



SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT #51

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Dr. Sandie MacDonald- Superintendent of Schools

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE Pittsfield School District

The Pittsfield School Board will hold a Public Hearing regarding the proposed submission of an Innovation Waiver Plan pursuant to RSA 194-E and Ed 1500 Innovation Schools rules.

Date: Thursday, June 4, 2026

Time: 6:00 PM

Location: Pittsfield Middle High School, 23 Oneida Street, Pittsfield, NH 03263

The purpose of the hearing is to receive public input regarding the District's proposed Innovation Waiver submission under RSA 194-E:2 and Ed 1501.03, which requires the local school board to hold a public hearing upon receipt of an innovation plan.

Innovation Schools and Innovation School Zones are authorized under New Hampshire law to allow districts greater flexibility in educational programming, instructional design, scheduling, staffing models, curriculum delivery, competency-based learning, and operational practices in support of improved student outcomes and educational innovation.

The proposed Innovation Waiver submission is being considered pursuant to:

RSA 194-E: Innovation Schools

Ed 1500: Innovation Schools Rules

Ed 1501.03: Local Planning and Approval Process

Community members, families, staff, and stakeholders are encouraged to attend and provide public comment regarding the proposed Innovation Waiver Plan prior to School Board consideration and possible submission to the New Hampshire Department of Education and State Board of Education.

Additional information regarding the Innovation Schools framework may be reviewed through RSA 194-E and NH Department of Education administrative rules Ed 1500.

Pittsfield School District (SAU 51)
Innovation School Plan Proposal (RSA 194-E)

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Pittsfield Middle High School - Alternative Pathways Program

To be Submitted to the New Hampshire State Board of Education

Pursuant to Ed 1500/1501

Date: TBD

Executive Summary

Summary Points

- This proposal is for a targeted cohort of approximately 16-20 students, not for the full student body.
- The District seeks Innovation School designation under RSA 194-E and Ed 1500/1501 to provide a flexible, rigorous pathway to graduation for students who are not succeeding within the traditional high school structure.
- The proposed model is a hybrid program combining:
 - traditional credit-bearing coursework,
 - competency-based learning,
 - Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs), and
 - flexible scheduling and pacing.
- The District is not seeking to lower standards, reduce graduation requirements, or waive federal protections.
- The District is seeking targeted flexibility in how students may earn credit and how instruction may be organized so that a small, clearly identified group of students has a viable path to earn a diploma aligned to district and state expectations.
- The proposal is grounded in:
 - the purpose and framework of RSA 194-E,
 - the Innovation Schools rules in Ed 1500/1501,
 - New Hampshire's longstanding leadership in student-centered and competency-based learning, and
 - the documented needs of Pittsfield students who are off-track for graduation under the current structure.

Narrative

This proposal is before the Board because the District has reached a point where maintaining the current structure without adjustment would mean knowingly allowing a defined group of students to continue on a path that is not leading to graduation. This is not a broad redesign of Pittsfield Middle High School. It is not a replacement for the existing high school program. It is not an attempt to lower standards or create a less rigorous pathway. It is a focused, carefully designed response for a small group of students, approximately 16-20, whose needs are not currently being met through the traditional schedule, pacing, and credit-acquisition model.

The District is not asking the Board or the State to approve innovation for innovation's sake. The District is asking for authority to make a limited, accountable, student-centered adjustment within the public school system so that students who are capable of meeting graduation expectations are not prevented from doing so by a structure that no longer fits how they learn, engage, and progress.

The proposal is intentionally narrow in scope and strong in accountability. It preserves the school's existing high school program for the vast majority of students. It maintains district graduation expectations. It keeps participating

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students enrolled in Pittsfield Middle High School and connected to the school community. It establishes a clearly monitored pathway with defined entry criteria, documented student review, progress monitoring, and formal evaluation.

In plain terms, this proposal asks for flexibility in method, not leniency in expectation. It asks the State to allow Pittsfield to hold approximately 16-20 known students to the same destination, while allowing the District to change the route by which those students get there.

I. Purpose, Need, and Rationale for Innovation

(RSA 194-E:2, III(a))

Summary of Need

- Pittsfield seeks Innovation School designation because the current high school structure is not producing successful outcomes for a defined group of students.
- This proposal is driven by:
 - graduation rates that have remained below the state benchmark over time,
 - dropout patterns that reflect sustained disengagement,
 - persistent academic gaps in literacy and mathematics,
 - the realities of a small rural district with limited ability to create multiple parallel programs, and
 - the presence of approximately 16-20 students who are off-track for graduation despite existing supports.
- The issue is not whether the school works for all students. It does not. The issue is whether the District is willing to respond responsibly when it knows exactly which students are being left without a viable pathway.

Narrative

Why the District Is Bringing This Forward

The Pittsfield School District is requesting Innovation School designation because, despite sustained effort and targeted intervention, the current high school structure is not working for a small but clearly identifiable group of students. This is not a theoretical concern, an abstract philosophical debate, or a future possibility. It is an immediate educational reality within Pittsfield Middle High School.

