's choice to use the opposite bathroom from the sex they were assigned at birth.

The signs clearly post who's to enter, so how can this unwritten rule be so easily overturned without discussion? I took early childhood education, as should most school district employees. These courses taught us that adolescents go through stages of identity role confusion, and some of us have firsthand experience from when we were children.

It is our job to love and support our kids, but first, to parent them properly so they will become strong, productive citizens who are prepared for the obstacles they will encounter in life.

These children are too young to make their own choices. We as adults have the job of protecting them from what may be and what may not be and preparing them for what is.

Unfortunately, we have to be in this place right now because we want to support all parents and their beliefs, especially a parent who has a child who is uncomfortable in their skin, but ultimately, it's just not possible to cater to everyone's needs. In this case, a child doesn't need to use the opposite sex bathroom because emotionally, they think they are a boy when they were born a girl or vice versa.

The reasonable and rational solution would be to keep the girl's and boy's bathrooms and add a gender-neutral bathroom. Without further discussion, I'm asking the School Board to make a policy on this issue as soon as possible.

Thank you.

d. Krista Garcia, 3 Melody Lane

"I am just curious what the current policy is for the bathrooms being used within the school system regarding people of the opposite sex. Using a bathroom of the other sex and where we can access the statute that covers this, if it is indeed a law, please cite the specific statute. Thank you."

Mr. Bressette asked if anyone else wanted to speak, and no one came forward. He noted that the Board heard some questions and asked Dr. McGee to state the law.

Dr. McGee referenced the **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99)** as a federal law protecting student education records' privacy. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable U.S. Department of Education program. He also referenced **NH Rev Stat § 193:38 (2020), Discrimination in Public Schools**. The law specifically prohibits students from being excluded from participation in or denied the benefits of or subjected to discrimination in public schools because of it. The law lists a set of characteristics, one of which is gender.

Mr. Bressette commented that he did not believe the Board was prepared to make any decisions regarding the topic this evening. He noted that was his opinion and opened it for the Board members to provide their views. Mr. Wilkerson said he agreed that the Board was not ready to decide. He noted that it was evident that the expressed thoughts had been given considerable time, and he appreciated that. Mr. Wilkerson also appreciated that the residents provided information in writing, allowing him to read and reflect on it.

Mr. Wilkerson acknowledged that this was an important issue, but it was also essential to give the Board time to understand the serious decision that needed to be made. Ms. Greenwood agreed with Mr. Wilkerson and added that they must know how their decisions would impact the students.

Mr. Russell commended the speakers for getting up and sharing their views and thoughts. He asked Dr. McGee if they had any gender-neutral bathrooms within the schools. Dr. McGee said that they have single-person bathrooms, staff bathrooms, and nurse bathrooms that are not gender-specific.

Mr. Gellar mentioned that tonight was his last meeting; he chose not to run for the School Board, and someone else will have his seat at the next School Board meeting. He noted that any time there is a discussion regarding policies, it requires some time to be prepared, and the Board members should be able to expect that they have some time to be ready.

Mr. Gellar acknowledged that he felt the District needed to address this issue. He stressed that further discussion is warranted on this policy and did not feel that anything should be done tonight.

The consensus of the Board was to take this into further consideration.

Public Input closed at 6:48 pm.

V. Opening Remarks:

A. Superintendent

Dr. McGee mentioned that state testing is called the State Assessment System or SAS. He noted that the New Hampshire SAS is what they call it, and it has started. Dr. McGee said he could see students doing their writing today at PES and PMS levels.

Dr. McGee commented that the students were taking the test on their computers in the cafeteria. He acknowledged that the cafeteria was a serious place where students showed what they knew. Dr. McGee added that he also had a high point today, as his morning was wonderful.

Dr. McGee stated that he attended the SAT Boot Camp for juniors at PHS. He mentioned several things that were at the core of what they were trying to get done. The first was that the students were arranged by what they needed to work on next. The second was that there were classroom teachers in the Math Department and outside the Department to help with reading, concepts, or graphing. He noted that the PES Math Coach and the Grade 8 Math Teachers both helped.

