



## PEMBROKE SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, March 4, 2025

North Pembroke Elementary School Library

### Call to Order

Mr. Chilcott called the meeting to order at 6:32 P.M.

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

**Present from Committee:** Patrick Chilcott, Chair; Allison Glennon, Vice Chair, Katrina Delaney, Clerk; and Susan Bollinger and David Boyle

### Pledge of Allegiance

### Public Comment

Mr. Chilcott gave a reminder about the public comment policy, emphasizing that comments are limited to residents and should not exceed three minutes.

Katie McPhail: A mother of five with children attending various Pembroke schools, shared her positive experiences with the school system but raised concerns about bullying and harassment at Pembroke High School. Her oldest child attended Pembroke High School and was not bullied, but others were. One of her sons has faced bullying and harassment at PHS, which she described as ongoing and damaging. She highlighted the need for a safe and supportive environment for all students, particularly those with mental health challenges. She urged the committee to listen to the concerns of parents and students and to take action against bullying.

Angelina Arons: A parent of a sixth grader at Hobomock Elementary School, questioned the presence of a community member at North Pembroke who took pictures of children during a school event. She expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived inconsistency in school policies regarding community access during school hours. The superintendent clarified that community members are allowed on school property during certain events but must respect students' privacy.

Rhonda Rosano: A resident for 12 years with children of varying learning capabilities, shared her son's struggles with mental health and the administration's response. She recounted incidents of her son being bullied and harassed by school administration, including unjust suspensions and lack of support for his mental health needs. She expressed distrust in the administration's handling of her son's situation and called for accountability and transparency.

Greg Goetz: A non-resident, sought clarification on the public comment rules and expressed his desire to comment. The chairperson reiterated that the public comment section is for residents but encouraged Greg to submit his concerns via email for consideration as a future agenda item.

Mr. Chilcott expressed gratitude to the speakers for sharing their experiences and concerns. He reiterated the commitment to transparency and open communication within the school district, especially regarding the ongoing challenges faced by students and staff.

### Acknowledge & Schedule Visitors

Mr. Chilcott welcomed the audience members.

## **Adjustments to the Agenda**

None

## **Communications**

### **a. Update on 2/27 Community Forum**

Mr. Chilcott said about a month to a month and a half ago, he expressed his commitment to ensuring that the residents of our town have a truthful, unbiased, and transparent discussion regarding the matters occurring within the school district. He attended the 2/27 Community Forum and did not speak. The Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Vice Chair, and clerk were in attendance. The main topic of discussion was the crisis in Pembroke Public schools. During the forum, a list of grievances was presented. However, this list, while containing a shred of truth, quickly expanded into a fabrication. The president of the PTA discussed the first bargaining session, which typically is not addressed publicly, as these matters are usually conducted in executive session. However, since there are no established ground rules and the topic was broached publicly, he felt it appropriate to respond. The PTA president accurately stated that the bargaining session lasted for 25 minutes before the parties broke. She indicated that the union was only explaining their first proposal. An explanation is appropriate so that everyone understands what is being asked. During the meeting, the MTA representative attempted to adjudicate a grievance that the Superintendent had recently denied. There was harsh and salacious language against a member and employee of this district. He and Mr. Emerson, school attorney, intervened to assert that this approach was inappropriate. During a break, he instructed the attorney that the school committee would not be returning to the meeting and asked him to gather any further proposals. The MTA representative claimed that she had every right to adjudicate the grievance, and said our attorney did not possess the authority to bargain, which is false, our attorney would not have been at the table if he didn't have the authority to bargain.

The second issue raised is concerning. A couple of months ago, a grievance was postponed at the request of the Association. The administration made significant efforts to reschedule it quickly, ensuring that the necessary people would be present. An arrangement was agreed upon the day before. However, we were later informed that it was not acceptable. A communication was sent to union representation, but it failed to remain confidential; it became public and was forwarded to me. I shared it on my personal page because it was now a public document. My intention was not to challenge its validity but to express my disagreement with the notion that posting it was inappropriate. Furthermore, I want to address the considerable chaos that has unfolded. I have spoken with three labor attorneys, and all three have confirmed that this situation is 100% part of a tactic designed to overwhelm. The individuals sitting at this table are volunteers and parents, not labor attorneys, and they have faced harassment and intimidating tactics that are unacceptable. Having been involved in public education in this town for 21 years, I have never witnessed such behavior. The school committee has historically maintained a strong relationship with the Pembroke Teachers Association. It's essential to emphasize that we have a set of rights and responsibilities; we should not be intimidated or threatened.