The District knows the students for whom this proposal is intended. They are not hypothetical. They are students currently enrolled or recently enrolled in Pittsfield Middle High School who have already demonstrated that the traditional structure - fixed pacing, standard sequence, seat-time-driven course progression, and limited flexibility in recovery- is not providing them with a viable path to graduation.

Some of these students begin to fall behind as early as ninth or tenth grade. Once they do, the existing structure becomes increasingly difficult to navigate. Credit deficits grow. Re-entry into the standard course sequence becomes harder. Recovery options exist, but they often function as add-ons to a structure that has already failed to hold the student's engagement. Over time, the student becomes less connected, less hopeful, less likely to re-engage, and less likely to graduate. This is not a sudden collapse. It is a predictable progression.

The District is bringing this plan forward because continuing to operate the same system, in the same way, while knowing the likely outcome for these students would itself be a decision. It would be a decision to preserve the structure rather than solve the problem. The District is not willing to do that.

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A System That Works for Many, But Not for All

Pittsfield Middle High School is a comprehensive secondary school in a small, rural district. Like many public high schools, it is built on structures designed to create order, consistency, and predictability. Those structures include:

- fixed daily schedules,
- traditional course sequencing,
- credit attainment tied largely to time and completion,
- and recovery models that often require a student to re-enter the same structure that contributed to the problem.

For many students, this model works well. For a defined group of approximately 16-20 students, it does not. That distinction is critical.

The District is not alleging that the school as a whole is failing. Teachers are working hard. Supports are in place. Administrators are intervening. Counseling supports exist. Credit recovery exists. Limited ELO opportunities exist. Yet there remains a small, visible cohort of students for whom these supports have not been sufficient because the structure itself remains unchanged.

This proposal begins with an honest acknowledgement: the current system works for many students, but not for all of them. When that pattern persists, the responsible response is not to blame students for failing to fit the system. The responsible response is to examine whether the system is sufficiently responsive to the students it serves.

What the District Sees in Its Students

This proposal is not intended for all students. It is for approximately 16-20 students whose needs are meaningfully different from those of peers who are progressing successfully through the traditional program. These students commonly share several characteristics:

- they are behind in credits or at serious risk of becoming so;
- they have struggled to recover once they fall off sequence;
- they have become increasingly disengaged from school;
- they may attend inconsistently or withdraw from participation even when physically present;
- they remain capable of learning, but are no longer meaningfully connected to the way learning is currently organized.

The District is not defining these students by deficiency. In fact, one of the most important points underlying this proposal is that these students are not failing because they lack ability. They are failing because the current structure is no longer producing conditions under which they can demonstrate what they know, progress at a workable pace, and remain connected to school.

How the Current Structure Produces the Current Outcome

The District has observed a consistent pattern. A student misses content due to academic struggle, attendance issues, social-emotional challenges, family instability, or a combination of factors. That student begins to fall behind. Credit gaps form. The standard schedule keeps moving. Recovery requires the student to catch up while the structure continues forward. That student begins to believe that catching up is unrealistic. Engagement declines. Attendance declines further. The student stops seeing school as a place where success is attainable.

This pattern is not rare. It is not unpredictable. It is not the result of a single bad year or a single isolated set of circumstances. It is a recurring structural pattern the District can see clearly.

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That pattern matters because it means the issue is not merely one of motivation, compliance, or effort. The issue is whether the District has enough flexibility to redesign the educational pathway for a small group of students without abandoning rigor or removing accountability.

Why Existing Supports Are Not Enough

The District has not come to this proposal as a first step. Existing efforts include:

- academic intervention and remediation,
- counseling support,
- credit recovery,
- limited ELO opportunities,
- staff intervention and individualized support,
- and instructional adjustment within the traditional program.

These supports are important and appropriate. They have helped some students. But they have not been sufficient for this defined cohort because they are layered on top of a structure that remains essentially unchanged.

When the core structure remains fixed, supports often function reactively rather than preventively. They are deployed after credit gaps have formed, after disengagement has taken hold, and after students have already begun to internalize the belief that graduation may no longer be realistic. This proposal is intended to address that structural limitation.

Why This Matters Especially in Pittsfield

In a larger district, this challenge might be addressed by creating a separate alternative high school, a specialized academy, or multiple parallel programs. Pittsfield does not have that scale. It has one high school, limited staff, and limited scheduling flexibility. The District cannot realistically create multiple separate systems and sustain them. It must instead make the existing system more responsive for the students who need a different path.

That is one reason this proposal is both necessary and appropriate for Pittsfield. Innovation in this context is not a luxury or branding exercise. It is a practical mechanism for a small district to solve a problem it already knows exists.

