Pittsfield School Board Meeting

DRAFT Minutes - November 5, 2026

Meeting Information

> Attending: Becky Berk, Sandra Adams, Molly Goggin, Tim Robinson, Adam Gauthier
>
> Administrators: Tim Herbert (Superintendent), Erik Anderson (PMHS Principal), Jack Dunn (Business Administrator), Melissa Brown (PMHS Asst Principal)
>
> Seven members of the public

Meeting Notes

Opening and Eagle Scout Project Recognition

- The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Garrick Pelletier, a homeschooled student, presented an update on his work near Head Start as part of an Eagle Scout project.
- He built four raised beds using pressure-treated materials. Each was described as 8 feet by 8 feet by 4 feet and 20 inches tall, with an expected lifespan of three to five years.
- He repaired a greenhouse window; the project introduction also noted repaired greenhouse roof siding. He is replacing the greenhouse stairs with concrete ones.
- Mr. Laroche and members of his scout troop helped with the project. Pelletier said the work was enjoyable and taught him a lot, including how to collaborate and coordinate with adults.
- Board members praised Pelletier’s leadership and conduct and recognized the project’s expected long-term benefit to the school community. Classes are considering how to use and maintain the beds. A large quantity of seeds remains to be donated.
- The School Board praised Pelletier’s work and recognized him for a job well done.

Agenda and Approval of Minutes

- A non-public contract item was requested for addition to the agenda. The superintendent also noted that finance, contract, and non-public matters were on the agenda.

- Molly reported attending a School Board Associations Network meeting with the Commissioner of Education and offered to share relevant information with the board.
- Adam motioned to approve the amended agenda, seconded by Becky. Approved, 5–0.
- Molly motioned to approve the October 1, 2026 public minutes, seconded by Tim. Sandra suggested adding pagination and noted a misspelling on the last page. Approved 5-0.
- Becky motioned to approve the October 1 non-public minutes, seconded by Molly. Approved 5-0. Tim motioned to seal the non-public minutes, seconded by Adam. Approved 5-0.
- Adam motioned to approve the October 27 public hearing minutes, seconded by Molly. The chair noted that Bruce Berk had inadvertently been omitted from the sign-in sheet. Approved 5-0.

Public Input

- None was offered.

Special Education and Staffing

- The district is having difficulty filling special education assistant/paraprofessional positions and finding additional service providers, reading specialists, tutors, and other specialized support.
- Funds for services are in the budget; recruitment has been the issue. The district is tracking services it has been unable to provide and considering compensatory services.
- Positions are posted and interviews are underway. The district is also discussing contracted services and rates.
- A superintendent-led staff and leadership team meeting was planned for November 6 to develop a plan.
- Pittsfield Elementary School reported shortages in paraprofessional, behavior support, special education, and reading specialist positions. Existing staff are covering needs, increasing stress and affecting preparation time and lunch periods.
- Recruitment is challenging because some paraprofessional roles require additional education and specialized skills, while available pay constrains options.
- Possible approaches include supporting current staff in gaining credentials, asking the Department of Education about site-based plans or training, contracting with service providers, and examining possible IDEA grant funding for professional development.
- **Conclusion:** Staffing needs remain unresolved. The scope of missed services and any compensatory services has not yet been reported.

Middle School Achievement Designation

- The middle school received an Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATS) designation because a student subgroup is

performing below other students. Students receiving special education services appear to be a focus area.

- The designation does not provide additional funding. Title I funds will need to prioritize interventions for the identified middle school students.
- The district will work with the Department of Education's accountability office to develop a plan. Targeted tutoring was discussed as a possible support. Tutors must have relevant credentials and skills suited to the identified learning gap.
- Attendance may be one factor affecting achievement, but the superintendent said multiple factors would be examined.

Finance, Audits, and Budget Planning

- The finance report covered account-classification reviews and planned budget transfers to align accounts with actual uses.
- A copier costing $308 per month was canceled, with an October credit expected.
- Work is underway on the 2025 audit, and preparation for the 2026 audit is also advancing. The auditors' document request package contained 27 pages; some requested information is still being collected.
- FY27 budget work is ongoing. The Department of Education returned a submission with requested edits, and a correction from the prior administration is pending. The FY28 budget will incorporate the most recent vote and be reviewed for caps.
- The business administrator reported three town-controlled expendable trust funds:
    - Special education reserve: $4,281.82
    - Drake Field reserve: $7,445.43
    - School building maintenance fund: $300,000,842.16
- Jack's unaudited estimate of the year-end fund balance was about $452,441. The estimate included a reported $668,000 deficit at the end of 2025, approximately $697,290 in 2026 expenditure savings to close the deficit, and approximately $820,000 in revenue above budget. It excluded a one-time $397,000 retirement-related payment.
- New Hampshire Retirement confirmed that the district's retirement account obligations were current. A tax-related liability remains under review.
- The Board discussed whether the Budget Committee should first establish the minimum default budget and determine whether even the default budget would exceed the tax cap. Projected increases in health insurance will run about $160,000, the state adequacy funding for Pittsfield fell by $224,000, and the costs for heating fuel and diesel for buses are up 50-70%.

