

Pelham School Board Meeting
Pelham Elementary School
February 19, 2025
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

Absent: Deb Mahoney, Mya Belanger, and Alexia Nou

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 6:32 p.m.

C. Opening Remarks:

a. Superintendent:

Superintendent Chip McGee provided opening remarks, highlighting that PES was celebrating Read Across America Week in recognition of Dr. Seuss's birthday.

Assistant Superintendent Sarah Marandos mentioned the success of the PMS boys' basketball team, which recently won the championship, and the cheerleading squad, which secured first place in their recent competition. Both teams will compete in Concord, NH, next Saturday.

Dr. McGee commented that students and chaperones are preparing for an upcoming international education trip to Athens and Rome, which is expected to provide valuable learning experiences.

II. Presentations:

A. None

III. Main Issues:

A. Additional Levers of Improvement:

The meeting shifted to discussing additional levers for improving student academic performance. Dr. McGee acknowledged the urgency conveyed by the Board regarding the improvement of student outcomes, particularly in the area of Math. Dr. Marandos and Dr. McGee clarified that while progress had been made, the impact was not yet as significant as desired.

Lever 1

Over the past two years, several initiatives have been implemented, including the re-establishment of Curriculum Teams, the introduction of a Supplemental Math Course for grade 8 at PMS, and the creation of accelerated programs for grades 6 through 8.

54 Additionally, Professional Development, SAT Boot Camps, and recruiting experienced Math, Science, and Reading
55 Teachers were highlighted as key steps to address these challenges. Despite these efforts, Dr. McGee emphasized
56 the need for more urgent action.

57
58 Dr. McGee and Dr. Marandos proposed four key strategies to accelerate improvements in student academic
59 achievement, seeking the Board's support. The first lever discussed was the expansion of Professional
60 Development (PD). Dr. McGee outlined plans for targeted PD for elementary teachers on foundational skills
61 related to the science of reading and for grades 6-12 in areas related to core academic skills, such as vocabulary,
62 reading comprehension, and writing. The goal was to offer PD during contracted school hours rather than outside
63 school time, though this would require securing Substitute Teachers and additional funding. He noted that
64 anticipated underspending in salaries and benefits for the current year could be used to fund this initiative.

65
66 Dr. Marandos clarified the timing of Professional Development, including the upcoming March 11 PD Day focusing
67 on the Science of Reading and iReady data analysis. The Team also planned additional sessions in May, targeting
68 times when college students hired as substitutes would be available. The importance of ensuring sufficient
69 substitute coverage to avoid classroom disruptions was emphasized. Ms. Greenwood asked about the logistics of
70 covering all grade levels within the three days allocated for PD. Dr. Marandos responded that the PD would be
71 structured in half-day sessions for each grade, rotating staff to minimize disruption.

72
73 Ms. Greenwood inquired about the potential to schedule PD and whether all grade levels could be covered in a
74 week. Dr. Marandos explained that in previous years, they had successfully used a system of half-day sessions for
75 each grade level, spread across three days. This model would allow them to cover all six grade levels without
76 overwhelming the schedule.

77
78 The discussion turned to aligning Professional Development with teacher needs. Dr. Marandos assured the Board
79 that teacher feedback, including surveys conducted after initial PD sessions, indicated strong interest and support
80 for the planned training. The feedback was used to refine the approach, particularly for the Science of Reading at
81 the elementary level.

82
83 Dr. Marandos responded to Mr. Wilkerson's question regarding PD specific to Math goals; the Team confirmed that
84 Math-related PD would be incorporated into the March 11 sessions, with further training planned for middle
85 school Math Teachers in preparation for a new curriculum next year. They stressed the importance of consistent
86 PD for teachers to successfully implement the new Math program, similar to the model used at the elementary
87 school level two years ago.

88
89 Mr. Wilkerson asked a question regarding the effectiveness of Professional Development in Math and the adoption
90 of a new curriculum. He requested clarity on how the effectiveness of this initiative would be measured and
91 whether there would be any indicators to track progress. Mr. Wilkerson expressed a preference for evidence-
92 based Professional Development and hoped to see measurable results.