The committee has frequently been asked why they haven't addressed certain issues. The reason is that we are preparing for a grievance hearing, and it's important to approach it with an open mind. If an investigation finds that an employee has engaged in harassment or created an unsafe environment, we will act accordingly, but all employees deserve the same process. The commitment to consistency is crucial. Having spent 21 years in this community and district, I am currently bound by certain restrictions. I am not running for reelection and after May 18, I would be happy to engage in a conversation, alongside a representative from the Union, about what the past 20 years in this organization have looked like. I will not stand by and allow the superintendent, any member of this administration, or any member of this body to be threatened.

### **Visit from State Representatives Sweezey and LaNatra and State Senator Fernandes**

Mr. Chilcott said our two State Representatives, Mr. Sweezey and Ms. LaNatra, as well as Senator Fernandes are present. He asked them to share some recent developments on Beacon Hill. Representative LaNatra said she represents Precinct 3 in Pembroke. Her colleague, Representative Sweezey, represents the rest of Pembroke, and Senator Dylan Fernandez represents all of Pembroke. She explained that the governor has released her budget, and it will be reviewed in the House. She and Representative Sweezey have participated in several briefings regarding Chapter 70, and are looking into reforming it this year. This marks the fifth year of the Student Opportunity Act, and the hope is that it will be fully funded this year as well. Additionally, with the Fair Share Amendment, there is optimism that some of the extra funds will be allocated towards schools. She represents six towns, many of which are facing budget deficits in their school systems, and they are working to address that issue.

Representative Sweezey expressed optimism about the potential for amending Chapter 70 this year. He noted that Pembroke is not alone in feeling that Chapter 70 is insufficient to meet the needs of local school districts. He believes that most of his five communities, possibly four of them, are considering potential overrides to address school budget constraints. He mentioned that he has filed some legislation regarding this issue, and he knows that both Representative LaNatra and Senator Fernandes have done the same. He said one area of significant interest is the inflation cap, which is currently set at 4.5%. Given that in the last couple of years, communities faced inflation rates that reached over 8%, this cap has left districts in a difficult position when it comes to funding. The lack of adjustment during periods of high inflation means that towns struggle to catch up and recover lost funding. He emphasized the importance of addressing not only Chapter 70 funding but also transportation and special education reimbursements. He said this is a shared focus among many in the legislature, demonstrating a widespread concern for education funding across various communities.

Senator Fernandes expressed gratitude for representing Pembroke and acknowledged the state's educational challenges. He takes pride in Massachusetts ranking highest in the nation for educational achievement. He and Representative LaNatra were involved in the Student Opportunity Act, which provided the largest funding boost for public schools in over 20 years. He said while Gateway Cities received more assistance due to greater challenges, it's crucial to address the funding gap for communities like Pembroke and increase the reimbursement. He said as Representatives LaNatra and Sweezey pointed out, this is an opportune time to discuss Chapter 70 funding. This gives the chance to secure more funding for towns like Pembroke, and help close the glaring equity gap between Gateway Cities and towns like Pembroke. The education funding bill will go through the necessary processes, and they want to make the right adjustments to Chapter 70 for better school reimbursements. The Senator added that there is likely to be a supplemental Chapter 70 budget; however, it is not extensive. It will not include transformational changes like those expected from Chapter 70 reform. Nonetheless, it could provide an opportunity to secure funds for smaller projects, which is something to consider when filing amendments. These amounts typically range from \$50,000 to \$100,000 and are focused on supporting schools. He requested feedback from the school district on needed changes and funding category revisions over the next few months to help them advocate effectively.

Mrs. Bollinger shared that a community member reached out and wants to be sure the Representatives and Senator are aware that Pembroke lacks vocational education access. Mrs. Bollinger inquired about possible assistance with the funding of vocational education as the town will be discussing a debt exclusion and it will be a significant expense for the town, and Pembroke is already facing financial struggles. Senator Fernandes said it would be helpful to have a clear understanding of the numbers involved in the vocational piece. This way, they can engage in a more accurate discussion about the potential options. Mr. Chilcott explained that Pembroke is considering joining South Shore Tech, which would mean a debt exclusion override for Pembroke's portion of their new school building. There is also the issue of tuition costs for sending students there. He explained that one of the challenges, whether in special education or vocational education, is the gap between the per-pupil funding and the actual tuition costs. This gap places a significant financial burden on the community to cover these expenses.

Mrs. Delaney said recently, that the State as a whole was found to not be following IDEA. Specifically, the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) was found to be non-compliant in several areas of IDEA. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted the review. This was released in the MA Differentiated Monitoring and Support (DMS) Report from OSEP, dated January 16, 2025. It's clear that we need to improve the ways we provide special education in our state, and she is wondering what specific ideas there are for enhancing special education to better meet the needs of students. Representative LaNatra said she filed a bill to increase the Circuit Breaker reimbursement from 75% to 90% and lower the threshold requirement for reimbursement. She mentioned a second bill that has been filed around transportation costs and she will send the committee the information.