Defined Student Population and Program Scope

- Approximate cohort: 16-20 students
- Not a school-wide redesign
- Entry based on specific, documented criteria
- Participation is intentional, limited, and monitored

This proposal is not about scaling a new model across the school. It is about ensuring that a clearly identified group of approximately 16-20 students has a viable, rigorous pathway to graduation within the existing system.

The District has intentionally designed the program to remain small, targeted, and closely monitored. That limited scope is a strength. It means the District can provide strong oversight, ensure fidelity of implementation, and measure results clearly. It also means the District is not disrupting what is already working for the larger student population.

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Equity, Responsibility, and the Risk of Doing Nothing

At its core, this proposal is about equity and responsibility.

A system that works for most students, but leaves a known group without a viable path, is not sufficient. When the District knows which students are likely to continue falling off track under the current model, maintaining the status quo is not neutral. It has consequences.

If the District does not act:

- students will continue to disengage,
- some will continue to fall further behind,
- some will not graduate,
- and those outcomes will occur in ways the District can already foresee.

That is the risk of doing nothing.

Final Statement of Need

The District is not seeking to change what students must achieve. The District is seeking the flexibility necessary to ensure that more students are able to meet those expectations. Maintaining the current structure without adjustment does not preserve rigor; it preserves inequity in outcomes for a group of students the District can already identify.

II. Legal and Policy Basis for the Proposal

(RSA 194-E; Ed 1500/1501)

Summary Points

- RSA 194-E was enacted specifically to allow public schools to pursue innovative, locally designed solutions.
- Ed 1501 establishes the process for local planning, local board hearing and approval, department review, state board hearing, and ongoing review.
- The law contemplates innovation in:
 - staffing,
 - scheduling,
 - curriculum and assessment,
 - student support,
 - graduation policies,
 - and educational services for students at risk of academic failure, expulsion, or dropping out.
- The State Board may waive identified administrative rules, but federal requirements and student protections remain in place.

Narrative

This proposal is fully grounded in New Hampshire law. RSA 194-E was established to allow public schools and local school boards to develop innovation plans and seek State Board approval for targeted flexibility when traditional structures are limiting effectiveness. The statute is not intended only for broad or dramatic reinvention. It is intended to allow local districts to propose solutions responsive to their own context, population, and educational challenges.

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That framework matters for Pittsfield. This District is not asking the State Board to invent a new authority or make an exception outside the law. It is using the process the Legislature created precisely for circumstances like this - when a district can clearly identify a problem, propose a controlled and measurable solution, and explain why flexibility is required to implement it.

The rulemaking structure in Ed 1500 and Ed 1501 reinforces that purpose. It requires a detailed innovation plan, local public hearing, local board approval, department review and comment, state board hearing, and recurring performance review. In other words, the innovation process is intentionally rigorous. It is designed to ensure that flexibility is granted only when the proposal is thoughtful, accountable, and clearly tied to student outcomes.

That is exactly how Pittsfield is approaching this request.

Why RSA 194-E Is the Right Vehicle

RSA 194-E specifically contemplates innovation in areas such as:

- curriculum and assessment,
- class scheduling,
- use of financial and other resources,
- staffing,
- student promotion and graduation policies,
- and educational services for students at risk of academic failure or dropping out.

This proposal fits squarely within that framework. The District is not seeking flexibility unrelated to student outcomes. It is seeking flexibility in credit, scheduling, and instructional structure so that a small group of students at serious risk of not graduating has a viable, rigorous public-school pathway.

What the Law Allows - and What It Does Not

The innovation law allows the State Board to waive identified administrative rules in support of an approved local innovation plan. It does not permit waiver of federal law, civil rights protections, or core student safeguards. This proposal fully accepts those limits.

This is important for Board reviewers who may not be familiar with the waiver process. Approval of this plan would not authorize Pittsfield to operate outside legal expectations. It would authorize Pittsfield to operate with carefully defined flexibility within a formal, reviewable, state-approved framework.

III. New Hampshire Context and Existing Innovation School Precedent

Summary Points

- New Hampshire adopted Innovation Schools rules in 2023 to encourage districts to pursue locally designed improvements.
- The stated purpose of the rules is to support creative strategies that increase student achievement and reduce achievement gaps.
- As of the most recent state reporting available to the District, there are only three Innovation Schools in New Hampshire, which means the pathway is still relatively new and selectively used.
- Existing approved Innovation Schools demonstrate that the State Board has already used this authority to waive rules in targeted ways when a district presented a clear rationale.

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Narrative

This proposal also should be understood in the context of New Hampshire's broader educational philosophy and the State's own implementation of the Innovation Schools law.

When the State Board adopted the Innovation Schools rules, state leaders described the purpose clearly: to give educators and local communities the opportunity to implement creative strategies that increase student achievement and reduce achievement gaps. The Commissioner and the State Board Chair publicly described the waiver process as a way to provide flexibility and a better educational experience when current administrative structures stand in the way of needed innovation.

That framing is important because it shows that the State's intent was not to create a symbolic process. It was to provide a real mechanism for districts to solve real problems.

