

**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT #51
PITTSFIELD SCHOOL BOARD**

MINUTES

Pittsfield School Board Meeting
January 21, 2021
Pittsfield Middle High School

I. CALL TO ORDER

Members Present: Bea Douglas, Chairperson
 Heidi Asdot, Vice Chairperson
 Jessica Drouin
 Adam Gauthier
 Ted Mitchell (via Zoom)

Others Present: John Graziano, Interim Superintendent of Schools
 Jessica Bickford, Director of Student Services
 Melissa Brown, PMHS Assistant Principal
 Derek Hamilton, PMHS Principal
 Danielle Harvey, PES Principal
 Kathy LeMay, PES Assistant Principal (via Zoom)
 Members of the Public (some via Zoom)

Ms. Douglas called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

II. AGENDA REVIEW

The following item was added to the agenda:

- Lakes Region Covid Status Survey (Ms. Bickford)

III. ACTION ON AMENDED AGENDA

On a motion made by Mr. Mitchell and seconded by Ms. Drouin , the Board voted unanimously to approve the agenda as amended.

IV. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Ms. Asdot and seconded by Mr. Gauthier to approve the minutes of the public meeting on January 7, 2021. Amendments included: on page 1, add “via Zoom” beside Mr. Mitchell’s name; on page 1, under agenda review, change “was” to “were”; page 2, change Roman numerals to be in proper sequence, starting with VI; page 4, paragraph 4, change to “...the Board unanimously approved...”. The motion was passed unanimously to approve the minutes as amended.

V. PUBLIC INPUT

Girard LeDuc brought up the issue of the Deliberative Session. He stated that he would not be taking questions from the phones. Ms. Douglas stated that a separate room will be offered to people who do not wear masks. Dr. Graziano clarified that this is for people who cannot wear masks due to health reasons. Mr. Hamilton said the library will be used for people who cannot use masks due to medical reasons. Arrangements will be made so that these people, on the premises, will be able to ask questions or add comments. Amendments requiring five signatures will only be entertained by the people present at the meeting. The meeting will begin at 7:00.

Bob Schiferle asked about documentation supporting the stipulations being placed on the process for the Deliberative Session. Dr. Graziano will provide Mr. Schiferle with such documentation.

Heather Elliot stated that it is very important for students to go back to school full time in school. She said that there is no evidence that schools are hot spots for infection. Ms. Douglas stated that her comments will be considered by the administration and a decision will be at the next meeting to move from the red status.

VI. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Dan Courtney, the advisor for Site Council, introduced Harrison Hill, member of the Site Council, to explain the proposal regarding community service. Kathleen Vassello, a teacher representative on the Site Council stated that many parents are very nervous about their senior students doing community service during the pandemic. The stipulations are that the service cannot be for individuals so parents are concerned about students being exposed to COVID-19 while trying to fulfill their community service requirement. Dalton Swenson explained that the proposal requests waiver in completing the number of hours of community service required for graduation. He opined that reducing the number of hours will not help. Matthew Swenson stated that he is the author of the proposal and is based on the concern that his classmates are having difficulty finding the opportunities to complete community service hours, which will threaten their graduation status. Charlene Vary, teacher, stated that her learning studio Quilting for Community Service is experiencing difficulties. She said that many of the places for whom they quilt will not accept their donations. There were approximately 400 hours of time that would have been available if not for COVID.

Mr. Gauthier stated that there was an issue with students not being allowed to receive credit for an activity that was sponsored by a community group. He opined that students can find outdoor activities, such as spring clean up, that can meet the requirements. Ms. Asdot stated that she would be open to decreasing the number of hours for juniors and seniors. Ms. Brown stated that there were quite a few students who were short on their community service hours. Ms. Drouin asked if students' health concerns were an issue, but Ms. Douglas suggested that it was more about lack of opportunity and parents' concern for their children being potentially exposed to COVID. Ms. Vassello stated that there were also some students who could not do outside work due to their own disabilities. Ms. Drouin stated that she would consider eliminating the requirement for juniors and seniors. Ms. Douglas stated that she would be in favor of a temporary reduction in the number of hours. Mr. Mitchell agreed and said that once things are back to normal, underclassmen would be expected to fulfill community service requirements.

