

Pembroke Public Schools

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PEMBROKE SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING **Tuesday, April 14, 2026** **North Pembroke Elementary School Library**

Call to Order

Mr. Boyle called the meeting to order at 6:01 P.M.

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

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

Public Comment

None

Acknowledge & Schedule Visitors

Mr. Boyle welcomed the visitors.

Adjustments to the Agenda

None

Communications

None

Approval of Bill Schedule

Bills are circulating electronically

Consideration for Approval: School Committee Meeting Minutes of April 7, 2026

VOTE: On a motion made by Katrina Delaney and seconded by Allison Glennon, it was unanimously voted to approve the school committee meeting minutes of April 7, 2026 as presented.

Voting Yes: David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Katrina Delaney, Susan Bollinger and Katrina Scarsciotti

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none

Visit from State Representatives LaNatra and Swezey and State Senator Fernandes

The Committee received a legislative update from Representative LaNatra and Representative Swezey, who provided an overview of current activity in the Massachusetts House of Representatives and its implications for Pembroke Public Schools. Representative LaNatra opened the discussion by noting that the Governor's budget had recently been released and that the House budget would be published the following day. She highlighted recent student engagement at the State House, including visits from a PHS AP

Government class and participants in Student Government Day, noting that Pembroke was well represented at the State House recently. Representative LaNatra then reviewed several key funding items secured for Pembroke in the supplemental “fair share” budget. These included:

- \$50,000 for HVAC repairs and replacements in school buildings
- \$100,000 for capital facility costs and expenses associated with joining a regional vocational school
- \$35,000 for the Pembroke Public Library to support educational programming and collaboration with the schools

She also reported that Pembroke is slated to receive \$14,811,699 in Chapter 70 funding, a slight increase over the prior fiscal year. She noted that the Governor again set the per-pupil minimum increase at \$75, though the House successfully raised this to \$150 last year and intends to file the same amendment again.

Representative Sweezey provided additional context regarding the Student Opportunity Act, which is entering its final year of phased implementation. He cautioned that the conclusion of this funding creates a cliff that districts must prepare for. He also described ongoing legislative concern about the Chapter 70 formula, referencing a recent 12-hour hearing on local aid in which communities across the state expressed similar challenges. He emphasized that while no immediate changes are expected, Chapter 70 reform is at the top of the list going forward.

Representative LaNatra informed the Committee that two bills, one concerning special education reserve funds and another concerning regional school assessment reserve funds, were in third reading and expected to move forward. When asked how the community could support their passage, she suggested emailing Chairman Tom Walsh.

Mrs. Glennon raised questions about the statewide cell phone ban bill. Representative LaNatra explained that the bill had passed both chambers and was now in conference committee, at which point local advocacy would be most effective. Representative Sweezey addressed the related social media provisions, noting that the Senate had not included them in its version of the bill, leaving significant differences to be negotiated. He explained that the House proposal created three age-based regulatory categories, under 14, ages 14–15, and over 15, but that the final outcome remained uncertain. Committee members discussed concerns about student access to chat-based apps, privacy risks, and the importance of statewide consistency. Ms. Brust clarified that most apps used by the district already meet higher privacy standards.

Mrs. Bollinger voiced concern about the loss of local control and the absence of accompanying funding regarding the cell phone ban. Mrs. Scarsciotti thanked the representatives for attending and echoed prior comments. Mrs. Delaney acknowledged the challenges but emphasized research showing that excessive technology access can hinder learning. She expressed appreciation for the statewide action, predicting positive long-term outcomes despite initial implementation hurdles. She also thanked the legislators for securing supplemental funding for HVAC repairs, school capital needs, and the public library.

In response to a question from Mrs. Glennon, Mrs. Obey clarified that the newly awarded \$100,000 may be used for HVAC or other capital improvements across the district’s five school buildings. She noted that the Town’s capital budget is significantly constrained this year due to snow and ice deficits, making these supplemental funds especially valuable for continuing necessary projects not covered in the spring Town Meeting warrant.

