2026 PSD Deliberative Session Minutes

PELHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT
Deliberative Session of Annual Meeting
February 4, 2026

Moderator Doug Vincent called the session to order at 7:00 pm at the Sherburne Hall. Mr. Vincent addressed inhabitants of the School District of the Town of Pelham in the County of Hillsborough and the State of New Hampshire, qualified to vote upon district affairs.

First session of annual meeting deliberative- You are hereby notified that the first session of the annual meeting of the School District of the Town of Pelham will be held at Sherburne Hall, 14 Village Green, in said Pelham on Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at 7:00 P.M. for explanation, discussion, and debate of warrant articles A, and numbers 1 through 3. Warrant articles may be amended subject to the following limitations: (a) warrant articles whose wording is prescribed by law shall not be amended, (b) warrant articles that are amended shall be placed on the official ballot for a final vote on the main motion, as amended, and (c) no warrant article shall be amended to eliminate the subject matter of the article. Please present any proposed changes in writing.

Second session of annual meeting official ballot voting - You are hereby notified that the second session of the annual meeting of the School District of the Town of Pelham will be held at Pelham High School gymnasium, 85 Marsh Road, in said Pelham on Tuesday, March 10, 2026 for the choice of School District Officers elected by official ballot, to vote on questions required by law to be inserted on the official ballot, and to vote on all warrant articles from the first session on official ballot per RSA 40:13, VII. The polls for the election of School District Officers and other actions required to be inserted on said ballot will open on said date at 7:00 A.M. and will not close earlier than 8:00 P.M and those qualifying may vote by absentee ballot.

Moderator Doug Vincent asked resident Bob Sherman to lead in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. He then began by introducing himself as Moderator and to his right School Board Member, Greg Smith, School Board Member, Krista Garcia, School Board Member, Garrett Abare, School Board Vice Chair Rebecca Cummings, School Board Chair Darlene Greenwood, and Pelham School District Clerk, Danielle Pilato. To his left, Superintendent of Pelham School District, Dr. Eric "Chip" McGee, Pelham School District Business Administrator, Deborah Mahoney, Pelham School District Attorney Peter Bronstein Esq., Pelham Budget Committee Chair, Brett Gagnon, and Budget Committee Vice Chair, Mike Carter.

Moderator Vincent then asked if there were any non-voters and requested that they please use the seats in the front section in order to keep track of those who are registered to vote and those who are not. He told the audience that there are handouts, and if they would like them to please see the folks where you checked in and received the Voting ID cards. He also mentioned to those who are watching from home that there are documents online on the pelhamsd.org website. Mr. Vincent then announced that the session would follow the usual rules of debate and asked that attendees come forward to the microphone, and once recognized by the Moderator, please state their name, address of residency, and/or the group they represent before questions or statements are made. Each speaker will have three minutes to discuss the Article under Deliberation. He asked that speakers be courteous, respectful and concise and to please direct the questions to the Moderator and he will recognize someone to respond as appropriate. If the speaker wishes to speak again, he said that they may do so after everyone has had the chance to speak. If there is a legal question, the Moderator will address the School District Attorney, Peter Bronstein Esq., to provide counsel. Comments on school operations and programs are welcomed; however, the Deliberative Session is not the place for personal complaints of school personnel or complaints against any persons connected with the school. Articles will be discussed in order, but the Moderator stated that there is no need to have each Article voted on this evening. He said that is done at the 2nd session on March 10th at the High School. Mr. Moderator instructed that only the Amendments and other motions require a vote, and to please only make one motion at a time. There is the ability for non-resident department heads to speak if that is so needed or desired. He asked that if anyone wished to make an Amendment, that they would please do so in writing and present it to the Moderator when appropriate and so that Mr. Greenwood from PTV and his team can project it. For any hand counts, he asked that they please raise their Voting Card over their head when requested. And lastly, to avoid surprises Mr. Moderator asked that after finishing discussing each Article, he would request a Motion to Restrict Reconsideration.

The first Article of the evening was Article A for the election of School District Officers. Mr. Moderator instructed that we do not take this article up for discussion, as it cannot be amended and must appear on the ballot as written.