93
94 Dr. Marandos responded, mentioning the positive reception of a previous trainer used during the rollout of the
95 elementary program and the hope of securing a similarly skilled trainer for this initiative. The company would
96 employ the trainer, providing Professional Development and ensuring high quality.

97
98 The idea of hosting a parent event was introduced. At this event, families could be engaged and potentially
99 complete an assessment. The event was expected to include a variety of topics and was scheduled for after the
100 upcoming February vacation.

101
102 Ms. Cummings suggested allowing teachers to observe colleagues' classrooms as a potential addition to future
103 Professional Development. She noted that this practice, previously implemented at both elementary and middle
104 school levels, had proven successful and could be an effective approach to learning.

Mr. Bressette highlighted the pilot nature of the current initiative, emphasizing the need to assess its effectiveness and gather feedback from teachers and families before proceeding with additional steps. A more comprehensive teacher feedback survey to gather input on Professional Development's impact was proposed.

A concern regarding the costs associated with substitutes for Professional Development was raised. It was noted that the estimated cost for substitutes alone for two days across all grades would be approximately **\$23,000**. The discussion then turned to the costs of bringing in outside trainers. Dr. Marandos mentioned that Title 2 funding, primarily allocated for Professional Development, could be used to cover these expenses.

Mr. Abare stressed that the full impact of the changes would not be seen immediately but would likely be felt next year.

Mr. Wilkerson commented on the importance of addressing teacher turnover. Concern was raised about the impact of turnover on the continuity of Professional Development, particularly for those who may not have benefited from earlier training. Dr. McGee proposed a strategy of front-loading training for new teachers, ensuring they received the necessary foundational knowledge early on. The District's mentoring program was also highlighted as a key support mechanism and the required new teacher orientation.

The discussion concluded with the recognition that while turnover is inevitable, the District's ability to manage a turnover rate of **10% or less** is ideal, as higher turnover can become overwhelming. Mr. Bressette addressed the District's mentoring efforts and new teacher orientation, and he asked about the possibility of using a "train the trainer" model. Dr. Marandos indicated that the model had not been as successful. The District's approach focuses on ensuring that all teachers receive the same training, with an upcoming Summer Boot Camp being an optional, voluntary opportunity for new teachers to attend before the start of the school year.

Lever 2

The Board's discussion focused on the importance of using objective data to make informed placement decisions, particularly to provide additional instructional time for students who are not yet proficient in their subjects. Dr. McGee mentioned that the aim is to give students who are behind more time to learn rather than sticking to the standard curriculum. This approach is seen as critical for students transitioning from grades 8 to 9 and from grades 5 to 6.

One key proposal involves placing grade 8 students who are not proficient in grade 8 Math into a two-semester intensive Algebra 1 course at Pelham High School. This would allow these students to receive double the amount of Math instruction in their freshmen year compared to the standard curriculum, signaling the importance of addressing gaps in knowledge early.

A similar strategy is proposed for grade 5 students transitioning to grade 6. Students who are not yet proficient in Math or Reading will take an additional class in either Math or Reading rather than a second Unified Arts class. The third approach is implementing an objective placement test for all high school Math classes, replacing Teacher recommendations or parental/student choices with data-driven decisions.

Dr. McGee emphasized the need for support from the parents and the School Board to implement these changes. There was an understanding that parents may be reluctant, especially if a parent wants their child in a class that doesn't align with their child's strengths. Dr. McGee acknowledged that some students, particularly in middle school, may not appreciate being placed in extra Math classes instead of Unified Arts. These changes are essential to ensure students are adequately prepared in core subjects.

Additional sections of Math and Reading may be required at the high school level, which could lead to trade-offs between Math and Elective Teachers. Although no changes are expected to the staffing requests for the upcoming year, adjustments might be necessary as the scheduling process progresses. Regarding the middle school, staffing needs will likely be met without additional resources, though further discussions may arise.

