

Pembroke Public Schools

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PEMBROKE SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Thursday, February 15 2024
North Pembroke Elementary School Library

Call to Order

Mrs. Bollinger called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Present from Administration: Erin Obey, Superintendent; Marybeth Brust, Assistant Superintendent; Jessica DeLorenzo, Director of Student Services

Present from Committee: Susan Bollinger, Chair; David Boyle, Vice Chair; Allison Glennon, Clerk; Michael Quinn and Patrick Chilcott

Pledge of Allegiance

Acknowledge & Schedule Visitors

Mrs. Bollinger welcomed the audience members.

Communications

Pembroke Teachers Association - Ms. Renee Bock, PTA president and teacher at Hobomock Elementary School, read a statement on behalf of the association members. The statement is attached to the minutes.

Public Comment

Ms. Paige Graziano said she is speaking on behalf of her daughters who asked her to come and speak. Many of you know that my daughters spoke at the public meeting on behalf of students who find it difficult to voice dissenting opinions and view viewpoints in the classroom. They did not plan to speak as they felt certain others would be speaking from that perspective based on discussions they had with friends both in and outside of school. When they realized that was not the case, they were compelled to stand and speak despite an overwhelming majority speaking in opposition. Since then, they have been glad to see that most students did not ostracize them as they had feared. Many have approached them to discuss their positions and many more reached out to say that they were glad that Ivy and Kora had spoken up because they felt the same. My girls decided to write a statement and asked students to sign it if they agreed with the statement, in their words it reads "We believe that Pride Flags should not be posted in classrooms and teachers should not be able to portray any kind of political or controversial opinion in schools". It has been signed by 14 students and there are many more who wanted to sign but are not in the high school or their schedules conflict with my daughters thus making signatures a little more difficult to obtain. This list of signatures has been emailed to the superintendent as well as to Mr. Talbot. My daughters plan to add signatures if students continue to show interest in signing. Although some felt that the public forum was disruptive and unnecessary, I believe it was vital to starting an open conversation which had previously been just a murmur within the schools. Students were speaking to one another about their discomfort but were not sure how to move forward because of feared retribution. Mrs. Bollinger's willingness to start a discussion has opened doorways of communication between students of different backgrounds, staff and teachers and for that I am grateful. Teachers are a bit more aware that in their valiant efforts to make sure that some of their students were included, they may have inadvertently silenced others. I know our public school teachers work very hard, especially in Pembroke and many have been very helpful to my kids. One thing seems clear, we cannot assume that everyone agrees or should agree on any given subject to find consensus and compromise. We have to be willing to talk with one another without assumption. There are families and people out there who are both strongly pro-Black Lives Matter and pro-

Thin Blue Line, there are Republicans who are pro-choice and Democrats who are fiscal conservatives, LGBTQ+ individuals who are concerned about how to best participate in sports, healthcare workers who do not believe every vaccine is necessary for every individual, there are Christians, Jews and Muslims who all vary in how they express and live out their faiths. This is why we have Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Evangelical Christians, we have reformed Orthodox and conservative Jews, there are Shia, Sufi and Sunni Muslims, and these are not the only sects or groups within each of these large religious faiths. Just because we identify as a particular group does not mean that is all we are or that we agree with 100% of the tenets of that group. As we move forward, we must be willing to talk and more importantly to listen from a place that seeks to understand rather than a place of condemnation. As long as our children have access to the internet, they will be aware of world affairs and these things will be present in our Pembroke community. Pretending that they don't exist will not elevate us, having compassionate ears and an openness to one another is how I hope our community moves forward. I am grateful for the start of this discussion as we move forward with our discussions of budgets, vocational education and other Town concerns, we will have to have a lot of difficult conversations so let's remember to listen with compassion and to be open to hearing hard things from those around us. It's our differing talents, education, specialties and history that give us each unique perspectives and add to the conversation so long as we are willing to have the conversation. I am excited to see how this team works together to boldly solve these issues for the benefit of our children's future.

Adjustments to the Agenda

None

Approval of Bill Schedule

Warrants were sent out electronically.

Superintendent's Report

FY25 Technology Budget Presentation

Mr. Brandon Hall presented his department's budget.

Security and device equity are at the top of the list along with best practices in professional development and creating replacement cycles for devices. The department supports over one hundred Ed tech software platforms, from HR software to grade books and everything in between. The department also supports MCAS, PSAT, ACCESS, NEAP, WIDA, the Pathways certification, College Board, AP and the Seal of Biliteracy online exams, not to mention over 3600 devices.