Mr. Moderator took a moment to thank those who have served the District and especially those whose terms will be ending. He began with Darlene Greenwood who has sat on the School Board for 6 years. Jean Kivikowski who has served as our School District Treasurer this year, and Danielle Pilato who has served as our School District Clerk for the past nine years. On behalf of the town, he stated his appreciation for their service and gratitude to those who will be running for election this cycle. He stressed that they are important District roles. He then read Article A in full.

ARTICLE A

To elect by ballot the following School District Officers:

School Board Member- 3-Year Term

School District Treasurer- 3-Year Term

School District Clerk- 3-Year Term

Mr. Moderator then introduced Darlene Greenwood again as the School Board Chair and said she would introduce the articles for the evening. Mrs. Greenwood explained that there are three articles the Pelham School Board has developed for the school district warrant this year.

Warrant Article 1 is the Operating Budget. She stated that the budget is up 2.2% over the current year's budget.

Warrant Article 2 is the PESPA Agreement. She said this agreement would provide wage increases for our instructional assistants, who work with some of our neediest students.

Warrant Article 3 is the Special Education Capital Reserve. This article would set aside funds, if funds remain at the end of this school year, in a reserve fund. The money would be available if we face a large unbudgeted expense in special education. It would not raise new taxes.

She then stated that all three articles are recommended by the School Board and the Budget Committee.

Mr. Moderator then stated that next on the agenda was Article 1, which addresses the School District operating budget for the Fiscal Year 2026 which applies to the 2026-2027 school year. He then read the Article in full.

ARTICLE 1 - OPERATING BUDGET

Shall the Pelham School District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session of the annual school district meeting, for the purposes set forth herein, totaling Forty Five Million, Sixty-Five Thousand, Six Hundred Eighty-Two Dollars ($45,065,682)? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be Forty-Four Million, Nine Hundred Forty Thousand, One-Hundred Fifteen Dollars ($44,940,115), which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Pelham School District or by law; or the Pelham School Board may hold one special

meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13 X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only.
(Majority vote required)
Recommended by the School Board (5-0-0)
Recommended by the Budget Committee (10-0-0)

Mr. Moderator began discussion on Article 1 by asking School Board Chair Darlene Greenwood to share the Board's explanation.

Mrs. Greenwood started with slide six of their presentation. She stated that as they do every year, the School Board set specific, measurable goals for the school year. This year they have four. Student Connections being the first: Their goal is to have 100% of our students to have strong connections at school (or an engaged adult to help them). Each school is tracking student connections to adults, friend groups, and extra-curricular activities to help find connections for students who do not have them.

The next goal she highlighted was mathematics. The goal is to have 12% more students proficient in mathematics, improving from 40% of students in grades 3 - 8 proficient or better on the annual state assessment in 2024 to 52% by 2027. Mrs. Greenwood stated that Pelham has begun to improve from 40% to 42% more proficient than last year. While improvement is good, she stated that the district has more work to do. They have adopted a consistent math curriculum from Kindergarten through Algebra I, expanded professional development, and required more instructional time for students not yet proficient. Moving forward, the District needs to continue teacher training and find additional ways to increase high quality instruction for students who are behind.

Proceeding with the slides, she explained the next goal of English Language Arts. The goal is to have 10% more students proficient in English Language Arts, improving from 47% of students in grades 3 - 8 proficient or better on the annual state assessment in 2024 to 57% by 2028. In the last year, Pelham has improved, moving from 47% to 53% proficient. She stressed that as with mathematics, the District will have more work to do. This year, they have added important curriculum and assessment tools, especially at the elementary level. Moving forward, she said the additional reading specialist along with additional high-quality instruction for struggling readers and extensive professional development will help them continue to improve.

Mrs. Greenwood shared the last goal of retention for teachers has improved from 82% to 94% in Pelham in the last five years. In order to maintain that and see the same high retention rates for all staff, they set a goal and will continue to seek competitive wages for employees and build on district culture through engagement surveys and Insights training. Mrs. Greenwood then asked if Vice Chair Rebecca Cummings could continue to the next slides that would discuss the District's perspective on the budget.

