

Record of the Marblehead School Committee Meeting

Thursday May 15, 2025

Marblehead Brown School Library

Members Present: Jennifer Schaeffner, Sarah Fox, Alison Taylor, Brian Ota, Al Williams

Student Spotlight and Opening Remarks (00:00:00–00:12:00)

a. Meeting called to order at 6:00 PM on May 15, 2025; agenda modified to move student spotlight to beginning

b. Village School peer leaders presented their programs:

- Six sixth-grade students mentored fourth graders, researched social topics, and participated in campus cleanup
- School newspaper club published monthly editions covering news, sports, and comics
- Daily student announcements delivered by rotating students from all grades
- Composting program implemented during lunch with students serving as "compost rangers"
- Monthly community meetings held for grades 4-6
- Village Organic Garden provided learning opportunities and donated produce to Marblehead Food Bank

c. School spirit and recognition programs:

- Duck Dollars earned for respectful, responsible, and safe behavior
- "George the Chair" weekly achievement award for classes demonstrating core values
- Spirit days included themed dress-up days
- Farewell celebration held for retiring custodian Mr. Rick after 20 years
- Thank you teacher campaign organized during Teacher Appreciation Week

Public Comment (00:12:00–00:37:00)

a. Staff recognition for town meeting venue change logistics

- Todd Bloodgood detailed moving 1,700 chairs from Veterans Middle School to high school field house with 30 facilities staff and DPW
- Administration thanked custodians, IT staff, and town clerks for managing venue change and record turnout
- Michael Lavender praised rapid breakdown and restoration while MCAS testing continued

- b. Sarah Polladian supported MTA curriculum resolution, displaying materials she characterized as antisemitic including Jewish star shaped like dollar sign and materials about Zionism, arguing resources posed lawsuit risks and harm to Jewish educators and students
- c. Karen Tal-Malkof thanked committee for flag policy, criticized media coverage as biased, noted BLM flag remained while Israeli flag was removed and not returned
- d. Mary LeBlanc addressed recess policy as part of comprehensive schedule redesign for common planning time and DESE's 900-hour requirement, cautioned proposed policy contained operational language under superintendent authority
- e. MEA co-presidents opposed MTA proclamation
- Sally Shevory stated MEA already disagreed with MTA's Gaza position, characterized proclamation as politically motivated, criticized following legal counsel over educator partnership
 - Jonathan Heller questioned timing since MTA resources were removed by March 2024, read MEA's December 2023 statement rejecting MTA's geopolitical motion and reaffirming commitment against antisemitism and religious intolerance

District Updates and Superintendent Report (00:38:00–00:43:00)

- a. Staff appointments and program updates
- Gloria Sen appointed as new human resources manager; Sayonara appointed as new executive assistant and registrar
 - 378 students took 933 AP exams this year, 153 more than previous year; total increase of 451 exams since 2014
 - METCO Director K.J. Johnson received Massachusetts House of Representatives recognition for advocacy work with Boston-based students
- b. Upcoming events: Brown Elementary Fun Run (May 22), grade six Bourndale trip, senior signing day (May 29, 12:30 PM), spring choral concert (May 20, 7 PM), MHS performing arts banquet (May 22, 6 PM), culture feast (May 30, 5 PM)

Consent Agenda and Bills Approval (00:43:00–00:44:00)

- a. A motion was made by Sarah Fox and seconded by Alison Taylor to approve the meeting minutes from March 6, 2025 and May 6, 2025. The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Al Williams, Brian Ota, Sarah Fox, Alison Taylor, Jenn Schaeffner.