The District's materials also reflect that, to date, only a very small number of New Hampshire schools have received Innovation School designation. That limited number actually strengthens Pittsfield's case. It shows that this is not a casual or routine path. Districts are not using the process lightly. The few approved schools have each had to articulate a specific need and a reason flexibility was necessary.

Existing State Examples

The District's review of the State's annual Innovation Schools reporting shows approved examples that illustrate the State Board's willingness to use targeted flexibility in different contexts:

- **The Blue School (Landaff)** received a waiver related to the certified principal requirement in a very small-school context.
- **Prospect Mountain High School** received waivers to support its Granite State Academy alternative program, including flexibility related to staffing, distance education, instructional time, and certain course/graduation requirements limited to that alternative program.
- **Cawley Middle School (Hooksett)** received targeted staffing-related waivers tied to educator certification requirements.

These examples are important for three reasons. First, they show that the State Board has already recognized that a one-size-fits-all regulatory structure does not always best serve students. Second, they demonstrate that approved innovation plans can be narrow, specific, and tied to a limited program rather than a whole-school redesign. Third, Prospect Mountain is especially instructive because its approval confirms that the State is willing to consider alternative high school models for a defined program within a larger school structure.

Pittsfield's proposal is consistent with that emerging pattern: a targeted request, limited to a defined cohort, designed to solve a documented student-outcome problem within the public school system.

IV. The Program the District Proposes

Alternative Pathways Program

Summary Points

- Hybrid model combining:
 - traditional credit-bearing classes,
 - competency-based instruction,
 - ELOs,

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- and flexible scheduling/pacing.
- Designed for approximately 16-20 students.
- Not a separate school and not a replacement for the current high school program.
- Students remain enrolled in Pittsfield Middle High School and remain connected to the broader school community.

Narrative

The District proposes an Alternative Pathways Program housed within Pittsfield Middle High School. This program is designed for a small, defined cohort of approximately 16 students whose needs are not adequately met through the traditional structure and whose likelihood of graduating under the current model is low without intervention.

The program is intentionally hybrid. That is one of its strengths. Rather than asking the State Board to approve a fully separate or wholly alternative school model, the District is proposing a blended structure that maintains connection to the existing high school while giving students access to more flexible methods of earning credit and demonstrating learning.

Core Program Features

The program will combine four main elements:

1. Traditional Credit-Bearing Coursework

Students may continue participating in selected traditional classes where that remains appropriate and beneficial. This helps preserve access to core instruction, electives, school relationships, and continuity with the broader high school experience.

2. Competency-Based Learning

Students will be allowed to earn credit through demonstrated mastery of required competencies rather than relying exclusively on traditional pacing and time-bound course completion. This reflects New Hampshire's longstanding commitment to competency-based education and ensures that rigor is measured by demonstrated learning rather than mere time spent.

3. Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs)

ELOs will be used as a central instructional and credit-bearing strategy, not merely an occasional supplemental tool. Properly designed ELOs allow students to connect academic expectations to relevant, applied, real-world learning experiences. For students who have become disengaged from conventional course delivery, this can be the point at which schooling becomes meaningful again.

4. Flexible Scheduling and Pacing

The program will permit individualized pacing and more flexible daily/weekly structures. For this group of students, the ability to alter how time is organized is not incidental. It is often the difference between continued disengagement and meaningful participation.

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Interdisciplinary Staffing Model

The District anticipates staffing the program through:

- a Humanities educator responsible for ELA and social studies instruction, and
- a Math educator responsible for mathematics and STEM-related instruction.

This is an efficient and appropriate design for a small cohort program. It also allows for more integrated instruction and stronger relationship-building with participating students.

V. Defined Student Population, Entry Criteria, and Safeguards

Summary Points

- Target population: approximately 16-20 students.
- Participation is not automatic; it is based on documented criteria.
- Entry factors may include:
 - credit deficiency,
 - chronic absenteeism,
 - disengagement,
 - and risk of not graduating on time.
- Participation is voluntary and reviewable.
- Students remain fully enrolled in PMHS.

Narrative

One of the strongest aspects of this proposal is that the District is not asking for broad flexibility without limits. It is presenting a clearly bounded program for a clearly defined group of students.

The District expects the program to serve approximately 16-20 students. That number is large enough to represent a meaningful need and small enough to permit close implementation oversight. This is not a school-wide reform. It is a targeted intervention for a group the District can identify with precision.

Entry Criteria

Students will be considered for the program based on documented need, including factors such as:

- credit deficiency or serious risk of becoming credit-deficient;
- chronic absenteeism or significant disengagement;
- evidence that traditional credit recovery alone is insufficient;
- risk of not graduating within four years under the current structure;
- recommendation through a documented student review process.

Review Process

Placement decisions will be made through a structured review process, such as a Student Support Team review, to ensure that:

- the student is appropriate for the program,
- the program is likely to address the student's needs,

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- and the placement decision is documented and defensible.

