

**BOE Regular Meeting**  
March 9, 2026 7:00 PM

1. Call to Order

Courtney Ennis, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:05PM. Other Members present: Nicole Serra, Kelly McNamara, Andrew Koniecko, Dan Harris, Heather Helwig and Charles Raymond. Also present: Dr. Roy Seitsinger; Superintendent, Cindy Varricchio; Director of Finance, and Gloria Homiski; Recording Secretary.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Consent Agenda

Ms. Ennis asked that her directive be added to the posted 2-9-2026 minutes.

**Moved, to accept the minutes of 3-2-2026 as presented and the minutes of 2-9-2026 as amended. McNamara/Serra. Unanimous. Motion Carries.**

4. Public Comment

Ms. Ennis read 5 letters sent in in support of the school social workers and school psychologists. They are attached.

In Person Public Comments:

Jill Keith; community member, publicly apologized to Courtney Ennis and Heather Helwig for things that were quoted in the past. She also noted that other districts are spending less money and still have enough to support children and staff. She asked that the Board please re-work the budget.

Vicky Spicer; Teacher and Parent, asked the Board to please consider how many students will it affect when making budget decisions. Will the cuts affect the whole student body? The District lost staff members last year and the Board is looking at similar cuts again this year. She asked that the Board approve the presented budget and move it forward to the BOF in tact. The Board must think of the Learning Community as a whole.

Bill Holmes, community member, wants to know what is mandated and what is not. Concerned that community members are not getting the FOIA documents that they asked for.

Jill Keith; community member, read a Public Comment from Birdie Savage; community member. Birdie is concerned that she has still not received all of the information from her November FOIA request. She filed with the state asking for assistance. She is filing another FOIA as well with regard to any correspondence between the Superintendent and the Director of Finance concerning the initial FOIA. She asked the Board to step in to ensure there are no further delays.

5. New Business

Snow Days: Dr Seitsinger explained that we have had 5 snow days this year. We made one up by changing February 17<sup>th</sup> to a school day. We can drop

Thursday the 18<sup>th</sup> because we have 182 days built into the calendar and only require 180. The last day of school will now be Wednesday, June 17<sup>th</sup>. Grade 8 graduation will be June 16<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Seitsinger also mentioned that all staff are aware of the heightened concerns of our military families right now.

The state enacted a new lock down procedure. The lock downs must be announced beforehand to lessen stress and anxiety.

The revised draft of the 2026-2027 School Calendar was presented. Dr. Seitsinger asked that the Board review the calendar. It will be brought back to the April meeting for a vote.

**Moved, to take the agenda out of order to review the Financial Reports prior to the budget discussion. Harris/Ennis. Unanimous. Motion Carries.**

Cindy Varricchio will continue to monitor the budget closely but right now it is possible that we may finish the year with about 117,000. She clarified that this could change at any time. Mrs. Varricchio presented her January year to date budget report. Dan Harris brought up the need to notify the Board to vote on the transfer of funds between line items as soon as a line is over budget. A lengthy discussion followed. Mrs. Varricchio stated that she would present more information at the next meeting.

**Moved, to accept the January 2026 year to date budget report as presented. Ennis/Serra. Unanimous. Motion Carries.**

#### FY27 Budget Discussion

Vicki Schwery handed out the revised budget sheets based on the discussions from the March 2<sup>nd</sup> and March 5<sup>th</sup> meetings. Mrs. Varricchio went over the acceptable risks. The current FY27 budget ask is 5.19%. These cuts would support a 4.04% increase over the FY26 budget.

Courtney Ennis asked for further explanation of the DRIP Grant. Dr. Seitsinger explained that we will receive about 47,000 in June. It can be used to cover small repair expenses. Dan Harris wanted to make sure that all Grant information will be included in the Budget presentation to the BOF. Dr. Seitsinger stated that it always has been included in the past and it will continue to be included this year. Dan Harris asked about using the non-lapsing account to pay for the acceptable risk items on the list. Mrs. Varricchio explained that non-lapsing can only be used for one-time non-recurring items. The Board stressed the importance of the need for transparency.

Dr. Seitsinger explained that besides laying out acceptable risks, the document shows the consequences of cutting the budget further. In order to keep the increase at 3.5%, we would need to cut a para-educator and move a staff member.

Further cuts would result in cutting the FTE of a school social worker and school psychologist and possibly an Administrator. Dr. Seitsinger does not support these cuts in any way. He wants to wait to hear what the BOF has to say.

Ms. Ennis said that she would rather cut all administrators by .2FTE than lay off a teacher.

Moved, to increase the FY27 Budget by 4.04% over the current budget. Raymond/McNamara.

Discussion followed.

Raymond in favor. Ennis, McNamara, Koniecko, Helwig, Harris and Serra opposed. Motion fails.

