

**Pelham School Board Meeting**  
**Pelham Elementary School**  
**November 20, 2024**  
**6:30 p.m.**

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

**Superintendent:** Chip McGee

**Business Administrator:** Deb Mahoney

**Absent:** Mya Belanger; Alexia Nou; and Sarah Marandos

**Also in Attendance:** None

**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.

**B. Public Input at 6:31 p.m.:**

No one came forward.

Public Input closed at 6:31 p.m.

**C. Opening Remarks:**

**a. Superintendent:**

Superintendent McGee provided updates as the school year progressed toward the Thanksgiving holiday. He noted that the high school's National Honor Society induction ceremony will occur tomorrow night. This year, 82 students, including high-achieving sophomores, will be inducted. Dr. McGee mentioned that the high school football team has advanced to the state championship game, scheduled for 1:00 p.m. this Saturday at Pinkerton Academy. The cheer squad will support them, ranking them second in the state.

Dr. McGee commented that the Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) program teaches students to create three meals from one chicken, emphasizing practicality and budget-friendly cooking. He said that students continue to benefit from the 3D printing program at the Memorial School, a resource available for several years.

Dr. McGee stated that PES will host a PTA Fun Night for second and third graders this Friday from 6 p.m. until 7:15 p.m. These events promote family engagement and community spirit. He added that the Salem Boys and Girls Club recently honored Fifth-grade Teacher Ms. McGuire as the Pelham Teacher of the Year. The Board congratulated her for this well-deserved recognition.

**II. Presentations:**

**A. None**

**III. Main Issues:**

**A. Budget Committee Decision:**

Dr. McGee commented that on November 14, the Pelham Budget Committee voted unanimously to support their School District's FY2026 Operating Budget, which they had reduced by **\$586,437** from the School Board's recommended budget. This changed the overall budget from **\$44,668,848** to **\$44,082,411**.

The Budget Committee reduced in three areas:

**1. PES Computer Technology Equipment Replacement (1011222500-738)**

The Budget Committee reduced this line by **\$19,600**. This was based on research the technology team completed regarding replacing our interactive panels. The team identified panels that cost **\$700** less per panel, which is **\$2,700** per panel instead of **\$3,400**. These panels still meet the required specifications. This is a reduction from **\$95,200** to **\$75,600** for 28 panels. This is for half of the panels at PES, with the other half scheduled for replacement in FY2027.

## **2. Medical Insurance Premiums**

The Budget Committee reduced these various lines by a total of **\$34,837**. This resulted from work by the Business Office to align the budgeted amounts for the district portion of the obligation for employee health insurance premiums with the actual rate increases. These rate increases varied according to the plan for this year. The overall rate increase was **\$34,837**, below the budgeted increase of **\$673,037**.

## **3. PHS Building Improvement Contracted Repair & Maintenance (1033460000-433)**

The Budget Committee reduced this line by **\$532,000** by removing the item to replace two boilers at PHS. The project is part of the Town Capital Improvement Plan. The Committee expressed openness to seeing this item again for reconsideration. They would expect additional information about whether the boilers need to be replaced in FY2026, whether they have useful life left, and the return on investment for this replacement. They asked for an impartial analysis.

Mr. Abare asked if the impartial analysis would be provided in time for reconsideration. Ms. Mahoney noted that third-party evaluations are being pursued to provide impartial analysis regarding the boiler's condition and potential return on investment if replaced. Challenges in this process include the recent departure of the Director of Facilities.

Mr. Bressette stated that this stemmed from the direction the Board provided Dr. McGee in October, and there was a clear expectation that they would meet that if possible.

Ms. Greenwood asked if the medical insurance number was set and whether the number was not going to be increased or decreased. Dr. McGee stated that the number used to be a guaranteed maximum, but now the number does not decrease.

Ms. Greenwood asked if the District would check how much life was left in the boiler. Dr. McGee added that a Budget Committee member had noted that the boiler could have four more years of useful life. The Budget Committee requested that a third-party company, not the vendor, provide alternatives to financing and energy efficiency.

Mr. Bressette pointed out that the Budget Committee is open to hearing additional information regarding the boiler if the information comes from an impartial third-party company, not the vendor. Reconsideration is approximately on January 16, 2025.

It was noted that the boiler's inclusion in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) should have ensured its priority status before reaching the Budget Committee.

Ms. Greenwood asked if the District had an emergency account in case the boiler stopped working. Ms. Mahoney said the District has a Capital Reserve Fund for facility emergencies. As of the end of the year, the account had \$330,512, and the District also has a Building and Grounds Renovations and Improvement Capital Reserve Fund, which has approximately **\$83,000**.

