



PEMBROKE SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Joint Meeting with Select Board and Advisory Committee
Tuesday, April 28, 2026
North Pembroke Elementary School Library

Call to Order

Mr. Boyle called the meeting to order at 7:00 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

Present from Select Board: Tracy Marino, John Brown, Daniel Trabucco and Sean Keegan

Present from Advisory Committee: Sandra Beaton, Tim Landy, Steven Ciciotti, Stephen Walsh, Brian Logan, Louis Carpenter, Stephen Pratt

Discussion of FY27 School Department Budget

Mrs. Obey provided a detailed presentation on the FY27 budget development process, beginning with an overview of historical funding trends and the district's long-term financial context. She reviewed the relationship between the school budget, the town budget, Chapter 70 state aid, and local contributions, noting that health insurance and pension costs are carried on the town side and therefore not reflected in the school department's operating budget.

Mrs. Obey reported that Chapter 70 funding continues to show minimal year-over-year growth. She also reviewed per-pupil expenditure data, explaining that the district focuses on in-district spending to avoid distortion from high-cost out-of-district placements. Pembroke's in-district per-pupil spending remains below the state average and below many neighboring communities. Comparisons to state-identified comparable districts (formerly DART districts) show Pembroke in the lower half of that group as well. She noted that professional development spending appears low because the district relies heavily on grant funding, and that operations and maintenance costs have increased as all school buildings are now 25–27 years past their major renovations.

Mrs. Obey then outlined the FY27 maintenance of effort budget, which reflects the cost of continuing all current programs and services into the next fiscal year. Required staffing additions include one special education teacher at Hobomock, one Grade 5 teacher at Hobomock due to enrollment, and additional special education staffing at both the middle and high school to meet service delivery requirements. She emphasized the district's commitment to making sustainable staffing decisions to avoid frequent reductions and additions.

Mrs. Obey stated the total FY27 budget request is \$41.8 million, representing an increase of approximately \$1.4 million over the current year. She explained the district's continued use of special education tuition pre-purchases to reduce future-year costs. She also noted that the School Committee voted earlier this year not to increase any district fees, following significant fee adjustments the previous year. The Governor's budget currently includes a \$75 per-student increase in Chapter 70 funding, with the possibility of a higher amount pending legislative action. The Town Manager's FY27 budget includes an increase of \$644,654 for school operating funds. At this stage, the district's budget is balanced.

Mrs. Obey then reviewed the administrative team's level-one priorities for FY27. These include converting the part-time special education positions at the middle and high schools into full-time roles to support co-teaching, smaller instructional groups, and reduced learning center caseloads. The district also seeks to maintain the current Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) position, which is grant-funded, and to add a second RBT if grant funding continues, due to strong support from building administrators.

Additional priorities include adding one kindergarten paraprofessional at each elementary school to support increasing student needs and readiness levels, and restoring a fourth specialist rotation at the elementary level by adding a Digital Learning Specialist. This position would provide instruction in digital citizenship and digital literacy, support technology readiness, and offer early exposure to world languages through digital platforms.

Mrs. Obey noted that updated state funding information is expected in the coming weeks and that the district will continue to refine the budget as additional data becomes available. She continued by reviewing several budget-neutral items included in the maintenance of effort budget. She explained that several positions in the FY26 budget were not filled due to the hiring freeze implemented at the start of the school year while the district was engaged in collective bargaining with the Pembroke Teachers Association. These unfilled positions remain in the FY27 budget and are expected to be filled. They include a Coordinator of Counseling, an English teacher at the high school, a physics teacher, a 0.4 FTE business teacher, and a 0.4 FTE world language teacher. Mrs. Obey noted that the high school experienced slightly larger class sizes this year as a result of these vacancies, with classes averaging 26 students instead of 22, and that filling these positions will help mitigate those increases. She also reviewed the new special education behavioral program at Hobomock Elementary School, which was funded in the FY26 budget and includes a teacher, a Registered Behavior Technician (RBT), and a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). While the RBT position has been filled, the teacher and BCBA positions remain vacant. She emphasized that the program benefits Pembroke students and also provides opportunities for cost avoidance by reducing potential out-of-district placements. Once fully staffed and established, the program may also generate revenue by accepting tuition students from neighboring districts.