Dr. McGee said Principal Mead gave a speech about Mr. Miyagi from the Karate Kid.

Thanks to the Pelham Community Coalition, they will have a mock bedroom activity on March 14. The bedroom will be in the PMS gymnasium at 6:30 pm. This provides families with a chance to understand and learn what they might want to look for and how you would recognize evidence of a student beginning to be involved in vaping.

B. Assistant Superintendent

Dr. Marandos commented that the boys' basketball team will be headed to UNH for the championship this Sunday. She noted that on March 14, they have their Parent-Teacher Conferences at PHS. The District is putting on Little Women on March 15 and 16. and the hypnosis show is on March 22.

As of the meeting, they had yet to publish the time for the basketball game.

VI. Presentations:

A. None

VII. Main Issues / Policy Updates:

A. <u>Culture of Belonging Task Force Action Plan</u>

Dr. McGee commented that in January, the Task Force provided its findings and included three recommendations. He noted that all three recommendations are valuable and actionable and wanted to move them into the action plan.

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Dr. McGee said that what he did with the leadership team was to flesh out what it would be, and they added a fourth recommendation regarding professional development. He reminded the Board and the community that he had requested a reset from the Board on developing Culture and Belonging in the District. The Task Force was charged with coming up with some of the core reasons why they are struggling and ways of improving how they collect, analyze, and respond to data about the Culture in the District.

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The Task Force accomplished that task, specifically regarding Trust, Communication, and Belonging.

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Follow Up Items

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Several items from the Task Force presentation require "course corrections" to continue progressing on this goal.

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1. Recognize this is a starting point:

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Dr. McGee mentioned that the Task Force was a starting point. Their observations came across in the report as conclusions, which they are not. There is still a lot of work to be done. It will be important to include input from the full staff moving forward.

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2. Share Generally not Specifically:

232 233 Dr. McGee said the key factors the Task Force shared are essential and appropriate to share with the School Board in a public session. Comments about individual situations do not belong in a public meeting. In hindsight, Dr. McGee apologized for allowing comments to be shared that were understood as being about specific individuals.

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3. Include context:

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Dr. McGee stated that the work will benefit from being set in a larger context. The Pelham School District has areas to improve, as all School Districts need to. The difference is that Pelham is willing to face them to get better. At times, staff members will have to make some decisions that are difficult or unpopular for others.

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Consistent and equitable, that will continue to be the case. These items are shared to recognize that they were heading off course, to acknowledge it, and to steer the District back on course. The goal is to build a culture where people can lower their defenses, freely share knowledge, skills, and perspectives, and work together to take the proper next steps. To get there, they want to build on trust.

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Recommendations

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The Task Force made three recommendations. After reviewing them with the Leadership Team, Dr. McGee proposed moving forward with all three recommendations and adding a fourth recommendation for Professional Development.

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Dr. McGee reviewed the four recommendations.

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Recommendation 1: Collecting Data

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The Task Force recommended that they survey the District twice per year utilizing an anonymous survey tool such as Survey Monkey and focus on simple and direct questions.

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Proposed Action Plan:

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a. Identify an outside organization to provide a survey for staff that improves reliability and validity, provides a greater assurance of anonymity, is for all District employees, and can be organized by staff role or school.

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b. Set the expectation that not every suggestion will be followed and that the focus is on finding ways to improve rather than on airing past grievances.

261 262 c. Pilot the survey in April 2024 to include all staff. This will allow the District to test and improve the deployment process for future surveys.

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d. After the pilot, commit to having the whole District use the survey starting in the fall of 2024.

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Recommendation 2: Analyzing Data

The Task Force recommended that the District create focus groups to develop action plans based on survey results and meet quarterly to report on progress.

Proposed Action Plan:

This action plan proposes renaming the focus groups "Action Teams" so that they can meet more quickly than quarterly.

