

**APPROVED BY THE PITTSFIELD SCHOOL BOARD**

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

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**MINUTES**

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

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Members Present: Adam Gauthier, Chairperson  
Justin Clough, Vice Chairperson  
Molly Goggin  
Diane Rider

Others Present: Bryan Lane, Interim Superintendent  
Jessica Bickford, Director of Student Services  
Members of the Public

Chairperson Gauthier opened the meeting at 5:30 p.m. Mr. Gauthier asked people to be respectful of others' opinions and to maintain civility.

**II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The pledge of allegiance was led by Mr. Gauthier.

**III. AGENDA REVIEW**

The following items were added to the agenda:

- NH School Board Association (Ms. Rider)
- Tuition Study Information (Mr. Lane)

**IV. ACTION ON AMENDED AGENDA**

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

V. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

The September 16, 2021 non-public minutes were considered by the Board. On a motion made by Ms. Goggin and seconded by Mr. Clough the Board unanimously approved the minutes of the non-public session on September 16, 2021 as written.

The October 7, 2021 minutes were considered by the Board. The only change was to remove the “r” next to section XV. On a motion made by Mr. Clough and seconded by Ms. Rider the Board unanimously approved the minutes of the September 7, 2021 as amended.

VI. PUBLIC INPUT

Beverly Drolet asked the members of the Board to speak loudly enough for the audience to hear.

VII. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Matthew Swenson reported that the Site Council is continuing work on the policy of grading. The policy is considering exemptions of grades for assignments missed due to excused absences.

VIII. INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

A. Life Skills Program Overview

Ms. Bickford provided a detailed overview of the life skills program. She indicated her intent to propose a program at PES in the future.

IX. SCHOOL BOARD

A. School Board Position

Five letters, according to Mr. Lane, have been received expressing interest in the vacant Board position.

B. Absentee Numbers

Mr. Lane provided statistics relative to absenteeism at PES and PMHS. He reported forty-one cases of COVID-19 in the last fourteen days, which is one percent of the population. Transmission remains substantial for our region, according to Mr. Lane.

C. Mask Survey

Mr. Lane reported the results of the mask survey.

#### D. Negotiations

Mr. Lane explained that the Negotiation Team will be meeting each Monday.

#### E. Tuition Study

Mr. Lane explained that he has gathered information from Merrimack Valley, Coe Brown, Pembroke, Winnisquam, and Concord. Prospect Mountain High School did not have information available until today so is not included on the handout provided to the Board and public. He further explained that there would be ongoing in-district costs regardless of tuitioning students out. Mr. Lane explained the space considerations for elementary students would not allow movement from PES to PMHS and the shutting down of one building.

Mr. Lane stated that the numbers are clear that there is not an economic advantage to the District to send students to another district. The increase in per pupil expenditure for 160 students ranges between \$712,640 and \$901,440 annually.

Mr. Lane stated that transportation is another issue that will need to be considered. With the shortage of drivers and finding a bus company that can provide five additional buses and drivers is not feasible at this time. He explained that although transportation is not mandated for high school students, many families would have a significant hardship to provide transportation.

Mr. Lane stated that test scores come from the SAT which is the state assessment for grade eleven as well as the grade eleven science assessment. He explained that the move to another district in ninth grade would not improve performance.

Mr. Lane addressed the issue of who decides the issue of tuitioning students out of the district. According to Attorney Barbara Loughman, the article was non-binding and advisory. To that end, the Board was not obligated to conduct an investigation, but did so in good faith. The article stated "Are you in favor of instructing the Pittsfield School Board, to in good faith, investigate and pursue viable options for tuitioning all students grades 9 through 12 to another high school(s) and to cease educating all high school students in Pittsfield?"

Mr. Lane said that based on the advice from the attorney, the Board can decide on their own relative to tuitioning students or they can create a new warrant article on which the voters could decide.

Mr. Gauthier asked if a third party could be sought to inspect PMHS to see if moving all students from PES is possible. Mr. Lane stated affirmatively and added that changes in plumbing, levels of chalkboards, egresses, and playground

equipment would become issues. Mr. Gauthier stated that more research is needed to identify costs of bringing PES students up to PMHS. Mr. Clough stated that there would be costs associated with assessing the viability of moving PES to PMHS. Ms. Goggin agreed that the costs associated with moving PES students to PMHS are important to know in order to make a decision.

Ms. Goggin asked Mr. Lane to further investigate the possibility of the entire student body being accepted by a district. She stated interest in knowing definitively if students could choose to go to another school, other than the district with which there is a contract. Mr. Lane explained the reasons that exist for students to have a plan that is alternative to that for all other students.

Ms. Goggin stated that consideration should also be taken relative to the number of students for whom tuition is being negotiated. She stated that if there was a bubble of students coming up that will need to be accommodated.

Mr. Lane stated that if PES was not used, it would need to be heated and insured, thus creating another expense to take into consideration.