Mrs. Obey gave an update on the district's planned adoption of new FOSS science materials for the elementary level. Capital funds allocated in the prior budget cycle for curriculum materials will be used to support this purchase. Additional curriculum work and professional development planned for the summer are already funded within the current budget. She then highlighted a budget-neutral proposal to establish a Director of Operations. She explained that the district's central office operates with a lean administrative structure and that the age of the district's five buildings requires increased attention to long-term maintenance and preventative planning. The position would be funded through a combination of savings from a planned retirement in the business office and contributions from the transportation and food service revolving accounts. Mrs. Obey noted that the role is expected to evolve over time into a more traditional Director of Finance and Operations, but the immediate focus would be on operational needs.

Mrs. Obey said the remaining items identified during the budget process were categorized as level-two or level-three priorities and that these items were not ranked in order and would be revisited only if additional funding became available. Examples include expanding math interventionists to all elementary schools, adding the remaining kindergarten paraprofessionals, and providing a dedicated digital literacy specialist at each elementary school rather than one shared across the district.

Mrs. Obey reported that the district anticipates having year-end funds available due to the number of unfilled positions in FY26. These funds will be used to address technology purchases typically requested through capital funding, as well as certain curricular materials. Items not covered through year-end funds will be supported through building-based budgets, depending on each school's instructional priorities.

Mrs. Obey then outlined the next step in the budget process, which is to hold the public budget hearing, which will provide another opportunity for community members to review the presentation and ask questions. The final step will be Town Meeting consideration of the FY27 budget.

Mr. Keegan, Select Board member, requested clarification regarding the proposed 0.4 FTE and 0.6 FTE special education teaching positions. Mrs. Obey explained that the required staffing to meet students' IEP service obligations includes a 0.4 FTE special education teacher at the middle school and a 0.6 FTE special education teacher at the high school. These fractional positions reflect the minimum staffing needed to remain compliant with

student service delivery requirements. However, the district is requesting to fund each as a full-time (1.0 FTE) position as full-time postings are significantly more attractive to qualified candidates, particularly at the secondary level where rotating schedules make part-time roles difficult to staff. She stated that if full-time funding was not available, the district would post the positions at 0.4 and 0.6 FTE, respectively, but emphasized that past attempts to hire part-time special education teachers have been challenging due to scheduling constraints.

Mrs. Beaton, Advisory Committee member, requested clarification regarding the “Other” line item within the school-based budget summaries, noting a significant increase beginning in FY26 and asking what specific expenses are included in that category for each school. Mrs. Obey explained that the “Other” category varies by school and typically includes items that do not fall neatly into major budget classifications such as salaries, supplies, or contracted services. She noted that the increase observed in FY26 reflects a combination of factors, including school-specific operational needs, curriculum-related expenses, and materials or services that were reclassified into this category during the budget cycle. She added that she would provide a detailed breakdown for each school to clarify the components of the “Other” line item and ensure transparency.

Mr. Ciciotti, Advisory Committee member, asked a follow-up question regarding the “Other” budget category, requesting that in future budget cycles the items currently grouped into this category be separated into individual line items so they can be more easily tracked over time. Mrs. Obey noted that the administration can further break out categories currently grouped under “Other.” She explained that, if helpful, future budgets can separate supplies and materials into more specific sub-lines such as instructional supplies, textbooks, and copy paper, to allow for clearer tracking and year-to-year comparison.