Mrs. Cummings then spoke to highlight that enrollment is a key driver in developing the budget. She said the District anticipates 1,527 students next year compared to 1,557

this year. That is a decrease of 30 students. With an anticipated increase at Pelham Elementary School from 752 this year to 775 next year. At Pelham Memorial School, enrollment is steady with a projected decrease from 339 to 326. And, at Pelham High School, the District anticipates a decrease in enrollment as a larger class graduates and a smaller class takes their place. They have 466 students this year and anticipate 426 next year. She moved to the next slide to discuss how the budget process goes through four levels to reach this point. She stated that first, the principals and directors make their level 1 requests. The superintendent prioritizes across the schools and departments for a level 2 budget. The School Board then makes additional adjustments for a level 3 budget. The Budget Committee makes a final set of decisions, which is level 4. And lastly, she explained that then if there is new information available prior to the Budget Committee's public hearing in January, that is Level 5. She highlighted that for simplicity's sake, the slide shows only the general fund, not the food service, grants, or special funds. She declared the vast majority of changes happen in the general fund.

Mrs. Cummings asked for the next slide to discuss in detail the Superintendent's "Level 2" reductions. She explained most of this reduction came from a line-by-line review, with reductions on over 240 different lines in the budget. In addition, these larger items were removed. She pointed out that the slide bulleted that first Dr. McGee eliminated a proposal for summer bus runs of $49,008 in order to give more time to determine participation rates and logistics. Second, he eliminated the 15th bus run. This will extend the average bus route in the district. This cut was $81,585. The intent of that cut was to offset the proposed late bus cost, but as the slides later showed it was also eliminated in a later round of cuts. Next, she said Dr. McGee eliminated additional stage and lighting equipment at PMS at $60,000 to request a more thorough plan be developed for the space. Last, she explained that the Superintendent eliminated an anticipated residential tuition to $258,964. Instead, she said that the Board proposed a separate warrant article to ask voters to set aside additional funds in a special education capital reserve fund for these types of extraordinary expenses. Mrs. Cummings then asked the Moderator if School Board Member Garrett Abare could explain the next two rounds of review.

Mr. Abare moved to the next slide that outlined that the School Board removed an additional $1,721,222 from the Superintendent's proposed budget. There were many smaller items, like identifying lower costs for electricity, removing some furniture replacement, and eliminating some software tools. He then stated that most of this reduction was the result of the bulleted cuts. The first is the PES HVAC Phase II at the cost of $940,613. He said this would have been to air condition the first-floor classrooms of the elementary school. It is the last space in the district that is not air conditioned and the plan is a part of the town's Capital Improvement Plan. Nevertheless, the Board decided to remove it. The next bullet was the PHS Boiler and Venting at the cost of $537,320. Mr. Abare said this would have been to replace two aging boilers at PHS in the older part of the building. It is now the second year this work has been postponed. The boiler has been inspected and maintained so it is anticipated it will make it through the winter of 26-27. The next bullet was a district wide Late Bus Run for $65,268. He explained that this was a proposal to allow those students without transportation to be

available to stay for after school academic support and activities. It would have been new this year and would have been another way to increase instructional time for students who are behind. The fourth bullet he detailed was a PES Door Access Upgrade of $50,000. This was a plan the district simply needed additional time to prepare appropriately. Mr. Abare said that it will be back for FY28. He moved next to the PHS Cell Phone Pouch Program for $17,682. This was a proposal from the Superintendent to limit the impact of social media and cell phones on high school students. This was affected by the statewide *Bell-to-Bell Ban* by Governor Ayotte. Ultimately, he said that the board did not support the new spending. And last, the Kindergarten Chromebook Replacement at $11,000. This was part of the tech plan to regularly update these Chromebooks in kindergarten. Mr. Abare said that the Board cut this funding for kindergarten's replacements and are continuing to talk at the Board level about the use of technology in early elementary classrooms.

After highlighting the Superintendent's cuts, Mr. Abare explained that he is the School Board's liaison to the Budget Committee. The level 4 cuts are at the Budget Committee. The Committee reviewed the full budget after the Board. He said the Budget Committee made four cuts. The first, he said, was removing the replacement of playground chips from the elementary school playground for $10,000. The second was the removal of t-shirts which were to be bought for middle school students on our new ESports team for $499. The third cut was not to increase field maintenance and fertilizer which was $13,860. Lastly, Mr. Abare said that the budget committee made an unspecified reduction of $325,000. The Budget Committee made the cut in regular education. However, he explained that the work of deciding what to eliminate has been left to the next School Board, which will convene after the March 10th vote.