- Administrators are preparing two draft budgets: one assuming Pittsfield Middle High School (PMHS) remains open and one assuming it closes. Drafts are expected the following week. Food-service and transportation costs are being explored for both scenarios; estimates may change with fuel prices and other costs.

- Members discussed rising expenses, reduced state funding, special education funding, and potential effects on local property taxes and student services. The updated state adequacy funding estimate was expected around November 15. Property values, declining enrollment, and the end of the 95% hold-harmless provision were mentioned as possible additional factors in reduced funding.

Health and Dental Insurance Costs and State Aid

- Health and dental premiums are projected to increase by about $160,000 next year, based on a 12.4% health insurance rate increase. The estimate carries current budgeted staffing forward and does not account for possible staffing or plan changes.
- A participant noted that the district is expected to receive $224,000 less from the state next year and asked how that reduction combines with the projected insurance increase.
- The budget presenter said the state's DRA may adjust the tax rate to make up for lost revenue, but this required verification because the process may differ locally.

Property and Food Service Accounts

- The business administrator reviewed property records with legal counsel, including deeds, rights of way, and easements, and said the district appears to have flexibility if it needs to take action involving the property.
- Food-service accounts are held in a standalone system that is not integrated with other district systems.
- The district is reviewing remaining balances and plans to contact families of graduates to ask whether they want balances returned or donated. Four checks were sent the prior week.

School Operations, Attendance, and Student Supports

- As of October 29, the school had 193 students in grades 7–12, including seven out-of-district students. Attendance was approximately 93% through October 29, and 57 students met the school's chronic absenteeism definition.
- Attendance letters were sent around October 5–6 and again on October 30. The school has an MOU with the police department for collaborative home visits when deemed necessary; no visits had occurred yet.

- Staff described visits as the next step in the attendance process. Participants discussed beginning supportive outreach early while recognizing that police visits may feel intimidating to some families.
- Participants noted that absences may have varied causes, including mental health, substance dependency, transportation, and students needing to contribute income to their households. Staff described connecting families with school and community resources, including DCYF when appropriate, to address barriers. A participant offered to help facilitate supportive connections with child and family services if the district is interested.
- Participants discussed reviewing the attendance policy and cautioned that punitive policies, such as denying credit after a set number of absences, could discourage students from returning. A flexible approach addressing individual barriers was also discussed.
- Pittsfield Elementary School's average daily attendance is 93.5%, with chronic absenteeism at 24%.
- The attendance policy is scheduled for review at the November 12, 2026 meeting. The school team described attendance-related home visits as the next step.

Middle and High School Reports

- The school recorded 179 behavior incidents over the past month, including 19 major incidents. The report also mentioned suspensions and 113 administrative conferences focused on coaching students to use alternative strategies when frustrated.
- Middle school NWEA testing began during the week of the meeting. The school aims for 70% of middle school students to meet projected growth by spring. Results will be reported when available.
- Ninth-grade advisories visited the Brown Center in October. Students also attended a fall theater workshop and production at Portland State University.
- EdAdvance presented financial aid information to seniors and their families.
- Apply NHTI Day was scheduled for November 17. Seniors can apply to New Hampshire schools with application fees waived and enter a scholarship raffle. College representatives have also been meeting with students.
- The band and chorus concert was scheduled for December 15. The jazz band is preparing selections and plans to perform as a pep band at two or more home basketball games.
- Basketball tryouts are scheduled to begin November 23.

Pittsfield Elementary School Report

- Enrollment was 199, down 13 from the prior month. Enrollment declined in kindergarten through grade five; grade six increased by two students.
- Staff discussed categorizing enrollment changes, such as moves, homeschooling, and in- or out-of-district placements, to identify trends.

- Fall NWEA testing is complete, but scores are not yet available. Title One reading interventions are underway, and Title One math support is provided in classrooms. Further interventions will be informed by assessment data.
- The school recorded 15 office referrals and six suspensions during the past month. Supports include team discussions and follow-up with students affected by behavioral incidents.
- The fall NWEA results were expected to be shared at a December board meeting.
- The Harvest Parade was described as a successful community event, with high school students watching and cheering for elementary students.
- During Community Day, classrooms recognized students for positive traits. Students selected fifth-grade teacher Mrs. Lindsey Bickford as staff member of the month, and 14 students were recognized for outstanding classroom efforts.

New Hampshire School Board Association Delegate Assembly

- More than 900 school board members and 166 school boards belong to the NHSBA; 53 school boards were represented at the assembly.
- Resolution outcomes:
    - Resolution 4, concerning Education Freedom Accounts, was not adopted.
    - Resolution 5, opposing state-mandated open enrollment, was adopted in amended form.
    - Resolution 6, concerning local education agencies, was adopted in amended form.
    - Resolution 7, concerning limiting state revenue reductions until special education funding reaches 40%, failed by voice vote.
    - Resolution 8, supporting parents' right to homeschool, failed by voice vote.
- The assembly's top stated position was opposition to state-mandated open enrollment.

