

Pelham School Board Meeting
Pelham Elementary School
September 25, 2024
6:30 p.m.

School Board Members: Troy Bressette, Chair; David Wilkerson, Vice-Chair; Garrett Abare; Rebecca Cummings; and Darlene Greenwood

Superintendent: Chip McGee

Assistant Superintendent: Sarah Marandos

Business Administrator: Deb Mahoney

Student Representatives: Mya Belanger and Alexia Nou

Absent: David Wilkerson

Also in Attendance: Erin Henderson, Library Media Specialist; Alison Bowman, English Teacher; Katie Ralls, FACS Teacher; and PMS Principal Zack Medlock

Students: Tristen Manchester; Kaelin Shanahan; Adam Price; and Cameron Marvin

I. Public Session:

A. Call to Order:

6:30 p.m. - Chair Troy Bressette called the meeting to order, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Opening Remarks:

A. Superintendent:

Superintendent McGee began the meeting with opening remarks. He first highlighted an upcoming community event: the grand reopening celebration of the Pelham Memorial School on Saturday. The ceremony will be held in the gym at noon, followed by building tours from 12:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. He encouraged community members to attend, noting it would be fun.

Next, Dr. McGee mentioned that the school had an early release today to facilitate Professional Development. He acknowledged that early releases can be inconvenient but stressed the importance of the training conducted. This year's Professional Development focused on annual suicide prevention and response training. Trainers from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in New Hampshire led the session at PES, addressing these difficult but essential topics. Additionally, the year's first 'Trust Survey' was completed during the day.

Dr. McGee shared a personal observation about Spirit Week at PHS, during which many students wore denim head-to-toe as part of the day's theme. He also previewed upcoming Homecoming events, including a football game on Friday and another game on Saturday.

Dr. Marandos announced that the Professional Development that occurred today for elementary and middle school will flip-flop at the next early release day in October. She noted that a special event is happening next Monday at 6:00 p.m. Lynn Lyons, a renowned speaker who has been featured on Good Morning America, will deliver a free presentation titled "From Stressed to Smart: What Parents Need to Know and Do About Worry, Anxiety, and Depression." Dr. McGee encouraged everyone to attend, emphasizing the value of Ms. Lyons' insights.

Mr. Bressette thanked Dr. McGee and Dr. Marandos for their updates, noting that the information sounded useful and practical. Mr. Bressette especially acknowledged Lynn Lyons, mentioning her previous presentations as impressive, and thanked Dr. Marandos and the team for arranging her return.

B. Student Representatives:

Ms. Nou noted that this week is particularly busy due to Homecoming and Spirit Week. She mentioned that today was Denim Day, and a rally at PHS will be on Friday. Following the rally, there will be a Homecoming football game, and the Homecoming dance will take place on Saturday.

Ms. Belanger shared that her personal favorite event during Spirit Week was the student and teacher swap. She found it amusing to see teachers wearing sweatpants.

III. Presentations:

A. None

IV. Main Issues:

A. PHS Overnight Field Trip Approval

During the meeting, the Board considered approving an overnight field trip for student government students. Erin Henderson and Alison Bowman, along with two students, Kaelin Shanahan and Tristen Manchester, were present to provide details. Ms. Henderson, the school's library staff member and student government advisor for six years, introduced the group. She was accompanied by Ms. Bowman, the newly appointed co-advisor, and two juniors. Ms. Henderson noted that both students attended the trip last year and were invited to share their experiences with the Board.

Mr. Abare entered the meeting at 6:36 p.m.

Kaelin and Tristen explained the impact of the previous year's trip, highlighting the creation of the Winter Carnival, which featured various activities such as a pancake bar, karaoke party, and games throughout the school. The day concluded with a pep rally, which was highly successful. Tristen emphasized how much they learned from interacting with other schools and noted that the trip was educational, fun, and an excellent opportunity to socialize. Both students appreciated the speaker and recalled that the conference's theme involved 'Keys to Success.' They also conducted an interview with the speaker, Ted, and offered to share the video with the Board.