The new strategy for Math placement in grade 8 is already being implemented as part of the course selection process. Parents have generally been supportive of this change. For grade 5 students not yet proficient in Math or Reading, the plan is to place them in smaller, targeted classes focusing on these subjects. A certified Math or Reading Teacher will be assigned to these sections rather than random staff.

Regarding staffing, the need for additional teachers for these sections is still unclear. Still, the number of sections may need to be increased at the high school level, which could require reallocating current staff. Although the District's budget for the next year has already been proposed, Dr. McGee mentioned that there may be slight adjustments to accommodate the necessary changes.

Dr. Marandos commented that adjusting student schedules has already been tested in the past two years with programs such as "Mathletes" and a Reading program, where students not proficient in these subjects were placed in specialized classes. The school has not yet asked parents to select which Unified Arts class their child will forgo but might consider implementing a survey to gather input on this matter.

Dr. Marandos stated that when it comes to the placement of grade 5 students who are not proficient in Math, the plan is to place them in a specialized Math class for **one trimester**, though this is still under discussion. Each section would likely consist of no more than **10 students**, allowing for more individualized attention. The goal is to boost these students' Math skills without overwhelming them, with the option to rotate groups of students each trimester.

Dr. McGee said that if the budget were not a concern, additional teachers could be hired to allow all students who are not proficient in Math to receive extra instruction until they are caught up. However, due to staffing limitations, the plan will focus on maximizing current resources. The urgency of addressing these gaps in proficiency is emphasized, even though it may mean students miss out on other areas of interest, like art, for a time.

The Board discussed the communication of proficiency levels to students and parents. Teachers regularly share performance data with students and parents at the elementary level. The District provides simplified one-page reports to parents to help them understand assessment results. However, there are concerns about how well parents understand these results, and there is recognition that teachers need training on how to interpret data, particularly from tools like IReady. Parents also have access to detailed reports, and the school encourages them to reach out if they need help understanding their child's progress.

Suppose students are proficient at the end of grade 5 but begin to struggle in grade 6. In that case, a process is in place for teachers to review historical data and alert the Administration to any discrepancies. Each school has an RTI (Response to Intervention) process that helps identify and address issues early. Dr. Marandos stated that students who typically perform well in elementary school continue to perform at grade level in subsequent years, but any sudden drop in performance is closely monitored.

The Board discussed several points related to the Math placement process. Mr. Bressette requested clarification regarding the differences between the current practices and the proposals outlined in bullets 1 and 3 under **Lever #2**. Dr. Marandos responded that the main difference is in the Math placement program, which had been implemented prior to COVID. The program of studies states that the Math placement process determines placement in freshman-level courses.

In the past, various data points were used; however, this year, the focus is on the mid-year **iReady** assessment. In January, students placed below grade level have two additional opportunities to improve their placement. The system has been well-received by parents, as students have their **SAS test** in May and the **iReady** assessment, with several months remaining for students to demonstrate they are on grade level. Students who meet the grade-level expectations can move out of the full-year algebra course.

Dr. Marandos then moved to the third bullet under lever **#2**, which involves potentially reallocating budget funds. The current **iReady** test is only available for grade 9 students, and the proposal is to extend it to grade 10. This would allow for a more specific assessment of Geometry and Algebra domains, ensuring objective, normative data supplement Teacher recommendations. The goal is to use the **iReady** test results to inform placement decisions for **Geometry** and **Algebra 2** rather than relying solely on teacher recommendations.

It was confirmed that this adjustment would be a minor tweak to the existing process. Instead of Teachers creating their placement tests, the **iReady** assessment will serve as an informed measure. Dr. McGee noted that the shift, as discussed by Dr. Marandos, is significant. Teachers would no longer have to balance the roles of both coach and referee for high-stakes placement decisions. Instead, the objective data from the **iReady** test would drive the placement decisions, ensuring a more standardized approach.

Lever 3

The discussion then centered around a proposal to enhance the curriculum in non-math and non-reading classes, particularly at the elementary and middle school levels. The focus would be on incorporating more core academic skills, particularly the Health, Library, and STEAM courses. The idea was to introduce additional Math standards into the middle school Science classes, aiming to increase instructional time and engagement with key standards. It was noted that while these classes are often perceived as fun, the expectation is that they should still maintain high academic rigor. The support of the Board, parents, and Teachers will be crucial in raising the expectations for these Unified Arts classes.