Mr. Stephen Pratt, Advisory Committee member, asked whether the district had conducted a cost-benefit analysis regarding educating certain special education students in-district rather than placing them out of district. She noted that this topic had been discussed in the prior year and requested an update on the district’s current position and progress. Mrs. Obey confirmed that the district has continued to evaluate opportunities to expand in-district programming where appropriate. She referenced the new special education behavioral program at Hobomock Elementary School, funded in FY26, as a direct result of this analysis. The program was designed both to meet the needs of Pembroke students who might otherwise require out-of-district placement and to create future opportunities for tuition-in students from neighboring communities once the program is fully staffed and operational. She reiterated that the program serves two purposes: cost avoidance for students who can be successfully supported in-district, and potential revenue generation through tuition agreements.

Mr. Pratt asked what percentage of the district’s budget is represented by transportation costs, noting the perception that transportation is a significant expense. Mrs. Obey explained that students served through the district’s new behavioral program would most likely have otherwise been placed in a collaborative setting. Because there are several collaboratives located geographically close to Pembroke, transportation for collaborative placements typically ranges from \$18,000 to \$30,000 per student, depending on whether the district is able to share a van with neighboring communities. She noted that the highest transportation costs occur for “one-off” placements, where a single student attends a private day school located farther from Pembroke. Many of these specialized programs result in significantly longer travel distances. In some cases, a student’s transportation cost can be as high as \$65,000 to \$70,000. She emphasized that while the district actively seeks opportunities to share transportation with nearby districts when possible, geographic realities limit the ability to reduce costs for certain placements. Mrs. Obey reiterated that expanding in-district programming, such as the behavioral program at Hobomock, helps reduce both tuition and transportation expenses over time.

Mrs. Beaton asked whether hiring an in-district Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) would allow the district to reduce its reliance on contracted BCBA services. Mrs. Obey explained that the district currently contracts for approximately 17–20 hours per week of BCBA support, with the majority of those hours dedicated to teacher consultation. She stated that if the district can hire its own BCBA, it is unlikely that contracted services could be reduced immediately. During the first year, the in-district BCBA would focus on establishing systems, supporting staff, and meeting student needs, and the district would likely continue to require contracted hours to ensure adequate coverage. She noted that over time, having an in-house BCBA may create opportunities to reduce contracted hours. However, she cautioned that student needs have been increasing, and therefore she could not commit to a reduction at this stage. She emphasized that the district’s priority is ensuring that students receive the

level of behavioral and instructional support required, whether through contracted services or district-employed staff.

Mr. Ciciotti asked for clarification regarding the ESSER III grant, what the grant represented, how it differed from earlier ESSER allocations, and why it no longer appears in the current budget cycle. Mrs. Obey explained that ESSER III was part of the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. She noted that ESSER III was the largest of the three ESSER allocations and was designed to support academic recovery, student services, and operational needs related to pandemic impacts. She further clarified that ESSER III funding has now expired, which is why it no longer appears in the district's active grant accounts. All ESSER funds were time-limited federal relief dollars, and districts were required to fully expend them by the federal deadline. With the conclusion of ESSER III, the district no longer receives pandemic-related federal grant support, and any positions or programs previously supported by ESSER funds have either been absorbed into the operating budget or discontinued, depending on need and available resources. Mrs. Obey noted that the district was intentional in how these funds were allocated, focusing on one-time expenses to avoid creating ongoing financial obligations once the grant ended. She highlighted that the district used ESSER III to make necessary technology investments, particularly as the pandemic required Pembroke to transition rapidly to a one-to-one device model. Prior to COVID-19, the district did not have a device for every student. ESSER funding allowed the district to purchase Chromebooks for the majority of students and then complete a full replacement cycle at the three-year mark before the grant expired.

She emphasized that the district did not use ESSER III to hire permanent staff. The only personnel supported through the grant were short-term "interrupted learning tutors," who were hired with a defined end date to support academic recovery. No full-time positions were added using ESSER funds. Mrs. Obey confirmed that all ESSER III dollars were fully expended on allowable, non-recurring needs before the federal deadline.