Ms. Henderson continued by explaining that last year's group, consisting of four sophomores and one freshman, gained valuable insights from the mostly older participants at the event. The school is part of the New Hampshire Association of Student Councils, which organizes the conference. Ms. Henderson also acknowledged an administrative error that delayed the receipt of communication from the organization due to a late payment. However, the issue had been resolved.

Mr. Bressette expressed his comfort with approving the trip based on general information and a proven track record. Ms. Henderson mentioned that this year's conference theme is "Take an Oath to Personal Growth" and that they plan to bring approximately ten students, depending on interest.

The cutoff date for signing up for the conference is October 15.

As the discussion progressed, Ms. Henderson shared that last year's trip had inspired the implementation of the Winter Carnival and a field day at the end of the school year, which had a significant positive impact. She recounted how students enthusiastically participated in activities, including petting baby goats, and how these events fostered a sense of community and connectedness among the students.

The Board members praised Kaelin and Tristen for their leadership and willingness to speak before the Board, emphasizing how their contributions aligned with the District's goal of student connectedness. After further discussion, Mr. Bressette called for a motion to approve the overnight field trip for student government.

Ms. Greenwood moved to accept the proposal for the overnight trip for student government. Ms. Cummings seconded the motion. The motion passed (4-0-0).

Ms. Henderson raised a question regarding the trip’s chaperone policy, specifically whether it was necessary to have both male and female chaperones since other schools involved would also provide chaperones of both genders. The possibility of an exception to allow only two female chaperones, Ms. Henderson and Ms. Bowman, was discussed. Ms. Henderson shared her experience of chaperoning the trip solo last year with five male students and requested approval to proceed similarly. After some conversation, it was agreed that further discussion was needed on the policy.

B. PMS Cell Phone Pouches Update

Next on the agenda was an update on the Yondr pouch implementation at PMS. Principal Zach Medlock was invited to present the findings. He began by introducing students Cameron Marvis and Adam Price and FACS Teacher Katie Ralls. Mr. Medlock then shared his initial data, specifically focusing on student bathroom sign-outs, discipline referrals, and the general atmosphere in the school since the Yondr pouch was implemented.

Early Data Findings:

- Last year, there were **718 office referrals**. This year, there have been **40 referrals in 16 days**, which projects **450 referrals over 180 days** for the school year.
- Last year, 27 phone violations were submitted through the office referral form; this year, there has been **one phone violation** to date.
- There were 15 bathroom violations last year and one so far this year.
- The school is working on effectively analyzing data on bathroom sign-outs and plans to share these insights later in the school year.

Overall, the school environment seemed calmer, with less roaming in the halls and fewer disruptions. He expressed optimism about collecting more data, including grades and test scores, as the year progressed.

A survey was distributed from September 8 to September 15 to gather feedback on the Yondr pouch implementation. However, only three students responded, so the results were not considered a large enough sample to draw significant conclusions. Mr. Medlock noted that teachers and parents had generally provided positive feedback, but parent responses were mixed, with opinions ranging from complete support to opposition.

Survey Results

Survey Question	Response Option	Percentage	Number of Responses
<i>How do you feel about the Pelham Memorial School being a phone-free space using the YONDR pouches?</i>	1 (I do not like this idea.)	23.7%	9
	2	0.0%	0
	3	18.4%	7
	4	13.2%	5
	5 (It is a great idea.)	44.7%	17

Survey Takeaways:

- Overall, both parents and teachers strongly support the program.
- However, there are areas for improvement in gaining further parental investment in the program.

The floor was then opened to Cameron Marvin, an eighth-grade student, who shared his experience with the new cell phone plan.

The letter read, “Good Evening. Thank you to Dr. McGee, Dr. Marandos, Mr. Medlock, and School Board members for allowing me to speak tonight.

My name is Cameron Marvin, and I am an 8th grader at Pelham Memorial. I wanted to share my experience with the new Yondr pouches so far.

