

AGENDA for Meeting of the Pelham School Committee
Wednesday, July 19, 2017
9:30 AM
Library, Amherst Regional Middle School

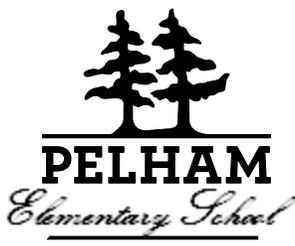
Call to Order

New and Continuing Business

- 1) Letter to the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regarding Charter School Costs (Vote)
- 2) FY17 Fourth Quarter Budget Update
 - a) Vote to Appropriate Additional School Choice Funds (Vote)

Adjournment

The listing of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.



Pelham Elementary School District

Pelham School Committee
170 Chestnut Street
Amherst, MA 01002

413-362-1810 (phone)
413-549-6108 (fax)

July 14, 2017

Paul Sagan, Chair
Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street
Malden, MA 02148

Dear Chair Sagan and Board of Education Members:

We write to respectfully request that you provide financial relief to Pelham Elementary School from the unforeseen and unbudgeted charter school tuition expense—roughly 4% of our annual budget—that was only recently presented to us due to a reporting error at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. **Specifically, we ask that the three full-time equivalent students from Pelham attending the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School (PVCICS) in 2017 be considered first year students in FY2018 due to the very late notice to the District.** This will give us time to budget for the expense, which would be extremely difficult even under the best of circumstances with the advance notice typically provided. Doing so less than two weeks before the start of the fiscal year, long after the FY2018 budget has been passed and teacher contracts signed, is a virtually insurmountable financial hurdle for our school and our town.

Like many small and rural public schools in Western Massachusetts, we face challenges related to a declining population, the rising costs of education, and the inability to realize economies of scale. Pelham faces the additional hurdle of being situated in close proximity to a charter school competing for our students. In response to these challenges, our town and its citizens have been working to develop innovative solutions for Pelham Elementary that would allow us to offer the same excellent education to students in the changing landscape of the 21st century. The strain this new development places on our finances may not allow us enough time to finish that work and ensure the best possible outcomes for our students and their families.

Many of the families living in Pelham purchased homes and pay taxes in our town specifically so their children may attend Pelham Elementary School, due to its excellent academic reputation and its close-knit community. And while we respect the right of families to choose the educational model they feel is most appropriate for their children, the tuition our school pays for the small handful of students at PVCICS makes up just under five percent of our annual budget, or \$67,000. **The unfortunate reality is that the funding formula for a charter school education for a few makes it increasingly difficult for our small school to provide a high-quality education to the many and calls into question the viability of the educational program that our taxpayers rightfully expect given their high tax rate.** The impact of the charter school funding formula cannot be overstated in a small-school setting. We have only one class per grade. In addition, we must provide for special education needs and believe our students also deserve the enrichment associated with specials programs including art, music, and physical education.

Pelham Elementary is a level one school whose 2016 third-graders scored first in the entire state on PARCC's ELA test and fifth in math. Just as important, it is the center of our small community, serving as both school and neighborhood to its students. The importance of Pelham Elementary School to the families in our town, who devote countless hours to making the school what it is, cannot be overstated. We do not want our school to become a casualty of the charter school system in Massachusetts. We do not want families in our town to be pitted against one another because of different educational choices they make for their children. Again, due to DESE's reporting error, we request that these three FTE students be treated as first-year charter school students in 2018 to give us time to plan.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration,

The Pelham School Committee

Cara Castenson, Chair

Ron Mannino, Vice-Chair

Jessica Jean-Louis

Emily Marriott