Superintendent’s Report

FY27 Administration Recommended Budget

Mrs. Obey provided a detailed review of Pembroke’s historical funding picture and the district’s current financial position. She began by reiterating the information shared by Representatives LaNatra and Sweezey regarding the Chapter 70 increase, noting that the district will receive a 1.22% increase, equivalent to just

over \$179,000, which translates to \$75 per student. She explained that, as in prior years, she and the Town Manager had discussed the possibility of revisiting the allocation if the per-pupil minimum is raised between the annual Town Meeting and Fall Town Meeting, with the intent of returning any additional funds to the school district.

Mrs. Obey clarified that the school department represents approximately 48% of the town budget, though this figure does not include the district's share of health insurance and pension liabilities, which are carried on the town side. She stated that she would present a full accounting of these shared costs at the upcoming April 28th joint meeting with the Advisory Committee and Select Board to ensure transparency and accuracy in public discussions.

Mrs. Obey then reviewed Pembroke's per-pupil spending. She emphasized that the in-district figure is the more meaningful metric because out-of-district special education placements vary widely in cost, making all-student comparisons less reliable. The most recent audited data, from FY24, shows Pembroke's in-district per-pupil spending at \$18,911, compared to the state average of \$22,414. The all-student figure for Pembroke was \$20,481, below the state average of \$23,165. She then reviewed Pembroke's position relative to neighboring districts. She cautioned that while communities often compare themselves to nearby towns, these are not necessarily like communities in terms of demographics or socioeconomic factors. She highlighted that Hanover's per-pupil spending decreased due to a failed override and that several surrounding districts pursued overrides last year, with mixed results. Updated information will be provided once new override outcomes are finalized.

Mrs. Obey reviewed the major spending categories that comprise the per-pupil calculation:

- Administration – district and school leadership
- Instructional Leadership – department heads
- Teachers – classroom educators
- Other Teaching Services – paraprofessionals, social workers, and other support staff
- Professional Development – largely grant-funded, which is why the reported expenditure appears low
- Instructional Materials – supplemented by grants and capital funding for curriculum materials
- Operations and Maintenance – an area experiencing significant cost increases

She highlighted that the district's professional development expenditures appear low in the state reporting system because Pembroke relies heavily on grant funding to support staff training. Similarly, instructional materials expenditures are supplemented through grants and capital requests, particularly for curriculum materials and equipment associated with the district's pathways programs.

She noted that operations and maintenance costs have risen sharply due to aging infrastructure, citing recent increases in HVAC, electrical, and especially plumbing repairs. She explained that because all buildings are the same age, failures tend to occur in clusters. She also highlighted the impact of health insurance cost-sharing differences across districts. Pembroke has a 75/25 split, whereas some comparison districts use a 50/50 model, which lowers their reported benefit costs. Despite lower spending, she emphasized that Pembroke offers robust programming across all schools, pre-K to 22, including elective options and AP course offerings that exceed those of many neighboring and comparable districts. She stated that this reflects the district's commitment to maintaining lean operations in some areas to prioritize investments that directly benefit students.

Mrs. Obey reviewed the district's budget development process, beginning with the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) budget presented in November. She reminded the Committee that the MOE budget reflects the cost of delivering all current services next year, incorporating contractual obligations, transportation contracts, inflation in supplies, and rising utility costs. The November MOE figure was \$41,280,729.

Over the past several weeks of budget presentations, the district identified two categories of additions:

- Required additions: \$250,000
- Administrative recommendations: \$319,000

Together, these adjustments brought the working budget to \$41,849,729, representing an increase of just over \$1.4 million from the current fiscal year. She noted that the district entered this year in a fiscally conservative place, having strategically used additional Fall Town Meeting funds, including increased Chapter 70 aid and unexpected new growth, to maintain flexibility. Several positions had been frozen, and certain special education placeholders did not materialize, enabling the district to continue its longstanding practice of special education tuition pre-buy.

She explained that tuition is one of the few expenses that may be prepaid, allowing the district to use FY26 funds to cover a portion of FY27 tuition costs. Pembroke has successfully used this municipal accounting tool for six years, purchasing up to one quarter of a private placement or a full year of collaborative tuition in advance. This year's pre-buy totals \$569,000, reducing the budget back to the MOE level of \$41,280,729, an increase of just over \$820,000 from the current year. The district's budget assumptions include \$179,000 in Chapter 70 aid (based on the Governor's \$75 per-pupil minimum) and a \$644,654 increase in the Town's contribution. With these figures, Mrs. Obey reported that the district is currently balanced.