Policy Discussions and Approvals

Policy ECAF: Surveillance and Audio/Video Recording

- Members discussed whether ECAF applied to recording board meetings and clarified that the policy concerns students and reflects changes related to parents' rights and school recordings.
- Members noted that public meetings may be recorded and suggested reviewing whether a separate policy is needed for public meetings.
- Becky motioned to approve policy ECAF, seconded by Molly. Approved 5-0.

Policy EHAG: Artificial Intelligence Policy

- Participants discussed whether to adopt an AI policy while the technology and related guidance are changing rapidly. A state task force is addressing screen time in schools first, with AI and social media in schools to be considered later.
- A policy could provide current guardrails while allowing for future changes. Sam Daigle (cybersecurity consultant for the district) also asked what is driving the policy and what the board wants it to accomplish, noting that those answers should guide its content.
- A motion and second were mentioned, but no vote or final adoption was recorded. Participants supported having a policy in principle, with further review needed.
- Participants discussed whether generative AI should be restricted for elementary students using it to brainstorm essays, practice writing or coding, or summarize reading passages. Some favored limiting AI for younger students until foundational skills are developed; others emphasized teaching responsible use, especially at the high school level.
- Participants raised questions about staff readiness, training, coursework, and tools for teaching ethical and effective AI use. Some said staff should be trained before AI tools are made readily available to students and should have policy guardrails.
- A participant described another district's AI literacy work, including teaching students to check accuracy, verify citations, and follow writing processes, as well as experimenting with a controlled, district-owned AI environment for selected classes and grades.
- Participants raised concerns about student data collection by service providers, commercial incentives behind free services, incorrect information, faulty citations, and tools that repeatedly provide unhelpful answers. Sam Daigle offered to connect the district with state, federal, or other subject-matter resources.
- **Conclusion:** The policy will be sent back to the Policy Committee for further review regarding purpose, grade-level boundaries, staff and student preparation, data protections, vendor evaluation, and implementation approach.

Employee-Student Relations Policy (GBEB)

- The policy updates and replaces current policy GICDA to align with the NHSBA policy.
- Becky motioned to approve GBEB, seconded by Molly. Approved 5-0.

Student Conduct Policy (JIC)

- A motion was made to accept the policy as written.
- Molly made the motion to approve the policy, seconded by Becky. Approved 5-0.

Computer Network and Internet Use Policy (JICL)

- Becky motioned to approve the policy as written, seconded by Molly, Approved 5-0.

Enrollment and Enrollment Capacities Policy (JF)

- The board clarified that this was a first reading.

Commissioner Davis and Education Advocacy

- The School Board Associations Network (SBAN) meets twice a month and advocates for public education and fair funding.
- Topics discussed with Commissioner Davis included the screen time task force, budget caps, special education funding, and literacy law implementation.
- Members discussed balancing educational screen use with student health, given that instructional programs and assessments often require computers.
- A separate School District Governance Association (NHSDGA) training on school budgets and budget preparation was noted for November 17.

Facilities and CIP Updates

- Safe Grants projects are progressing. Work on the elementary school's main entrance is expected on non-attendance days or weekends; access and oversight still need to be arranged.
- A hot water heater serving the kitchen is scheduled for replacement.
- The committee discussed using Crotched Mountain Grant funds for walkways, pathways, and the playground. The grant has a year-two funding cycle of $58,000.
- The committee discussed replacing wooden clapboard on the front and south sides of the building and obtaining vinyl siding quotes. Siding and roofing costs may be substantial, and members discussed completing the work in phases.
- Further discussion of the grant and facilities planning was expected at the next meeting, scheduled for November 24.

Legislative Committee

- A member shared a selected summary of education-related filed legislative service requests (LSRs).
- Elected legislators may continue to submit LSRs in the coming weeks.

High School Options Study Committee

- The committee meets about every two weeks and has received information from neighboring districts and about the district's current buildings.
- Members are narrowing the report's scope to match the committee's charge and make the findings understandable.
- About 60–70% of the report is drafted; some sections are awaiting information. The committee is working toward a December 1 deadline and may meet remotely to finish.

Next Meeting Planning

- The next meeting was scheduled for December 3, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. The High School Options Study Committee report is expected to be a major agenda item, and the default budget may be close to finished by then.

Board Financial Items and Administrative Updates

- Manifests reviewed were October 28 totaling $257,737.59, November 2 totaling $123.45, and payroll for November 6 totaling $153,552.89. The speaker stated that the listed items were “all good.”
- Erik reported covering at Pittsfield Elementary School and thanked staff for their support.

Non-Public Meeting

- Sandra made the motion to enter a non-public meeting at 7:20 pm, seconded by Adam and confirmed by roll call vote.
- The Board resumed the public portion of the meeting at 9:24 pm with no further action.

Adjournment

- Molly motioned to adjourn at 9:25 pm, seconded by Tim. Approved 5-0.

Submitted by Becky Berk

November 7, 2026