The 2023-2024 staff successes include the development of an assistive technology interest group by Mr. Tinker. Staff members presenting at and attending state and regional technology professional development. MassCue awards for staff members and weekly digital learning updates via Tech Tip Tuesday.

The 2023-2024 student successes include the creation of the PHS student help desk internship, the introduction of the Student Innovation/Help Desk semester-long course, 3D printing and design K-12, and the expansion of "Coding across the curriculum" and digital learning skills.

The 2023-2024 hardware and infrastructure successes include the new administrative staff device rollout, the replacement of 200 Chromebooks as devices aged out, continued upgrades to the wireless network, upgrades to the firewall and threat protections and upgrades to backup emergency power supplies.

The current staffing of the Technology Department is:

1 Director of Instructional Technology, 1 Software and Data Manager, 1 Network Manager, 1 Media Technician, 1 Digital Learning Specialist and 5 building-based stipend Technology Integrators. There are 7 student interns this year and there were 5 senior project students last school year.

The current costs of the department total \$984,380 which includes existing staff, district-wide technology software and programs, and supplies and materials. Mr. Hall said he would like to grow the size of the department because device levels have grown since 2019. Going into next year devices will need to be replaced and there will be well over 3600 devices needing support, in addition to the work tickets that have grown each year.

A Technology Department priority budget request is to add a full-time Network Admin/Level Two Tech for \$65K given the number of repairs and the rapid expansion of the network and currently having only one person who handles that.

The Technology Department's priority budget device requests include the replacement of student Chromebooks, the replacement of student iPads, desktop replacements for computer science classes, and desktop replacement for Digital Arts classes. The hardware & equipment priority budget requests include Papercut, AP replacements and additions district-wide. The software needs include GoGuardian Teacher and Admin Software, Seesaw Premium, renew PearDeck, Google Enterprise Plus education edition, Clever IDM, threat protection against DDoS attacks and network management software.

Mr. Hall said the next steps for the department include working on year 2 of the three-year strategic technology plan, developing a Digital Learning Specialist at the secondary level, developing a Network Administrator/Level 2 Tech position, expanding the PLTW and Career Pathways and continuing the device and hardware replacement cycle.

Mr. Quinn commended the department for maintaining a good ratio of staff to devices that require technical support. He also inquired about the future increase in the number of devices. Mr. Hall said that while the department does its best to refurbish devices, replacements are sometimes necessary. Mr. Quinn asked about the increase in work tickets and Mr. Hall said it is due to increased usage and problems with older devices. Mr. Boyle asked how much time an average ticket takes and Mr. Hall said he can share this information at a later date. Mr. Boyle asked about using old Chromebooks and Mr. Hall said the department salvages parts to reuse. Mrs. Glennon inquired about fees charged to families for damages. Mr. Hall responded that the district is understanding and uses warranties whenever possible. Mrs. Bollinger asked about the lifespan of a Chromebook and Mr. Hall informed her that a Chromebook could last up to 10 years, but frequent transportation to school would decrease its lifespan. Mr. Chilcott said the reality is when students are taking it back and forth its lifespan is probably two years. He added that using old Chromebooks for parts is brilliant. Mr. Chilcott asked about cybersecurity and Mr. Hall said it is taken care of by the hardware and software already in place. Mrs. Bollinger said she is impressed with what the department has accomplished with the current staffing level.

FY25 Fine and Performing Arts Budget Presentation

Mrs. Chapman said the department's 2023-2024 goals and ongoing work include celebrating community through numerous community performances, concerts and juried art shows to celebrate the talents of the students. The Digital Arts Pathway provided internships and info sessions for PCMS students as well as community outreach. Teachers participated in MassCue, NAEA, and MMEA conferences and professional development, year 2, of Navigating Access and Accommodations for Diverse Learners in the Arts Classroom.

Mrs. Chapman highlighted the K-12 Accomplishments for the 2023-2024 school year. 10 of 11 Studio Arts students earned a qualifying score on the 2023 AP Exam portfolio. Six PHS students successfully took part in the first Digital Arts Pathway in 2022-2023 and there are currently 13 students in the Pathway this year. Additional accomplishments include students accepted to the 2024 Senior and Junior District Music Festival, the 2024 MA All-State Chorus, and 2024 SEMSBA Musical Festival. PPS concerts, art shows, musicals, plays, and Veteran's Day and Memorial Day ceremonies. The PPS Music Department was named "Best Communities in Music Education" by the NAMM Foundation for 2023.