In the next slide, Mr. Abare reviewed Level 5 which was for reconsideration. He said this level is to address new information that comes forward after the budget committee process starts in mid-October. At this time, the District identified two items for reconsideration and the Board and the Budget Committee supported them both in the operating budget. First was the medical and dental final premium rates that were received after the School Board vote. He explained that the School Board had predicted a 20% medical and 5% dental increase but then received a 23.1% increase for medical and 4.3% dental premiums. He then highlighted that across the full budget; this amounted to $102,140 in additional increases to premiums paid by the district. The second item was for Special Education Adjustments for items unknown at budgeting. The District has students requiring additional services like translation services for the hearing impaired and transportation costs for out of district students attending our CTE program. Those two items, Mr. Abare concluded together, were an increase of $153,849. He then illustrated the challenge in the year's budget by comparing two key increases to the overall budget increase from the current year to next year. Health Insurance premiums increased by 23.4%, on average. That increase amounts to $1,055,346. Meanwhile, he reminded the citizens that the town is in the third year of our teacher's contract, so voters in 2024 had already decided to raise the teachers' contract by $689,791. Between these two items, that is $1.7 million in increases. He ended his explanation by telling them that what they have in front of them on the slide is an overall

budget increase of $983,271. In other words, the Board needed to make sure everything else in the budget collectively went down by over $700,000 to get to this point. Mr. Abare then asked Mr. Moderator to recognize Board Member Krista Garcia to continue the discussion.

Mrs. Garcia began her presentation on slide 16 by explaining how the Board lowered the budget. She said the most important and most expensive part of the budget is staff. For next year, the board proposed four professional staff subtractions and one addition. They have planned to reduce the PHS Special Education Coordinator administrator position (1.0 full time equivalent,FTE) by not filling the vacant role, and instead by adding 28 days to a Dean role to support the absence. Mrs. Garcia said they would also reduce PHS Guidance Counselors by 1.0 FTE through the CBA process for a reduction in force and reduce PHS Special Education Teachers by 1.0 FTE by not filling an open position. This position is currently grant-funded. Lastly, she said they will reduce PHS Science Teachers by 1.0 FTE by not filling an open position. This position is proposed to be reassigned to PES as a Reading Specialist teaching position to support district literacy goals.

The next slide helped Mrs. Garcia display that staff reduction has been the trend over the past six years. The School District has a net decrease of 8.45 teacher positions. The next slide shows the transitions each year. She said in that same time, the Board has been able to increase the programming. They have added seven sections of full day kindergarten as well as FACS and STEAM at PMS. The slide displayed a table that listed that in 21-22, the District reduced 0.35 PHS teacher position and added 0.5 PES Nurse. That was an increase of 0.15 teacher position increase. In 22-23, they reduced 3.5 teacher positions. That was 2.5 at PMS and 1.0 at PES. They also added 4.5 teacher positions that year. 2.5 Kindergarten positions allowed them to move to full-day Kindergarten. They also added FACS & STEAM positions at PMS. Overall, she said this meant they increased by 1.0 teaching position in the District. In 23-24, there was a reduction by 4.7 teacher positions. That was 1.0 PHS Special Education, 0.7 PHS World Language, 1.0 PHS Math Teacher, and 1.0 PMS teacher position. Mrs. Garcia said they also added 1 teacher position at PES due to increased enrollment. That resulted in a reduction of 3.7 teacher positions. For the last school year, 2024-25, they reduced by 3.0 teacher positions. That was another PHS Special Education, a PHS Business Teacher and a PHS Science Teacher. For last year, they also needed to add a one-on-one nurse at PES and add a seventh kindergarten, again due to increased enrollment at that level. Overall, this resulted in a 1.0 teacher position decrease. For the current 25-26, they had a reduction of 3.9 teacher positions. That is 1.0 PHS Business, 0.4 PHS Reading Specialist, 0.5 PMS Special Education position, and 1.0 PES Special Education position. For clarity, she stated they would like to note that they added a contracted Special Education Provider. This is really a 2.9 teacher position decrease. For 26-27, the Board has planned to decrease the PHS Guidance Counselor, Special Education Teacher and Science Teacher with a proposed addition of a Reading Specialist at PES. Overall, for the last six years, they have reduced our teaching staff by 8.45 teacher positions.

