

Marblehead School Committee Minutes

Date: 8/21/25

Time: 6:00 PM

Location: Brown School Library, 40 Baldwin Rd, Marblehead, MA, 01945

Members Present:

Al Williams

Jennifer Schaeffner

Kate Schmeckpeper

Henry Gwazda

Members Joining Remotely: none

Members Absent: none

Minutes Created By: Henry Gwazda

Agenda Link:

<https://marbleheadma.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Marblehead-School-Committee-AMEND-ED-Agenda-8-21-25.pdf>

Video Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpbUq8Sw0_M

Meeting Summary:

I. Initial Business and Public Comment:

The meeting began with a moment of silence to honor an 8th-grade student who passed away. Sarah Fox raised concerns about the potential reopening of collective bargaining without proper public session and emphasized the need for transparency and adherence to ethical processes. Fox also highlighted the alarming youth behavior risk survey results, urging the community to address the issue collectively and not sweep it under the rug. Tom McMahon expressed skepticism about the accuracy of the survey results and stressed that the problem is a cultural issue in Marblehead, requiring a comprehensive approach involving schools, parents, and local authorities.

II. District Updates (00:10:00–00:14:00)

A. Interim Superintendent expressed condolences to Savannah's family and reported counselors positioned at Veterans Middle School and high school to support students, staff, and community partners

B. Facilities upgrades nearing completion:

1. Glover Elementary HVAC system installed and being tested
2. Playground completion delayed due to equipment delivery issues
3. Veterans Middle School auditorium renovations completed
4. Village School scoreboard installed
5. District painting, floor refinishing, and exterior landscaping completed

C. District acquired first electric van for fleet alignment with green Marblehead initiatives; staff preparation activities scheduled for the week with student return on Wednesday

III. Consent Action and Agenda Items (00:14:00–00:16:00)

- A. A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Henry Gwazda to approve the identified schedules of bills totaling \$918,034.58
 - 1. The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Kate Schmeckpeper, Al Williams
- B. A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Henry Gwazda to approve the meeting minutes of August 4th and August 7th of the school committee
 - 1. Jennifer Schaeffner noted edits needed regarding open meeting law requirements including meeting location and documents used
 - 2. The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Kate Schmeckpeper, Al Williams
- C. Chair clarified building subcommittee meeting minutes are approved by the subcommittee itself rather than the school committee, acknowledging placing them on the agenda was an error

IV. School Committee Communication and Discussion Items

A. **Handbook Updates and Bullying Prevention Plan (00:17:00–00:35:00)**

- 1. Handbook language updated regarding student surveys and parental consent
 - a) Changed from "notify parents" to "obtain consent from parents and guardians" to operationalize policy ILD
 - b) District would align with NASC guidelines requiring family consent with opt-out options
 - c) Provides blanket consent through handbook acknowledgment while maintaining individual survey opt-out rights
- 2. Committee concerns and approval
 - a) Jennifer Schaeffner objected to blanket consent approach and questioned its legality
 - b) Concerns raised about policy ILD not being formally approved yet and timing with school starting Wednesday
 - c) A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Henry Gwazda to approve the proposed updates to the NPS handbooks regarding Notification of Rights under the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment
 - d) The motion passed 3–1 with one abstention, with votes in favor: Henry Gwazda, Kate Schmeckpeper, Al Williams, abstained: Jenn Shaeffner.
- 3. Bullying prevention plan updates and approval
 - a) Plan reviewed by attorney Matt McAvoy with mostly grammatical changes
 - b) Language updated: "perpetrator" to "aggressor" and "victim" to "target" per Massachusetts statute

- c) Professional development training added through ARCs ED training and building presentations
- d) Correction noted that parents would be notified before investigations begin, not after completion
- e) A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Henry Gwazda to accept the proposed updates with the discussed edit to the MPS bullying intervention and prevention plan
- f) The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Kate Schmeckpeper, Al Williams

B. High School Roof Project Committee Formation (00:35:00–00:44:00)

- 1. Chair proposed appointing Ralph Wallace and Sam Altruiter as community members to high school roof subcommittee with Henry Gwazda as chair per policy PDE
- 2. Jennifer Schaeffner raised concerns about appointment process:
 - a) No public advertising seen for positions
 - b) No background information on proposed appointees in committee materials
 - c) Emphasized need for robust community solicitation and advance candidate review
- 3. Henry Gwazda explained notice was placed in newspapers with only two respondents expressing interest; offered to provide appointee qualifications
- 4. Timeline concerns discussed:
 - a) Pre-bid documentation due August 28th
 - b) Building subcommittee can continue project progress until roof committee fully formed
 - c) Pre-qualified bidders submit applications demonstrating qualifications, past projects, financial backing
 - d) Committee input needed during bidding phase for roof repair versus replacement decisions
- 5. Chair withdrew motion to appoint community members:
 - a) Committee agreed to conduct wider announcement of positions
 - b) All members to be in place for September 4th meeting vote
 - c) Timeline allows project to proceed without significant delays