Mr. Bressette requested a list of all the District's Capital Reserve Funds.

Mr. Wilkerson entered the meeting at 6:49 p.m.

## **B. Goal Development:**

The conversation shifted to the School Board's goals for the current school year, which focus on strengthening student connections and improving student outcomes in mathematics. Dr. McGee noted that improving student connections would be handled at the individual school level, allowing each building to tailor its approach to its unique needs.

Board members debated the balance between providing oversight and allowing schools the autonomy to develop and execute their plans. Members agreed on the importance of transparency and the need for each school to publicly present its specific plans and progress.

Dr. McGee clarified that progress updates will be presented while each school develops its strategy to improve student connections. The first update from PMS is scheduled for the next meeting. This update will serve as a model for other schools.

Mr. Bressette suggested understanding the plans beforehand would help the Board and the public assess progress effectively. He highlighted the value of aligning building-level goals with broader District objectives, ensuring accountability while respecting the schools' expertise in achieving these goals.

The Board discussed language challenges impacting communication and trust. It was noted that terms like "escalate" and "judge" had been used during the meeting but were not intended in their literal or negative connotations. Mr. Wilkerson emphasized that communication barriers represent a significant obstacle, particularly in expressing trust across various entities within the District.

Mr. Wilkerson highlighted a broader concern: educators often feel directed by the District, the Board, or Principals rather than treated as collaborators. It was stated that effective educators prefer to work *with* these entities, not *for* them. This sentiment underscored the importance of addressing language issues to foster mutual trust and enable individual schools to align with shared goals.

Mr. Wilkerson expressed satisfaction with articulating the Board's objectives and readiness to proceed. The discussion concluded with an agreement to proceed iteratively, ensuring that plans are shared and feedback is incorporated at every stage.

The conversation continued with a brief discussion on the agenda order. A review of literacy goals highlighted a performance improvement, with Dr. McGee emphasizing the foundational role of language. The previously established goals were reiterated, focusing on the current challenges and the rationale for continuing them. It was noted that progress in literacy is ongoing and will remain a priority until the desired outcomes are achieved. The group expressed satisfaction with the positive trends observed so far.

Mr. Bressette welcomed input and acknowledged that public feedback has been instrumental in reshaping the approach to individual goals. The contributions were appreciated, reinforcing the importance of community involvement in the planning process.

The goal of making the District the "best place to work " was unchanged from the version presented at the retreat. The merging of "culture," "belonging," and "best place to work" into a unified goal was confirmed. No further discussion arose on this topic.

Mr. Wilkerson moved to approve the District goals as presented. Mr. Abare seconded the motion, which passed (5-0-0).

Before proceeding with the vote, the distinction between building-level plans and the District goals was clarified. The Board concurred that building-level plans are separate but will be provided for review.

Mr. Bressette thanked Dr. McGee for his receptiveness to feedback and confirmed that updates regarding the Memorial School will be shared in the coming weeks.

### **C. Policy Review:**

The Board reviewed the policies listed below.

**a. First Reading:**

- i. EH - Public Access to School District Records
- ii. JLCJA - Emergency Plan for Sports-Related Injuries and Additional Protocols for Athletics Participation.

**b. Second Reading:**

- i. BBBF - Student Members of the School Board
- ii. GBGNA/JLCEA/KFD - Use of Automated External Defibrillators(s) (AED)
- iii. IC - School Year and School Year Calendar
- iv. IJOA - Field Trips
- v. JRA - Student Records and Access - FERPA
- vi. IHBA - Programs for Pupils with Disabilities

Green text - Language that the Policy Committee added.

Yellow text - Language Recommended by the NH School Board Association

Mr. Wilkerson moved to approve the policies recommended upon second reading. Mr. Abare seconded the motion, which passed (5-0-0).

**VI. Other:**

- A. None

**VII. Board Member Reports:**

- A. Mr. Wilkerson noted that he could not attend the regional meeting in Salem on November 14.
- B. Dr. McGee mentioned that the regional meeting in Salem was a great event. He stated that the Salem Boys and Girls Club helps build a strong community and added that he was proud to have the Teacher of the Year on stage with the Policeman and Firefighter of the Year. Last year was the first year that Pelham was involved in the event.

**VIII. Consent Agenda:**

- A. Dr. McGee provided an update regarding Brian Sands, the Director of Facilities. Mr. Sands resignation letter was presented, as he had accepted a position with the New Hampshire Department of Education focusing on building inspections. The Board wished Mr. Sands well with his future endeavors.

The Board agreed to approve the Consent Agenda with the exception of the noted Correspondence item.