Mrs. Garcia asked for the next slide. On this slide there was a bar graph to display the cost per pupil spending in the State of NH reflecting the highest, lowest on either end with Pelham and the state average in the middle. She started the discussion on this slide by exclaiming the obvious "Education is expensive". In the State of New Hampshire for 2024-25, the average cost per pupil to provide an education in public schools was $22,700. In contrast, Pelham's cost per pupil was $20,213. In fact, Pelham is $2,487 less per child. She explained that another way of thinking of it is that it costs Pelham $3,872,072 less overall than it would if Pelham was at the state average. For context she stated, the highest K – 12 district cost per pupil is $36,078 and the lowest for a K – 12 district is $17,811. Mrs. Garcia concluded by saying that the Board remains committed to fiscal responsibility and as measured by cost per pupil, the Pelham School District is 142nd out of 163 districts in New Hampshire for 2024-2025.

At the close of the Board discussion the Moderator then asked the citizens if there were any comments on Article 1. The first to come forward was resident Debbie Kruzel of Beacon Hill Rd. She asked to refer to the last graph presented. She questioned if the $20,213 was "all in" for all the expenses. For example, she asked if she divided the operating budget by the number of students, would that be the number presented? Dr. McGee began with an answer to say that that is not how the figure is created to compare. To compare across districts you must remove the cost of food service, long-term debt and any costs that are not annual operating expenses. He gave an example of different districts that may have made capital improvements or have a larger transportation cost that would not be comparable. He said that is why it is not an "all in" cost. Ms. Kruzel then said that by her calculations the budget for 24-25 was 41.5 million and with 1613 in student count that the actual number is $25,730. She commented that she knows that the way the numbers are shared for each district are done by the DOE, but she would like to ask that the actual number be reflected in the Voter's Guide for the taxpayers.

Lisa Brown of Webster Ave came forward to ask for $450 of the $499 that was removed from the budget by the Budget Committee for the ESports t-shirts. She said she feels very strongly as a Psych Nurse Practitioner that students need connections, and this program is a way to keep them connected and actively engaged at the school level. The Moderator asked if anyone from the Budget Committee wanted to comment and no one came forward. Resident Natasha Trettel of Tallant Rd came forward next to ask regarding Lisa Brown's request how this cut was made to add clarification. Brett Gagnon, chair of the Budget Committee gave comment from notes from the budget process that the E-Sports shirts were cut but the program was not. The vote to cut the shirts was a 6-5-0 vote and was highly debatable. Ms. Trettel asked if there is a way to amend to add the amount back into the budget and if the amendment was to fail, could a citizen donate the funds for the shirts. She then stressed her support for the same thoughts that Lisa Brown had regarding student's connections and the importance of ESports. Mr. Moderator provided Ms. Trettel with her answer and said that an amendment could be made regarding adding the amount back in. He then asked Budget Committee member Ken Woonton if he wanted to come forward with some clarification on this question. Ken Woonton of Skyview Dr. came forward to state that

this cut was not specific to the ESports club exclusively. He reminded citizens that all sports teams apparel is paid for, but that there are 30 plus clubs in the District across high school, middle and elementary. He stated that once you pay for one club then you open the door for additional requests which could make quite a shift to the budget to provide for them all. Ms. Trettel then asked to create an amendment, but the Moderator reminded her that comment on her question was not complete.