Mrs. Chapman explained the Music Department's staffing. There is one visual art and one music teacher at each elementary school. At PCMS there is one visual art and 1.2 music teachers and at PHS there are 3 visual art teachers and 1.8 music teachers. For elementary instrumental grades 5 and 6 there is a full-time band and a .2FTE string teacher. She said the elementary instrumental enrollment this year is 197 which is up from 180 last year. Current Art class enrollment at PCMS is at 83% and Music is at 56%. At PHS Art enrolment is 38% and Music is 18%. Mrs. Chapman said eliminating the directed study for grade 9 could result in an increase in the PHS enrollment numbers.

The Maintenance of Effort FY25 VPA K-12 budget is \$93,450 and is made up of textbooks, instructional supplies and materials, instructional technology and equipment, contracted services, dues and subscription renewals and transportation.

The departmental next steps for FY25 are to expand the Pathways offerings to include a Music Pathway starting in the fall of 2024, to do an ongoing revision of Digital Arts Pathway as needed, to continue to explore ways to connect to the broader Pembroke Arts Community and to explore the possibility of expanding the Ceramics offerings to include AP 3D Art and Design.

Mr. Quinn said it's great to see more students taking up instruments. Mr. Boyle asked if the participation numbers will level off and Mrs. Chapman said she hopes not, and hopes the numbers return to what they were six to seven years ago. She is happy with the retention from grade 8 to grade 9 and finds the numbers encouraging. Mr. Chilcott said he is hopeful the rise in the elementary enrollment will carry through the upper grades. He asked about costs related to the drama program and Mrs. Chapman said it is self-funded through ticket sales. Mr. Chilcott emphasized that the music department is of significant importance to the district and money, time, and effort have been invested because the district understands that not all children are interested in sports. The more opportunities provided to students, the better it is for the community. Mrs. Bollinger said she loves the professional development in art therapy and she is also excited about the Art Pathways.

Overview of Work to Date on New Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Standards

Mrs. Obey said MA general law requires all public schools to teach health and physical education. The elementary rotate through PE/Wellness 1x per week for 50 minutes, middle school rotate through PE/Wellness 3x per 6-day cycle for 48 minutes and at PHS, 9th graders are required to take a PE in Wellness class that meets six times per 7-day cycle for 54 minutes for one semester and 10th–12th graders are able to sign up for various PE/wellness electives if they choose. Mrs. Obey said new health standards came out in September 2023, the first time it has been updated in 24 years. There is not a lot of health taught across the curriculum K-12 but it finds its place in gym classes and some science classes. At PCMS in the 21st-century skills rotation there are some concepts and strands that are taught but there is not a health teacher in any one of the schools. There was a teacher before 2010 but the position was reduced.

The PPS Strategic Leadership Team reviewed the updated document in October, in November the PE/Wellness staff reviewed the document and some items were identified as curriculum work for summer of 2025. It's important to note that school districts have the discretion to determine how the standards are implemented at the local level including what curriculum materials are used. No additions or revisions to our current curriculum are being proposed. A couple areas to focus some work on in the summer of 2025 are topics under Public, Community and Environmental Health and some topics under Personal Health and Personal Safety to see if they can be incorporated into the current structure. Mrs. Obey added that no surrounding communities plan on revising their curriculum. Mr. Quinn asked Mrs. Obey to define curriculum framework and Mrs. Obey said it is a high-level topic that you should be addressing depending upon the grade level and age appropriateness. Mr. Chilcott said the PPS staff have done a great job of taking the framework and the concept and making it pertinent for the students in Pembroke. Mrs. Obey added that any frameworks are unfunded mandates so that is why it is at the discretion of the district. Mrs. Bollinger confirmed that parents can opt out of sex education topics.

Review of Titan Talk Data

Mrs. Obey said in 2020 the district stopped using the Let's Talk platform and started handling it internally. In November 2022 it was named Titans Talk. During the 2019-2020 school year, there were 52 entries, which could be comments or questions on any topic, mostly submitted anonymously. In 2020-2021 there were 86, in 2021-2022 there were 12, in 2022-2023 there were 2 and in 2023-2024 there have been 10. Mr. Boyle confirmed that anyone can access Titans Talk. Mrs. Glennon inquired about the percentage of anonymous entries and Mrs. Obey said roughly 50%. Mr. Chilcott asked student representative Lauren if students are aware of Titans Talk and Lauren informed him that while students are aware of it, they are hesitant to use it because they believe that the administration could identify who submitted the information. Mrs. Obey said the person has to check a box if they want to share their email. Mr. Chilcott said it is very important to make students aware this is an option. Mrs. Bollinger inquired about ways to increase the advertising of Titan Talk and Mrs. Obey the information will be put out through the building principals and the Communications Specialist. Mrs. Bollinger suggested creating a tutorial to explain how to enter the information anonymously since many students didn't understand it.