School Improvement Plans Presentation and Discussion (00:44:00–01:17:00)

- a. Brown Elementary presented 2025-26 improvement plan with four focus areas:

- Teaching and learning: deepening MTSS implementation, facilitating Wit and Wisdom instruction, strengthening ELA and math intervention blocks
- Professional Learning Communities as foundation for student success through data discussions
- SEL curriculum: continued Wayfinder program implementation with Responsive Classroom practices
- Professional culture: integrating staff groups into unified identity, ensuring accessibility through DCAP implementation

b. Village School presented improvement plan structured around three focal areas:

- Teaching and learning: using math and literacy data to inform MTSS instruction for all learner levels through data meetings and WIN blocks
- Professional culture: building educator leadership through learning walks, classroom observations, and teacher leader collaboration
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion: creating belonging through counselor partnerships, Wayfinder implementation, morning meetings, and positive behavior programs

c. Veterans Middle School outlined three MTSS-focused goals:

- WIN block refinement: shifting from general assistance to structured interventions for at least half of participating students using assessment data
- Wayfinder program continuation with Waypoint surveys for SEL data and Tier 2 interventions through guidance counselors
- Tier one instructional practices through peer observations, with 80% of teachers visiting colleagues' classrooms
- Students in performing arts programs unable to access WIN blocks during school receive interventions through restructured after-school homework club 2:30-3:00 PM

d. Committee discussion clarified DCAP (District Curriculum Accommodation Plan) provides accommodations to all students in general education classrooms and requested improved website accessibility for parents. A motion was made by Sarah Fox and seconded by Brian Ota to approve the school improvement plans for Village School, Brown Elementary School, and Veterans Middle School. The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Sarah Fox, Al Williams, Jenn Schaeffner, Alison Taylor, Brian Ota.

International Trip Proposal Spain Morocco (01:17:00–01:37:00)

a. Leslie Richmond presented a Spain-Morocco trip for February 2026 targeting Spanish, French, and Latin students

- Itinerary: Boston to Malaga, Granada, Sevilla in Spain, then ferry to Chefchaouen, Fez, Volubilis, Rabat, and Casablanca in Morocco

- Morocco selected as former French colony with Roman heritage sites accessible to all three language programs
- Students would engage in peer education with Spanish students teaching about Spain and French students about French colonial history

b. Trip logistics and safety measures confirmed

- 14-40 students, \$4,000-\$4,400 cost, double/triple occupancy accommodations
- Application process prioritizing seniors/juniors with 200-word statement in target language and teacher recommendation
- Dan Richards committed to chaperoning; threat levels for both countries at level 2 (equivalent to Western Europe)
- Alternative France-Spain itinerary prepared as backup for April 2026
- Insurance package includes medical, evacuation, and trip coverage with optional "cancel for any reason" option A motion was made by Sarah Fox and seconded by Alison Taylor to approve the Spain Morocco trip for February 2026. The motion passed 5-0, with votes in favor: Sarah Fox, Al Williams, Jenn Schaeffner, Alison Taylor, Brian Ota.

Village School Scoreboard Donation Discussion (01:37:00–01:57:00)

a. Jennifer Schaeffner presented Marblehead Youth Football's proposal to donate a replacement scoreboard for Village School's Hopkins Field

- Current scoreboard has been non-functional for years
- New scoreboard would serve football, soccer, and lacrosse for high school JV teams
- Includes National Grand Bank advertising, compliant with Policy KHB guidelines

b. Shelley Bedrosian explained funding coordination with Recreation and Parks' \$500,000 Gatchell Field lighting project

- Project costs reduced to ~\$79,000 through collaboration with Marblehead Youth Baseball (\$50,000 donation), revolving funds, and Marblehead Electric Light labor
- Youth Football's potential lighting contribution could be redirected if school committee funded scoreboard independently
- Recreation and Parks needed to proceed within 30 days

c. Sarah Fox proposed alternative funding approach using school district revolving funds (~\$4,000-\$5,000) to free up donation for other town projects

- Superintendent confirmed appropriate revolving accounts available
- Committee discussed timing challenges and coordination between projects

A motion was made by Alison Taylor and seconded by Brian Ota to accept the donation from Marblehead Youth Football for the scoreboard at Village School's Hopkins Field. The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Sarah Fox, Al Williams, Jenn Schaeffner, Alison Taylor, Brian Ota.

