

Record of the Marblehead School Committee Meeting

Thursday April 17, 2025

Marblehead High School Library

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

Opening and Introductions (00:00:00–00:02:00)

a. Meeting called to order at 6:05 PM with Chair Jennifer Schaeffner, members Alison Taylor (via Zoom), Sarah Fox, and Brian Ota present; Al Williams absent

b. Student representative updates

- Quarter three ended, senior projects began with spring presentation planned
- Recent events: "Hadestown" musical and All Jazz concert completed
- Spring sports records as of April 11 reported
- AP exams begin in 2.5 weeks

Committee Commendations (00:02:00–00:04:00)

a. Steve Kwiatek, Director of Technology, commended for exceptional service in professional development sessions and going above and beyond expectations without seeking credit

b. Katie Freegon from Village School commended for coordinating the Treble Chorus program

- Coordinates annual select choral program for grades 4-6 students performing in Northeast Treble concert
- Praised for creating amazing experience and handling logistics including signups and transportation

c. Eric Williamson recognized as director of Northeast Treble concert for phenomenally coordinating approximately 200 students from multiple locations with exceptional performance quality

Public Comment (00:04:00–00:20:00)

a. Student Kira opposed proposed flag/banner policy

- Removing displays would "dehumanize" art and make hallways bland
- Student artwork in hallways provides recognition and pride
- Removing supportive banners from classrooms would harm student education and morale
- Requested student and parent polls for broader input

b. Margaret Clark criticized policy timeline and scope

- Timeline too rushed with insufficient community notification
- Language creates "insurmountable roadblock" to displaying anything
- Concerns about impact on required workplace posters and instructional materials
- Urged focus on acceptance rather than cultural erasure and broader community surveys

c. Naila (remote) requested viewpoint neutrality clause addition

- Community spent 18 months debating pride flags, BLM banners, Israeli flags
- Symbolic displays are subjective—same symbols viewed as inclusive or exclusive by different community members
- Proposed framework with three criteria: values-based (district mission alignment), curriculum-based (educational integration), viewpoint neutral (universal message interpretation)
- Framework would provide clear decision-making metrics while allowing reconsideration

d. Flag policy public comments raised constitutional and implementation concerns:

- Angus McClure questioned retention of symbolic display language, argued petition prohibition was unconstitutional, and asked how committee would handle teacher non-compliance
- Aaron Alberman argued committee lacked First Amendment understanding and recommended no policy, stating existing management was adequate
- Additional speakers urged tabling the proposal, questioned removing enforcement from administration, and requested implementation procedures before voting

Public Hearing for School Choice (00:20:00–00:48:00)

- Superintendent explained districts automatically participate unless opting out annually by June 1st
- School choice students generate \$5,000 versus \$18,000 for resident students
- Chair noted Marblehead has never participated and expressed concerns about fiscal and operational impacts despite potential diversity benefits

- Motion by Chair, seconded by Alison Taylor, that Marblehead Public Schools not participate in school choice program for 2025-2026 school year
- Motion passed 4-0 (votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Alison Taylor, Sarah Fox, Brian Ota; Al Williams absent)

Student Donation Presentation (00:48:00–00:53:00)

a. Jared Kaplowich, Senior class president, presented Class of 2025 donation proposal totaling \$6,969.44

- New graduation banner (\$875)
- vinyl with wind slits to replace Class of 2017 indoor banner
- Three water bottle filling stations (\$6,094.44) replacing outdated Class of 2013 units at cafeteria and A wing locations

b. Class of 2025 will order banner through Final Graphic Works; facilities department will order/install water fillers with class reimbursement

c. Motion by Sarah Fox, seconded by [Name], to approve the donation in the amount of \$6,969.44. Motion passed 4-0, with votes in favor: Alison Taylor, Brian Ota, Sarah Fox, Jennifer Schaeffner, and Al Williams was absent from the meeting

District Updates (00:53:00–01:03:00)

a. Administrative changes and recent programs

- Matt Fox, longtime middle school principal, named finalist for Principal at West Middle School in Andover; district working on replacement procedures
- Julia Ferreira and PTO brought Project Reboot to district focusing on safe technology usage with presentations for parents and students
- High school musical "Hedestown Teen Edition" performed successfully as final show for seniors

b. Athletic and school activities

- Unified Track completed three meets; superintendent praised inclusivity of Unified sports program
- Superintendent judged Kelly Delaney's Culinary Arts Chopped Challenge where student teams created dishes from secret ingredients
- Seventh graders performed original poetry at "Holmes at the Pack" event

- Village School planning Earth Day service project to clean school areas and neighborhoods

c. Kindergarten orientations and elementary events

- Kindergarten orientations held at Brown School and Glover School for class of 2038
- Over 100 kindergartners performed outside at Brown School coordinated by music teacher Eileen Demore
- Third grade parents welcomed to Village School to learn about transition to fourth grade
- Chair expressed interest in expanding Unified Games; superintendent explained Unified Sports pairs differently abled students with typically developing students and requires meeting Special Olympics criteria

Schedule Bills Approval (01:03:00–01:04:00)

a. Sarah Fox moved to approve schedule bills for \$958,360.52, seconded by [Name]

- Motion passed 4–0 (Alison Taylor, Brian Ota, Sarah Fox, Jennifer Schaeffner in favor; Al Williams absent)

b. Meeting proceeded to school committee communication items

- Technical issue addressed with Megan before continuing

Gender Violence and Sexual Assault Awareness Initiatives (01:04:00–01:24:00)

a. Megan Sweeney (Power Up founder) presented on sexual assault awareness initiatives