My class has seen a lot of change within the school since our first day in 6th grade. This is our first year without construction or renovations. With that construction, there were a few distractions. However, I feel the distractions inside the classroom were worse. Any distractions from construction were small and gave us a great new school. The distractions from phones in the classroom do not have benefits.

I am a teenager, so I definitely do not like getting up for school every single day, but once I am there, I like school. I like our school, and I really like our teachers. The distractions I mentioned were mostly with other kids using the phone, and then they had to be spoken to. Sometimes, this would be multiple times, and it is frustrating when class has to stop so much. The teachers are trying to talk, but they would have to keep stopping because they caught someone using their phone. It made it really hard to focus on what they were saying or to work on independent work.

Kids would have their phones open and check Snapchat, show videos and text, or sometimes take photos or videos. It was every day. When you go into the bathroom, there will always be someone on the phone or a group of people using them. Since Yondr started, classes have been much calmer this year.

The temptation to sneak on the phone is not there because no one can access it. The kids are not getting in trouble as much, and the teachers can teach the whole class without having to stop to tell someone to put their phone away or send them to the office. The good thing is that not just one person is punished with their phone taken away. Everyone is equal and has to do the same thing with their phone. No one has that pressure.

When people ask me how it is going, the main description I can give is that it's more peaceful. There is a big weight lifted off our shoulders. The phones are out of sight, and everyone knows it, so it makes the day much calmer. I love that when the teacher is talking, I can pay attention more. I used to leave school some days stressed out because I couldn't focus in class. With all the TikTok's being made, videos taken, and all the kids sneaking their phones, it was stressful when trying to pay attention. I could tell the teachers did their best to stop it, but a 13-year-old is really good at hiding it. I am not really sure how they could ever teach if they were looking for phones the whole class.

In the beginning, kids were very annoyed about it, but that is because we didn't know enough about it. I am on the football team here in town, as well as baseball and band. Because of that, I have a group of different friends and teammates. Many of those I have heard opinions from do not mind and say they appreciate it now.

The fact that the pressure of the temptation to use the phone (even for a quick second) is gone makes things much calmer.

The office always allows us to call a parent if we need to talk to them about something important, like rides home or if something is canceled after school, so that is something the kids and parents can feel good about.

I know this isn't an official survey, but when talking to my friends, they don't really mind it anymore. I really feel like the pouches will benefit us all, and the future classes moving up.

Thank you"

Mr. Bressette expressed gratitude to Cameron for his courage in sharing his thoughts. Following Cameron's remarks, he provided a brief explanation regarding how the phone pouches work. He stated that each student is assigned a pouch in which they place their phone, and it remains sealed throughout the day. Unlocking the pouches at the end of the day takes less than a minute.

Ms. Cummings expressed disappointment about the low student survey participation, with some members suggesting alternative methods for future surveys, including anonymous in-school surveys to encourage higher

response rates. The logistics of ensuring anonymity and the legal requirements to provide notice to parents before administering non-academic surveys were discussed.

The discussion ended with a consensus to continue collecting data and conducting surveys while maintaining transparency with parents and students. Further check-ins will be scheduled to evaluate the Yondr pouches' ongoing effectiveness.

Mr. Abare raised a question, asking for clarification about the consequences of not putting a phone in the Yondr pouch. He asked, "What happens if someone doesn't put their phone in the pouch?" Cameron explained that if a student is caught with their phone outside the pouch without permission, the consequence would likely be detention. Mr. Bressette commented that the District has a comprehensive progressive discipline program outlined in the Handbook. Mr. Medlock said the first step is usually a warning, with a call home to inform the parents. Subsequent violations would lead to detention and then suspension. The goal is to change the student's behavior.

Mr. Abare asked another question about last year's situation before introducing the Yondr pouches. He asked Cameron to paint a scenario of why monitoring students using cell phones was difficult while a teacher was teaching. Cameron explained that students would often be on their Chromebooks, but some would also secretly be on their phones. At any given time, at least six students in a class could use their phones, making it difficult for teachers to maintain control and focus.