The cost of this initiative is minimal, as it can be covered by reprioritizing funds typically allocated for curriculum revisions. The proposal will be prioritized over other competing initiatives. Ms. Greenwood expressed concerns about the potential workload for Library Teachers, who typically teach multiple grade levels. Dr. Marandos clarified that the curriculum revision would be an ongoing process and that Teachers would be supported in their efforts. Collaboration between elementary, middle, and high school teachers was emphasized, especially ensuring a cohesive program highlighting critical literacy skills.

There were also discussions about the flexibility of the curriculum. Teachers could select which areas to enhance with guidance from the Administration. Once the Board approves the plan, work will begin in the third trimester, and summer curriculum work will also be a possibility. The collaboration across grade levels is expected to foster better communication among unified arts teachers, who often lack vertical collaboration opportunities. The initiative is seen as a great opportunity to advance the curriculum.

Mr. Abare, regarding a separate matter, asked a question regarding the percentage of grade 8 students requiring two terms of Math when entering high school. Although the exact number was not finalized, Dr. Marandos estimated that approximately **50%** of students would need this additional support. She noted that the reception to this initiative has been positive, with parents and students showing enthusiasm. It was noted that offering extra credit for completing the Math test could increase student motivation, particularly after the grade 8 trip to Washington, D.C., when motivation tends to dip.

Mr. Bressette confirmed that there would be additional opportunities for students to improve their performance, particularly in response to standardized assessments. Dr. McGee stated that students would have the chance to move out of Remedial Math classes if they demonstrated proficiency. This approach was viewed as motivating for students to engage more actively in their academic work.

Lever 4

The meeting shifted to Lever 4. The Board discussed the need for summer school to increase instructional time for students who are not yet proficient, particularly those who have not passed Algebra 1. Dr. McGee said that PHS Principal Dawn Mead and Assistant Principal Adam Barrier contributed to the conversation, suggesting the inclusion of summer school to help these students.

Dr. McGee said the program would be a recovery initiative for students below proficiency in Algebra 1, with a benchmark range of **50 to 64** for eligibility. This would be the first time the program has been reintroduced since COVID, when a virtual recovery program was offered instead. The summer school would align with past practices before COVID-19, specifically targeting Algebra 1.

The funding for the summer school program would come from anticipated underspending in salary and benefits from the next fiscal year, as this initiative was not initially included in the budget. The discussion also highlighted the importance of encouraging participation in the summer school program, as it can be life-changing for students when they can work in a lower-stakes environment.

Mr. Wilkerson raised a concern regarding the scope of the summer school program. It was clarified that the program would not include other classes beyond Algebra 1. Previously, when funds were more readily available, recovery programs were offered for multiple courses, but this would now be focused solely on Algebra 1.

The meeting moved to discuss the progress of the ongoing initiatives. It was agreed that progress reports could be made in May detailing professional development, the student's Math placement status, and the start of curriculum work. The report would also provide a general update on the recovery programs. It was noted that the output, such as student performance data, would be crucial to measure the success of the initiatives, with the state assessment data expected to be available in the fall.

Mr. Bressette suggested increasing community engagement by developing a more robust mechanism for reporting progress, such as a goals dashboard or a newsletter that could highlight key academic achievements. This could also involve student participation, where they contribute to sharing updates or progress reports. It was further suggested that academic accomplishments, like those in Math, should be recognized in school communications, similar to how athletic achievements are currently highlighted.

Further discussions included innovative ways to communicate progress, such as student involvement in reporting efforts. Ideas ranged from community updates via newsletters to leveraging existing platforms for academic recognition, similar to how athletic achievements are celebrated. Suggestions included integrating progress reports into school communications like "Tiger Techs" or "Panda Techs."

Mr. Bressette thanked Dr. McGee and Dr. Marandos for compiling the information and the work that went into the presentation.

The Board acknowledged the significant planning and execution efforts and expressed unanimous support for moving forward.