Superintendent Mid Cycle Evaluation (01:57:00–02:13:00)

a. Jennifer Schaeffner read the complete mid-cycle formative evaluation report for Superintendent John Robidoux into the record

- Professional practice goal: "some progress" rating
- started staff accountability reports but needs complete analysis and recommendations for budget processes
- Student learning goal: "significant progress" rating
- successful Brown School Student Leadership Program implementation, committee requested similar programs at all schools
- District improvement goal: good detail in proposed plan but all outcomes must be measurable with consistent communication and stakeholder feedback

b. Superintendent thanked committee for meaningful feedback, acknowledged collaborative effort needed from administrative team and community, and emphasized importance of school committee support in the superintendent role

c. Next steps for district improvement plan: incorporate central office feedback, send to broader administrative team, survey staff and community partners, create final three-year living document connecting to school improvement plans and budget decisions A motion was made by Sarah Fox and seconded by [Name] to approve the mid-cycle evaluation report for Superintendent John Robidoux. The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Sarah Fox, Al Williams, Jenn Schaeffner, Alison Taylor, Brian Ota.

A motion was made by [Name] and seconded by [Name] to enter into contract negotiations to offer a transition from interim position to permanent position for the superintendent. The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Sarah Fox, Al Williams, Jenn Schaeffner, Alison Taylor, Brian Ota.

Recess Policy Second Reading (02:13:00–02:38:00)

a. Superintendent presented revised recess policy draft:

- Grades K-5: minimum two scheduled recess periods (morning and afternoon)
- Grade 6: one afternoon recess period
- Equitable access for all students; cannot be withheld as punishment
- Supervised by school staff for safe, inclusive environment

b. Policy development status and next steps:

- Further consideration needed to differentiate grade-level requirements
- K-3 students preferred two recesses; grades 4-6 showed mixed preferences
- Grades 5-6 leaned toward one potentially longer recess period
- Committee agreed to continue development through subcommittee work before final approval

c. Historical context and contractual obligations:

- August 2021: community pushback restored morning recess, formed task force
- Recess task force (parents, teachers, administrators, school committee member) unanimously supported two recesses
- Unit A contract Article 10, Section B requires elementary teachers take classes to playground during morning sessions
- Elementary principals initially opposed removing morning recess; data analysis confirmed two recesses legally compliant with state requirements

Committee Proclamation Regarding MTA Curriculum Materials (02:38:00–03:05:00)

a. Jennifer Schaeffner presented a resolution regarding Massachusetts Teachers Association curriculum materials on the Israel-Gaza conflict, modeled after Brookline School Committee's May 1st resolution

- Resolution addressed accusations of antisemitism over past two years following completed district investigation
- MTA assembled resources after October 7, 2023 Hamas attack, with 67 of 89 resources allegedly characterizing Israel as illegitimate state
- Materials included Zinn Education Project resources, Museum of Palestinian People virtual tour, and pro-Palestinian books/documentaries
- Marblehead Education Association had already rejected MTA's position in January 2024 statement

b. Proposed resolution called for cautioning district staff about MTA materials and reaffirming instructional materials policy preventing discriminatory content

- Referenced criticism from Massachusetts Special Commission on Combating Antisemitism
- Next steps included sharing proclamation with staff, state commission, DESE, and Attorney General's Civil Rights Office if adopted

c. Committee members expressed divided opinions on resolution necessity

- Brian Ota opposed, trusting superintendent/assistant superintendent curriculum oversight, saw resolution as inflammatory
- Sarah Fox supported as logical next step following investigation, citing standard practice across Massachusetts districts
- Al Williams questioned whether resolution was additive, expressed trust in teachers' judgment
- Alison Taylor compared to previous racism proclamations, questioned viewing resolution as divisive

d. Administrative response confirmed no MTA materials present in district schools

- Superintendent Robidoux and Julia Ferreira expressed confidence in existing curriculum review processes
- Resolution would serve as committee statement rather than change administrative processes or policies A motion was made by Sarah Fox and seconded by Alison Taylor to approve the proclamation regarding MTA curriculum materials on the Israel-Gaza conflict. The motion passed 3-2, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Sarah Fox, Alison Taylor, and votes against: Al Williams, Brian Ota, .