- Described organization's work since October 2023 with faith leaders, activists, survivors, and law enforcement
- Shared personal survivor experience and emphasized cellular-level impact of assault
- Argued that pretending communities are immune to gender violence perpetuates harm
- Noted Select Board and Board of Health already approved proclamations for April Sexual Assault Awareness Month
- Secured support from Representative Armini, Senator Crichton, Essex County Commission, and district attorney's office

b. Proposed expanding current school programs beyond existing menstrual equity and senior year YWCA consent education

- Recommended expanding YWCA programming to earlier grades since survivors were assaulted before senior year

- Suggested student accountability pledge events, gender awareness professional development workshops, and feminist student organization sponsorship
- Committee supported being proactive and including all genders in programming

c. Motion by Sarah Fox, seconded by [Name] to approve Sexual Assault Awareness Month proclamation for April 2025

- Motion passed 4–0: Brian Ota, Sarah Fox, Alison Taylor, Jennifer Schaeffner in favor; Al Williams absent
- Proclamation acknowledged national statistics (1 in 3 women, 1 in 6 men experience sexual violence) and recognized organizations like HAWC
- Chair committed to signing proclamation, sharing with press, and following up on implementation

Flag Policy Second Reading and Discussion (01:24:00–01:49:00)

a. Chair announced sexual assault awareness resources in district newsletter and conducted second reading of flag policy IMDB

- Policy read with "similar symbolic displays" language removed per previous vote
- Policy applies only to flags and banners permanently affixed to walls, not student artwork or rotating displays

b. Committee member proposed three policy additions for clarity

- Explicit exemptions for sports banners, graduation banners, student artwork, personal attire, locker decorations, and personal items
- Positive affirmations language clarifying welcoming messages and basic signage would not be removed
- Heritage month recognition language allowing banners during African American History Month, Women's History Month, Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, LGBTQ Pride Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Native American Heritage Month

c. Chair committed to incorporating suggested modifications and seeking legal counsel review before third reading

- Requested written versions of proposed additions from committee members
- Draft will be sent to legal counsel for review before next meeting

English Language Learner Curriculum Approval (01:49:00–02:01:00)

a. DESE monitoring found district did not consistently support ESL curriculum for all English proficiency levels in high school, prompting curriculum review process

- Office of Teaching and Learning inherited English learner program in January 2024
- Selected Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's English 3D curriculum after review process
- Curriculum reflects linguistically and culturally sustainable pedagogies

b. Implementation details for grades 7-12 starting next school year in separate ESL classes

- Professional development already begun with positive student response from piloted lessons
- District serves 17 English learner students
- K-6 uses integrated Wit and Wisdom lessons; grades 7-12 needed differentiated curriculum
- Program receives Title III federal funding for Parent Advisory Council, professional development, tutoring, and coordinator stipend

c. Motion by Sarah Fox, seconded by [Name], to approve English 3D curriculum as new English learner education curriculum for grades 7-12 in Marblehead Public Schools. Motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Brian Ota, Sarah Fox, Alison Taylor, Jennifer Schaeffner, and Al Williams was absent from the meeting.

Superintendent Evaluation Workshop Scheduling (02:01:00–02:06:00)

a. Scheduling coordination using Google survey due to member conflicts (Al Williams unavailable until May 3rd)

b. Evaluation timeline established:

- April 28th deadline for committee members to complete individual evaluation forms
- Alison Taylor assigned to summarize stakeholder survey results
- Sarah Fox to assist with locating and distributing evaluation forms
- May 8th workshop date confirmed
- Evaluation presentation and vote scheduled for May 15th meeting

c. Executive session for contract negotiation planned for day after May 15th meeting rather than extending regular meeting

Recreation and Parks Memorandum of Understanding (02:06:00–02:13:00)

a. MOU approval and facility arrangements

- Current MOU required only date changes, proposed to run April 15, 2025 to August 31, 2026
- Parks and Recreation will use Glover School during inclement weather instead of transporting children
- Former library space at Glover School identified as potential indoor space for rainy days

b. Former library space cleanup and current status

- Superintendent to work with maintenance and Parks/Recreation to clear remaining materials
- Metal shelving disposal via free dumpsters with scrap revenue to disposal company
- Non-metal items disposal costs billed back to library
- Two classrooms used for town scanning equipment storage, one for school storage
- Chair expressed frustration that library should complete cleanup rather than leaving items behind

c. A motion was made by Sarah Fox and seconded by Brian Ota to approve the memorandum of understanding with the Recreation and Parks Department for the period from April 17, 2025 through August 31, 2026

- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Alison Taylor, Sarah Fox, Brian Ota, Jenn Schaeffner

School Committee Subcommittee and Liaison Updates (02:13:00–02:28:00)

a. Communication Subcommittee transitioned from coffee meetings to office hours format

- New monthly office hours with two school committee members (not from same subcommittee) for one hour with public Q&A
- Committee supported starting in April/May with advance notice through district newsletter
- Proposed school-based meetings at individual buildings for following school year to increase parent participation

b. Facebook page development addressed commenting policy concerns

- Mixed opinions on allowing comments versus following MASC guidelines prohibiting comments to avoid open meeting law violations
- Three-tier communication strategy: static website for permanent information, monthly newsletter for events, Facebook for immediate announcements

- Committee agreed to seek updated MASC and legal counsel guidance before finalizing approach

c. Budget forums proposed to address community misinformation and Finance subcommittee updates provided

- Alison Taylor suggested May budget forum with one-page process explanation after town meeting
- Chair supported quarterly forums on different subjects for transparency
- Finance Committee unanimously recommended town budget and override article for HVAC addition to roof project
- Capital requests for Glover School playground equipment and Peck auditorium seat reupholstering recommended for approval
- Roof project ceiling sealant test patch completed at vendor expense with two-week review period

Meeting adjourned at 8:31 pm