Mr. Medlock gave the example of a student being caught using their phone in class. The discussion centered on how students, particularly 13-year-olds, are skilled at hiding their phones and pushing boundaries. He mentioned that even at home, it is common for teenagers to test limits, and the same behavior is seen in the classroom.

Ms. Ralls mentioned that there were typically **20 to 25 students** in the classroom who regularly used their phones. Many teachers favored implementing a plan like the one used at PES, as students were already accustomed to keeping their phones in their bags, making the transition to the new plan smooth.

In the mornings, students place their phones away, organized by number, which has become routine. For special cases, such as students with medical needs, their phones are treated accordingly. Students can access their phones at **2:10 p.m.**, most completing this process by **2:12 p.m.** The procedure has proven efficient, and students can check their notifications between **2:12 p.m.** and **2:15 p.m.** before boarding the bus.

Feedback from 8th-grade students indicated that they feel more engaged in class, claiming they "have never learned so much." Teachers also observed less bullying and vandalism, which they attributed to the reduced distraction from phones. Guidance Counselors reported a significant decrease in peer-to-peer conflicts, often called "drama," as students focus more on in-person interactions. Additionally, there has been a noticeable improvement in bathroom usage, with students completing their breaks in record time.

Ms. Ralls stated that the average teenager receives **247 daily notifications** across various apps, games, and texts, which previously contributed to distractions. Teachers, many of whom are parents, expressed an understanding of the anxiety associated with not being able to reach their children in an emergency. However, they emphasized the importance of maintaining students' undivided attention during critical situations, as phones can cause panic. In one instance, during a lockdown, students became agitated as their phones were buzzing, detracting from their focus on safety instructions.

Mr. Medlock mentioned that a referral system is in place for disciplinary issues. Teachers submit incidents via a Google form. The main office processes referrals, with consequences ranging from discussions to administrative interventions. Early data suggests that referrals related to phone use have nearly been cut in half, though it is too soon to draw definitive conclusions.

Ms. Greenwood expressed concern about students' access to their phones in an emergency. Dr. McGee confirmed that students would have access to their phones, but only after the emergency had passed. The school has one portable magnet, with another on order, allowing the staff to unlock the Yondr pouches.

It was noted that the Yondr pouch system has garnered mixed reactions, but there is a commitment to analyzing data before expanding the program to high schools. Mr. Medlock admitted initial skepticism about the Yondr pouches. Still, after seeing the positive impact, he acknowledged that it may have been the best idea, even though he was initially resistant to it.

C. Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Presentation

Mr. Bressette shifted the meeting to the budget portion of the agenda. Superintendent McGee expressed appreciation for the previous presentations and proceeded with an overview of the Superintendent's budget, referred to as "Level 2". He acknowledged that the earlier "Level 1" budget presentations, provided by the Principals and Directors, had been reviewed, and adjustments were made based on feedback.

In summary, the proposed budget presented was a little over **\$43 million** from the General Fund, compared to the current year's adopted budget of **\$40.5 million**, marking a **\$2.5 million** or **6.4%** increase. Dr. McGee emphasized that while this increase is significant, the District is currently operating on a default budget of **\$250,000 to \$265,000** less than the Board's initial budget for the previous year. The new budget aims to restore cuts made due to the default budget while refraining from adding many new initiatives.

Dr. McGee highlighted staffing reductions due to declining enrollment, citing a tentative count of **1,622 students** compared to **1,647** the previous year, with an expected further decline. Salary increases, mandated by passing the teachers' contract, account for **\$635,000**, and raises from the PESPA contract added **\$90,000**. Health Insurance premiums are estimated to rise by 16%, equating to a **\$715,000** increase, although this figure is subject to change pending final confirmation.

Two Key Fixed Costs:

First, **\$532,000** is budgeted for replacing a boiler at PHS installed in 1998 and is now reaching the end of its useful life. Second, Special Education costs were also highlighted, with a projected increase of over **\$1 million** due to Out-of-District (OOD) tuition, related services, and transportation.