B. March 11 Annual Meeting Session 2 - Voting:

The discussion then shifted to a reminder of the upcoming town election on **March 11**, with polling hours from **7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.** The voter guide is set to be distributed during the week of **March 3**.

C. Draft Calendar 2025 – 2026 - Second Read:

The Board reviewed the 2025-2026 School Calendar. The only modification was designating August 26 as the first full school day, ensuring specialized transition days for PES Meet and Greet, PMS Grade 6, and PHS Grade 9.

Mr. Abare moved to adopt the calendar as presented. Mr. Wilkerson seconded the motion, which passed (5-0-0).

The Board then reviewed the School Board Meeting Calendar. Regarding the Board meeting schedule, an optional Saturday budget session was discussed as an alternative to multiple evening meetings in September.

The Board deliberated on scheduling adjustments, noting that consolidating meetings could streamline discussions on budgetary matters, including the three building budgets: **Facilities, SAU, and Nutrition Services**. Board members expressed mixed opinions, with some favoring an extended session for efficiency and others prioritizing family time. The decision was left to the next Board.

D. Policy Review:

The Board reviewed the policies listed below.

a. First Reading:

- i. None

b. Second Reading:

- i. BDC - Appointed Board Officials
- ii. DAF - Administration of Federal Grants
- iii. DID - Capital Fixed Assets
- iv. GBGD - Workers Compensation Temporary Alternative Work Program

Mr. Wilkerson moved to adopt policies BBC, DAF, DID, and GBGD, as presented. Ms. Greenwood seconded the motion, which passed (5-0-0).

IV. Other:

A. Title IX

Regarding Title IX policy updates, Mr. Bressette mentioned that the Board received an urgent recommendation from the **New Hampshire School Boards Association (NHSBA)** to revert to the 2020 policy standards. The Board discussed the implications and the necessity of an emergency adoption.

Dr. McGee clarified that legal counsel had reviewed the situation and advised that an immediate policy change was not necessary, as the District was already in compliance with the 2020 federal regulations. Given this alignment, the Board followed the standard Policy Committee review process rather than expedited changes.

Mr. Abare moved to direct the Superintendent to follow all federal laws regarding Title IX. Mr. Wilkerson seconded the motion, which passed (5-0-0).

V. Board Member Reports:

Darlene Greenwood – Ms. Greenwood shared a personal reflection on visiting a grade 4 classroom as a guest reader. She read *Horton Hears a Who!* and engaged students in discussions about perseverance. She appreciated the experience, noting the meaningful connections formed with the students.

Mr. Bressette said that his go-to book during Read Across America Week is *Fox in Socks*, and Dr. McGee will read *Grumpy Monkey* to Grade 3 students.

VI. Consent Agenda:

A. Correspondence & Information:

a. Pelham Planning Department – Letter on Solar Project

Dr. McGee provided the correspondence included in the consultation feedback from the Planning Board regarding the Solar Project. The Planning Board provided suggestions on snow management, roof security, and solar glare issues. This feedback was shared with the internal Team for review. Mr. Bressette noted that these topics had been thoroughly discussed during prior solar considerations, and the Board expressed confidence that the necessary concerns had been addressed.

367
368 **b. Testimony to House Education Finance Committee**

369 The second item of correspondence involved testimony provided to the state regarding House Bill 717, which
370 pertains to special education aid. The bill, proposed by Representative Rick Ladd, suggested an amendment to
371 fund Special Education Aid in the same manner as adequacy funding.

372
373 If passed, this change would ensure full reimbursement at **\$1.00 per approved expense** rather than the current
374 **\$0.67 per dollar**, potentially saving the District **\$266,000** in local property taxes. The Board acknowledged the
375 significance of this bill and discussed the legislative process, including committee reviews and potential timelines,
376 with final decisions expected in June.