Consideration for Approval: Surplus Materials PHS – Science

Mrs. Obey presented science textbooks that are out of date.

VOTE: On a motion made by Michael Quinn and seconded by Patrick Chilcott, it was unanimously voted to approve the PHS science surplus materials as presented.

Voting Yes: Susan Bollinger, David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Michael Quinn and Patrick Chilcott

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none

Subcommittee/Liaison Updates

Budget Subcommittee

Mrs. Bollinger said the school committee budget subcommittee met with the Town budget subcommittee. Made some progress toward bringing down the \$1.9 million gap. Mrs. Obey added that some enrollment-driven reductions and offsets have also been identified. The Town Manager will present his budget next week so there isn't a final number from the town at this point but there are ongoing conversations. Mr. Chilcott said about \$425k has been added back by doing the work and asking the right questions. Mr. Boyle said the district isn't going to see money from the state with collections being down.

Regional/Vocational Planning Liaison

Mrs. Obey said the planning committee met last week. Mr. Hickey talked about the timeline and scope and sequence. They had done the schematics for 850 and 905 enrollments which is a significant increase from their current enrollment of 675. They are deciding on whether to get the schematics for an enrollment of 750 to make it a more palatable cost to member communities. This change would make it an April timeline with MSBA. The project vote would be put out to their member communities in January of 2025. This doesn't change the PPS timeline of fall 2024 or spring 2025 conversation at Town Meeting. If accepted as a member town and Pembroke chooses to move forward the liability is anywhere between the \$19-\$24 million range depending upon which project is selected. Four years into membership 9-12 grade potential enrollment about of 70 to 74 students would be the full enrollment.

Master Planning Committee Liaison

Mrs. Bollinger asked the committee to review the draft and email her any suggested changes/additions. There will be a public forum on 2/29.

Policy Subcommittee:

Consideration for Second Read and Approval: Policy Section G (recode/revise/rescind)

Mrs. Obey said Policy Section G is being presented for approval.

VOTE: On a motion made by Patrick Chilcott and seconded by Allison Glennon, it was unanimously voted to approve Policy Section G (recode/revise/rescind) as presented.

Voting Yes: Susan Bollinger, David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Michael Quinn and Patrick Chilcott

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none

Future Meeting Dates and Topics

3/5 and 3/19

VOTE: At 7:51 PM, on a motion made by David Boyle and seconded by Patrick Chilcott, it was unanimously voted, by roll call vote, to enter Executive Session pursuant to Chapter 30A, Section 21(a)(3) to discuss strategy related to collective bargaining, as an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the legal position of the School Committee, as declared by the Chair.

Voting Yes: Susan Bollinger, David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Michael Quinn and Patrick Chilcott

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none

APPROVED: March 19, 2024

MOTIONS

VOTE: On a motion made by Michael Quinn and seconded by Patrick Chilcott, it was unanimously voted to approve the PHS science surplus materials as presented.

Voting Yes: Susan Bollinger, David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Michael Quinn and Patrick Chilcott
Voting No: none
Abstaining: none
Absent: none

VOTE: On a motion made by Patrick Chilcott and seconded by Allison Glennon, it was unanimously voted to approve Policy Section G (recode/revise/rescind) as presented.

Voting Yes: Susan Bollinger, David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Michael Quinn and Patrick Chilcott
Voting No: none
Abstaining: none
Absent: none

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Voting Yes: Susan Bollinger, David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Michael Quinn and Patrick Chilcott
Voting No: none
Abstaining: none
Absent: none

Statement of Vote of No Confidence in the School Committee Chairperson

Dear Esteemed Members of the School Committee,

As the President of the Pembroke Teachers Association, it is my duty and privilege to address you today on behalf of our association and the members we represent. This action has been approved by a vote of an overwhelming supermajority of our members who are hereby demanding action from the School Committee. Therefore, I come before you to present the Pembroke Teachers Association's Vote of No Confidence in the current School Committee Chair, Susan Bollinger.