A motion was made by Ms. Asdot and seconded by Mr. Mitchell to reduce the community service requirement to 30 hours for the class of 2021 and 2022. The motion passed with Ms. Asdot, Ms. Douglas, Ms. Drouin, and Mr. Mitchell voting in the affirmative and Mr. Gauthier in opposition.

Ms. Brown asked the Board about a specific case involving a student who has moved in and has not done community service hours. Typically, the number of hours are pro-rated. Ms. Douglas stated she should pro-rate according to this change in the requirement.

Ms. Douglas thanked everyone for their input.

VII. PES PRINCIPAL

A. Attendance

Ms. LeMay stated that she will be reaching out to families to offer support in having their students attend remote learning.

B. PES Clubs / Activities

Ms. LeMay stated that the pandemic is not only affecting our students academically, but social emotional, as well. She said that they would like to support students by offering two clubs remotely (Guitar Fun and Kindness Club) and one outside (Walking Club). The outdoor activities will require maintaining safe distances and wearing masks.

Mr. Gauthier questioned the staffing for the Walking Club. Ms. LeMay stated that there are four adults who will assure small groups and the full implementation of safety precautions. Mr. Gauthier asked if school grounds would be considered to be campus because the COVID plan stipulates that during the red status there should be no students on campus. Ms. LeMay suggested that

they can use a downtown space to gather, rather than the school grounds, if the Board thought that was better. Ms. Douglas stated she thought using the school as a meeting place was not a problem. Ms. Drouin suggested they meet at Drake Field, although it was pointed out that that is still school property. Ms. LeMay stated that they could also limit their choices to remote opportunities and cancel the Walking Club. Mr. Gauthier stated that he didn't have a problem with the club, just the issue of the starting place. Discussion ensued and it was ultimately agreed that starting at the school would be acceptable.

C. COVID Tracking

Ms. Harvey stated that because they are in red status, there are no statistics to share.

D. Playground Equipment

Ms. Harvey provided the Board with an update on the playground equipment status.

Discussion ensued regarding the proposed expenditures. Ms. Asdot stated that the money has been budgeted, but Mr. Mitchell expressed his concern for being able to send money back to the town at the end of the year. Mr. Gauthier stated he thought the Board should hold back on spending the money.

Ms. Douglas stated that the Board should be making decisions that are in the best interest of the children and to monitor the tone of their comments. She suggested tabling this topic until a later time, to which the remaining members agreed. Ms. Harvey stated she would bring it forward later in the year.

E. Free and Reduced Lunch Program

Ms. Harvey explained that efforts are being made to increase the number of returned forms for free and reduced lunch. She has used Facebook to communicate the importance of these forms being completed, as it will impact the amount of State funding that is received by Pittsfield. She also suggested that contacting State legislators may help as they are entertaining legislation that would revise current regulations.

F. School Usage

Ms. Harvey notified the Board that she approved Revolution Basketball to hold the recreation basketball practices and games at PES. They were requested to follow the same guidelines as the PMHS basketball program. Ms. Asdot stated that she had issues with PMHS having basketball and now has issues with this, as well. Mr. Gauthier stated his concern about allowing a handful of students in the building when others are not allowed during the red status. Ms. Drouin stated that

she did not agree with basketball during red status and Mr. Mitchell agreed. Ms. Harvey agreed to notify Revolution Basketball.

Ms. Harvey explained that Concord YMCA Kystop is interested in looking at offering something in person at the local community center.

G. FLEX Room

Ms. Harvey asked the School Board for permission to do some refurbishing of a cool down space in the FLEX room. These changes are related to safety and hygiene. She presented two quotes, one from Dave Ayotte & Associates for \$5,207, one from Porter Equipment for \$6,448, and one from BSN for \$3,361. Ms. Harvey explained the differences in the quotes and recommended they approve the Dave Ayotte & Associates quote. On a motion made by Ms. Asdot and seconded by Ms. Drouin, the Board voted unanimously to approve the Ayotte quote to complete the repairs.

H. Basketball Hoop

Ms. Harvey reviewed quotes to replace basketball hoops at PES. This item was tabled for a future meeting.

VIII. PMHS PRINCIPAL

A. School Calendar

Mr. Hamilton raised issues relative to the official school calendar and the use of the building for voting on March 9, 2021. He suggested flipping Tuesday to a remote day, all depending on the school's status at that time.