Moved, to add an additional 15 Minute Public Comment to the agenda. Ennis/Harris. Serra, Helwig, Koniecko and McNamara also in favor. Raymond opposed. Motion Carries.

Andy Depta; community member, stated that he believed the Board should have voted to pass the 4.04% increase. He believes the BOF will cut the Budget further once it is presented to them.

Bill Holmes; community member, stated he is very worried about what the housing bill will do to our Town. He supports a 0% increase to the budget.

Johanna Thibdeau; parent, believes that a 3.5% increase is a good choice. She does not recommend going any lower without a directive from the BOF.

Kara Sawyer; parent, stated that she believes an increase of 3.5% to 4.0% is appropriate to bring to the BOF. She doesn't want to take away any opportunities from the children.

Jill Keith; community member, said that the Board claims to be following new procedure and not past practice. It is time for change. Other districts are offering accelerated education for their students and are taking money away from other areas.

Vicky Spicer; parent and teacher, asked the board to keep the following question in mind: how many students will this impact? She agreed with Mr. Depta. Don't cut now when we will have to cut more later.

The Board had further discussion after weighing the comments of the Public.

Moved, to increase the FY27 Budget by 3.75% over the current budget for a total budget of 15,653,741. Helwig/Serra. Harris, McNamara, Raymond, Koniecko also in favor. Ennis opposed. Motion Carries.

Moved, to extend the meeting not to exceed 9:30PM. Harris/Helwig. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

## 6. Principals' and Director of Student Services Reports

Chris Pickett; PPMS, stated that PPMS students read to PVMS students on Read Across America Day. He and Mr. Bernier are very proud of this collaboration. The student/faculty basketball game will take place tomorrow to raise money for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade trip to Washington D.C. Project O trips will begin taking place next month. Janine Paige's class is collaborating with North Stonington to fundraise for a former Preston student who is now attending North Stonington and battling cancer.

Ray Bernier; PVMS, stated that PK and K screenings will take place this week. Spirit Week will take place the week of March 17<sup>th</sup>. An Art Show will be held on March 19<sup>th</sup>. The Annual State Fair will be held on March 27<sup>th</sup> and a Magic Show is in the works.

Mr. Bernier and Mr. Pickett also shared the STAR Testing Data with the Board.

Craig King; Director of Student Services, stated that OLSAT testing was completed and mailed in for scoring. We confirmed that they were received by Pearson and hope to have the results soon. He explained that he worked on a Special Education Expansion Grant which he hopes will be accepted soon. He will also begin working on the IDEA 611 and 619 grants. He explained that he is also working on ESY for in district and out placed students. PPT's and 504's are all up to date.

#### 7. Committee Reports

Finance Committee: Kelly McNamara stated that they met many times over the past couple of months to finalize the budget info presented to the full board tonight.

Curriculum Committee: Andrew Koniecko said the last meeting was held on 2-17-26. The Social Studies curriculum is the priority they are reviewing. They will conduct a needs assessment and hold a Learning Walk on 4-1-2026. The next Curriculum Meeting will be held on 3-18-2026

Communication Committee: Courtney explained that a meeting would be held after the budget moves forward.

Learn: no representative

CABE: Dr. Seitsinger is helping to plan the next conference.

Building Needs Assessment Committee: Dan said no meeting was held.

Transportation Committee: Corky stated negotiations will be coming up in the near future.

#### 8. Financial/Capital Report

See above

#### 9. Public Comment

Andy Depta; community member, downloaded Preston's Profile and saw that our per pupil cost is 23K. Our Math and Reading proficiency is at 60%. He wants to know why. He wants the Principals to talk about academics in their reports to the Board.

Jill Keith; community member, stated that the correct per pupil cost is actually 25,820 per PK-8 student and 15K per high school student. She said tonight's discussion sounded more like past practice and doesn't establish this new Board. There is mistrust in the community. This needs to change without taking things away from the kids.

#### 10. Adjournment

Moved, to adjourn the meeting at 9:20PM. Harris/Helwig. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

March 4, 2026

RE: Emily Ambeau, PPMS Social Worker  
and Rebecca Brigner, PPMS School Psychologist

To whom it may concern:

I am writing as the parent of a 7th-grade student at Preston Plains Middle School (PPMS) to express my strong support for our school social workers and psychologists, specifically Mrs. Ambeau and Mrs. Brigner.

My child, who has been diagnosed with anxiety disorder, major depressive disorder, and ADHD, has relied heavily on the expertise of the mental health staff at both PVMS and PPMS. Their frequent support—often required daily—has been instrumental in managing her symptoms, which include panic attacks and suicidal ideation. It was through the early intervention of the PVMS staff that we were able to secure a timely diagnosis and necessary medical treatment.