Dr. McGee also outlined proposed staffing reductions through retirement due to declining enrollment, including a Business Teacher position at PHS, a Case Manager position at PMS, and a Classroom Teacher at PES. These cuts reflect genuine changes in enrollment and were strategically planned to avoid layoffs affecting staff members expecting to work next year.

The meeting continued with a discussion of detailed budget adjustments amounting to **\$281,000** in reductions, including removing software previously used for instructional purposes. The budget's default status and timelines were reviewed, with updates expected on October 2 and further discussions on October 16 regarding the finalized default budget.

Mr. Bressette then opened the floor for questions from Board members.

The discussion continued with a review of the budget. It was clarified that the current budget was the same as the one previously reviewed, with the only change being highlighted where "Level 2" was mentioned. Ms. Mahoney noted some subtle changes that needed attention.

The budget packet included the General Fund, with new Salary and Benefits lines that had not been presented before. This included all Salaries and Benefits, not just those for the PEA and PESPA. Fund 22, the grant fund, was also included with no proposed changes to its appropriation, as well as the Special Revenue Fund and Food Service, which now included Salaries and Benefits.

Dr. McGee raised two key points. First, facilities had proposed adding a Custodian to maintain appropriate square footage per Custodian, which was included in the budget for PMS. Second, a Special Education Case Manager was added. This position was reassigned from a currently vacant position to maintain caseload levels, avoiding the need for reductions.

Other additions included an auditorium stipend, with an increase of **\$1,000** to cover both middle and high schools. There was also a request to support Game Management Supervisors for PMS athletics, which was retained in the budget.

Mr. Bressette asked a question on page 6 of the detailed report by function, focusing on a proposed reduction of IXL for ELA and the cut of Reading A through Z. Dr. Marandos explained that IXL was previously free during COVID-19 and was currently funded through a grant for grades three through eight. However, due to grant cuts, the plan was to eliminate it for ELA but retain it for Mathematics. The reduced figure of **\$10,800**, with a **\$7,500** reduction, reflected this change, focusing on grades three through five.

Further discussion on page 18 highlighted proposed reductions related to supplies, specifically a **\$3,241** cut. Dr. McGee stated that this was based on anticipated growth in food and supply purchases, with the adjustment to reflect current expenditure patterns with some growth for the next fiscal year.

On page 33, a proposed cut of **\$6,000** related to vocational evaluations was discussed. Dr. McGee commented that the rationale for this reduction, which falls under Student Services, was based on the Director's assessment of anticipated needs. She believed this was the area with the least likelihood of being required. Additionally, a new CPI trainer was removed from the budget, as it was determined that the two current trainers could meet the District's needs without an additional resource.

Moving to page 34, under category 332, there was a proposed reduction of **\$24,480** related to Special Education Tutor Services, particularly affecting homebound students and charter schools. Dr. McGee commented that the Director indicated that this was an area with potential for cuts, as future costs were uncertain.

On page 38, a discussion took place regarding a note about a vacant IA (Instructional Assistant) position in Special Education. The budget shows **\$21,740** for each of the four Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions. An additional level 2 IA brings the total to five positions at PES, which will be needed for the next school year. The budgeted total for these positions amounts to **\$725,879.89**, which includes all vacant positions, although individual line items for each vacancy do not appear in the budget report.

Page 45 noted reductions in Language Resource Rooms, publications, and software. Based on feedback from the Director of Student Services, the cuts were proposed to minimize damage.

On page 49, Vocational Education at PHS expenditures were highlighted. The 2023 expenditures amounted to **\$84,500**, while the 2024 expenditures were **\$24,145**. The adjusted budget for the current year is **\$169,200**, but the requested budget is **\$115,200**, reflecting a reduction of approximately **\$54,000**. Ms. Mahoney provided clarification that this figure is consistent with the approved budget for FY2025 and includes carry-over costs from previous years.