Safeguards

The District intends the following safeguards to remain in place:

- participation is voluntary;
- students remain fully enrolled in Pittsfield Middle High School;
- students may return to the traditional program when appropriate;
- students retain access to electives, activities, and services to the extent appropriate;
- students with disabilities continue to receive all required IEP services and protections;
- no federal protections are waived or diminished.

These safeguards matter because they make clear that this proposal is not a segregated track, not a removal from the school, and not a lowering of obligations. It is a structured pathway within the existing public high school.

VI. Why Flexibility Is Necessary

Summary Points

- The program cannot function effectively if the District is required to operate entirely within traditional time-based and schedule-based rules.
- The requested flexibility is necessary to make the model real, not merely aspirational.
- The District seeks flexibility in:
 - credit acquisition,
 - scheduling,
 - instructional delivery,
 - and the use of ELOs and competency demonstration.

Narrative

A key question for Board approvers unfamiliar with the waiver system is simple: why can the District not do this already?

The answer is that while some elements of the proposed approach can be attempted within current rules, the full model cannot be implemented with confidence, consistency, and fidelity unless the District has formal approval to organize time, credit, and instruction differently for the program. Without that approval, the District remains constrained by rules that were designed for a traditional, seat-time-driven high school model.

This proposal therefore asks for flexibility not because the District wishes to avoid accountability, but because the District wishes to implement a more accountable model for students whose current path is not working.

The Core Need for Flexibility

The District needs the ability to:

- recognize mastery and competency as a valid route to credit,
- use ELOs as a primary instructional mechanism,
- create nontraditional instructional blocks and pacing,
- and organize student schedules in ways that make persistence and re-engagement possible.

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In a traditional system, these kinds of strategies often exist only at the margins. In this proposal, they must be central in order to solve the problem the District is trying to solve.

VII. Requested Waivers and Their Rationale

(RSA 194-E:2, III(c))

Summary of Requested Flexibility

The District requests targeted flexibility tied to the Alternative Pathways Program, including:

- **Ed 306.27** - flexibility from strict time-based high school credit requirements so students may earn credit through demonstrated competency, ELOs, and performance-based learning;
- **Ed 306.04(a)(13)** - flexibility to elevate ELOs from a supplemental opportunity to a core instructional and credit-bearing strategy;
- **Ed 306.26** - flexibility in daily scheduling and time structures for participating students;
- **Ed 306.22** - flexibility to organize instruction in interdisciplinary and nontraditional ways;
- **Ed 306.14** - flexibility in how students demonstrate completion of graduation requirements, without reducing the graduation expectations themselves.

Narrative

The requested waivers are limited, purposeful, and tied directly to implementation. Each requested flexibility serves the same core purpose: to allow approximately 16-20 identified students to meet the same destination through a structure that is workable for them.

Ed 306.27 - High School Credits

The District seeks flexibility from strict time-based credit assumptions so that students may earn credit through competency demonstration, ELOs, projects, and applied learning. This is one of the most important requested waivers because the program cannot succeed if students are required to re-earn credit only through the same pacing and delivery structure that previously failed to hold their engagement.

Ed 306.04(a)(13) - Extended Learning Opportunities

New Hampshire already recognizes ELOs, but in most schools they remain supplemental rather than central. Pittsfield seeks flexibility so that ELOs can operate as a primary instructional vehicle in the program. For this student cohort, real-world, relevant, supervised learning is not an enhancement. It is one of the methods most likely to restore engagement.

Ed 306.26 - Scheduling

The District seeks flexibility in how school time is organized for participating students. Fixed bell schedules and conventional sequencing are part of the current problem for this cohort. The program needs authority to structure time more flexibly while preserving academic accountability.

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Ed 306.22 - Instructional Program

The District seeks flexibility to deliver instruction in interdisciplinary ways and through hybrid models that do not fit neatly into traditional course structures. This is particularly important for a small cohort program staffed by a Humanities teacher and a Math/STEM teacher.

Ed 306.14 - Graduation Requirements

The District is not asking to reduce graduation expectations. It is asking for flexibility in how students may demonstrate completion of those requirements. This distinction is central to the integrity of the proposal.

What the District Is Not Requesting

The District is not requesting:

- waiver of federal law,
- waiver of civil rights protections,
- waiver of IDEA or special education obligations,
- waiver of student health and safety requirements,
- or authority to award a lesser diploma.

Students in this program will still work toward a district-awarded diploma aligned to existing district and state expectations.

VIII. Why This Proposal Is Educationally Sound

Summary Points

- One-size-fits-all models do not serve all learners equally well.
- New Hampshire has long embraced student-centered, competency-based approaches.
- National research and policy trends support the use of carefully designed waivers and flexible pathways when tied to student outcomes.
- Existing innovation school examples in New Hampshire and other states demonstrate that targeted flexibility can support meaningful redesign without sacrificing accountability.