Resident Ann Balcom Dadak of Blackstone Cir. added that she is also supportive of the shirts and the idea to put the funds back into the budget. She then pivoted to a question regarding the position that was cut but funded by a grant which was a Special Education teacher. She asked the board what happens to that grant funding. Business Administrator Deborah Mahoney answered that they will not recruit for that position, and they estimate funding. Although it will not be used for that position it may be received and used for something else. The Moderator then returned to the question of amending to add the shirt funds back into the budget. He explained that although you can amend the amount it cannot be specifically appropriated for an item. Ms. Trettel returned to ask what the cost to the taxpayer for these shirts would be. Dr. McGee said that to give that answer it would require an estimated tax rate which was not available. And stated he had already heard two citizens state they would be willing to support the cost personally. He then pointed out the coach for the ESports team, Pattie Lamontagne who could be contacted if anyone wanted to come forward with the funds or fundraising ideas for the shirts. Resident Michelle Woonton of Skyview Dr. came forward to speak to the shirt discussion. She gave an example of her years of being a team mom for her five children. She stressed the importance of fundraising, team bonding and uniting a group for the common good of something like shirts for the team. Then resident Spencer Bucholz of Christopher Lane came forward and questioned if they eliminate the 15th bus run and how that may affect the time of the other routes overall. Superintendent Dr. McGee said that they have not calculated routes for next year. They have a goal of 45 minutes; this may shift to 60 minutes, but they do not have the information for next year at this time. Dr. McGee stressed that the overall goal is to minimize the routes the best that they can.

The discussion on Article 1 concluded. There was a motion to Restrict Reconsideration from resident Deb Ryan, and it was seconded by resident Bill Scanzani. The motion passed and Reconsideration was restricted to Article 1.
Moderator Vincent moved to Article 2 and read the article.

ARTICLE 2 - PESPA CBA

Shall the Pelham School District vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Pelham School District and the Pelham Education Support Personnel Association (PESPA) that call for the following increases in salaries and benefits over the amount paid in the prior fiscal year at current staffing levels:

Year	Estimated Increase
2026-2027	$ 201,679
2027-2028	$ 184,643
2028-2029	$188,131

And further to raise and appropriate Two-Hundred One-Thousand, Six-Hundred Seventy-Nine Dollars ($201,679) for the 2026-2027 fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement that would be paid at current staffing levels?
(Majority vote required)
Recommended by the School Board (5-0-0)
Recommended by the Budget Committee (11-0-0)

He then recognized Board member Greg Smith to speak on Article 2. Mr. Smith asked for the next slide which described an overview of the agreement. He began by stating that he and Mrs. Greenwood had the responsibility this year of serving on the negotiations team across the table from our PESPA representatives. He wanted to start with some context that PESPA stands for the Pelham Educational Support Personnel Association. These are the District's Instructional Assistants, Title I Tutors, and Academic Tutors. He explained that they do the most fundamental work in Pelham, working directly with students who need it most. They support kindergarten classrooms, work with our students with intensive needs at every level, monitor lunches and recess, support students with learning disabilities, and help students who need an extra boost academically. Mr. Smith stressed that all our PESPA employees do vital work for the District, working directly with our students. He then asked for slide 2 which continued the overview of Article 2. He stated that he and Mrs. Greenwood were responsible for bargaining in good faith to get to a deal that works for our IAs, for our voters, and for our students. They saw their role as balancing two competing needs: Recognizing the District's valuable employees with pay increases and keeping the overall cost to the community reasonable. He closed discussion on slide 2 by exclaiming that this contract is a part of the Board's goal of making the Pelham School District one of the best places to work.

Mr. Smith then explained he would share details of the contract and asked for slide 3 which bulleted specific points in the agreement. He said they came to an agreement on a three-year contract. He brought attention to the salary increase and said that the IAs work on a salary schedule. The base salary increase is by 6.0% in 2026-27. That means the starting pay for an IA with no experience next year would be $17.51 per hour. Then the increase would be 5.5% in 2027-28. He said that means the starting pay for an IA with no experience next year would be $18.48 per hour. The increase would be 5.0% in 2028-29. That means the starting pay for an IA with no experience next year would be $19.41 per hour. He stated there is also a change in the pay schedule to recognize those who work as a part of our special education programs, as opposed to general education programs, with a 0.30 per hour increase. Slide 4 was next and Mr. Smith said he would share the changes regarding the other major cost item, which is health insurance. He stated that regardless of whether the article passes, health insurance premiums will increase by 31% on the plan for PESPA for next year.

