

Pelham School Board Meeting
Pelham Elementary School
April 16, 2025
6:30 p.m.

School Board Members: Darlene Greenwood, Chair; Rebecca Cummings, Vice-Chair; Garrett Abare; and Greg Smith

Superintendent: Chip McGee

Assistant Superintendent: Sarah Marandos

Business Administrator: Deb Mahoney

Student Representative: Alexia Nou

Absent: Krista Garcia

Also in Attendance: Troy Bressette

I. Public Session:

A. Call to Order:

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

II. Public Input @ 6:32 p.m.

The Board encourages public participation. Our approach is based on Policy BEDH, which includes these guidelines:

- a. Public comments are limited to 3 minutes per person.
- b. Please give your name, address, and the group, if any, that is represented.
- c. We welcome comments on our school operations and programs in public sessions; however, the Board will not hear personal complaints from school personnel or complaints against any person connected with the school system.
- d. We appreciate that speakers will conduct themselves in a civil manner.

A. Christina Tetreault, 11 Magnolia Drive

Ms. Tetreault read the following:

"Good evening, members of the board. My name is Christina Tetreault, and I reside at 11 Magnolia Drive. I am here in support of Warrant Article 3, and I would like to address data presented in the district memo included in tonight's agenda.

First the district states the position dates to 2013 and that the name of the position has changed numerous times since. However, with each name change there has been a salary increase even when the same person occupied the position going from \$50,500 in FY 2013 to \$107,00 in FY 2026. I have provided you with the salary numbers from each fiscal year.

*Next, the district has referenced three high schools in support of maintaining three administrators at Pelham High or a student to administer ratio of **171 to 1** despite other high schools in New Hampshire functioning with student to administrator ratios closer to **330 to 1**.*

In referencing these three schools, the district has overlooked critical context which should be taken into consideration, and it has included inaccurate information.

For instance, in the case of Sanborn Regional High School (enrollment 448) the district doesn't include that one of the assistant principals also serves as the Athletic Director for both the middle and high schools. Additionally, the principal at Sanborn High also serves as the principal of the middle school, enrollment 251 students bring the total number of students principal oversees to 699.

The district also cited Campbell High School, but according to the school's website and the Litchfield 2025-2026 operating budget, the high school operates with two administrators. I have provided copies of the information I found during my research for your review.

Furthermore, the district memo overlooks four high schools in NH with similar enrollment numbers that manage with only two administrators, or in the case of Laconia, one principal, one assistant principal, and a Dean of Students who also serves as the Athletic Director. These schools include:

- **Fall Mountain Regional:** Enrollment 479
- **Gilford High:** Enrollment 470
- **Monadnock Regional:** Enrollment 449
- **Claremont High:** Enrollment 477
- **Laconia High:** Enrollment 562

Additionally, if a high school with an enrollment of 512 students requires three administrators, equating to 171 students per administrator, then how are large schools with enrollments of 940 (Windham), 1003 (Goffstown), and 1017 (Portsmouth) able to function properly?

In closing, I urge the board to consider the following as it discusses this matter: First, the people of Pelham voted to reduce the number of principal positions at the high school. Second, with declining enrollment (this year there are only 99 children enrolled in kindergarten) and the resignation of a current assistant principal, this is the perfect time to reassess the necessity of a third administrative position and while it will not change the current operating budget it will will save taxpayers money this year because the district will be paying one less six figure salary and the benefits that go along with the position and it will help reduce the budget for next year.

Finally, it is common practice for employers both private and public such as businesses, hospitals and even police departments to adjust their staffing numbers when circumstances change. The Pelham School District shouldn't be any different.

Thank you for your time and consideration."

B. Debbie Kruzel, Beacon Hill Road

Ms. Kruzel read the following:

"April 16th

Thank you for the time to speak, I'm Debbie Kruzel on Beacon Hill Rd.