Narrative

This proposal is not an educational outlier. It is consistent with both New Hampshire's own history and broader national practice.

New Hampshire has for years been identified as a leading state in competency-based and student-centered learning. The core idea behind that movement is straightforward: students differ in how they learn, the pace at which they master content, and the types of support they need in order to succeed. A system that insists every student must learn in the same way, at the same pace, within the same structures will inevitably produce uneven results.

That is precisely the problem this proposal addresses.

Nationally, states have increasingly used waiver systems and innovation frameworks to allow districts to move beyond rigid structures when those structures impede student success. District innovation programs in other states have been used to support flexible scheduling, competency-based progression, alternative graduation pathways, and

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locally designed educational models. The consistent lesson across states is that flexibility is most effective when it is:

- clearly tied to a student-outcome problem,
- grounded in a coherent local vision,
- limited in scope,
- and paired with measurable accountability.

That is the design of Pittsfield's proposal.

IX. Accountability, Monitoring, and Measures of Success

Summary Points

- The program will be monitored closely.
- Success indicators may include:
 - credit accumulation,
 - attendance,
 - persistence,
 - graduation progress,
 - and student engagement.
- The program is structured to satisfy the review requirements of RSA 194-E and Ed 1501.

Narrative

This proposal does not ask the Board or the State to simply trust the model and hope for the best. Accountability is built into the law and into the District's design.

The District intends to monitor the program closely using student-level and program-level measures. Likely indicators include:

- improvement in student attendance,
- improved credit accumulation,
- demonstrated competency mastery,
- increased persistence toward graduation,
- and improved student engagement.

Because the program is small and targeted, the District will be able to monitor implementation closely and make adjustments in real time. The size of the cohort is a practical advantage here. It allows the program to be highly individualized without losing coherence or oversight.

The District also recognizes that under RSA 194-E and Ed 1501, innovation plans are subject to recurring review. That is appropriate. The District is not requesting permanent, unchecked discretion. It is requesting an opportunity to implement a targeted solution and demonstrate its value through actual results.

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X. Conclusion

Summary Points

- This proposal is limited, rigorous, and necessary.
- It is for approximately 16-20 students, not the entire school.
- It does not lower standards.
- It gives Pittsfield a lawful, accountable way to provide a viable path to graduation for students who do not currently have one.

Narrative

The Pittsfield School District is not bringing this proposal forward because it wants to experiment casually or depart from public education's obligations. It is bringing this proposal forward because it knows, with clarity, that approximately 16 students do not currently have a viable path to graduation within the existing structure, despite the District's efforts to support them.

The District is asking for a limited form of flexibility so that these students can remain in the public school system, remain connected to Pittsfield Middle High School, and meet the same expectations through a structure that is educationally sound and actually workable.

This is not a proposal to change what students must achieve.

It is a proposal to change how a very specific group of students may achieve it.

That is a narrower request than a wholesale redesign. It is also a more responsible one.

The Board and State are not being asked to approve something vague. They are being asked to approve a clear, targeted, measurable response to a documented problem, within a legal framework the State itself created for that purpose.

Final Statement

The District is not asking for permission to lower standards. The District is asking for the flexibility necessary to ensure that a clearly identified group of approximately 16-20 students has a viable, rigorous pathway to meet those standards within Pittsfield Middle High School.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Sandie MacDonald, Superintendent

Pittsfield School District

Dr. Erik Anderson, Principal

Pittsfield Middle High School

PITTSFIELD INNOVATION SCHOOL PROPOSAL

PUBLIC HEARING PRESENTATION

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS PROGRAM (RSA 194-E)

PITTSFIELD MIDDLE HIGH SCHOOL



WHY ARE WE HERE?

- **APPROXIMATELY 16–20 STUDENTS ARE OFF-TRACK FOR GRADUATION**
- **EXISTING INTERVENTIONS HAVE NOT BEEN SUFFICIENT**
- **THE DISTRICT SEEKS A TARGETED SOLUTION, NOT A SCHOOL-WIDE REDESIGN**

THE PROBLEM WE NEED TO SOLVE

- **STUDENTS FALL BEHIND IN CREDITS**
- **ENGAGEMENT AND ATTENDANCE DECLINE**
- **TRADITIONAL RECOVERY OPTIONS OFTEN REQUIRE STUDENTS TO RE-ENTER THE SAME STRUCTURE THAT WAS UNSUCCESSFUL**
- **SOME STUDENTS LOSE A VIABLE PATHWAY TO GRADUATION**

WHAT THIS PROPOSAL IS

- **A TARGETED ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS PROGRAM**
- **A PROGRAM HOUSED WITHIN PMHS**
- **TRADITIONAL COURSEWORK + COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING + ELOS + FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING**
- **A RIGOROUS PATHWAY TO GRADUATION**

WHAT THIS PROPOSAL IS NOT

- **NOT A SEPARATE SCHOOL**
- **NOT A LOWER DIPLOMA**
- **NOT REDUCED GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**
- **NOT A WAIVER OF FEDERAL PROTECTIONS**

WHO WOULD BE SERVED?