Committee members asked how many districts still use tuition pre-buy. Mrs. Obey responded that very few do, noting that Pembroke's long-standing fiscal discipline has allowed the district to maintain this practice. She highlighted several safeguards the district has built over time:

- A Special Education Stabilization Fund established four years ago, now holding just over \$600,000, which can be used for unanticipated high-cost placements or mid-year changes.
- The district's continued use of Circuit Breaker reimbursement on a one-year delay, meaning FY27 will use the reimbursement received in FY26. Most districts now spend circuit breaker funds in the same fiscal year.

She emphasized that these practices position Pembroke favorably, given the volatility of special education costs. She then reviewed the required staffing additions for FY27. Based on caseloads and mandated service minutes, the district needs an additional special education teacher at Hobomock. In addition, enrollment projections require adding a fifth-grade classroom teacher, as three fourth-grade sections will advance into a grade that currently has only two sections. She stressed that the district evaluates enrollment-driven staffing changes over a three to five year horizon to avoid hiring and reducing positions in short cycles, which can negatively impact both staff stability and candidate recruitment.

Mrs. Obey continued her budget presentation by outlining additional special education staffing needs at both the middle and high school levels. Based on caseload analysis and mandated service minutes, the district requires a 0.4 FTE special education teacher at the middle school and a 0.6 FTE special education teacher at the high school, totaling approximately \$250,000 when budgeted at an average salary. She noted that actual hiring costs may come in lower, creating breakage, and such savings could be strategically redirected if significant. She emphasized that fractional positions are extremely difficult to fill, particularly at the secondary level, where rotating schedules require staff to be available throughout the school day. Because part-time roles attract very limited candidate pools and create scheduling challenges, the administrative team agreed that converting both positions to full-time roles would be the most effective and educationally beneficial approach. Full-time staffing would also allow for additional co-taught sections, reduced group sizes, and improved instructional support beyond minimum compliance.

Mrs. Obey then reviewed the district's need to retain its current Registered Behavior Technician (RBT), who is funded through a grant that may or may not be renewed. Maintaining this position is a Level 1 administrative priority. If the grant is unexpectedly renewed, the district would pursue hiring a second RBT; however, the budget request is designed to ensure the district does not lose the existing RBT. The current RBT serves all five school buildings, with the greatest concentration of support in grades pre-K through 8.

Next, she addressed the need for kindergarten paraprofessionals. She described the significant demands of kindergarten classrooms, each with approximately 22 students, and emphasized the value of having an additional adult to support instruction, transitions, and student needs. While the long-term goal discussed earlier in the year was to place one full-time paraprofessional in each kindergarten classroom (nine total across the district), she recommended beginning with a smaller, sustainable implementation. Once the school year begins and student needs become clearer, staffing can be allocated proportionally across classrooms, recognizing that some sections may require more support than others.

Mrs. Obey continued by outlining the final Level 1 administrative priority: reinstating a Digital Learning Specialist to serve as a fourth specialist rotation at the elementary level for one trimester. She explained that the district previously employed library or STEAM paraprofessionals in each building, but those positions were eliminated three years ago. The following year, the district restored one STEAM paraprofessional who rotated among the three elementary schools, providing one trimester of STEAM instruction per building. That position was frozen at the beginning of this year and could not be filled mid-October without disrupting schedules. Moving forward, the administrative team recommends converting the role into a licensed teaching position due to the need for curriculum development, instructional coordination across buildings, and alignment with district technology goals. During budget subcommittee discussions, administrators also explored whether elementary world language could be incorporated into this model. They discussed using Duolingo during library time to address both digital learning and introductory world language exposure, allowing the district to advance multiple long-term goals within existing structures.