I am here to speak about Warrant Article 3. When I initially presented this back in February, I showed how the number of high paid administrators had increased during declining enrollment. Specifically in the HS, we've decreased from 619 students to 512 from 2012 to 2025 (a decrease of 107 students or 17%) with a prediction of more declining enrollment for the immediate future. In that same period our overall enrollment went from 2098 to 1608, a drop of 23%.

The district memo to be read shortly states that "cutting a specific person's job is not helpful to the district to be a great place to work". I understand that. The most important goal, I might say, is to increase student's math and ELA proficiencies. With that in mind, critiquing jobs to support that goal (as people leave their positions) seems like an

obvious focus. When our focus is on the students improving their scores and we have wins there, that will likely create a winning environment to teach and work in.

I noticed that one of APs at the high school has resigned, this is the perfect time to evaluate the true need for this position rather than trying to keep up with the nearby districts and their number of administrators. A one size fits all plan doesn't exist in education because each school and district is unique. Pelham should focus on what our town and district need, not adopt plans that other districts use.

Since there is no indication that student numbers will be increasing in Pelham I realize that this is a new challenge to us as well as many school districts across the country. I challenge this board to look carefully and create a thoughtful downsizing program to be implemented as positions throughout all 3 schools are vacated.

Last fall I saw that student/teacher ratios at PES ranged from 16-22 students per teacher with a small KG class of 99 students (compared to grades 1-5 numbers of 107-134). (The max class size is 25... maybe that needs to be looked at more closely?)

I know there are a lot of moving pieces to run a school district and I don't have all the answers. The one thing I DO KNOW is that maintaining the same number of staff in declining enrollment is irresponsible and unsustainable. Businesses are constantly analyzing P&L statements and sometimes have to make hard decisions to let go of employees. Focusing on and attaining higher proficiencies in math and ELA should be the highest priorities (as well as science, in my opinion).

That being said, I will reiterate my 4th point from the last meeting: PLEASE CRITIQUE the SUCCESS of the proposed math curriculum to be purchase for the middle school before we get locked into 6 years of mediocrity! Are there any districts in NH that are having wild success with the proposed curriculum? If not, what curriculum are districts using that have the incredible successes that Singapore Math has?

Thank you for your time and interest and your dedication to making our students more successful."

Public Input closed at 6:41 p.m.

III. Opening Remarks:

A. Superintendent

Superintendent McGee provided an update on Wednesday, May 14, which will be an early release day for Emergency Planning. He noted that the Pelham Memorial School will conduct a reunification drill by relocating students to St. Patrick's School, which has agreed to provide space for the exercise. Pelham Elementary and High Schools will have a normal early release day with regular dismissals.

Dr. McGee also announced the nomination of a Long-Term Substitute Teacher currently teaching first grade, who has accepted a Full-Time role for the upcoming school year.

Dr. McGee shared, with permission, a personal update that two District employees, Katie Kondi (Choir Teacher) and Jimmy Kavarnos (PE Teacher), are getting married this weekend. He recognized they fell in love because of their connection to working in the same District.

Dr. Marandos commended PHS Principal Ms. Mead, Heather Kress, and other staff for their management of the SATs today. Dr. Marandos stated that the students were well-prepared and enthusiastic to take the test. Recognition was also given to four students who earned top honors in the New Hampshire History Day competition:

a. **Kaitlin Souza** – Outstanding Project on Black History Award

b. **Kai Sierra** – First Place, Senior Individual Exhibit

c. **Bella Nou** – First Place, Senior Individual Website

d. **Mia Suchecki** – Second Place, Senior Individual Documentary and Outstanding NH History Award

These students now have the opportunity to present their projects in Washington, D.C. Dr. Husby was thanked for his advisory support.

B. Student Representative

Alexia mentioned that the SAT test was held earlier that day. She noted it was a tiring experience for many students. She then turned to upcoming events. In two days, PHS will host a Beach Day fundraiser supporting Brenda. This event is expected to draw participation and support from the school community.

Alexia ended her update by noting that the National Honor Society is organizing a Craft Fair next week.