B. School District Newsletter

Mr. Hamilton provided the Board with a copy of the School District Newsletter. He highlighted the Internet Assistance Program for families. If families can prove that they installed the internet in March due to COVID, they are able to apply for grants to cover costs; this was covered in the newsletter.

C. Site Council Proposal

Mr. Hamilton thanked the Board for their consideration of the Site Council's proposal. He explained that the process to bring a proposal to the Board represents approximately three months of work on the part of the Site Council.

IX. DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SERVICES

A. Medicaid

Ms. Bickford provided the Board with information regarding the highly regulated Medicaid process. She explained the efforts that she and her team are making to ensure all rules are being followed.

B. Lakes Region COVID Status Survey

Ms. Bickford stated that she has, at the request of the Board, surveyed her Lakes Region colleagues regarding practices being followed during COVID-19. The results of the survey were shared with the Board.

X. PMHS ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

A. Program of Studies

Ms. Brown distributed a copy of the Program of Studies to the Board for their review and approval at the next meeting. She highlighted the changes that have been made.

B. Concord Regional Technical Center (CRTC)

Ms. Brown provided an update on the CRTC program.

C. Senior Financial Aid Night

Ms. Brown reported that Angela Castonguay from the New Hampshire High Education Assistance Foundation made a presentation to students and their families regarding financial aid and completion of the FAFSA, the federal financial aid form.

D. *I Am College Bound / I Applied* Event

According to Ms. Brown, PMHS participated in the *I Am College Bound / I Applied* event again this year. This event allows students to apply to NH colleges and universities free of charge and provides students an opportunity to win a \$500 scholarship.

E. Homeschool Students

Ms. Brown stated there are seven families being homeschooled. This number is much lower than usual.

XI. INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

A. 2021-2022 School District Calendar

On a motion made by Ms. Asdot and seconded by Ms. Drouin, the Board unanimously approved the 2021-2022 calendar.

B. 2021-2022 School District Budget

Dr. Graziano commended the administration and Ms. Sally Blanchette for their work on the budget. He stated how difficult the situation has been to reduce the budget by \$487,000 and still maintain the integrity of the educational program for students. He stated they have looked at moving items to grants and scrutinized areas such as technology.

Ms. Douglas reminded the Board that they cannot discuss the budget from the perspective of specific personnel positions unless entering a non-public session. She stated she was devastated to hear that members of the public on social media suggested the Board was being dishonest about the school budget. Ms. Douglas stated that the social media miscommunication should stop and people should come to meetings to face the Board. She said that the Board and the administration are working so hard to do what is best for the education of students. Any cuts that are made will devastate the educational programs in schools, according to Ms. Douglas.

Ms. Douglas stated that the Board should consider a non-public budget work session with the administration. Mr. Gauthier stated he had recommendations for a possible reduction. Mr. Mitchell stated that at the Deliberative Session, if the budget is voted down, it will go to a default budget.

On a motion made by Mr. Gauthier and seconded by Mr. Mitchell, the Board voted unanimously to approve the administration's recommended budget of \$10,529,306, which is \$487,000 less than the original proposal.

Dr. Graziano suggested the remaining warrant articles could be considered by the Board. On a motion made by Mr. Gauthier and seconded by Ms. Asdot, the Board unanimously recommended Warrant Articles 1, 2, 4, and 5.

A motion was made to approve Warrant Article 3 by Ms. Douglas and seconded by Mr. Gauthier. The motion was defeated with Mr. Gauthier voting in the affirmative and Ms. Asdot, Ms. Douglas, Ms. Drouin, and Mr. Mitchell voting in opposition of recommending the passing of Article 3.

A non-public work session of the Board and administration was scheduled for Tuesday, January 26, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

XII. SCHOOL BOARD

XIII. COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

- A. Budget Committee - Mr. Mitchell
- C. Drake Field & Facilities - Mr. Gauthier
- D. Negotiations – Ms. Asdot and Ms. Douglas
- E. Foss Family Scholarship Foundation – Ms. Drouin

XIV. PUBLIC INPUT

Robert Schiferle asked if there was a separate room for non-masked participants, how would votes be taken. Ms. Douglas responded that a ballot box will need to be made available to the people in a separate room.

Mr. Schiferle explained that someone at the Deliberative Session could move to change the bottom line of the budget. He said if this happened, the Budget Committee would meet to then vote on whether they recommended the new amount.