Mr. Glennon said every year the committee has to make cuts. She added that the district needs help so anything that can happen from their end would be helpful. Senator Fernandes said it has been a couple decades since Chapter 70 was tweaked and there is broad agreement on the need to change it. He asked for specifics on costs like transportation, technology, and anything else in order to advocate for Pembroke. Mrs. Bollinger asked for the timeline of needing the information and Representative LaNatra said getting the information to her by the beginning of April will be helpful.

Mr. Chilcott suggested that the committee look at this from three different perspectives. In the supplemental piece, the committee could identify short-term initiatives. If the legislative group could secure funding of \$100,000 or \$150,000

for Pembroke, that funding could be used to purchase items that would provide immediate benefits and continue to offer advantages over the next year. Additionally, there is a second request for the social-emotional program, which aims to establish a new elementary program that would help bring students back into the district. However, there are startup costs associated with this initiative. This program could be significant as it may generate revenue and help avoid costs in the future. Finally, there is a longer term strategy around changing Chapter 70.

Mrs. Delaney mentioned that, regarding the presentations all the departments conducted, it would be helpful to evaluate the priorities for each program and get the legislators this information by the beginning of April.

Mr. Boyle thanked them for coming tonight to hear the committee's concerns.

### **Approval of Bill Schedule**

Warrants were circulated electronically.

### **Superintendent's Report**

#### Hobomock Air Quality/Mold Overview Presentation

Mrs. Obey said a tremendous amount of work has happened in regards to air quality in the district. She explained the three different types of HVAC systems in the schools. NPES, BES and PCMS have a univent System. PHS has a closed air system and Hobomock has an air handler system. At Hobomock the air is controlled by six rooftop units. Each rooftop unit controls a certain section of the building. The bulk of the units on top of Hobomock are 40 plus years old. Each of the units has a double filter, which is a paper either Merv 8 or Merv 10 filter that is changed every 4 months, and it has a fixed Merv 12 or Merv 13 filter, a metal filter that is changed annually or as needed. Each classroom has on average two supply and two exhaust vents.

Mrs. Obey said she was asked for background on Hobomock so she went back to August 2003.

In August 2003, there was a press release regarding mold damage at Hobomock following a moisture concern in certain areas of the building. In November 2016, there was limited air quality testing done by P MEC in response to a musty odor in areas of the building. In November 2017, the district partnered with the Department of Public Health Indoor Air Quality Testing to do a full assessment of the buildings (done for all 5 buildings). In December 2020, as part of the efforts to return students to classrooms during COVID, a building health assessment was conducted by Pure Air (done on all 5 buildings).

Mrs. Obey said the experts that play a role include Lisa Cullity, the Pembroke Licensed Health Agent, Paul Matuszko of (P MEC) is the District's Air Quality Expert, and Scott Fulmer is the MTA's Health and Safety Expert.

In November 2016, Paul of P MEC came to Hobomock to investigate an odor that had been reported in the kindergarten, first grade, and third grade hallways. He noted that there was no visible mold growth and examined a list of classrooms. He checked the ceiling vent grills and HVAC supply vents. While he was in room 130, he detected a musty odor at the back of the room and inspected the ceiling supply diffuser. He also conducted some sampling during his visit. The recommendations made by Paul were completed. He also recommended that if the concerns persist, to do some additional sampling investigation and the district engaged with the Department of Public Health in November 2017 and did more extensive testing. All recommendations from this testing were completed except for two. One is a refrigerator that is still on carpeting in the teachers' room, and the second was to regularly clean/vacuum supply vents and fans. The entire system was professionally cleaned in 2024 and upkeep will be part of summer cleaning going forward.

In December 2020, Pure Air System did a health check on all five buildings. Eight rooms were sampled at Hobomock. The report contained recommendations, all of which were completed.

In August 2023, a concern was raised about Room 225. In September 2023, additional areas of concern were raised by staff. Paul of P MEC did testing on Room 225, Art Hallway, Hallway at Room 150, Room 245/250 and the atrium by the cafeteria. In October 2023, a Division of Labor Standards Complaint was filed by PTA. In October 2023, the PTA conducted their testing with their expert and shared the results with the Administration on 1/19/24. The PTA testing report recommendations have been completed or are ongoing, except for the removal of the rug in the teacher's lounge. In November 2023, all recommended remediation was completed and a closeout report was issued by DLA, and the complaint closed.

Additional testing was completed by P MEC in February/March 2024. The remediation work was completed during the summer of 2024. There is ongoing quarterly testing done at Hobomock and February 2025 was the most recent. The JLMC will meet to discuss the results and next steps.