C. Charter Committee Review (00:44:00–00:47:00)

- 1. Amy Drinker, charter committee chair, requested feedback on draft B charter Article 6, Section 8 regarding school committee establishment and functions by Monday, October 6th

2. Kate Schmeckpeper designated to review charter section and provide feedback on behalf of committee

D. MASC Conference Discussion (00:47:00–00:51:00)

1. Joint MASS and MASC conference November 12th-14th for school committees and administrators
 - a) School committees decide individually who attends
 - b) Budget available for all members to attend
 - c) Members contact Lisa Manning for registration and hotel bookings
 - d) Various attendance options: full conference, single days, or day-only without overnight stays
2. Conference requires delegate appointment to vote on legislative and policy items
 - a) Delegate must be empowered by committee to cast votes
 - b) Committee should discuss issues beforehand to provide guidance
 - c) Committee agreed to handle delegate appointment at future meeting closer to conference date

E. Donation Acceptance (00:51:00–00:52:00)

1. Interim Superintendent presented \$500 donation from Making Ends Meet Incorporated Foundation to Brown School
 - a) Initially listed as "blanket donation" causing confusion about purpose
 - b) Clarified via email with Mary Maxwell as general donation, not for blankets
2. A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Henry Gwazda to accept the donation from Making Ends Meet Foundation
3. The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Kate Schmeckpeper, Al Williams

F. Anti Discrimination Committee Discussion (00:53:00–01:08:00)

1. Jennifer Schaeffner proposed restructuring the anti-discrimination committee from superintendent's committee to school committee advisory committee for better accountability and measurable deliverables after two years of difficult district experiences
2. Interim Superintendent preferred maintaining current structure to preserve safe spaces for sharing lived experiences without public scrutiny
 - a) Acknowledged limited progress with only 3-4 meetings previous year
 - b) Committed to monthly meetings, better structure, clearer deliverables, and regular school committee reporting

- c) Confirmed 100% of benefit would be lost if meetings became public as participants wouldn't speak openly
- 3. Committee agreed to maintain current structure with enhanced accountability
 - a) Quarterly reporting with students and adults presenting perspectives directly to school committee
 - b) Anti-discrimination work incorporated into district improvement plan and superintendent evaluation goals
 - c) Option retained to restructure if progress unsatisfactory

G. Planning and Committee Updates (01:08:00–01:15:00)

- 1. Kate Schmeckpeper proposed developing a year-long agenda for the school committee following MASC recommendations as a full committee effort with community publication, providing three district examples (Lexington, Andover, Greenfield) for review
- 2. Jennifer Schaeffner noted the committee already had a yearly calendar focusing on time-sensitive items like budget votes and warrant articles, but it was not publicized or available on the website
- 3. Committee agreed to make their existing yearly calendar available to the community on the website using a format similar to the examples reviewed
 - a) Al Williams preferred month-by-month box format over graphical approaches
 - b) Jennifer Schaeffner supported simple bullet point format
- 4. Al Williams requested subcommittee updates and noted monthly updates would be easier when the committee had a new member and all committees were fully staffed
 - a) Kate Schmeckpeper reported policy subcommittee meeting scheduled for following week

V. Closing Business

- A. Jennifer Schaeffner proposed adopting state anti-Semitism recommendations for K-12 schools locally in Marblehead
 - 1. Full committee and Anti-Discrimination Committee will review recommendations
 - 2. Jennifer Schaeffner will facilitate discussion at next meeting
- B. Jennifer Schaeffner proposed multi-board leadership group to address youth substance abuse and safety issues following recent community tragedy
 - 1. Group would include School Committee, Select Board, Board of Health, Parks and Recreation, first responders, police, parents, and potentially clergy
 - 2. Meetings structured to avoid quorum issues and open meeting law requirements

3. Al Williams authorized her to represent school committee in initial conversations with other board chairs
 4. Will report back at September 4th meeting
- C. Committee requested condolence letter for Savannah Getel family
1. Henry Gwazda will draft letter following home visit
 2. Letter will be signed by committee chair per standard protocol

VI. Executive Session Motion and Adjournment (01:25:00–01:28:00)

- A. Al Williams requested motion to meet in executive session for two purposes:
1. Discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with Unit A of the Marblehead Teachers Association pursuant to Chapter 38, Section 21A3, Purpose 3, as open meeting may have detrimental effect on bargaining position
 2. Discuss litigation Kelly Ferretti et al vs. Marblehead Public Schools, John Robideaux and Al Williams, Essex Superior Court, pursuant to Chapter 38, Section 21A3, Purpose 3, as open meeting may have detrimental effect on litigating position
 3. Chair declared no intent to return to open session
- B. Motion made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Henry Gwazda to enter executive session for stated purposes. Roll call vote passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Kate Schmeckpeper, Al Williams.
- C. Committee relocated to another room for executive session