- **APPROXIMATELY 16–20 STUDENTS**
- **CREDIT-DEFICIENT STUDENTS**
- **STUDENTS WITH CHRONIC DISENGAGEMENT OR ABSENTEEISM**
- **STUDENTS AT RISK OF NOT GRADUATING ON TIME**

CORE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

- 1. TRADITIONAL CREDIT-BEARING COURSEWORK**
- 2. COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING**
- 3. EXTENDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES (ELOS)**
- 4. FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING AND PACING**

WHY CURRENT SUPPORTS ARE NOT ENOUGH

- **COUNSELING SUPPORTS ALREADY EXIST**
- **CREDIT RECOVERY ALREADY EXISTS**
- **ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS ARE ALREADY IN PLACE**
- **LIMITED ELO OPPORTUNITIES ALREADY EXIST**
- **SUPPORTS ALONE CANNOT SOLVE A STRUCTURAL PROBLEM**

SAME STANDARDS, DIFFERENT PATH

WHAT STAYS THE SAME

- **PITTSFIELD DIPLOMA**
- **GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**
- **ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS**
- **STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY**

WHAT CHANGES

- **HOW CREDIT MAY BE EARNED**
- **EXPANDED USE OF ELOS**
- **FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING**
- **COMPETENCY-BASED PROGRESSION**

INNOVATION SCHOOL EXAMPLES IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

- **PROSPECT MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL – GRANITE STATE ACADEMY**
- **THE BLUE SCHOOL (LANDAFF)**
- **CAWLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL (HOOKSETT)**
- **DEMONSTRATES STATE APPROVAL OF TARGETED FLEXIBILITY TIED TO STUDENT OUTCOMES**

REQUESTED FLEXIBILITY

- **COMPETENCY-BASED CREDIT ACQUISITION**
- **EXPANDED USE OF ELOS**
- **FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING**
- **INTERDISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION**
- **ALTERNATIVE DEMONSTRATIONS OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

STUDENT SAFEGUARDS

- **STUDENTS REMAIN PMHS STUDENTS**
- **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**
- **STUDENTS MAY RETURN TO THE TRADITIONAL PATHWAY**
- **IEP PROTECTIONS REMAIN INTACT**
- **ACCESS TO ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES REMAINS**

ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

- **ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT**
- **CREDIT ACCUMULATION**
- **COMPETENCY MASTERY**
- **STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**
- **GRADUATION PROGRESS**
- **ONGOING STATE REVIEW AND MONITORING**

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR PITTSFIELD

- **SMALL RURAL DISTRICTS CANNOT EASILY CREATE SEPARATE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS**
- **INNOVATION STATUS PROVIDES TARGETED FLEXIBILITY**
- **KEEPS STUDENTS CONNECTED TO PMHS**
- **CREATES A VIABLE PATHWAY TO GRADUATION**

INNOVATION SCHOOL APPROVAL TIMELINE

LOCAL PLANNING & PUBLIC HEARING



SCHOOL BOARD APPROVAL



NHDOE REVIEW



STATE BOARD HEARING



PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION



ANNUAL REVIEW & ACCOUNTABILITY

IMPORTANT CLARIFICATION

APPROVAL DOES NOT:

- **CREATE A NEW SCHOOL**
- **CLOSE EXISTING PROGRAMS**
- **CHANGE GRADUATION STANDARDS**

APPROVAL DOES:

- **AUTHORIZE A SMALL ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS PROGRAM WITHIN PMHS**
- **SERVE APPROXIMATELY 16-20 STUDENTS**
- **PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY IN METHOD, NOT LENIENCY IN EXPECTATION**

QUESTIONS & PUBLIC COMMENT

- **QUESTIONS FROM THE BOARD**
- **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**
- **DISCUSSION**

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED

- **APPROVE SUBMISSION OF THE INNOVATION SCHOOL PROPOSAL TO THE NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION UNDER RSA 194-E.**

Innovation School Plan Submission and Approval Process⁽¹⁾

STEP 1 - SCHOOL DISTRICT SUBMISSION

The School District submits a School Innovation Plan (ISP) to the local School Board addressing each relevant component of RSA 194-E:2 (III).

STEP 2 - LOCAL APPROVAL

Upon receipt of a ISP, the local School Board shall hold a public hearing on the ISP. Within 60 days of receipt of the ISP, the local School Board shall either:

- (1) Approve the ISP and seek designation from the State Board of Education (SBOE) under Ed 1501.04; or
- (2) Reject the ISP and provide to the school(s) a written explanation for the basis of the decision as described under RSA 194-E:2(I)(d).