Currently, my child has a vital bond with Mrs. Ambeau. As my child struggles with significant social-emotional triggers and difficulty with change, Mrs. Ambeau provides the stability and trust necessary for her to feel safe at school. I am deeply concerned that losing these dedicated professionals would significantly jeopardize my child's mental health and physical safety.

I urge you to consider the profound impact these staff members have on the well-being of our students and request that both Mrs. Ambeau and Mrs. Brigner be retained within our school system.

Regards,

A Concerned Parent

Dear Members of the Board of Education and Dr. Seitsinger,

We are writing to respectfully urge you to reconsider any decision to reduce the number of school psychologists or social workers in our district.

**School psychologists and social workers are not supplemental supports** — they are essential to the academic, behavioral, and emotional success of our students. Reducing these positions will significantly impact *students who rely on consistent, preventative, and responsive support* throughout the school day.

In recent years, student mental health needs have grown 35% overall in the U.S. We have seen a similar growth in Preston. Most schools, including our own, are seeing higher rates of anxiety, depression, trauma-related behaviors, and social skill deficits. Without adequate mental health staff, students may experience increased behavioral challenges, academic decline, absenteeism, and disciplinary referrals. This not only affects individual students but also impacts classroom learning environments and overall school climate. We know that mental health is at the basis of a person's hierarchy of needs. Without access to mental health support, students are not able to access their education and perform to their full potential. These needs and responsibilities do not fade simply because a funding source must be repositioned.

School psychologists and social workers play a critical role that goes well beyond any assigned caseload. These roles include:

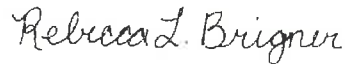
- Conducting timely special education evaluations to ensure legal compliance
- Conducting functional behavioral assessments
- Developing and supporting behavior intervention plans
- Providing counseling services for IEP, 504 and general education students
- Crisis response and management
- Case managing students on IEPs and 504 plans
- Creating and facilitating behavior plans
- Peer mediation support- reducing bullying and peer conflict
- Partnering with families to strengthen home-school collaboration
- Training and supporting staff in effective behavioral and mental health strategies
- Mandated reporters and DCF point of contact
- Gifted and Talented Evaluations
- Manage attendance and school refusal

**In addition, school psychologists and social workers have legally mandated responsibilities that districts must fulfill.** We play a critical role in ensuring compliance with federal and state laws, including timelines for special education evaluations, reevaluations, and eligibility determinations under IDEA and Section 504. Reducing these positions increases the risk of delayed evaluations, out-of-compliance documentation, and potential legal challenges. **Maintaining appropriate staffing levels protects not only students' rights but also the district's legal and financial stability.**

In closing, school-based mental health services are foundational to student achievement, family trust, and a stable school community. Reducing these supports would be a shortsighted decision that compromises student safety and the district's responsibility to meet growing mental health needs. We urge the Board to prioritize these services so that every student continues to receive the support they need and deserve.

Respectfully,

Rebecca Brigner (PPMS School Psychologist)



Emily Ambeau (PPMS Social Worker)



Megan Lautieri (PVMS School Psychologist)



Jess Boucher (PVMS Social Worker)



Please Note: A list of the possible impacts of reduced mental health support

- Increased outplacements
- Increased need for expensive outside services- crisis management, evaluations
- Increased peer conflicts and bullying
- Reduced student safety due to lack of emotional support- suicidality, self-harm
- Classroom disruptions from dysregulated students
  - Decreased instructional time due to increased behavior management time
- Physical risk of harm to students and staff due to insufficient crisis management and mental health staff availability
- Missed IEP/504 service hours due to crisis management
- Reactive model of operation
- Exposure to legal due process complaints due to the inability to fulfill service hours
- Students in need may fall through the cracks
- Teachers may be unable to educate kids to the best of their ability because they are trying to manage emotional issues they are unqualified to treat

## **District Parent Feedback Regarding Mental Health Support**

Sarah Burton- 37 Ross Road

Middle school students today are facing unprecedented levels of anxiety, stress, and emotional strain. The demands on their time, the constant social comparison intensified by social media, and the lingering social and academic gaps resulting from COVID have created a mental-health landscape unlike anything we have seen before. These challenges are not diminishing, they are increasing, and they profoundly impact students' ability to learn. Even academically strong students are struggling under the weight of anxiety, OCD, and depression. When a child is overwhelmed by mental-health concerns, they cannot access learning at the level they need to, regardless of their potential or motivation.

For these reasons, having both a school social worker and a school psychologist in the middle school is not optional; it is essential. Teachers cannot simultaneously meet academic demands and support students through complex mental-health crises; they do not have the time nor the specialized training required. As both a parent and an educator, I know firsthand the difference these professionals make. For my daughter, the social worker and school psychologist have been trusted adults, people she could speak to when she felt she couldn't talk to anyone else. They recognized subtle changes that signaled deeper concerns, guided us in advocating for her needs, and consistently provided a safe, supportive place for her to land when the world felt overwhelming. They are an integral part of her care team, and their work has been nothing short of transformative.