On page 121, there was a query about the necessity of Professional Services, which included Engineering Consulting, E-rate consulting, Document Management, and PowerSchool consulting. Dr. McGee noted that this matter will be discussed in more detail at the next Board meeting.

Finally, on page 126, the budget includes **\$500,000** to replace a 27 to 28-year-old boiler. A recent report from EEI is being reviewed to explore energy-efficient solutions, which will be discussed in the next meeting. Dr. McGee commented that the District received a fast-track report today.

Questions were also raised about staff-to-student ratios, and data showing the ratio of staff to students over the past three years was requested. Transparency was emphasized, and there was a commitment to share the findings with all Board members.

Next Steps:

Ms. Mahoney explained that the usual practice involved preparing a discussion list for the upcoming week. The individual responsible for compiling the list offered the Board the option to continue with the established method or to make adjustments. The consensus was to maintain the current process, where a template is developed and distributed in advance, with members sending their individual inputs for aggregation and inclusion in the meeting packet for further discussion.

The conversation then shifted to specific budget areas requiring discussion or adjustment. It was emphasized that having a prepared discussion list would allow Board members to gather necessary information beforehand, particularly given that a vote was scheduled for the following Wednesday.

Ms. Mahoney agreed to be responsible for sending out the template, allowing the members to mark their discussion points with their initials for inclusion.

Ms. Cummings and Mr. Abare requested a hard copy of the budget, which was arranged.

D. DOE-25 and MS-25 Reports for Signature

The discussion then moved to state reports, specifically the DOE-25 and MS-25, which are required by the Department of Education and the Department of Revenue, respectively. Ms. Mahoney commented that the reports contain financial information, such as the balance sheet, revenues, and expenses, due by October 1, following an approved extension. The Board was asked to review the reports, and signatures were to be gathered via Panda Doc. Both reports contained identical information, with the format differing between the two Departments.

Mr. Bressette inquired about the amount of money being returned to the General Fund for FY2024. It was confirmed that the **Unassigned Fund Balance was \$1,891,442.41**, as noted on page one of the DOE-25 report. The system used to input and reconcile the data was discussed, with assurance that validation mechanisms were in place to ensure accuracy.

V. Policy Review:

The Board reviewed the policies listed below.

a. First Reading:

- i. BGAA - Policy Development, Adoption, and Review
- ii. FAA - Annual Facility Plan and Unused District Property
- iii. JICD - Student Discipline and Due Process

b. Second Reading:

- i. None

VI. Other:

- A. None

VII. Board Member Reports:

- A. None

VIII. Consent Agenda:

A. Adoption of Minutes

- a. September 11, 2024 – Draft Public Minutes
- b. September 11, 2024 – Draft Non-Public Minutes

411 **B. Vendor and Payroll Manifests:**
412 a. 557 \$683,480.41
413 b. PAY557P \$311,780.30
414 c. AP092524 \$4,995.00
415 e. DU092524 \$377,397.02

416 **C. Correspondence & Information:**
417 a. None

418 **D. Enrollment Report:**
419 a. None

420 **E. Staffing Updates:**
421 a. **Leaves:**
422 i. None

423 b. **Resignations:**
424 i. None

425 c. **Retirements:**
426 i. None

427 d. **Nominations:**
428 i. None

429 Ms. Greenwood moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Mr. Abare seconded the motion, which passed (4-0-0).

430 **IX. Future Agenda Planning:**
431 A. Mr. Bressette commented that the Policy Committee may want to review and amend Policy IJOA – Field Trips.

432 **X. Future Meetings:**
433 A. 10/02/2024 – 6:30 p.m. School Board Meeting @ PES Library
434 B. 10/16/2024 – 6:30 p.m. School Board Meeting @ PES Library

435 **XI. Adjournment:**
436 Ms. Greenwood moved to adjourn the School Board Meeting at 8:11 p.m. Mr. Abare seconded the motion, which passed (4-0-0).

437 Respectfully Submitted,
438 Matthew Sullivan
439 School Board Recording Secretary