

BOE Regular Meeting

October 20, 2025 7:00 PM

1. Call to Order

Megan Gallant; Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00PM. Other members present: Dan Harris, Courtney Ennis, Nicole Serra, Cindy Luty, Mike Hinton and Deborah Burke-Grabarek. Also present: Dr. Roy Seitsinger; Superintendent, Cindy Varricchio; Director of Finance, and Gloria Homiski; Recording Secretary.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Public Comment

Two emails were received prior to the meeting. One email was from Andrew Sawyer; Vice Chair of the Preston BOF, and the other was from Johanna Thibdeau; Preston taxpayer and parent. Megan Gallant read both emails which questioned certain expenditures from 2024-2025. Please find them attached to these minutes.

Megan Gallant read the following statement: Public Comment and Question Session: Each individual will be limited to 3 minutes and the entire session will last no more than 15 minutes. All comments and questions must be germane to the agency's business. No individual may yield his/her time to another individual. (Town Ordinance: 03.06.08)

In Person Public Comment:

Kayla Thompson; parent, expressed her concern over the increased cases of bullying at PVMS. She believed that Preston had a zero-tolerance policy but learned that a child brought some type of a knife to school and that parents were not notified. She stated that children told their parents about this incident. The school did not. She believes that kids deserve safety and parents deserve honesty.

Andy Depta; community member, asked how much money was being returned to the Town from the BOE.

Allison Thayer; parent, also expressed her concern over the knife incident at PVMS. She said that she knows of fights in classrooms that are not shared with parents either. She emphasized the need for better communication.

Moved, to take the agenda out of order to discuss the Financial Reports (Item 9). Ennis/Burke-Grabarek. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Cindy Varricchio reported that the audit visit went very well. The remaining funds to be given back to the Town will be determined by the end of the calendar year when the audit is complete.

She reviewed all financials with the Board.

In 2023-2024, \$105,037 went into the Board's Non-Lapsing Fund. None of that money was spent in 2024-2025. The BOE already received the procedure

to be followed for the Non-Lapsing Fund, but this procedure will also be shared with the BOF.

Dr. Seitsinger and Mrs. Varricchio reviewed the purchase of the van at the end of the 2024-2025 school year. The decision was made due to safety and security, availability, cost (pre-tariff), and assurance that special education students would have the van for the start of the school year. A request came from the transportation department after a very large expense was made to cover the repairs in another van. By law we are required to provide special education transportation. Money was saved at the time of the purchase because the van was immediately accessible and it was purchased before any of the tariffs were imposed. Dr. Seitsinger admitted that he did not bring the purchase back to the Board for a vote. He apologized for that and stated that some of our policies be reviewed and adjusted where necessary. Current Policy and even the Superintendent's Contract give him the authority to act as long as a follow up affirmation is taken by the Board. He will work to rebuild Board and community trust.

Courtney Ennis requested an itemized list of what was spent at the end of the 2024-2025 school year. She is worried about Board transparency and maintaining taxpayers' trust. Nicole Serra agreed with Courtney.

Cindy Varricchio stated that it has not been past practice to make official line item transfers, but we can adjust this. We will have a policy review and renew voting on line item transfers in the future.

The Business Office is working on expediting encumbrances for 2025-2026. All tracking will be part of the budget report in the future.

The BOF has begun discussing Capital Projects. Dr. Seitsinger will prepare a letter for the BOF to highlight new projects that have appeared since the original submittal.

The Board decided to vote on this report along with the September report at the next BOE meeting in November. At that meeting they will also review the explanations which they asked for regarding purchases from 2024-2025.

4. Consent Agenda

Moved, to accept the consent agenda as presented. Serra/Burke-Grabarek. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

5. Superintendent's Report/Updates

Dr. Seitsinger congratulated the Preston Soccer Team on an undefeated season so far this year. He thanked Trooper Fisher for his commitment to maintain the DARE Program despite the reduction in resident troopers. He also thanked Diane Hansen for continuing to display student artwork at the Town Hall. Dr. Seitsinger also informed the Board that Preston Public Schools now has an Instagram Account to enhance our means of communication even further. The Amazon Web Service outage affected our payroll system for most of the day. Glad to report we were up and running by end of day.