Mr. Clough raised the issue of transitioning students to a new school, pointing out that there would be differences depending on whether all students would go out at the same time or if there was a plan to gradually transfer students. This would become an issue if PMHS was to be retrofitted to accommodate PES students.

Mr. Gauthier opened the conversation to the public.

Sarah Duval stated that to add to the transportation issue, it is more difficult to acquire a CDL license than previously.

Beverly Drolet provided accolades to Mr. Lane for the information shared. She expressed concern that this information is not easily distributed to the community due to lack of media in town. She asked if there could be a report issued to provide the information.

Jennifer Codispoti asked why we are talking about why we “cannot” do something and not why we “can”. She expressed her concern that the public has only heard the negative aspects of the concept of tuitioning students out. Ms. Codispoti stated her appreciation for the explanation of what decisions the Board can make. She suggested a full picture of information be presented to the community. Ms. Codispoti urged the Board to consider the long-term future of the high school.

Fred Hast stated that the Concord Monitor and Manchester Union Leader could be used to publicize the information being gathered. People should be encouraged to attend School Board meetings to gain a deeper understanding. Mr. Hast pointed out that once our students are in another district, the budget of that district will be

out of the Pittsfield taxpayers' control. He spoke to the issue of taxes and the re-evaluation of property.

Dan Schroth stated that this is the third study completed and it is a waste of time, in his opinion. Mr. Schroth stated that he doesn't think the taxpayers will agree to paying more money for students to be sent to another district.

Heather Elliott asked what the projected student population would be and asked if the current high school would need an addition to accommodate more students. Ms. Elliott stated that she would not want her child to spend more time on a bus and wondered if a second bus would be made available for students to participate in sports. Mr. Lane stated that additional buses would mean an additional cost but would need to be part of the considerations taken into account when making final decisions.

Elisha Griffin stated that she thought the point of the study was to see if taxes could be lowered. She stated that the taxpayers will need to make a decision as to whether they want to pay for an education out of town or spend the money to improve education in Pittsfield.

Katie Nikas asked if the town would have representation on the Board of the town who accepted the students. Mr. Lane stated that this would be part of the negotiations with the district. Ms. Nikas asked if the tuition rate could be increased after an agreement has been made. Mr. Lane stated that usually agreements are for three years; the accepting district could demand an increase in tuition after the initial agreement.

Mark Riel asked about the cost of transportation to the five towns investigated. Mr. Lane explained that the cost of transportation was calculated to include the cost of getting the students to PMHS and then to the town in question. Mr. Riel asked how many students now ride the bus; Mr. Lane could not provide the number but speculated it was about sixty percent.

Katie Bocash stated that she thought voters would be in favor of higher taxes if there was evidence of positive changes and a quality education. She stated that the warrant article was meant to investigate more than the financial impact and also the quality of education. Ms. Bocash stated that if we are not going to tuition students out, then we should be discussing how to improve education in Pittsfield.

Jamie Koladish asked if there has been any discussion about making the school a charter school. Mr. Lane stated he would investigate further the possibility of developing a charter school.

Jill Gauthier asked for clarification regarding the SAT. Mr. Lane stated that all juniors take SATs in the spring of the year. All students are required to take the test.

Ms. Gauthier asked if Head Start could be moved out to make more room for PES students.

Ms. Duval asked if the possibility of having other towns tuition their students to Pittsfield has been considered. Mr. Clough stated that this is difficult when the school is perceived to be sub-par.

Ms. Griffin reiterated her desire for the taxpayers to be clear about what they want - lower taxes or a good education.

Ms. Nikas wondered what it means to be successful for a student in Pittsfield. She wonders why Pittsfield's education is considered to be sub-par. She pointed out that testing is not always the way in which success can be measured.

Tracy Huyck stated that she believes it is possible to have all PES students moved to PMHS. She also questioned the decreases in the budget that would be realized in the elimination of teaching staff. Mr. Lane explained the ongoing costs and pointed out that staff salaries were taken into consideration. Ms. Huyck stated that she had to send her daughter to a private school in order to receive the education she was seeking. She questioned why students should have to leave the community to get the education they deserve.

Ms. Gauthier asked if PES was vacant would it belong to the district or the town. Mr. Lane stated he believed it would remain the responsibility of the school district.

Ms. Codisoti asked if the information shared tonight would be on the website. Mr. Lane said it will be posted next week.

Ms. Elliott asked if her request to review the curriculum had been acted upon. Mr. Lane stated that this remains on his list of things to do; budget and tuition study has taken his time currently. It is the plan to identify a curriculum that is nationally recognized.

Dawn Mistler stated that people who are unable to drive will have difficulty transporting their students to another district if transportation is not included in the plan. She stated that she thought it would be difficult to think that taxpayers will be willing to increase their taxes to tuition students out since they recently cut close to a million dollars from the proposed budget last year.