IV. Presentations:

A. 2025 Pelham Champions for Children Award Recognition – Troy Bressette

The meeting shifted to Troy Bressette, who was formally recognized as the Pelham School District's Champion for Children. Dr. McGee led the acknowledgment, inviting Mr. Bressette to the front.

Dr. McGee began by reading a few tributes highlighting Mr. Bressette's outstanding service.

Dr. Marandos wrote:

"I have worked with Troy for the past eight years, and he constantly works to make Pelham the best place to be. He's our unofficial district sports photographer and was the driving force behind getting the community to rally around our middle school construction project through a community group called ACES."

PHS Principal Dawn Mead wrote:

"He is a bridge-builder who has always brought an open ear, a collaborative spirit, and a commitment to finding common ground to support the community."

David Wilkerson wrote:

"His focus on a wider range of community concerns through prominent advocacy for school and community programs such as those promoted by our Parks and Recs Department, the Pelham Library, and though not a volunteer in the movement, his support for Scouts."

In addition to being honored locally, Dr. McGee commented that the Pelham School District nominated Mr. Bressette for the South-Central Region of New Hampshire. He was selected to represent all School Districts in the region, which is a significant recognition of his wide-reaching contributions.

The presentation concluded with Chair Greenwood presenting Mr. Bressette with a gift commemorating his eight years of service. This gesture acknowledged his formal Board role and countless informal contributions. Ms. Greenwood thanked Mr. Bressette, noting how instrumental he had been to the community and her personally.

V. Main Issues:

A. Citizen Petition Warrant Article 3:

The Board proceeded to review Warrant Article 3, as presented by Dr. McGee, then provided context and clarified details:

Article Language

The article, which must be printed on the ballot as written by the petitioner, read as follows:

"Shall the Town vote to remove the position of the 2nd Assistant Principal at Pelham High School (a non-union position recently established in the school year 2023-24) with a proposed salary of \$107,000 to help reduce the school budget and focus on teacher retention?"

The article passed with 1,659 "Yes" and 643 "No" votes.

Dr. McGee mentioned that Ms. Kruzel had previously presented on February 5, stating her understanding that the position was created during the 2023–2024 school year. She referenced declining enrollment and noted national trends showing an increase in school administrators. She emphasized that her intent was to address administrative-to-student ratios, not to target any individual, and suggested reallocating funds to support teacher retention and potentially reduce the budget.

Dr. McGee provided clarifications and corrections. He acknowledged the enrollment decline, citing 1,822 students in 2019–2020 to 1,613 in the current school year. He agreed with Ms. Kruzel's goal to improve teacher retention, calling it the most critical factor for maintaining educational quality.

However, he noted three inaccuracies in Ms. Kruzel's statement. First, the position in question was not established in 2023. It originated in 2013 as a School-to-Career Coordinator. In 2018, it became the Dean of Students, and in 2022, it was retitled Assistant Principal due to certification requirements.

Second, Dr. McGee highlighted the essential duties of the position. The Assistant Principal oversees the Master Schedule, graduation tracking, course alignment with college and career goals, teacher supervision, Professional Development, Guidance Department oversight, and all personnel matters. The role is pivotal to the school's academic programming and student support systems.

Third, he addressed the legal context. The School District's attorney confirmed that Warrant Article 3 is advisory only and not legally binding. Staffing decisions fall under the jurisdiction of the School Board. The Deliberative Body, the citizens who vote, are responsible for the budget. While the article mentioned a salary figure, it did not impact the operating budget approved in March.

Dr. McGee stated that he heard the two residents say the position needed to be eliminated. He strongly disagreed with suggestions to eliminate the position, citing the recent resignation of one of the Assistant Principals. He emphasized the loss of institutional knowledge and the impact on academic planning and student scheduling. He argued that reducing the administrative team would hinder progress on educational goals and compromise student supervision, safety, and discipline.

Mr. Abare asked Dr. McGee to describe the Assistant Principal's role. Dr. McGee and Dr. Marandos confirmed that the two Assistant Principals divide their responsibilities: one focuses on discipline and student conduct, while the other leads curriculum, instruction, assessment, scheduling, and guidance. He restated that eliminating the position would force the District to abandon essential academic functions.