377
378 **B. Adoption of Minutes**

- 379 a. February 5, 2025 – Draft Public Minutes

380
381 **C. Vendor and Payroll Manifests:**

- | | | |
|----|----------|--------------|
| a. | 567 | \$644,224.93 |
| b. | 567M | \$2,858.32 |
| c. | AP021925 | \$440,870.76 |
| d. | PAY567P | 21,136.61 |

382
383 **D. Enrollment Report:**

- 384 a. **February 1, 2025 Enrollment Report**

385 The enrollment report was then reviewed. It highlighted significant movement in and out of the District, resulting
386 in a net decrease of three students.

387
388 **E. Staffing Updates:**

- 389 a. **Leaves:**

- 390 i. None

- 391 b. **Resignations:**

- | | | | |
|----|--------------|-----|-------------------|
| i. | Justin Hufft | PHS | Athletic Director |
|----|--------------|-----|-------------------|

- 392
393 c. **Retirements:**

- 394 i. None

- 395 d. **Nominations:**

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------|-----|---------------------|
| i. | Kimberly Hirsh | PES | LTS |
| ii. | Tiffany Smith | PMS | Assistant Principal |

396
397 Dr. McGee mentioned he was nominating Kim Hirsch, an author and parent, as a Long-Term Substitute Teacher.
398 Tiffany Smith, currently an Administrator at John Stark High School, was nominated for the position of Middle
399 School Assistant Principal, effective July 1, 2025.

400
401 Mr. Wilkerson moved to accept the Consent Agenda as presented. Mr. Abare seconded the motion, which passed (5-0-
402 0).

403
404 **IX. Future Agenda Planning:**

405 Mr. Abare proposed two topics: the implementation of high school phone pouches and the academic schedule.
406 Board members debated the benefits of restricting phone use, with some advocating a structured approach to
407 minimizing distractions.

The discussion also touched on the importance of involving Student Government in decision-making. The Board agreed that this issue warranted further discussion and that any policy changes should align with student engagement efforts.

Regarding the academic schedule, the Board expressed interest in understanding the pros and cons of the current **4x4 block schedule** versus an **A/B schedule**. It was noted that scheduling changes involve multiple stakeholders and require careful consideration. The Board emphasized the need for informed discussions with relevant School Administrators and Counselors before making any decisions.

The discussion concluded by acknowledging the importance of student involvement in decision-making processes, particularly regarding issues that directly impact their education.

X. Future Meetings:

- A. 03/05/2025 – 6:30 p.m. School Board Meeting @ PES Library
- B. 03/11/2025 – 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Town Meeting (Voting) PHS Gymnasium
- C. 03/19/2025 – 6:30 p.m. School Board Meeting @ PES Library

XI. Non-Public Session:

Personnel Matters, Superintendent Evaluation, Solar Roof Lease Contracts, and Emergency Planning

- (a) The dismissal, promotion, or compensation of any public employee or the disciplining of such employee, or the investigation of any charges against him or her, unless the employee affected (1) has a right to a meeting and (2) requests that the meeting be open, in which case the request shall be granted.
- (c) Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person, other than a member of the public body itself, unless such person requests an open meeting. This exemption shall extend to any application for assistance or tax abatement or waiver of a fee, fine, or other levy, if based on inability to pay or poverty of the applicant.
- (d) Consideration of the acquisition, sale, or lease of real or personal property which, if discussed in public, would likely benefit a party or parties whose interests are adverse to those of the general community.
- (i) Consideration of matters relating to the preparation for and the carrying out of emergency functions, including training to carry out such functions, developed by local or state safety officials that are directly intended to thwart a deliberate act that is intended to result in widespread or severe damage to property or widespread injury or loss of life.

Mr. Bressette moved to enter non-public under RSA 91-A:3, II (a); RSA 91-A:3, II (c); RSA 91-A:3, II (d); and RSA 91-A:3, II (i) at 8:11 p.m. Mr. Wilkerson seconded the motion, which passed (5-0-0).

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|----|--------------|---|-----|
| a. | T. Bressette | - | Aye |
| b. | D. Wilkerson | - | Aye |
| c. | G. Abare | - | Aye |
| d. | R. Cummings | - | Aye |
| e. | D. Greenwood | - | Aye |

Respectfully Submitted,
Matthew Sullivan
School Board Recording Secretary