Mrs. Beaton asked whether any of the district's current grants are ending or at risk of ending in the near future. Mrs. Obey explained that many of the grants listed in the district's grant history are entitlement grants, including Title I, Title IIA, Title IV, and IDEA. These grants are awarded annually and are generally stable, though the funding amounts may fluctuate slightly from year to year. She noted that the district has also received several competitive grants related to the expansion of career pathways at Pembroke High School. Some of these grants were designed to support initial program development. As intended, these grants are now concluding, and the ongoing costs of maintaining the programs have been incorporated into the district's operating budget. Mrs. Obey added that the district continues to pursue new grant opportunities each year. For example, North Pembroke Elementary recently secured a School Water Improvement Grant, which funded the installation of water bottle filling stations. She also highlighted the behavioral health grant, which currently funds the district's Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) position.

Mr. Walsh, Advisory Committee member, asked whether the stated figure indicating that the school department represents 48% of the town budget, includes health insurance costs. Mrs. Obey clarified that the 48% figure does not include health insurance or other shared costs carried on the town side of the budget. She noted that when health insurance is considered, the school department accounts for approximately 59–60% of the town's total health insurance expense, reflecting the number of school employees enrolled in the plan. She further explained that the district represents a much smaller share of the town's pension costs, as the majority of school employees participate in the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System (MTRS), which is fully funded by the state and employees, with no town contribution. Only a small number of school employees, primarily in non-teaching roles, participate in the Plymouth County retirement system. Mrs. Obey estimated that an additional \$6–7 million in shared costs would be attributable to the school department if those expenses were allocated directly. She reiterated that she has consistently noted in public presentations that the 48% figure excludes health insurance and pension costs, and she agreed to provide a more detailed breakdown of shared benefits costs in a future meeting to support transparency for residents.

Mrs. Peterson asked whether the School Committee and community could receive the district's budget presentation earlier in the annual cycle, noting that the Town Meeting warrant had been posted the same day, leaving little opportunity for meaningful adjustments. She emphasized that earlier access to the information would support more thorough review and deliberation. Mrs. Obey responded that the district follows the municipal budget timeline

coordinated with the Town Manager and broader town schedule. She explained that the district begins internal budget development in November, which is earlier than in past years, and starting sooner would be difficult because principals and department leaders would have limited time in the school year to assess needs. She added that the district has operated under a maintenance-of-effort budget for roughly a decade, meaning the overall budget is largely determined by the Town Manager's funding level. Because the district does not receive its target number until early February, it cannot finalize the budget before that point. She also noted that state funding information is not available early in the process, and relying on assumptions too far in advance risks inaccuracies. Mrs. Obey concluded by acknowledging the interest in earlier discussions and stated that the administration will consider possible adjustments as it develops the FY27 budget calendar.

Mrs. Beaton suggested that the district consider presenting a multi-year budget comparison with the fiscal year final to the Advisory Committee at the close of the fiscal year. She suggested that sharing the final year-end financials alongside multi-year trend data would allow the Advisory Committee to begin identifying patterns earlier, better understand cost drivers, and contextualize year-over-year changes. This approach could strengthen transparency and help Advisory develop a clearer picture of long-term fiscal trends before the start of the district's formal budget season. Mrs. Obey explained that the School Committee traditionally holds its closing budget meeting during one of its summer sessions, either the July meeting or the first meeting in August. Because the district's books are closed by that point, she noted that she would be fully able to compile and present the finalized fiscal year results shortly thereafter, and could present the multi-year comparison to any relevant town body, including Advisory.

Mr. Pratt expressed frustration with understanding the stipends listed on the town side of the municipal budget. Mrs. Obey provided clarification regarding stipends within the school department budget. She explained that athletic stipends are governed by the collective bargaining agreement with the teachers' unit and are listed in the appendix of that contract. She stated that there are very few stipend positions outside of the collective bargaining agreement. Nearly all school-based stipends are tied to athletics or extracurricular activities, such as club advisors for programs like the National Honor Society. The stipend amounts for these roles are contractually defined. She added that in some years, not all stipend positions are filled, for example, if a freshman sports team is not offered or if a particular club does not run. However, the district is bound to the stipend amounts established in the collective bargaining agreement for any positions that are filled.