Mrs. Obey then reviewed several budget-neutral priorities, consisting of positions included in the FY26 budget but left unfilled due to the hiring freeze or candidate shortages due to mid-year hiring. These positions remain in the Maintenance of Effort budget and will be filled as qualified candidates become available. They include:

- Coordinator of Counseling, previously funded half by local funds and half by a one-year grant; now fully funded in the operating budget
- High School English teacher (unfilled)
- High School Physics teacher (unfilled)
- 0.4 FTE Business teacher
- 0.4 FTE Latin teacher
- Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), posted since October but not yet filled
- Teacher for the new behavioral program at Hobomock, unfilled during FY26 due to budget freeze

Additional budget-neutral adjustments include a paraprofessional reassignment from the middle school to the high school based on student needs, and the replacement of a custodial position following a recent retirement.

Mrs. Obey also reviewed curriculum-related needs. The district previously requested \$100,000 in capital funding for FOSS science materials at last year's Spring Town Meeting. Summer curriculum work, budgeted annually at approximately \$40,000, will determine how much of the science materials implementation can be completed. Summer professional development will continue to rely on grant funding where possible.

Finally, she addressed the need for a Director of Operations, noting that the age and complexity of district facilities now require dedicated leadership for capital planning and project management. While she has managed these responsibilities to date, she emphasized that the district has reached a point where full-time oversight is necessary. She recommended adding the position with a January start date, timed to coincide with a planned retirement in the business office. The position would be funded through a combination of business office savings and revolving accounts (transportation and food services), making it budget-neutral for FY27. In FY28, the net operating impact is projected to be approximately \$30,000, assuming continued use of revolving funds and the decision not to refill the retiring payroll clerk position.

Next, Mrs. Obey reviewed the Level 2 and Level 3 budget requests, noting that these items represent all additional needs and proposals submitted by departments and school leaders throughout the budget presentation cycle. She emphasized that these items are not ranked, as doing so could create the impression that certain programs or departments are less valued. Instead, the list is presented as a comprehensive record of all requests that did not reach Level 1 priority status. She acknowledged that many of the items, including instructional materials, staffing enhancements, and program expansions, would be valuable additions to the FY27 budget. However, given finite resources, Level 1 priorities were selected based on their direct and immediate impact on students and staff. She also noted that the district is adding more this year than in recent cycles, due in part to the \$457,000 received at Fall Town Meeting, which came from increased Chapter 70 aid and new growth, not from free cash or expiring grants. All additions are fully funded within the operating budget.

Mrs. Obey also noted that some athletic-related requests, such as a press box and basketball hoop replacements, may be more appropriately pursued through Community Preservation Committee (CPC) funding, and the Athletic Director is exploring those avenues.

Turning to staffing cost management, she explained that breakage, savings realized when higher-step retirees are replaced with lower-step new hires, has declined significantly. Whereas breakage once generated \$30,000–\$35,000 per position, Pembroke now attracts more mid-career educators, reducing typical savings to about \$10,000. Any breakage that does occur will be directed toward expanding extracurricular funding at Pembroke High School to support new collective bargaining requirements for multi-year clubs.

Mrs. Obey then reviewed additional technology and curriculum needs that may be addressed using the remaining year-end funds. These include continuing the teacher laptop replacement cycle, with elementary teachers scheduled for upgrades, and purchasing Chromebooks for paraprofessionals. However, she expressed caution about replacing iPads and Chromebooks at the scale originally proposed, citing the need for a broader conversation about screen time at the elementary level. She anticipates a shift away from one-to-one device use toward a center-based model, reflecting both developmental considerations and teacher feedback. She also noted that several curricular materials identified in department budgets, including those highlighted by the Director of Teaching and Learning, will be funded to the extent possible.

Mrs. Obey then previewed the materials prepared for the upcoming joint budget meeting with the Select Board and Advisory Committee, followed by the public budget hearing and Town Meeting. She highlighted several key components included in the appendix:

- Twenty-plus years of district enrollment history, showing a significant decline over the past decade followed by recent stabilization
- Class size data for elementary, middle, and high school levels
- A record of enrollment-driven staffing reductions made over the past ten years, demonstrating the district's practice of reinvesting reductions where possible and using them to balance the budget when necessary
- Revolving account balances, including transportation, athletics, building utilization, and extended day
- Revenue from classroom rentals to North River Collaborative, which provides a meaningful funding stream for building maintenance needs not covered in the operating budget
- Three years of grant history (FY23–FY25) and preliminary FY26 grant activity
- A detailed explanation of per-pupil expenditure categories

She reiterated her commitment to transparency, noting that she will provide the School Committee with a line-item spreadsheet showing FY23–FY27 budget figures. This document will support historical comparison and ensure clarity as the district enters the final stages of the FY27 budget process.