SBAC Scores Presentation: Chris Pickett and Ray Bernier reviewed the scoring presentation with the Board with a strong showing and some areas to work on. A copy of the presentation is attached to these minutes.

Electric Buses: School districts are struggling to make the transition date. Perhaps more time will be allotted.

Mandated Reports: Dr. Seitsinger reviewed the mandated report which must include the community-based organizations that the district uses as well as existing certified and non-certified staffing.

Moved, to accept the new 2025 mandated report required by the State of CT and comprised of community-based organizations and staffing information. Ennis/Hinton. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Policies at First Read: 3240: Tuition Fees
4211: Recruitment
6153: Field Trips

These policies will be brought back to the November meeting.

Moved, to add to the agenda discussion regarding the concerns of the elementary school parents from Public Comment. Serra/ Ennis. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Nicole Serra asked what procedures are in place if a weapon is brought to school. She also asked what the appropriate punishment should be. She would like all parents to receive details of such an incident so that safety is ensured.

Dan Harris understands Nicole's concerns but also understands the need for confidentiality. Communication must be shared appropriately. Michael Hinton agreed stating that student privacy is important.

Mr. Bernier made a statement. He said that a threat was never made. The weapon was a toy knife, not a real knife. He disciplined the child who brought it to school. Dr. Seitsinger will review protocol and procedure with Mr. Bernier and Mr. Pickett so that everyone is on the same page in the future.

6. Preston PTO

Allison Thayer; PVMS, reported the following: The Butterbraid and Cookie fundraiser will run until November 10th. Orders will come in before Thanksgiving. A Veterans' Day assembly will be held at PVMS on November 7th. A Thanksgiving Food Donation will be held focusing on what seniors really need. A craft fair will be held on November 22nd.

Heather Helwig; PPMS, she reported that Thanksgiving Baskets will be made and delivered. A school dance was held last Friday.

7. Principals/Director of Student Services Reports/Other Reports as Needed

Craig King; Director of Student Services, reported that parents can expect to hear when DESSA will be administered and also when the results are available. The rubric for last year's qualifying gifted and talented students is in place. These students were originally identified through OLSAT Testing. Scoring is available to parents and parents will receive letters if their students are moving on in the process.

Ray Bernier; Principal PVMS, reported that open house was well attended. More than 600 people attended the Annual Grandparents' Luncheon. NAEP Testing, for which we were selected, will take place in Feb/March. A

Veterans' Day assembly will be held at PVMS on November 7th. Students will Prepare skits, poems and sing songs. Veterans have been invited to attend. Parent/Teacher conferences will be held on November 24th and 25th.

Chris Pickett; Principal PPMS, reported that we are finishing up the first marking period and will be piloting the new middle school grading system. The Preston Youth Service Bureau and Parks and Recreation Department, in conjunction with Trooper Fisher have arranged Positive Psychology and Internet Safety assemblies. PPMS has a very successful high school night. He thanked Mrs. Griffin; grade 8 advisor, for all her hard work. He was happy to announce that the PPMS soccer team is still undefeated!

8. Committee Reports

Finance Committee: Megan Gallant reported that the committee discussed the information Mrs. Varricchio covered in her report earlier.

Curriculum Meeting: Mrs. Luty stated that they met on September 17th. They talked about being in year 3 of the new reading program and year 2 of the new math program. They discussed NAEP Testing and began to talk about a new science curriculum. The new middle school report card was reviewed as well. Team meetings and pacing were discussed.

Communication Committee: did not meet

LEARN Rep: Cindy Luty reported that recruiting and retaining qualified staff at LEARN is a real problem. Within the next two years magnet schools may disappear due to lack of funding. LEARN's Infant/Toddler Program is opening a second classroom.