Mrs. Benotti, Advisory Committee member, asked about grant eligibility and Mrs. Obey explained that many large grant programs base eligibility on community demographics, including racial and ethnic diversity as well as the percentage of low-income students. She noted that while the district consistently submits strong, well-regarded applications, reviewers often respond that Pembroke does not meet the demographic thresholds required for funding. She emphasized that the challenge is not the quality of the proposals but the district's relatively low minority and low-income populations, which frequently make the district ineligible for major competitive grants. Despite these limitations, the district continues to pursue all feasible grant opportunities.

Mrs. Beaton asked about the status of the press box and CPC funding. Mrs. Obey said she is still determining whether such a request would be feasible. She acknowledged that the school department has several older CPC-funded projects with no recent activity and is currently reviewing them with town staff to identify which can be closed out. One outstanding project involves earlier plans to bring baseball back to the high school campus. Aside from irrigation work, the district did not complete the remaining components, such as dugouts. Given the significant improvements made to the Mattakesett Street fields, Mrs. Obey stated that relocating baseball back to the high school is likely no longer in students' best interest. As a result, the district may return the unused CPC funds and, if possible, request that they be redirected toward the press box project.

Mrs. Marino asked about outstanding projects with CPC funding and Mrs. Obey noted that one remaining CPC-related item is phase three of the field plan, which involves constructing baseball dugouts. She also referenced a prior CPC request for an engineering study at the Hatch Building. Although the study was completed, the final cost was lower than the amount originally approved, meaning the district must formally release the unused funds. Aside from these items, she stated that the district has addressed most of its outstanding CPC-funded projects.

Mrs. Peterson asked for an update on the status and outcome of the Hatch Building. Mrs. Obey explained that the district previously requested an environmental engineer to conduct an assessment of the building and provide an estimate for asbestos remediation. That study has been completed, and the district now has both the report and the associated cost estimate. The next step will be for the Long-Range Planning Committee to meet and determine whether to pursue funding through the Community Preservation Committee (CPC). She emphasized that regardless of whether the Town ultimately chooses to rehabilitate the building or demolish it, asbestos remediation will be required, and the cost must be addressed before any future use or disposition of the building can be considered.

Mr. Ciciotti noted that while the school department does not currently have significant use for the Hatch Building, with its central location on the town campus, the Town might. He emphasized, however, that the language of the deed complicates potential reuse, and that the Town must first clarify the deed restrictions with the family associated with the original conveyance. Mrs. Obey added that attempts to contact the family have been unsuccessful.

Mr. Trabucco added that the Select Board and Town Manager are exploring whether the Hatch Building could be rented to an educational institution, such as a junior college, as a potential reuse option. He noted that because the building contains asbestos, any rental arrangement for educational purposes would require that asbestos removal and rehabilitation be incorporated into the agreement. In such a scenario, the town could not complete the rehabilitation “on spec”; instead, the partnering institution would need to participate in funding or supporting the necessary remediation work. He also expressed doubt that the town would be able to invest the full cost of rehabilitation independently.

Mrs. Beaton asked whether the district plans to continue with a one-to-one student device model as it begins replacing aging Chromebooks, or whether the administration is considering a shift away from one-to-one access. Mrs. Obey stated that she does not foresee students continuing in a one-to-one device environment. While one-to-one access served an important purpose during COVID-19, and the district was effectively forced into that model, the administration does not believe it remains instructionally appropriate for all grade levels. She noted that one-to-one devices continue to have a clear role at the secondary level, and in some communities, grades five and six are considered part of a middle school structure. However, for younger students, she emphasized a desire to return to the pre-COVID center-based model, in which classrooms had five or six shared devices (Chromebooks or iPads) used during instructional rotations such as math centers or Titan Time. Mrs. Obey expressed concern about the amount of screen time younger students currently experience and stated that the district is intentionally planning to reduce device density in early grades. She added that a group of district educators is actively examining this issue as part of their professional development work this year, ensuring that staff input informs the district’s technology decisions.