School Committee Operating Protocols and Ethics (03:05:00–03:20:00)

a. Jennifer Schaeffner presented revised operating protocols organized into governance, operations, communications, and professional development sections based on consultant Alicia Mallon's recommendations

- Protocols condensed from six pages with signature section added for all committee members and superintendent
- Language revised to clarify decisions should be based on what is best for students
- Public comment procedures confirmed: three-minute individual limit within 15-minute total timeframe
- Agreement to reference existing policies rather than restate policy language to reduce verbosity

b. Committee discussed balancing individual viewpoints and community perspectives in decision-making

- Language clarified around representing both individual and community viewpoints
- Referenced item 13 regarding keeping open mind, considering public input, avoiding predetermined decisions

c. Brian Ota raised enforcement concerns about protocol violations

- Questioned consequences for members who violate protocols

- Existing accountability mechanism relies on members holding each other accountable
- Committee acknowledged current ability to disagree professionally without personal conflict

d. Superintendent suggested adding Robert's Rules of Order reference as foundational framework

- Committee agreed to include Robert's Rules as complement to operating protocols

e. Committee reviewed separate MASC code of ethics document

- Sarah Fox requested clarification of subjective phrase "play politics"
- Suggested adding examples: acting for political/personal gain, spreading rumors, withholding information
- Distinguished between local ethics code and mandatory state ethics requirements with legal enforcement

MEA Administration Safety Committee Update (03:20:00–03:46:00)

a. Joint safety committee with up to 10 MEA members and 10 administrators held four meetings to address safety concerns and develop collaborative solutions across all schools

b. Safety initiatives implemented across four categories:

- Student safety: de-escalation training for all staff, consistent bullying prevention forms, calming spaces with usage logs, 504 process checklists
- Mental health: safety assessments for suicidal ideation/self-harm, threat assessments, substance abuse protocols, NARCAN policy review, manifestation determination checklists
- Staff safety: restraint training, emergency response protocols, MTSS/PBIS/RTI training for new staff, common incident reporting, mandatory 48-hour debriefing after behavioral incidents
- Building safety: full evacuation drills to off-site locations with law enforcement, enhanced loudspeaker systems and flashing lights, ongoing security camera placement, reinforced exterior door protocols, monthly safety meetings with first responders

c. Outcomes and implementation:

- Restraints down approximately 85% from previous year
- All protocols consolidated into single digital repository replacing "red book" crisis manual
- Wayfinder curriculum continuing with Tier 2 interventions planned
- All protocols to be introduced during first two professional development days of next school year
- Committee to continue meeting periodically for protocol review and updates

Tomos Tackle Donation Approval (03:46:00–03:52:00)

a. Donation request and approval

- Superintendent requested approval to accept gift cards from Tomos Tackle (104 Wharf Street Salem) valued at approximately \$200
- Three gift cards for Bourndale trip fishing activities: largest fish prize, second place prize, and raffle prize
- Gift cards enable students to purchase fishing gear for continued use after trip A motion was made by Alison Taylor and seconded by Sarah Fox to accept the donation of gift cards from Tomos Tackle valued at approximately \$200 for the Bourndale trip. The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Al Williams, Brian Ota, Alison Taylor, Jennifer Schaeffner, Sarah Fox.

b. Executive session transition

- Committee requested photographs be taken during Bourndale trip for communications A motion was made by Brian Ota and seconded by Sarah Fox to enter Executive Session pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 30A Section 21A(2) to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with non-union personnel without intent to return to open session. The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Al Williams, Brian Ota, Sarah Fox, Alison Taylor, Jennifer Schaeffner.

Meeting adjourned at 8:16PM.