Mr. Smith asked if a lower-level staff member could backfill the role. Dr. McGee clarified that there is no intermediate administrative level between Teachers and Assistant Principals. Teachers serving as Deans receive a modest stipend and still carry a full teaching load, which does not provide the same capacity for leadership or oversight.

The discussion also touched on staff reductions in response to declining enrollment. The Board noted that numerous positions had already been cut or left unfilled, including a first-grade position following a retirement. While such reductions have occurred in teaching staff, administrative staffing remains proportional to Peer Districts.

Dr. McGee provided comparisons with similar schools, all of which maintain three general education administrators:

- a. Kearsarge (481 students)
- b. Sanborn (448 students)
- c. Campbell (340 students)

Mr. Abare acknowledged Dr. Marandos for her versatility and dedication. She had covered responsibilities during a period when the District was short-staffed. The Board stressed the importance of returning her focus to Instructional Leadership rather than extending her already expanded role.

The Board did not introduce a motion to eliminate the Assistant Principal position. As the article was advisory, no formal action was required. The Board emphasized its awareness of the vote and reaffirmed its commitment to open discussion, transparency, and responsible governance.

Ms. Greenwood noted that the warrant article had been included in the Deliberative Session slides.

Ms. Cummings asked for clarification regarding a statement about a resignation, asking whether it was related to the current issue under discussion. Dr. McGee confirmed that the resignation of a skilled individual was partly connected to the matter at hand. He added that it was not the sole reason but was a contributing factor.

Mr. Smith emphasized that new information might warrant re-evaluating positions during the next budgeting cycle. Ms. Greenwood confirmed that all positions would be revisited during the development of the new budget and that the topic could be reconsidered at that time.

Ms. Greenwood then outlined the process: either a motion would be made and seconded for a vote, or the Board would take no action and proceed to the next agenda item. Since no motion was offered, the Chair concluded the discussion.

B. General Assurances for FY2026 Federal Funds:

The meeting then moved on to the General Assurances for FY25 Federal Funds. Dr. Marandos presented an annual requirement to receive federal Title Grant funding. She noted that the District must sign a set of General Assurances affirming compliance with various federal legal and procedural guidelines. These include:

- a. Policy and Procedures
- b. Audits
- c. Drug-Free Workplace
- d. Gun Possession
- e. Disciplinary Records
- f. Personnel Cost
- g. Procurement

Dr. Marandos mentioned that the Superintendent and the Board Chair sign the General Assurances document. It was confirmed that a copy of the approved meeting minutes must be submitted with the signed assurances.

The Board discussed the consolidated application, which is due by June 1. This submission is required for all School Districts and is essential for receiving initial federal funding allocations. These allocations enable the District to support Title I, Title II, Title III, and Title IV programs, which form key components of Pelham's overall teaching and learning package.

Dr. McGee and Dr. Marandos confirmed that the District was compliant.

Mr. Smith moved to approve the General Assurances for Fiscal Year 2026. School Board Meeting Minutes. Mr. Abare seconded the motion, which passed (4-0-0).

Dr. Marandos confirmed that the Board would receive the corrected General Assurances for Fiscal Year 2026 and not Fiscal Year 2025.

Once the correct form is signed, the District will upload the necessary files to initiate the consolidated application process. Dr. Marandos emphasized that this process is foundational in accessing federal grant funding.

315 **C. Legislative Update: Senate Bill 297 Regarding Risk Pools:**

316 The Board then moved to a legislative update on **Senate Bill 297** concerning insurance risk pools in New
317 Hampshire. Dr. McGee stated that although legislative matters are not usually within the Board's purview, this bill
318 has drawn significant attention from staff, community members, and education professionals across the state.