#### F. COVID-19 Protocol

Ms. Goggin stated that the mask survey indicated a fairly close split on the use of masks. Ms. Rider stated that with that split, the current protocol should be

followed. Mr. Lane explained that the current policy does not consider the regional trends and the PCR tests.

Mr. Clough asked about testing at school. Mr. Lane stated that there are questions to consider such as do parents want their students tested, do they want them tested at school, and what criteria would need to be met to do the test. Mr. Clough expressed the frustrations experienced when students need to be tested by parents when the student is presenting COVID-19 symptoms.

Ms. Rider asked clarifying questions regarding the symptoms that necessitate testing, which Mr. Lane answered.

Mr. Gauthier proposed that the percentage move to twelve percent over a three-day period. He clarified by saying it would need to be over twelve percent for three days before masks would be required. On a motion made by Mr. Gauthier and seconded by Mr. Clough, the Board unanimously approved the COVID-19 protocol with the amendment suggested by Mr. Gauthier. Mr. Lane stated that he will communicate with families by email and telephone call.

#### G. 2022-2023 Budget Proposal

Mr. Lane provided the Board with a copy of the proposed budget. Narratives have been created for the PES, PMHS, and special education budget. The proposal represents a decrease of \$138,981.46 over the current school year's budget. Due to lower salary and benefit costs of new hires the budget decreased significantly. In addition, there was a decrease in health insurance premium cost of three percent and dental insurance of one and a half percent. The budget includes an addition of a Family and Consumer Science teacher, as that has been determined necessary to meet minimum standards for education required by the NH Department of Education.

Mr. Lane provided an explanation of the requests including technology, facilities, transportation, and curriculum programs.

Mr. Lane asked the Board to study the proposal, send questions via email, and be ready to discuss at the next meeting.

Ms. Rider asked about the process for ordering new text books. Mr. Lane will investigate the answer to that question for the next meeting.

Mr. Lane invited members of the public to email any questions to him and he will be sure to provide answers at the next meeting.

### X. SCHOOL BOARD

#### A. School Board Vacancy

Mr. Gauthier suggested the Board use the questions previously used. Mr. Clough suggested each member ask the same question and use the rating scale from last time. Mr. Gauthier proposed that the process include a time for discussion.

The Board agreed to hold a public session at the November 4, 2021 meeting to interview the applicants. Mr. Lane explained that the discussion of the candidate can happen in either public or non-public session. He recommended the discussion occur in non-public, especially if there were concerns.

Ms. Goggin suggested the criteria be reconsidered by the current Board members. Mr. Lane agreed to facilitate the process by gathering the questions and creating a scoring mechanism.

#### B. NH School Board Association

Ms. Rider stated that the NH School Board Association annual meeting was held on Saturday, October 16, 2021. She explained an article relative to remote meetings. Mr. Lane explained the ramifications of the article if it were to be made law.

### XI. COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

#### A. Budget Committee Representative - Mr. Clough

Mr. Clough asked Mr. Schifferly if the Board was on the right track regarding the presentation of the proposed budget. Mr. Schifferly answered in the affirmative and reminded them that the Budget Committee wanted information relative to the COVID-19 grant expenditures.

#### B. Drake Field and Facilities - Mr. Gauthier

Mr. Gauthier explained that the Board granted him permission to do some shrub pruning with the help of students.

Mr. Gauthier stated that he is unaware of details relative to the painting of the fence because he continues to not be invited to meetings where those decisions are made.

#### C. Negotiating Team - Ms. Goggin & Mr. Gauthier

Negotiations are in progress.

#### D. Foss Family Scholarship - Ms. Rider

### XII. NEXT MEETING



The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for Thursday, November 4, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. in the Pittsfield Middle High School Media Center.

### XIII. PUBLIC INPUT

Katie Nikas stated her approval of doing the COVID-19 testing at school. She asked if parents could be invited to participate in the process when it becomes necessary.

Ryan Rafferty stated that public input at the beginning of the meeting and then at the end is frustrating. He questioned the validity of a statistic being used in the COVID-19 protocol.

Heather Elliott explained the differences in the COVID-19 tests. She stated that the rapid tests have a high rate of inaccuracy. She asked if consideration of wearing masks for students who are under twelve and have not been given the option of a vaccination has been considered.

Ms. Nikas asked why a van would be leased and not purchased. Mr. Lane added clarification on why leasing is a more viable option.

Ms. Koladish asked if there is a curriculum committee that works on curriculum. Mr. Lane asked her to email him the question and he would investigate further.

Ms. Huyck asked if insurance premiums were fully investigated. Mr. Lane stated that he has used the current company for the budget proposal but is investigating other options to present during negotiations with teachers.

Ms. Koladish asked if the Board would be willing to look at targeted masking options similar to those being executed in Goffstown.

### XIV. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made by Ms. Goggin and seconded by Mr. Clough, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tobi Gray Chassie  
Recording Secretary