CABE: conference is in November - great training and guest speakers

Building Needs Assessment Committee: Dan Harris stated there was no news to report.

9. Financial/Capital Report

See notes above.

10. Public Comment

Johanna Thibdeau; parent, appreciates that Courtney and Dan want a process in place to review expenses and funding. She also mentioned that six students in last year's third grade class were identified as gifted and talented, therefore it will be interesting to watch that group's SBAC scores over the years.

Jill Charron; parent, was happy to report that PowerSchool is up and running better than ever. She also verified that the school field trip procedure is the most recent one on file.

Heather Helwig; parent, stated that the BOE reviewed Purchase Orders in the past before orders were placed. She suggested that offering complete Board packets to audience members might be helpful.

Kayla Thompson; parent, expressed her concern over physical aggression and fighting at the elementary school. Culture and Climate must be addressed.

Megan Campbell; parent, stated that overcommunication is best. She would like to see grade two go back to three sections next year. She believes that will allow for the greatest success on SBAC testing.

Bill Holmes; community member, said he would like to see specific invoices for any over-expenditures. He also said that Linda McMahon stated that schoolwide violence is up 45%. Maybe the school should pay someone to check student bags as they enter the buildings.

Kelly McNamara; parent, stated that the lack of communication is creating a broad sense of mistrust. She wants more information on policies being reviewed, etc.

Heather Helwig; parent, believes that society as a whole is more mistrusting and unfortunately this puts the Board on the defensive.

Jill Charron; parent, unfortunately the current tone is politics over people right now.

Kara Sawyer; parent, would like policies to be shared with the audience as well as the Board.

11. Adjournment

Moved, to adjourn the meeting at 9:15PM. Burke-Grabarek/Serra. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Preston Board of Finance
October 16, 2025

Preston Board of Education
Attention: Ms. Megan Gallant, Board Chair

Subject: 2024-2025 fiscal year spending

Dear Members of the Board of Education:

The Board of Finance would like to express its concern about spending within the school system during the just-completed 2024-2025 fiscal year. We would particularly highlight Board of Education policy #3160, which states:

“Based on recommendations from the Superintendent, the Board may make adjustments in the form of transfers between line items to cover projected shortfalls that are projected to be under expended after the end of the first quarter and after the end of the third quarter. If there is a need to move funds between budget areas (i.e. Utilities and Supplies, Transportation, Plant Operations, Administration, Technology, etc.) to address a line item need or shifted district priority, then the superintendent must make the recommendation and the Board approve such adjustments.

The Board shall explicitly authorize by vote the expenditure of any amount, or budget areas of related amounts, exceeding \$10,000 not previously identified in the approved budget; provided, however, that this restriction will not apply to budgeted major categories of expenditures; salaries, special education, secondary tuition, etc. which the Superintendent may authorize. The Superintendent shall present to the Board such items requiring its approval.”

The preliminary figures for the 2024-2025 fiscal year show that several line items substantially exceeded budget, most notably:

- Transportation was \$209,940 over budget,
- Plant Operations was \$101,573 over budget,
- Instructional Technology was \$81,868 over budget, and
- Supplies and Materials was \$41,059 over budget.

The aggregate spending in these four non-major categories was \$434,440 above the approved budget for these categories of \$1,440,441, which is a 30% overage. The Board of Education minutes do not mention any authorization for this spending with respect to adjustments or transfers between line items.

The Board of Finance would encourage the Board of Education to look into this matter to explain why policy does not appear to have been followed, whether or not this has occurred in prior years and to what degree, and what steps are being taken to ensure that spending controls are properly implemented going forward.

The Town of Preston is already facing pressure on its budgets. Taxpayers have clearly expressed concerns about the level of spending in town, as evidenced by the multiple failed budget referendums in 2025. If there was spending of \$434,440 during the 2024-2025 fiscal year in areas that were not authorized by the Board of Education, that would likely further increase voter skepticism about the budget.

The Board of Finance views this as a serious issue and believes that there needs to be appropriate accountability if non-adherence to policy led to spending overages of this magnitude.