The plan is called Access Blue Site of Service and has a $3,000 deductible per person. The District currently pays a dollar amount equal to the cost of a single plan. If an employee wanted a two-person or family plan, the employee would pay the difference. With this contract, Mr. Smith explained that the District will provide the following percentages of the premium for a single plan 96% in 26-27, 93% in 27-28, and 90% in 28-29. Employees will still be able to apply that dollar amount for a 2-person or family plan. As an additional measure, he said IAs will have the option of creating a Flexible Spending Account (FSA) for Medical and Dependent Care expenses. He then moved to the last slide on Article 2 which outlined improved experience by highlighting some other changes as well with the aim of improving employees' experience without large budgetary impacts. The agreement would increase pay for substituting for a teacher from the current sub rate ($110 per day) to $150 per day, increase pay for those with over 20+ years of service to the district from $0.25 to $0.50 per hour and propose improved severance for those who get to 15 years of service or more. It would also increase the mentor stipend from $250 to $300 and allow for a paid New Instructional Assistants orientation prior to the beginning of the official school year/work year. Mr. Smith concluded by thanking everyone for their attention on this article and for their support on voting day.

The Moderator then asked if there was anyone for discussion on Article 2. Resident Kelly Basinas of Marsh Rd came forward to share her experience as an Instructional Assistant in the Pelham School District and as a representative of PESPA. She thanked everyone for being there. She shared that Instructional Assistants help students with learning disabilities, emotional needs and medical needs. Those jobs help them read, write, regulate emotions, stay safe and succeed inside a classroom. Mrs. Basinas said that these individuals do these jobs daily because they care deeply about the students and their success. She explained Pelham loses staff because the pay is not competitive and staff must leave and go to other districts for better pay to support their families. She stressed that investing in Instructional Assistants is an investment in Pelham's children. And, if we could offer competitive pay, we could retain staff and attract qualified assistants. She asked the Town to recognize the value of their work not just with words but action, and to please support this article.

Kimberly Wunderlich of Scenic View Dr. came forward next to share her experience as an Instructional Assistant, proud Pelham School District employee, and longtime resident. She shared that she has the privilege of working with some of the hardest working assistants who have an unwavering commitment to student success. Mrs. Wunderlich described the job of instructional assistant and the value of their roles supporting the students and their success now and in the future. She said that investing in the PESPA contract is investing in the inclusive education of every student in the District. She then reminded everyone to vote and asked for their support.

Pattie Lamontagne of Fletcher Dr came forward to share her experience as a District employee for 29 years and longtime resident. She began her time as an Instructional Assistant and explained how she not only knows first-hand the importance of these roles but sees every day in her role as a classroom teacher how hard these individuals

work to help students. She stressed the importance of supporting this article and asked everyone to please vote yes for PESPA.

There was a motion on the floor to Restrict Reconsideration from resident Bill Scanzani and seconded by resident Bob Sherman. The motion carried and the reconsideration was restricted for Article 2.

The Moderator then asked for the slides for Article 3 which is the final article for discussion.

ARTICLE 3 - CAPITAL RESERVE

Shall the Pelham School District vote to raise and appropriate the sum of up to One Hundred Sixty-Eight Thousand Dollars ($168,000) to be added to the Capital Reserve Fund for educating educationally disabled children previously established in 2014? This sum is to come from the June 30, 2026 unassigned fund balance available for transfer on July 1, 2026. No amount to be raised from taxation.
(Majority vote required).
Recommended by the School Board (4-1-0)
Recommended by the Budget Committee (9-2-0)

The Moderator then recognized Chairman, Darlene Greenwood to begin discussion on Article 3 for the Board. Mrs. Greenwood began by asking for the next slide and stating that this article is the result of the change made in the operating budget. She said she would walk everyone through the reasoning. She said the District is responsible for educating all Pelham students, including students with significant special needs, which can mean, at times, residential placement. For fiscal year 27, the Superintendent eliminated an anticipated residential tuition expense of $258,964. She said that can be seen in the budget book as a Level 2 reduction. Mrs. Greenwood explained that "Anticipated" means that we might have a student needing that placement next year, but there is not a specific student currently in need of that service. If such a need arises, the district has a legal obligation to provide those services. She stated, if that happens, the District will need to fund it by reducing the budget elsewhere in the FY27 operating budget. On the next slide, the Capital Reserve Fund was explained. She began by saying that as a board, they do not think it appropriate or useful to create an unnecessary fight over resources. Instead of having to cut programs in one area to fund a surprise expense, they are asking to approach the challenge in a different way. They would like to consider another option to fund it with a capital reserve for this purpose. Mrs. Greenwood stated the current Special Education Capital Reserve fund held $232,109 as of June 30, 2025. The average anticipated residential tuition cost for schools where Pelham students might attend is $400,000. That includes tuition, specialized services, 24-hour care, etc. She explained that the warrant article would allow the district to set aside $168,000 from unexpended funds in the current fiscal year to bring the balance to approximately
$400,000. This article states that the funds will not be raised through new taxation.