- a. Start by having the District leadership team review the survey results.
- b. Share the survey results with all staff members.
- c. Form "Action Teams" using volunteer participants to quickly provide insights into the opportunities for improvement and input on how to implement the idea.
- d. Implement those actions and share implementation with the full staff more quickly than quarterly.
- e. Pilot this process in the spring of 2024 using the pilot survey data for a District-Wide opportunity for improvement and Action Team.

Recommendation 2.1: Analyzing Data

The Task Force recommended that the District continue using retention as a measurable outcome.

Proposed Action Plan:

Continue to use retention as a measurable outcome.

Recommendation 3: Reporting

The Task Force recommended that the District share survey results and action item progress with all District team members and the School Board.

Proposed Action Plan:

- 1. Start with the District leadership team reviewing all survey results.
- 2. Share the same results with staff to identify opportunities for improvement.
- 3. Share the implementation of actions with all District staff members.

Recommendation 4: Professional Development:

In addition to the recommendations from the Task Force, the leadership team recommends providing professional development for staff.

Proposed Action Plan:

- a. Next year, Continue training on trust, communication, and belonging with the leadership team.
- b. Expand this training to include all staff.
- c. Focus on helping work teams (i.e., SAU, Building Administrations, and PLCs) build trust.

Previous Experience

Dr. McGee used the t-shirts the Board wore as an example of a cross-content professional learning community at PHS. He noted that surveys showed the Board how valuable the staff found cross-content professional learning opportunities.

Mr. Bressette commented that he was glad they took that additional time to update the plan to reflect the feedback they received.

Mr. Bressette mentioned that Dr. McGee had suggested using a vendor for the surveys, which would remove the Superintendent and Human Resources from collecting and analyzing the results. Mr. Bressette asked if Dr. McGee envisioned any open-ended questions. Dr. McGee said they are going to look for primarily quantitative data in the surveys. He noted that at the same time, the Action Teams are where they turn the data into the specific areas that the data concerns.

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Mr. Russell commented that he liked the idea of open-ended questions. He asked Dr. McGee to speak about the size of the task force or your actions regarding who is involved. Dr. McGee said that the Task Force has completed its work. The last time the Board spoke, there were 12 people on the Task Force because it was trying to be a representative group of the schools,

Dr. McGee noted that he was talking about creating Action Teams for each survey at the school level. Each team might consist of three people, which would be voluntary because they will be asking people to step up to take on these roles, and it also needs to be people who represent the right groups.

Mr. Bressette asked what the District was doing to socialize the work of each Action Team. He also wanted to know how the word is getting out amongst the staff and how they are gathering additional input. Dr. McGee said he was asking permission to test-run it in April so they could see it happen. They would run an Action Team out of it and see how it works.

Mr. Gellar mentioned that a Culture of Belonging to him is very intangible. Mr. Gellar noted that he was okay with it as a test plan to see whether there is something to it. Mr. Gellar commented that if the responses are minimal, he would like the Board and the Administration to say they are looking for information for good reason.

Mr. Gellar's concern was that if the District could successfully assure the staff that this was what they wanted, they would respond positively. Otherwise, he was not too sure what would happen. Mr. Gellar commented that the Culture of Belonging is not just about the staff but also the students. He noted that it is important that it starts with the Administration, works its way down to the staff, and then keeps on going to the students.

Mr. Gellar stated that he would love to be there to see it, and the Board offered him the ability to join them but on the other side of the table.

Mr. Bressette said they had discussed the varying degrees of responses in the past and what they could do to promote a better response rate. He asked Dr. McGee what he would do to encourage a better response rate. Dr. McGee mentioned that he would need to commit to having it be part of the staff's Professional Day.

Dr. McGee acknowledged that he would need to resolve this to ensure it's built into the staff's "Workday." He noted that they could provide staff 15 to 20 minutes to complete the survey, and the response rate would go up to approximately 90 instead of 35%, a completely different data set.

Mr. Wilkerson echoed what Mr. Bressette and Mr. Gellar asked because it helps make the point that it is a concern across the Board members. Mr. Wilkerson stressed that the response rate is a real concern.