Thank you in advance for addressing this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrew Sawyer". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Andrew Sawyer
Vice Chairman, Preston Board of Finance

CC: Sandra Allyn-Gauthier, First Selectwoman
Dr. Roy Seitsinger, Superintendent



Gloria Homiski <homiskig@prestonschools.org>

BOE public comment for 10/20/25 meeting

1 message

Johanna Thibdeau <johanna.thibdeau@gmail.com>
To: Gloria Homiski <homiskig@prestonschools.org>

Wed, Oct 8, 2025 at 11:52 AM

To the Preston CT Board of Education:

This correspondence is submitted as a concerned parent and taxpayer within the community. It has come to my attention, through the Board of Finance's regular meeting on September 18, 2025, that the Board of Education expended a surplus of approximately \$500,000 within a 60-day period.

As a parent, I have consistently supported the Board of Education. I have actively communicated the importance of budget votes to fellow parents and advocated for budget approval at town meetings, despite potential personal financial implications. This support stems from my trust in the Board of Education and its administration to exercise fiscal responsibility. Education budgets have historically been presented as largely "uncontrollable," primarily due to the top five line items: Salaries, Healthcare, Tuition, etc. However, two months ago, the previous budget for these top five items was projected to be under budget by nearly \$500,000, with the remaining five line items expected to meet the budget, resulting in a surplus. How does the school administration justify the rapid expenditure of these funds without prior consultation with the Board, particularly given the close scrutiny of educational spending by the town? Furthermore, my review of the Board of Education minutes has not revealed any references to this spending, and the available Board of Education Board of Finance minutes (February 2025 and September 2025) also lack such information.

Frankly, I feel misled. How can I credibly convey to fellow parents and taxpayers that the schools require our support, that difficult budgetary decisions are being made with full consideration, when knowledge of this expenditure was only obtained through my own diligent attendance at multiple monthly meetings?

While I can understand the purchase of a van under specific circumstances, I believe such a decision should not have been made independently. The Board previously voted on the last van purchase. If significant budget overruns are anticipated, the Board should be informed and consulted by the administration.

Thank You,

Johanna Thibdeau
48 Ross Rd
Preston, CT 06365



Smarter Balanced Assessment Using Data to Improve Student Outcomes



October 20, 2025

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01

The Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) measures student progress in ELA and Math, focusing on critical thinking, problem-solving, and writing skills. Results help guide instruction and support student learning.

SBA In Context

This is our state-mandated test from grades 3-8.

What is a DRG?

- District Reference Groups (DRGs) = groups of CT districts with **similar socioeconomic status (SES)** and needs.
- Created by the **Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)**.
- Updated (non-officially) by the **School and State Finance Project** using same methodology.

How DRGs are determined?

7 Key Variables:

1. Median Household Income
2. Parents with Bachelor's Degree or Higher
3. Parents in Professional/Managerial Jobs
4. Students in Single-Parent/Non-Family Households
5. Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Meals
6. Families Speaking a Non-English Language at Home
7. District Enrollment

DRG E Schools


ASHFORD (003)
BOZRAH (013)
BROOKLYN (019)
CANAAN (021)
CHAPLIN (024)
CHESTER (026)
COLEBROOK (029)
COVENTRY (032)
DEEP RIVER (036)
EASTFORD (039)
EAST HADDAM (041)
FRANKLIN (053)
HAMPTON (063)
HARTLAND (065)
KENT (068)
LEBANON (071)
LISBON (073)
LITCHFIELD (074)

NORFOLK (098)
NORTH BRANFORD (099)
NORTH STONINGTON (102)
PORTLAND (113)
PRESTON (114)
SALISBURY (122)
SCOTLAND (123)
SHARON (125)
THOMASTON (140)
UNION (145)
WESTBROOK (154)
WILLINGTON (160)
WOODSTOCK (169)
DISTRICT NO. 1 (201)
DISTRICT NO. 6 (206)
DISTRICT NO. 16 (216)
WOODSTOCK ACADEMY (903)