319
320 Senate Bill 297, which passed the Senate and has crossed over to the House, addresses the operation and funding
321 of health insurance risk pools. These pools allow School Districts and municipalities to combine resources to
322 purchase insurance and manage risk collectively. The proposed legislation mandates that risk pools retain a
323 minimum percentage of annual expenditures in a Capital Reserve Fund to cover potential catastrophic claims.
324 Should reserves fall below the required threshold, the pool must immediately issue assessments to member
325 Districts, with funds due within 30 days.

326
327 Dr. McGee noted that while the New Hampshire Secretary of State supports the bill, the District's current provider,
328 HealthTrust, has raised serious concerns. HealthTrust stated that the proposed structure would make their
329 continued operation unfeasible. They indicated that if the bill passes as written, they will cease operations
330 effective June 30, 2026. This would significantly impact districts across the state, including Pelham, by creating
331 uncertainty about securing affordable, comprehensive health insurance for employees.

332
333 HealthTrust supports the idea of maintaining a Capital Reserve Fund, but it opposes the inflexible financial
334 timelines and requirements. For instance, a recent **16%** rate increase included a **5%** component specifically to
335 replenish reserves, which already poses budget challenges. Dr. McGee clarified that while the District is not taking
336 an official position yet, it is monitoring developments closely.

337
338 Mr. Smith inquired whether a longer timeline, such as 12 months, might be a viable compromise. Dr. McGee stated
339 that the situation remains fluid and acknowledged legitimate concerns. The potential implications for staff health
340 coverage and the District's financial planning are significant, and the administration is tracking the bill closely.

341
342 Dr. McGee noted that if HealthTrust disbands, the District would be forced to seek alternative insurance providers,
343 likely without the benefit of a risk pool, leading to potential cost spikes far beyond current levels. Other risk pools
344 in the state include SchoolCare and the New Hampshire Interlocal Trust. Only Interlocal Trust has objected to the
345 bill, though they have not stated plans to cease operations. SchoolCare and Primex (which handles non-health
346 insurance risks) have not opposed the legislation.

347
348 While still developing, Dr. McGee stressed that this situation could lead to a disruptive transition in employee
349 health coverage. The Board acknowledged the gravity of the issue and affirmed the need to remain informed as
350 the bill proceeds through the legislative process.

351
352 Mr. Smith commented that the Senate bill currently has only one sponsor. He noted that, typically, bipartisan
353 support is expected for a bill to advance, which is not evident in this case. He asked whether communication from
354 the Board would need to go through the Chair or the Superintendent. It was clarified that Dr. McGee would draft
355 such communication, and Ms. Greenwood would also be involved. An online portal is available for public
356 comments, and in-person attendance is possible, schedule permitting.

357
358 Mr. McGee confirmed they would need to wait for the bill to proceed to the House for further discussion. Mr. Smith
359 volunteered to follow up by checking the legislative calendar and reporting. He reiterated that while individuals
360 can contact state representatives independently, Board-level communication carries more influence.

361
362
363 **D. Policy Review:**

364 Dr. McGee informed the Board that the policies under review had been carried over from the previous Board. This
365 meeting marked the second reading of the policies. The Board had already reviewed the first reading under the
366 last administration, and the District complied with the proposed changes.

The reviewed policy set stems from a recent Executive Order that moves the enforcement of Title IX regulations from the 2024 version back to the 2020 version. This reversal, enacted at the federal level, nullifies recent changes made by the Board in September 2024. As a result, the District must revert to the earlier set of regulations.

The Board reviewed the policies listed below.

a. **First Reading:**

- i. None

b. **Second Reading:**

- i. ACAC - Title IX Prohibition of Sex Discrimination and Sex-based Harassment Policy and Grievance Procedure (2024 current version)
- ii. ACAC - 2020 Version
- iii. GBAM - Accommodation of Pregnancy and Related Medical Conditions: Personnel
- iv. IHBCA - Accommodation of Pregnancy and Related Medical Conditions: Students

Mr. Smith asked about training and notification procedures for staff and students. Dr. McGee confirmed that training and acknowledgments are conducted annually, and the District is already aligned with the federal changes. Despite frustration over repeated policy shifts, the Board agreed on the importance of maintaining compliance.