Mr. Boyle said everything is here, in the open. We run a balanced, efficient operation, leaner than many comparable districts, and we position ourselves for long-term success. Much of that is due to the superintendent and the administrative team and tonight's presentation reflects the strength of their work.

Subcommittee Updates

Budget Subcommittee

Mrs. Obey reported that the Budget Subcommittee met last week and will meet again before the joint meeting with the Advisory Committee and the Select Board.

Vocational Planning Committee

Mrs. Obey reported that she is doing a podcast on 4/27. Also, she is communicating with Tom Hickey about setting up tours of SST for those interested.

The Advisory Committee recommended that a list of capital items or projects be created. This way, if the \$2 million override is approved, the community will understand how the funds will be used in the initial years. The Long Range Planning Committee will need to convene to develop this list.

Policy Subcommittee:

Consideration for a Second Read and Approval: Policy EFBA – School Food and Nutrition: Meal Modifications

Mrs. Obey reported that this policy is new and simply formalizes long-standing district practice.

VOTE: On a motion made by Katrina Delaney and seconded by Susan Bollinger, it was unanimously voted to approve as a first read Policy EFBA: School Food and Nutrition: Meal Modifications as presented.

Voting Yes: David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Katrina Delaney, Susan Bollinger and Katrina Scarsciotti

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none

Consideration for a Second Read and Approval: Revised Policy EFD – Meal Charge Policy

Mrs. Obey noted that the revisions to policy EFD reflect that student are currently allowed one free meal per meal service period under the law.

VOTE: On a motion made by Susan Bollinger and seconded by Katrina Delaney, it was unanimously voted to approve as a first read Policy EFD: Meal Charge Policy as presented.

Voting Yes: David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Katrina Delaney, Susan Bollinger and Katrina Scarsciotti

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none

Future Meeting Dates and Topics

4/28 @ 7:00pm, 5/5, 5/12 before Town Meeting and 5/19

Mr. Boyle asked the superintendent to write a letter regarding the cell phone ban.

VOTE: At 7:07 PM, on a motion made by Allison Glennon and seconded Katrina Delaney, it was unanimously voted to adjourn.

Voting Yes: David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Katrina Delaney, Susan Bollinger and Katrina Scarsciotti

Voting No: none
Abstaining: none
Absent: none

APPROVED: May 5, 2026

MOTIONS

VOTE: On a motion made by Katrina Delaney and seconded by Allison Glennon, it was unanimously voted to approve the school committee meeting minutes of April 7, 2026 as presented.

Voting Yes: David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Katrina Delaney, Susan Bollinger and Katrina Scarsciotti
Voting No: none
Abstaining: none
Absent: none

VOTE: On a motion made by Katrina Delaney and seconded by Susan Bollinger, it was unanimously voted to approve as a first read Policy EFBA: School Food and Nutrition: Meal Modifications as presented.

Voting Yes: David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Katrina Delaney, Susan Bollinger and Katrina Scarsciotti
Voting No: none
Abstaining: none
Absent: none

VOTE: On a motion made by Susan Bollinger and seconded by Katrina Delaney, it was unanimously voted to approve as a first read Policy EFD: Meal Charge Policy as presented.

Voting Yes: David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Katrina Delaney, Susan Bollinger and Katrina Scarsciotti
Voting No: none
Abstaining: none
Absent: none

VOTE: At 7:07 PM, on a motion made by Allison Glennon and seconded Katrina Delaney, it was unanimously voted to adjourn.

Voting Yes: David Boyle, Allison Glennon, Katrina Delaney, Susan Bollinger and Katrina Scarsciotti
Voting No: none
Abstaining: none
Absent: none