02

Data and Comparatives



Scores Explained

- 1 - Does not meet
- 2 - Approaching
3. Meets
4. Exceeds

Math Cohort Charts

Mathematics

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Grade 8	39	29	54	60	56 (40)
Grade 7	33	42	33	38	44 (43)
Grade 6	35	34	35	32	30 (42)
Grade 5	31	38	50	39	29 (44)
Grade 4	51	47	56	54	45 (51)
Grade 3	61	51	54	55	75 (52)

English/Language Arts Cohort Charts

English/Language Arts

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Grade 8	50	32	60	53	60 (50)
Grade 7	35	52	74	60	58 (50)
Grade 6	43	59	61	57	56 (50)
Grade 5	55	65	50	54	56 (52)
Grade 4	51	60	48	57	51 (51)
Grade 3	61	55	66	54	73 (46)

Science Cohort Charts

Science

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Grade 8	50	31	69	78	68 (50)
Grade 5	70	78	70	67	58 (52)

Performance Index Explained

The Performance Index accounts for all students' performance on the test.

The Performance Index is the weighted average of these points across all students in a group.

Math Performance Index

District	Math Performance Index
State Average	61.1
Group Average	62.6
Preston	64.5
Bozrah	73.2
N. Stonington	72.4
Franklin	68.5
Voluntown	65.2
Lisbon	64.2
Ledyard	62
Griswold	56.5
Sprague	51.5
Norwich	48

ELA Performance Index

District	ELA Performance Index
State Average	64.7
Group Average	65.81
Preston	70.2
N. Stonington	72.4
Bozrah	70.8
Franklin	70.8
Lisbon	67.4
Ledyard	66.7
Voluntown	65
Griswold	62.3
Sprague	58.3
Norwich	54.2

Science Performance Index

District	Science Performance Index
State Average	62.6
Group Average	66.1
Preston	72
Bozrah	75.5
N. Stonington	72.1
Franklin	71.2
Ledyard	69.1
Voluntown	68.9
Lisbon	66.9
Griswold	59.6
Sprague	54
Norwich	51.7

03

How Data Drives Instruction



Grade-Level | Content Area Meetings

Data Analysis

Smarter
Balanced

STAR
DIBELS

Curricular
Measures

Tier 1 Strategies

HMH Literacy
Programs

Go Math! + Into
Math Program

Differentiated
Instruction

Targeted Small-Group Instruction

Classroom Supports

Intervention

Use of Interim Assessments


Individual Items -
Quick Check


Instructional Activity -
Together


Standardized -
Individual Learning Check

Our Portfolio of Data


Key Data Sources:


 **DIBELS** – Early literacy assessment to track foundational reading skills.


 **SBA/NGSS Results** – Reading, Mathematics, and Science results


 **OLSATs** – Measures cognitive abilities and aptitude.

 **STAR Assessments** – Benchmarks student achievement in reading and math.

 **Progress Monitoring Adjustments** – Ensures interventions align with student needs.

 **Lexia** – Adaptive literacy program supporting individualized growth.

 **PBIS Behavioral Data** – Tracks positive behavior interventions and supports.

 **Tier 2 Behavioral Data** – Identifies students needing targeted behavioral support.

 **Classroom Performance** – Teacher observations, grades, and participation.

By utilizing multiple data points, Preston Public Schools ensures a well-rounded, responsive approach to student learning and development.

04

**Closing
Thoughts**



Celebrations

Historically High Scores in 3rd grade

Continued success in our science performance

Impressive growth 7th and 8th grade math

Continued consistent performance in ELA across grade levels

Staff ownership of the challenges ahead



Our Takeaways

Regular use of Interim Assessment Blocks

Pacing is important!

Articulation - what worked? What didn't?

Lumos Learning materials

Partnership with area schools (No. Stonington)

Improvement and growth is achievable!



Thank You!



“Growth is not a straight line; it’s a series of peaks and valleys that teach us resilience and perspective.” — Unknown