Ms. Greenwood asked if SurveyMonkey was the professional survey company that Dr. McGee was talking about. Dr. McGee said that SurveyMonkey is software that allows someone to design a survey. He noted that Google Forms is another option. Dr. McGee pointed out that even though he did not know how to retrieve one's e-mail address, there were many concerns regarding using Google Forms.

Dr. McGee commented that using SurveyMonkey means the District would still be designing the survey. Instead, the District is looking at several companies, but only presenting the plan. If approved, he would then start meeting with the companies. He added that the companies are not interested in the District's input because these companies have reliable and valid measures of trust and belonging.

Dr. McGee added that the companies tend to be organizational-based, not school-based. Ms. Greenwood mentioned that the companies could tweak the surveys, but Dr. McGee said that once they start tweaking them, they become less reliable.

Dr. McGee stressed that he would not be designing the surveys and that they would only find out what the feedback was.

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Mr. Russell stated that his background requires two things: accountability and urgency. He asked Dr. McGee to explain what happens after the April timeframe and whether the Board or staff should expect to see something before the end of the school year to make an impact. Dr. McGee said, "Yes."

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Dr. McGee mentioned that this is aggressive, and he was way out on this one. He stressed that he must make this happen. Dr. McGee expected them to receive the results and run a District-Wide presentation. He would be looking for volunteers to be part of a single action team regarding the information from the survey.

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Dr. McGee pointed out that he was only looking for one Action Team. The team would be used to test the idea.

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Mr. Wilkerson asked if this required a motion from the Board. Dr. McGee said that it did not, and unless he hears "No," he is doing this. Mr. Wilkerson pointed out that whenever someone does home surveys, they ask for trouble. He added that using a third party will be a superior source.

Mr. Bressette mentioned that the School Board generally times things differently than the Town regarding the Voter's

Guide. The School District prefers that they arrive closer to the election date for the taxpayers. He also thanked Erin

Mazzariello for helping to guide the process and ensuring that the District made all its milestones along the way. Dr.

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March 12 Voting Day:

387 Mr. Bressette commented that the Town Election is on March 12 from 7 am until 8 pm. He noted that the Pelham

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School District's Voter's Guide should reach the residents' mailboxes on March 7 or 8.

McGee agreed and thanked Ms. Mazzariello for her hard work. VIII. **Policy Review:**

The Board reviewed the policies listed below.

a. First Reading:

i. None

b. Second Reading:

i. DK - Payments, Checks and Manifests ii. DFH - Students Activities Fund Management

iii. IIH - Students Activities Fund

Mr. Wilkerson moved to approve the policies DK, DFH, and JJH, as presented. Ms. Greenwood seconded the motion, which passed (5-0-0).

IX. Board Member Reports:

A. Mr. Bressette commented that he wanted to recognize Mr. Gellar; this was his last meeting after many years on the Board. Mr. Bressette noted that the Board members all admire how he has conducted himself on this Board over nine years.

Mr. Bressette recognized Mr. Gellar's impressive and long-standing dedication to the Pelham School District. They could always count on him to ensure that the students were at the core of all the board decisions. The Board members were very grateful.

B. Mr. Gellar mentioned that it was a tough decision not to run again, but he felt it was time for new blood to come in with new ideas. Mr. Gellar stated that he had two rides; the first was for six years, and he took two years off. The second ride was for three years. Mr. Gellar noted that he came back to the Board because he thought he could help transition from COVID to post-COVID.

Mr. Gellar proudly stated that over the nine years that he has been on the School Board, only one warrant article, a Retained Earning Warrant Article, did not pass. Mr. Gellar commented that anybody who is on the Board must balance the things that they want for education and those things that they want. The Board needs to rely on the community to decide whether the ideas they bring forward every year are the ones the community wants to support.

Mr. Gellar was hopeful that it would be possible again on March 12. He wished the Board and the District all the best in educating Pelham students.