STEP 3 - STATE REVIEW

Upon approval of an ISP, the local School Board shall submit the ISP to the New Hampshire Department of Education (NHED) - Bureau of Educational Opportunities (BEO) for review and comment. Within 45 days after receipt of the ISP, the BEO shall issue written feedback to the local School Board using the criteria identified in RSA 194-E:3(III), at which point the local School Board may elect to withdraw and resubmit the ISP. After review by NHED, the local School Board(s) shall submit the ISP to the State Board of Education (SBOE) for review.

STEP 4 - STATE APPROVAL

The SBOE board shall hold a public hearing on the ISP, during which a representative from the BEO and a representative from the local School Board shall be present. Within 60 days of receipt of the ISP, the SBOE shall either approve or reject the ISP based on the elements set forth in RSA 194-E, III-IV, and shall provide written explanation of the decision to the local School Board. If the SBOE rejects the ISP, the local School Board may resubmit an amended ISP to NHED at any time after rejection.

(1) - In accordance with RSA 194-E:2 Local Planning and Approval and RSA 194-E:3 State Approval.



Innovation School Proposal (RSA 194-E) - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What is an Innovation School?

An Innovation School is a public-school program authorized under RSA 194-E that allows a district to request targeted flexibility from certain state administrative rules in order to better meet student needs.

Innovation School designation does not remove accountability, reduce standards, or exempt schools from federal law. It provides a structured process for implementing innovative educational approaches with State Board approval and ongoing oversight.

2. Is Pittsfield creating a new school?

No. This proposal does not create a new school. It establishes a small Alternative Pathways Program within Pittsfield Middle High School for a limited number of students.

Participating students remain enrolled as Pittsfield Middle High School students and continue to earn a Pittsfield diploma.

3. Why is the District proposing this program?

The District has identified approximately 16–20 students who are currently off-track for graduation despite existing interventions and supports.

The proposal is intended to provide a viable pathway to graduation for students who have not been successful within the traditional structure while maintaining academic rigor and accountability.

4. How many students would participate?

The District anticipates serving approximately 16–20 students.

This is not a school-wide redesign and is not intended for the majority of students.

5. Who would be eligible?

Students may be considered based on documented factors such as:

- Credit deficiency
- Chronic absenteeism
- Significant disengagement from school
- Risk of not graduating on time
- Evidence that traditional interventions have not been sufficient

Placement decisions would be made through a structured review process.

6. Does this lower graduation requirements?

No. Students will still be required to meet Pittsfield School District graduation requirements.

The proposal changes how students may earn credit and demonstrate learning. It does not change what students are expected to learn.

7. Will students receive a different diploma?

No. Students participating in the Alternative Pathways Program will earn the same Pittsfield School District diploma as all other graduates.

8. What would instruction look like?

The program combines:

- Traditional coursework
- Competency-based learning
- Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs)
- Flexible scheduling and pacing

The goal is to create a more personalized pathway while maintaining high expectations.

9. What are Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs)?

ELOs are structured learning experiences that occur outside the traditional classroom.

Examples may include:

- Internships
- Job-shadowing experiences
- Community-based projects
- Career and technical learning experiences
- Independent projects aligned to academic competencies

All ELOs must be supervised, documented, and connected to academic requirements.

10. Will students still have access to sports, clubs, and school activities?

Yes. Students remain enrolled at Pittsfield Middle High School and may continue participating in school activities, athletics, and extracurricular opportunities, subject to normal eligibility requirements.

11. What about students with disabilities?

All federal and state special education requirements remain fully in effect.

Nothing in this proposal waives or reduces protections under IDEA, Section 504, or other applicable laws.

Students with disabilities will continue receiving all required services and supports.

12. What specific flexibility is the District requesting?

The District is requesting targeted flexibility related to:

- Competency-based credit acquisition
- Expanded use of ELOs
- Flexible scheduling structures
- Alternative instructional delivery models
- Alternative methods for demonstrating graduation competencies

The District is not seeking flexibility from federal laws or student protections.

13. How will student success be measured?

The District intends to monitor:

- Attendance
- Credit accumulation
- Competency attainment
- Student engagement
- Persistence toward graduation
- Graduation outcomes

The program will also be subject to State review under RSA 194-E.

14. Is this similar to other Innovation Schools in New Hampshire?

Yes. The State Board of Education has previously approved Innovation School plans for schools such as:

- Prospect Mountain High School's Granite State Academy
- The Blue School in Landaff
- Cawley Middle School in Hooksett

These examples demonstrate that New Hampshire supports targeted educational innovation when tied to improved student outcomes.

15. What happens next?

The process includes:

1. Public Hearing
2. School Board Review and Vote
3. Submission to the New Hampshire Department of Education
4. Department Review and Recommendation
5. State Board of Education Hearing
6. Program Implementation (if approved)

16. What is the most important thing to understand about this proposal?

This proposal is about maintaining high expectations while providing a different pathway for students who are not currently succeeding within the traditional structure.

The proposal offers flexibility in method, not leniency in expectation.

Students will still be expected to meet Pittsfield School District graduation requirements and earn a Pittsfield diploma.