Mrs. Peterson requested clarification on the district’s cell phone policy. Mrs. Obey explained that while the School Committee maintains an overarching restriction on student cell phone use during the school day, each building implements the policy in a manner appropriate to its students. At the elementary level, cell phones are not used for instruction and must remain “off and away.” Some students bring phones for bus use, but devices are not permitted once inside the building. The middle school also operates as an “off and away” environment, with minimal compliance issues after the first weeks of school. At the high school, older students have limited flexibility: phones may be used during unstructured times such as passing periods or lunch, but not during class. Some teachers incorporate phones into instructional activities, while others require students to store devices in classroom “cell phone hotels.”

Mrs. Obey acknowledged the broader statewide conversation about cell phone restrictions but emphasized the importance of local decision-making to meet the needs of individual communities. She noted that a blanket statewide ban would be difficult to implement, not only for students but also for families who rely on the ability to contact their children during the day. She stated that Pembroke has navigated this issue effectively, with strong compliance at the middle school and generally responsible use at the high school.

Mr. Brian Logan, Advisory Committee member, asked whether there is a formal cell phone usage policy in place for staff. Mrs. Obey stated that there is no formal staff cell phone policy. She explained that staff is expected to

model the same behavior the district expects of students, using professional judgment to ensure that personal device use does not interfere with instruction, supervision, or the learning environment.

Mr. Ciciotti asked how MCAS scores have changed since the state removed the graduation requirement tied to the high school MCAS. Mrs. Obey explained that the district has observed a decline in MCAS performance at the secondary level, noting that students who understand the assessment no longer carries graduation consequences approach the test with less seriousness. She emphasized that this trend is not unique to Pembroke and is consistent with patterns seen statewide. She noted that the impact has been far less pronounced at the elementary level, where students in grades three through five generally take the assessment seriously and continue to put forth strong effort. Mrs. Obey also highlighted that MCAS still carries meaningful implications for high school students, particularly through eligibility for the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship.

Mr. Ciciotti noted the importance of recognizing how effectively the district manages its budget in relation to student performance. The member suggested that in future School Committee meetings or joint budget sessions with the Town, the district consider presenting student achievement data alongside per-pupil spending. He stated that displaying these metrics together, such as showing how Pembroke's performance compares to state averages while also illustrating the district's relative spending, could help the community better understand the value generated from the school budget. He added that some residents believe school spending is excessive or that certain areas could be reduced, and that a clear, data-driven presentation could help illustrate the district's efficiency and outcomes. Mrs. Obey acknowledged the comment and indicated openness to incorporating such comparative displays in future presentations.

Mrs. Peterson asked whether the district has a minimum enrollment threshold below which an Advanced Placement (AP) course would not be offered. Mrs. Obey explained that for students enrolled in world language pathways, the district is committed to ensuring access to the AP level. As a result, even if only three students request AP French or another language AP course, the district will run the class to honor the continuity of the program. For non-language AP courses, she noted that several AP offerings at Pembroke High School operate on an every-other-year rotation, such as AP European History, allowing students to take the course either junior or senior year. For annually offered AP courses, the district generally looks for 8 to 12 students enrolled in order to run the class.

Mr. Boyle thanked both the Advisory Committee and the Select Board for their participation.

VOTE: At 8:09 PM, on a motion made by Allison Glennon and seconded Susan Bollinger, 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 12, 2026

MOTIONS

VOTE: At 8:09 PM, on a motion made by Allison Glennon and seconded Susan Bollinger, 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