- **C.** Ms. Greenwood thanked Mr. Gellar for his service and added that it was interesting to negotiate with him and that she learned a lot more about him.
- **D.** Mr. Russell thanked Mr. Gellar and added that he would be missed.
- **E.** Mr. Wilkerson appreciated Mr. Gellar's ability to be a deliberate thinker. He added that Mr. Gellar never showed evidence of jumping to a conclusion without probing an idea and determining the best course of action.
- **F.** Mr. Gellar mentioned that he chose not to be the Chair this time. He noted that when you are a Board member without the responsibility of being a chairman, you have more freedom of action.
- **G.** Mr. Bressette thanked Mr. Gellar and added that they learned much from him.

X. Housekeeping:

A. Adoption of Minutes

- **a.** February 21, 2024 Draft Public Minutes
- **b.** February 21, 2024 Draft Non-Public Minutes

Mr. Gellar made a motion to approve the February 21, 2024, Public Meeting Minutes as presented. Mr. Wilkerson seconded the motion. The motion passed (5-0-0).

Mr. Gellar made a motion to approve the February 21, 2024, Non-Public Meeting Minutes as presented. Mr. Wilkerson seconded the motion. The motion passed (5-0-0).

B. Vendor and Payroll Manifests

a.	466	\$605,363.27
b.	AP030624	\$669,360.40
c.	BFPMS30	\$ 10,109.18
d.	PAY466P	\$449,092.40

Mr. Gellar made a motion to approve the Vendor and Payroll Manifest as presented. Mr. Wilkerson seconded the motion. The motion passed (5-0-0).

C. <u>Correspondence & Information</u>

a. None

D. Enrollment Report

The Board reviewed the enrollment report.

	End-of-Year			Change from
Grade Level	23-24	2/1/24	3/1/24	2/1/24
PES Total	747	766	763	-3
PMS Total	354	341	341	0

PHS Total	571	552	550	-2
PSD Total	1,672	1,659	1,654	-5

E. Staffing Updates

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a. Leaves

i. None

b. Resignations:

i. Thomas Babaian PHS Assistant Principal

c. Retirements:

i. None

d. Nominations:

i. Zachary Medlock, PMS Principal

Dr. McGee mentioned that Mr. Babaian, PHS Assistant Principal, resigned at the end of the school year after 30 years. Dr. McGee reminded the Board that Mr. Babaian was also the long-term football coach. The Board agreed that this was sad news.

Mr. Bressette said that Mr. Babaian was leaving some big shoes to fill.

Dr. McGee commented that they have a nomination for the PMS Principal position. He nominated Mr. Medlock, who went through the search process for the PMS Principal position.

Mr. Gellar made a motion to accept the resignation of Tom Babaian, as presented. Mr. Wilkerson seconded the motion. The motion passed (5-0-0).

Mr. Gellar made a motion to accept the nomination of Zachary Medlock as the PMS Principal. Mr. Wilkerson seconded the motion. The motion passed (5-0-0).

XI. Future Agenda Planning:

A. No Future Agenda Planning

XII. Future Meetings:

A. 03/12/2024 – 7 am until 8 pm Voting Day @ PHS Gymnasium

B. 03/20/2024 – 6:30 pm School Board Meeting @ PES Library

XIII. Non-Public:

Mr. Gellar made a motion to enter a non-public session under RSA 91-A:3 (II) (c) – reputation and RSA 91-A:3 (II) (i) – emergency planning at 7:35 pm. Mr. Wilkerson seconded the motion. The motion passed (5-0-0).

Roll Call

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 Mr. Bressette
 - Yes

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 Mr. Gellar
 - Yes

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 Ms. Greenwood
 - Yes

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 Mr. Russell
 - Yes

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 Mr. Wilkerson
 - Yes

XIV. <u>Reconvened:</u>

The Board returned to Public Session at 8:16 pm.

XV. Adjournment:

523 524	Mr. Wilkerson made a motion to adjourn the School Board Meeting at 8:17 pm. Mr. Gellar seconded the motion. The motion passed (5-0-0).
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526	Respectfully Submitted,
527	Matthew Sullivan
528	School Board Recording Secretary