**B. Adoption of Minutes**

- a. November 6, 2024 – Draft Public Minutes
- b. November 6, 2024 – Draft Public Minutes

**C. Vendor and Payroll Manifests:**

- a. 561 \$632,109.10
- b. AP112024 \$298,883.99
- c. DU112024 \$100.00
- d. PAY561P \$320,529.99

**D. Enrollment Report:**

- a. None

**E. Staffing Updates:**

- a. **Leaves:**
  - i. None

- b. **Resignations:**
  - i. Brian Sands                      District    Facilities Director
- c. **Retirements:**
  - i. None
- d. **Nominations:**
  - i. None

Mr. Wilkerson motioned to approve the Consent Agenda with the exception of the Correspondence. Ms. Greenwood seconded the motion, which passed (5-0-0).

**F. Correspondence & Information:**

a. Special Education Funding

The meeting moved on to discuss Correspondence received from the Commissioner of Education for New Hampshire regarding Special Education Aid. Dr. McGee introduced the topic, summarizing the letter and its implications for the Pelham School District's budget.

The Commissioner's letter outlined that the reimbursement rate for Special Education Aid for fiscal year 2025 is anticipated to be **67%**. For high-cost Special Education Cases—those exceeding 3.5 times the state per-pupil cost—the District is eligible for **\$821,248** in aid, known as **District Entitlement**. However, the state will only reimburse **\$554,342**, leaving a shortfall of **\$266,906**. This gap arises because the reimbursement rate has dropped significantly, marking the lowest level in eight years.

Dr. McGee explained that while the District qualified for aid under state and federal mandates, the reduced reimbursement rate shifts the financial burden to local taxpayers. Historically, reimbursement rates have ranged from 87% to 100%, with the current year's **67%** being unprecedented. This funding gap directly impacts the District's ability to manage its budget without relying on local property taxes.

Dr. McGee noted that the statewide appropriation for Special Education Aid has remained flat for three years despite rising costs due to inflation, increased transportation expenses, and higher identification rates for Special Education services. This static funding allocation has led to reduced reimbursement percentages for all Districts in New Hampshire.

Dr. McGee proposed discussing the matter with Pelham's legislative delegation to advocate for increased appropriations in the state budget. The Board unanimously supported this initiative, recognizing the importance of addressing the growing financial burden on local taxpayers

During the discussion, Board members raised questions about the sources of state education funding, including the use of the Statewide Education Property Tax (SWEPT) and the Educational Trust Fund. Dr. McGee clarified that while funds from SWEPT are not used for Special Education Aid, revenue sources such as business taxes and the state lottery contribute to the Educational Trust Fund, which covers these costs.

Board members voiced frustration with the unfunded mandates imposed by state and federal laws, which require compliance without adequate financial support. They agreed to engage local and federal representatives to address the disparity and advocate for fair funding for mandated services.

Ms. Mahoney assured the Board that revenue estimates for the budget had accounted for a conservative reimbursement rate of **56%**, which mitigated potential shortfalls. However, the reduced reimbursement rate will affect the District's year-end fund balance, leading to a lower return to taxpayers.

In conclusion, the Board strongly supported Dr. McGee’s plan to collaborate with legislators and other Superintendents to address the funding challenges. Dr. McGee acknowledged the Board’s consensus and commitment to advocating for fairer financial support for Special Education mandates.

**IX. Future Agenda Planning:**

Mr. Abare suggested including a topic for a future agenda, specifically requesting a brief overview of the mandates and responsibilities assigned to the District by the Department of Education. He clarified that this would include state and federal mandates, emphasizing its potential focus in the coming years.

Dr. McGee and Ms. Mahoney discussed researching federal funding and grants. Mr. Abare sought clarification regarding the specific funds received from the federal government. The budget includes **\$723,000** in grant funds categorized under Fund 227. These appropriations cover various grants, such as IDEA, Title I, Title II, and others, which flow through as reimbursements to the District.

Ms. Mahoney noted that these funds are allocated for Special Education and other programs with no tax impact since grants fully fund them. If these federal revenues were unavailable, the corresponding expenses would have a tax impact.

**X. Future Meetings:**

**A.** 12/04/2024 – 6:30 p.m. School Board Meeting @ PES Library

**B.** 12/18/2024 – 6:30 p.m. School Board Meeting @ PES Library

**XI. Adjournment:**

Mr. Wilkerson moved to adjourn the School Board Meeting at 7:38 p.m. Mr. Abare seconded the motion, which passed (5-0-0).

Respectfully Submitted,  
Matthew Sullivan  
School Board Recording Secretary