Mr. Smith moved to adopt the policy changes as outlined by the Superintendent. Mr. Abare seconded the motion, which passed (4-0-0).

VI. Board Member Reports:

- A. Ms. Greenwood mentioned she was on a two-hour Zoom call with the NH-SBA and commented on the notes she took regarding the bills in the House and Senate.

VII. Consent Agenda:

A. Adoption of Minutes

- a. March 19, 2025 School Board Minutes (updated)
- b. April 2, 2025 School Board Minutes
- c. April 2, 2025 a School Board Non-Public Minutes
- d. April 2, 2025 b School Board Non-Public Minutes

B. Vendor and Payroll Manifests:

- a. 571 \$667,681.04
- b. AP041625 \$1,201,153.03
- c. PAY571P \$13,094.36

C. Correspondence & Information:

- a. None

D. Enrollment Report:

- a. None

E. Staffing Updates:

- 418 a. **Leaves:**
i. None
- 419
- 420 b. **Resignations:**
i. Adam Barriere PHS Assistant Principal
- 421
- 422 c. **Retirements:**
i. None
- 423
- 424 d. **Nominations:**
i. Megan Beal PES Teacher
- 425
- 426

427 Dr. McGee shared a staffing update and announced the resignation of Adam Barrier, Assistant Principal at Pelham
428 High School. The Board expressed appreciation for his contributions and noted that he is returning to the
429 classroom to teach English at Pinkerton Academy.

430

431 Dr. McGee also presented a nomination for Megan Beal, who served as a long-term substitute this year. Ms. Beal
432 has accepted a full-time position for the upcoming year.

433

434 Mr. Abare moved to accept the Consent Agenda as presented. Ms. Cummings seconded the motion, which passed (4-0-
435 0).

436

437

438 **VIII. Future Agenda Planning:**

- 439 A. None
- 440
- 441

442 **IX. Future Meetings:**

- 443 A. 05/07/2025 – 6:30 p.m. School Board Meeting @ Hal Lynde Conference Room
444 B. 05/21/2025 – 6:30 p.m. School Board Meeting @ Hal Lynde Conference Room
- 445
- 446

447 **X. Non-Public Session:**

- 448 (c) Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely adversely affect the reputation of any person other than a
449 member of the public body itself unless such person requests an open meeting. This exemption shall extend to
450 any application for assistance or tax abatement or waiver of a fee, fine, or other levy, if based on inability to
451 pay or poverty of the applicant.
- 452
- 453 (i) Consideration of matters relating to the preparation for and the carrying out of emergency functions,
454 including training to carry out such functions, developed by local or state safety officials that are directly
455 intended to thwart a deliberate act that is intended to result in widespread or severe damage to property or
456 widespread injury or loss of life.
- 457
- 458 (l) Consideration of legal advice provided by legal counsel, either in writing or orally, to one or more members of
459 the public body, even where legal counsel is not present.
- 460

461 Mr. Smith moved to enter non-public under RSA 91-A:3, II (c) – Reputation; RSA 91-A:3, II (i)—Emergency Function;
462 and RSA 91-A:3, II (l)—Legal Advice at 7:35 p.m. Mr. Abare seconded the motion, which passed (4-0-0).

463

- 464 a. D. Greenwood - Aye
465 b. R. Cummings - Aye
466 c. G. Abare - Aye

467 d. G. Smith - Aye

468

469 **XI. Reconvene:**

470 8:01 p.m.

471

472 **XII. Adjournment:**

473 Ms. Greenwood moved to adjourn the School Board Meeting at 8:02 p.m. Mr. Smith seconded the motion, which passed
474 (4-0-0).

475

476 a. D. Greenwood - Aye

477 b. R. Cummings - Aye

478 c. G. Abare - Aye

479 d. G. Smith - Aye

480

481

482

483 Respectfully Submitted,

484 Matthew Sullivan

485 School Board Recording Secretary

486