This vote was not made lightly, but rather with deep concern for the well-being and integrity of our educational community. The concerns have been carefully considered and deliberated upon by the Pembroke Teachers Association. Our action here today stems from a series of troubling actions and stated beliefs exhibited by the Chairperson, which are incongruent with the values we hold dear and which jeopardize the safety, inclusivity, and supportive learning environment we strive to maintain. We believe that the Chairperson's actions have significantly undermined the principles of effective and collaborative governance, negatively impacting the educational environment within our community. Despite the Committee's unanimous decision against creating a policy for social/political advocacy in the classroom, the Chairperson's actions and stated beliefs have raised serious concerns, as outlined below:

The points of concern are numerous and substantial:

- 1. Intolerance and Discrimination:** The Chairperson has displayed intolerant and discriminatory behavior, particularly in comments that unfairly scapegoat Judaism and exhibit anti-Semitic sentiments, as a rationale for implementing policies that promote intolerance and violate the civil rights we hold dear and which are essential to modeling principles of inclusivity and dignity for all.
- 2. Lack of Judgement and Character:** There's a concerning lack of judgment and character displayed by the Chairperson, which are inconsistent with the values required for effective leadership within our educational community, evident in proposed policies that undermine principles of respect and dignity for all. Ms. Bollinger's proposed policy falsely projects that treating all others with dignity and respect is a divisive subject.
- 3. Dehumanizing Actions:** The Chairperson's behavior has been dehumanizing, creating an unsafe and unwelcome environment for both educators and students.
- 4. Implicit Bias:** The Chairperson's actions and words reflect implicit bias, and a commitment to those biases, negatively influencing decision-making processes and undermining the principles of fairness and equity.
- 5. Association with Concerning Groups:** Affiliation with groups like Pembroke Rising raises questions about the Chairperson's motives and interferes with responsible decision-making that prioritize the best interests, social-emotional needs, and overall well-being of our students. We question how this aligns with the promotion of tolerance and acceptance of others, and the celebration of the differences that make us all who we are.
- 6. Financial Irresponsibility:** Proposed policies restricting social/political advocacy in the classroom expose the district to significant legal and financial risks, further straining already limited resources. The inclusion of such a policy would not only open the District to costly litigation but also presents a serious liability. Given the District's existing financial challenges and the anticipation of necessary budget cuts in

the upcoming fiscal year, the introduction of a policy with such potential legal ramifications is particularly concerning. The financial strain resulting from protracted legal battles would likely divert resources away from essential educational priorities, impacting the overall quality of education for our students. In this context, the Chairperson's actions are perceived as financially irresponsible.

7. Hypocrisy and Lack of Empathy: The Chairperson's behavior has been characterized by hypocrisy and a lack of empathy, jeopardizing the emotional well-being of our educational community. This is further exemplified by the Chairperson's introduction of a proposed policy purportedly aimed at "creating neutrality." This policy, however, is revealed to be based on personal bias and extremely polarizing, thereby exposing a contradiction and contributing to the perception of hypocrisy.

While professing to give a voice to a perceived silent minority, the Chairperson's proposal, in reality, has the effect of silencing many within our educational community, particularly those from the LGBTQ+ community. **The incongruence between the stated intention of creating neutrality and the actual impact of suppressing certain voices underscores a lack of empathy for the diverse perspectives and experiences within our educational community.**

This contradiction not only undermines the sincerity of the Chairperson's professed goal but also raises concerns about the Chairperson's ability to consider the emotional well-being of all members within our educational community. The introduction of a policy that, in practice, may marginalize certain groups without genuine consideration for their emotional well-being reflects a leadership approach that is inconsistent and potentially divisive.

8. Harm to Reputation: The Chairperson's actions have damaged the reputation of our town and school district and our commitment to providing a safe and inclusive educational and social-emotional environment.

9. Legal Jeopardy and Disregard for Constitutional Rights: Willingly putting the town in legal jeopardy displays a lack of regard for constitutional rights and human dignity.

10. Ineffective Representation: The Chairperson's representation of the School Committee has been ineffective, leading to a breakdown in communication and an overall lack of confidence in her leadership to effectively lead and represent the interests of our educational community.

In light of these concerns, the Pembroke Teachers Association presents a Vote of No Confidence in the current School Committee Chairperson, Susan Bollinger. We believe that a change in leadership is imperative to restore transparency, trust, and the well-being of our educational community ensuring our schools remain safe spaces, free from threats that are dehumanizing, discriminatory, and harmful. The Pembroke Teachers Association is committed to fostering an environment that values inclusivity, respect, and the well-being of all members of our educational community.

We urge the School Committee to consider this vote seriously and to prioritize the best interests of our students and educators. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Renée Bock
President, Pembroke Teachers Association
pembroketeachersassn@gmail.com