Girard LeDuc stated that the amount agreed upon at the Deliberative Session will need to be added to the ballot on which residents will vote.

Discussion ensued regarding the process for finalizing the budget and documents that need to be signed by the School Board.

Tracy Hyuck asked for clarification on the amount of money that was returned to the Town from the fund balance last spring. She stated that she did not see anyone on social media accusing the Board of anything dishonest but did think there was confusion in Town.

Ms. Hyuck opined that she did not think any technology should be decreased from the budget nor anything from the athletics budget. She stated, however, that people in town are very desperate and concerned about their taxes. Dr. Graziano invited Ms. Hyuck to go to the SAU to look more closely at the budget to have her questions answered.

Justin Clough stated that the administration is hired to do the right job for the students. He suggested that the Board needs to maintain their integrity by holding to their convictions relative to the budget. He suggested there may have been prior mismanagement and that “we” need to do better.

Mr. Clough asked the Board to consider socially distancing during the Board meeting. He opined that if the Board can meet face to face, they should seriously consider ways in which the students can return to school.

Kelly Page stated that she is very supportive of the school system. She stated her appreciation that people are beginning to look at social activities for the children. She asked if there are opportunities for social interaction why there aren't opportunities for students going back to school. Ms. Douglas stated that the decision to move from red status will be reconsidered at the next meeting. Ms. Page is refraining from pulling her students to be homeschooled hoping that things will get back to normal soon.

Ms. Page stated that although she wants children to have the opportunity to walk, she wonders why the hybrid plan of separate A and B groups is necessary if students are potentially able to walk together. Ms. Douglas repeated that the Board will be revisiting the decision to move from red status at the next meeting and thanked Ms. Page for voicing her opinion.

Jenn Codispoti stated her appreciation for all of the work the Board, administration, and teachers are doing. She stated her opinion that the students returning to school is of utmost importance for both the academic and social emotional reasons. She explained the challenges that parents are facing at home, especially those that are also working full time. She reiterated how important it is for students to be back in the classroom for their sake, as well as their family's sake. Ms. Asdot expressed her understanding of the challenges Ms. Codispoti is facing, given the situation in her own home with her daughter.

Ms. Codispoti explained that she has paid for the Revolution Basketball program and was looking forward to her children taking advantage of that program. Although she understands why the Board decided not to allow the use of the building for this purpose, she stated her concern for the program being cancelled.

Ms. Codispoti thanked the Board for their work on the budget in support of providing a quality education. She stated that taxpayers often see the bottom line and react to that. She wondered if there was a way in which the community can be better educated about the budget in order to muster the support of the voters.

Ms. Codispoti asked about the status of the High School Tuition Committee. Dr. Graziano explained that the sub-committees are working on gathering information for the Board's consideration. The committee will continue to meet and report out in June.

Jill Gauthier asked if walking to nursing homes was in the plan for activities. Ms. Douglas said it was not a plan to have any students visiting nursing homes, due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Heather Elliot stated that her child's learning is being negatively impacted by having to stay at home. She is concerned about his social emotional development. Ms. Elliot is concerned that her son is in day care all day and then tries to do his school work at night. She stated that the hybrid model is not working for her family.

Mary Perry applauded teachers for their work during remote learning. She said that the deadlines imposed by teachers are difficult to meet. Upon being asked by Ms. Douglas, she said she has communicated with the teacher directly.

Ms. Perry stated she is concerned that the Revolution Basketball program is being cancelled when PMHS basketball is continuing. She suggested that it is allowed at PMHS based on making money. Ms. Douglas stated that money is not the motivator for allowing PMHS basketball.

Ms. Hyuck asked how many classes include teachers teaching in Zoom. She wonders if assignments are being given and completed offline. Mr. Hamilton explained that during a 60 minute class, there is direct instruction for a portion of the time and then teachers remain available to help students as they complete independent practice.

Ms. Hyuck asked if the High School Tuition Committee is reporting out in June, when is the earliest a decision would be implemented. Dr. Graziano said he did not have a date.

XV. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for Thursday, February 4, 2021 at 5:30 in the Pittsfield Middle High School Lecture Hall.

XVI. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made by Mr. Gauthier and seconded by Ms. Asdot, the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tobi Gray Chassie
Recording Secretary (via Zoom)