Mrs. Obey said several meetings were held from February-June 2024 to establish a side letter of agreement between the PTA and the PSC on how air quality and mold concerns would be handled moving forward. A Joint Labor Management Committee (JLMC) was created consisting of PTA president, Vice President, Negotiations Chair, MTA expert Scott Fulmer, PPS expert Paul Matuszko, PHS Principal Marc Talbot. The committee met on 10/7 to discuss protocols for reporting per the side letter of agreement. Administration created a flow chart and shared it with the PTA on 11/1/24 and is still waiting on feedback from the PTA.

The breakdown of the costs: August 2023-Present Day

PMEC Testing: \$32,720

Air duct services: \$67,183.52

North Star Cleaning/servicing rooftop units: \$17,138.23

North Star replacement of ductless AC in LIR: \$24,761

Allied Environment remediation of LIR: \$6,800

Stanley Steamer cleaning: \$5,415.07

Replacement of flooring in Music room: \$12,441.40

Total: \$166,459.22

Anticipated future costs:

PMEC quarterly monitoring: \$2,200/visit

HVAC replacement at HES: \$1.3-\$1.6 million

Continuation of carpet removal project: \$100,000

The HVAC replacement is a compilation of funds requested as capital at Town Meeting for the previous four years. The flooring project will be a request on the 2025 spring Town Meeting Capital Article.

Mr. Boyle confirmed that the school committee feels all buildings are safe. He suggested that people reach out to him or other committee members with questions or concerns. Mrs. Obey clarified that the custodians are not being asked to perform any work that should be completed by mold remediation experts. Mrs. Delaney said all this information has put her at ease as she has a student that is immunocompromised.

Mrs. Glennon expressed concern about the superintendent not receiving the PTA testing information in a timely manner. Mrs. Obey stated that she does not expect this to be an ongoing issue. The purpose of the JLMC is to review all matters.

Mr. Chilcott asked if the roof is leaking. Mrs. Obey said in 2012-2013, the roofs of four out of five buildings were replaced. However, on a 52-year-old building, using a water tight membrane can lead to water finding alternative entry points. The masonry, cinder blocks, and mortar are all 40-50 years old, and preventive maintenance like brick repointing is lacking. The rooftop units, also 40 years old, have outdated technology. While they have metal louvers to let in outside air, some don't close properly. During sideways rain, water can enter through the rooftop units, traveling along the ductwork and not necessarily from roof leaks.

Mrs. Rosano inquired about the quarterly assessments, and Mrs. Obey said that Paul from PMEC conducts them. Additionally, Mrs. Rosano asked about the cost of operating the air scrubbers continuously, and Mrs. Obey replied that the schools' electricity is sourced from the solar farm.

Mrs. Pelletier inquired about the roofs and the storm in 2015. Mrs. Obey stated that the contractor examined all four roofs that had been replaced after that storm. She also noted that the exhaust fans on the roof assist with snow melting. Mrs. Pelletier asked if the district will consider a facilities manager and Mrs. Obey said this addition has been discussed for several years, however, it doesn't make sense to add an administrative role during times when staff is being cut. There have been discussions about the possibility of sharing some services with the town, whether it be through technology, human resources, or facilities. This could involve a shared position. Expect to hear more about this at the next meeting.

Mrs. McPhail asked if all schools have the HEPA filters and Mrs. Obey explained they are only at Hobomock due to the air handler system, which is different from the other schools. Mrs. McPhail asked if the quarterly testing results can be shared and Mrs. Obey said the Hobomock principal will share the information.

FY26 Teaching and Learning Budget Presentation

Tabled until the next meeting.

**Future Meeting Dates and Topics**

3/18 @ 7:30, and 3/25

VOTE: At 9:11 PM on a motion made by David Boyle and seconded by Allison Glennon, it was unanimously voted to enter Executive Session Pursuant to Chapter 30A, Section 21(a)(3) to discuss strategy related to collective bargaining and a legal matter as an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the legal position of the School Committee, as declared by the Chair.

Voting Yes: Patrick Chilcott, Allison Glennon, Katrina Delaney, Susan Bollinger, David Boyle

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none

**APPROVED: March 18, 2025**

**MOTIONS**

VOTE: At 9:11 PM on a motion made by David Boyle and seconded by Allison Glennon, it was unanimously voted to enter Executive Session Pursuant to Chapter 30A, Section 21(a)(3) to discuss strategy related to collective bargaining and a legal matter as an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the legal position of the School Committee, as declared by the Chair.

Voting Yes: Patrick Chilcott, Allison Glennon, Katrina Delaney, Susan Bollinger, David Boyle

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none