In my classroom, I see the same needs echoed in many students. Kids today struggle to bounce back from stress, to manage worries, and to cope with pressures both internal and external. They carry burdens that make it difficult for them to engage, participate, or even enter the classroom ready to learn. The social worker and school psychologist make it possible for these students to try again each day. They provide the support, guidance, and intervention necessary for students to feel safe, regulated, and ready to learn. Without these roles, we risk failing to meet the most fundamental needs of our students. Ensuring that every middle school has access to these professionals is an investment not only in student mental health, but in academic success, long-term well-being, and the overall health of our school community.

Kylie Desjardins- Comment at 3/2/26 BOE Meeting- 12 Wheeler Farm Road

"I can tell you that both the psychologist and social worker have been essential to the success of my children in Preston. They pick up where the teachers cannot, take the one on one time to help intervene with crisis. Remember that crisis is perceptual."

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Social-Emotional Learning team in our district.

Our SEL team members possess unique knowledge and skills that allow them to assist students in regulating their emotions and navigating challenging situations. They are able to recognize early warning signs, deescalate difficult moments, and prevent student escalation before it disrupts learning. These proactive strategies help maintain a calm and supportive atmosphere that promotes safety and keeps students engaged in the learning process.

It is essential to have these supports available in our school for students who might otherwise present with physical symptoms that lead to dismissal from school. In many cases, these students are not physically ill but are experiencing emotional distress that manifests as physical symptoms. The SEL team helps students recognize and manage these feelings, allowing them to remain in school and return to learning.

I respectfully encourage the Board of Education to continue prioritizing and supporting our SEL team. By doing so, you help ensure that our schools prepare students not only to be successful learners, but also compassionate, resilient, and responsible members of society.

Thank you for your time, dedication, and commitment to the well-being and success of all students.

Sincerely,  
Denise Tedeschi, RN  
PPMS School Nurse



Gloria Homiski <homiskig@prestonschools.org>

## Fwd: Public Comment

1 message

Jill Keith <jillskeith@gmail.com>

Mon, Mar 9, 2026 at 7:53 PM

To: "Courtney Ennis, Preston BOE" <ennisc@prestonschools.org>

Cc: Gloria Homiski <homiskig@prestonschools.org>, Birdie Savage <savagebirdies@gmail.com>

Resending to copy Gloria and Birdie for their records

*Jill*

Jill S Keith

cell: 860-884-9719

[jillskeith@gmail.com](mailto:jillskeith@gmail.com)

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Jill Keith <[jillskeith@gmail.com](mailto:jillskeith@gmail.com)>

Date: Mon, Mar 9, 2026, 7:27 PM

Subject: Public Comment

To: Courtney Ennis, Preston BOE <[ennisc@prestonschools.org](mailto:ennisc@prestonschools.org)>

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

As you are aware, I wrote a FOIA request that was originally submitted by Ms. Jill S. Keith and on behalf of several community members during November's board meeting.

Unfortunately, I feel that this request has not been fulfilled with promptness. The district has utilized maximum allowable fees in order for us to receive those records. Additionally, in-person inspections were not offered by the district, and upon my request to review the records in person, Ms. Keith and I have been told that we can not use our own laptops for note taking or our own dedicated document scanners, and would have to pay a fee per person to use our phones to scan the records. Furthermore, we have been limited to Wednesdays only for in-person review of records. Some email responses have taken more than a week to receive a reply.

As a result of what I feel to be unnecessary delays and barriers, Ms. Keith and I filed a complaint with the Freedom of Information Commission Board for the State of Connecticut, and the case is pending, docket number FIC#2026-0031.

Additionally, we are submitting another FOIA request for record of any written or digital correspondence by any board member to/and or from the superintendent and/or finance director concerning or related to our FOIA request that we submitted in November.

As public agents responsible under the Freedom of Information Act, I am hopeful that the Board of Education may be able to assist in ensuring that residents are able to review these records in a manner that is consistent with the spirit and requirements of the law.

Because the budget discussions are currently underway, timely access to these records is especially important for informed public participation. Several community members signed onto this request for that reason, and we are eager to complete our review while the budget process is still active.

We are respectfully asking the Board to assist in helping facilitate reasonable access to the requested records so that the review can be completed without unnecessary delay or barriers.

Thank you for your time and for your continued service to the community. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to working cooperatively toward a resolution.

Sincerely,

Birdie Savage

108 Krug Road

*Jill*

Jill S Keith

cell: 860-884-9719

[jillskeith@gmail.com](mailto:jillskeith@gmail.com)