

**Eric "Chip" McGee, Ed.D.**  
*Superintendent*

**Deb Mahoney**  
*Business Administrator*

**Keith Lord**  
*Director of Technology*



59A Marsh Road T:(603)-635-1145  
Pelham, NH 03076 F:(603)-635-1283

**Sarah Marandos, Ed.D.**  
*Assistant Superintendent*

**Toni Barkdoll**  
*Director of Human Resources*

**Kimberly Noyes**  
*Director of Student Services*

---

## **Culture of Belonging Task Force**

Presented to the Pelham School Board: January 17, 2024

### Background:

The task force was charged with identifying the key factors that are holding the District back from a better culture of belonging, recommending an improved process for collecting, analyzing and acting on information, and recommending an improved method for reporting on progress.

The task force was composed of a cross section of team members including a custodian, educators representing each school, PEA and PESPA representatives, school level support staff, school/district administrators and technology team members.

### Definitions and Key Factors:

Initially, the task force collected words that defined a culture of belonging to them. Words included diverse, innovative, motivating, community focused, collaborative and empowered. When asked to define Pelham's culture and to identify what was currently holding the District back the following challenges were identified:

Lack of Trust	Confusing
Lack of Change	Little/No action when feedback is given
Lack of Communication	Individual school's vs a District culture and rules
Us vs them mentality	Not supported/heard
Micromanaged	Administration- doesn't remember being in the classroom
Hierarchical	Administration- lack of understanding
Treat as professionals	Treat everyone as equals no matter position
Lead by example	Power/Control

### Quick Wins:

The task force expressed the need to demonstrate the willingness, desire and commitment of the District to bring about improvements in the areas of culture of belonging. Acting as a voice of the

educators and support staff within the District, members of the task force identified four quick and easy updates/changes that would relay the District's commitment to improving culture and belonging.

These four were identified as:

- 1- Dress code expectations have been updated with jeans able to be worn during the work week beginning January 2, 2024.
- 2- Chromebook chargers for students were placed within classrooms at PMS to reduce time away from class.
- 3- Supervisors have been encouraged to share innovative, fun, and interesting activities seen during formative class visits that increase collaboration and success of team members.
- 4- Team members have had an opportunity to provide feedback on District leadership during the evaluation process.

Key Factors that are holding the District back:

1- Trust:

- a. Support: When support is sought, listen and formulate a plan to assist.
- b. Team: Build trust in one another, work as a team, trust until there is a reason not to.
- c. Visibility: As situations arise requiring an administrator, it is often perceived as negative compared to administrator visibility focusing on the positive outcomes that are happening every day.
- d. Policies: When new policies (and procedures) are put into place, communicate them and trust they will be followed to the best of the team member's ability.
- e. Expertise: Team members voiced wanting to be valued for their professional expertise rather than micromanaged.

2- Communication:

- a. Emails: Include everyone so all team members are aware and act in unison. This includes teachers, support team members, and all members of a school or department.
- b. Professional Standards: Private conversations need to be held in private, not in hallways or on walkies, etc. Otherwise colleagues and even students can think the team member is in trouble. Negative feedback needs to be shared privately and without negative emotions. Otherwise the team member can feel they are not liked. Students can over hear and think their teachers are in trouble.
- c. Communication: Communication is at times in a disciplinary tone/manner instead of in a mutually respectful manner.
- d. Hierarchy: Many team members feel there is a top-down culture within the District that does not encourage team members to grow, take on responsibilities, or rise to new challenges.

3- Belonging:

- a. History: A feeling that in the past "things" have not been addressed fairly and in a timely way.
- b. Professional Trust: Some team members feel overlooked.
- c. Listening: When appropriate, it can be enormously helpful to acknowledge there are two (or more) ways to approach a situation or problem. Team members will feel they belong when

both parties are being heard and asked to help find a solution instead of being told what the solution is.

### Recommended Ways of Improving Collecting, Analyzing and Reporting Data:

1. Collecting:
  - a. Survey twice per year utilizing an anonymous survey tool such Survey Monkey.
  - b. Focus on simple and direct questions.
2. Analyzing:
  - a. Create focus groups charged with creating action plans based on survey results. Groups meet quarterly to report on progress.
  - b. Continue using retention as a measurable outcome.
3. Reporting:
  - a. Share survey results with all District team members and the School Board.
  - b. Share action item progress within the District and to the School Board.

### Next Steps:

1. Leadership surveys delivered fall/winter of 2023. Will re-survey in the Spring of 2024.
2. Create team member survey and send in the Spring of 2024.
3. Create focus groups that will meet once a quarter to measure and report progress on action items.

Respectfully Submitted by the Culture and Belonging Task Force

Toni Barkdoll, Human Resources Director (chair/facilitator)

Zach Belanger, Facilities Team

Sue Bianchi, School Support Team

Cindy Brunelle, Information Technology Team

Brian Driscoll, District Mental Health Counselor

Sarah Goldsack, District ELL Teacher

Brandon Hannon, PHS Teacher

Kim Kelly, SAU Team Member

Keith Lewis, PMS Teacher

Tara MacDonald, Leadership Team Representative

Brian Sands, Leadership Team Representative

William Scanzani, Instructional Assistant

Erin Weigler, PES Teacher