The Moderator asked if there was anyone who would like to speak on Article 3. Resident Ken Woonton on Skyview Dr. came forward with an amendment and gave a copy of the written amendment to Jim Greenwood of PTV to display his amendment. The amendment showed the article written as proposed but with "No amount to be raised by taxation" crossed out and replaced with red writing that stated "The unassigned fund consists of taxes raised. Should this Article be defeated, the $168,000 is to be returned to the town and may be used to reduce property taxes". He stated he would like to add this wording to improve transparency for the voters and more accurately reflect the source of funds and financial impact. He asked for the statement of no funds being raised by taxation to be removed as he finds it to be false. He said the funds are from tax money but not new tax money. The moderator then asked for the District's attorney to weigh in on the amendment language. Attorney Bronstein stated the wording could have been simplified by saying that "No amount to be raised by additional taxation". Mr. Woonton said he considered that language but wanted to be sure the taxpayers could see the benefit if the funds were returned and unused. School Board Member Greg Smith asked for the wording clarification and stated he could somewhat agree with where he believes Mr. Woonton was intending to go with this amendment. Mr. Smith said he would be concerned if this would then obligate the district to return the funds and gave examples of reasons why the funds could not be returned. Business Administrator Deb Mahoney said that the "up to" language in the article would not obligate that entire $168,000 be moved. She explained that the article is reviewed at the DRA level and the language has been used before with regards to these funds. She agreed with counsel that adding the word "additional' to the wording would align with the request for transparency. The Moderator then asked if Mr. Woonton wanted to amend the wording and he said he would like to keep it the same. Mr. Woonton also commented back to School Board member Greg Smith to say that the unassigned fund balance has never been below $350,000 and often is closer to 2.5 million, so there would be no worry they would not be able to return the funds to the taxpayers. Mr. Smith said that he was considering next year's board and not wanting to commit to something of restriction that may back them into a corner. Moderator Vincent then stated that there is an amendment on the floor and asked if there was a second. A second was called and the motion came to vote. The motion was defeated.

Resident Debbie Kruzel of Beacon Hill Rd came forward to ask about Title 15 and the Special Education funds work. She claims that she understands that schools are responsible for 100% payment for all students until a student requires 3.5 times a student required expenditure and then the state reimburses 80% of the cost for that student. She asked if that statement is true. Superintendent Dr McGee said that is the law, but that the legislature last year instead of reimbursing they shortchanged the District by $278,000. This then left the District still responsible for these funds. Dr. McGee said he is hopeful that since the law has changed, they will now truly reimburse for the 80%. Ms. Kruzel then questioned whether any student who requires 10 times that amount would be reimbursed at 100%. Dr. McGee explained the reimbursement process and the timing of what we qualified for that aligns with that law. Ms. Kruzel questioned again that even though the District must pay, they will still be reimbursed.

Dr. McGee stressed that yes, that is true and the District will have to pay their bills and hope the reimbursement will happen next year. Ms. Kruzel then thanked Dr. McGee for his answer.

There was a motion on the floor to Restrict Reconsideration from resident Bill Scanzani and seconded by resident Paul Grant. The motion carried and reconsideration was restricted for Article 3.

The Moderator then listed all his gratitude to all the volunteers who helped with set-up and meeting process. And he asked for extra gratitude and applause for Deb Mahoney who will be leaving the District for her retirement. He then announced the Budget Committee would meet shortly after the meeting.

Moderator Vincent asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was given by resident Bill Scanzani and seconded by resident Deb Ryan. Moderator Vincent adjourned the meeting at 8:16pm and closed by reminding residents about voting March 10th, 2026, at Pelham High School.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Danielle Kelley

Date: 2-23-26