

Record of the Marblehead School Committee Meeting

Thursday April 3, 2025

Marblehead High School Library

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

Meeting Opening and Pledge of Allegiance (00:00:00–00:02:00)

a. Meeting opened with Pledge of Allegiance and agenda reordered to accommodate student representatives who would present first then leave

Student Presentations from Veterans Middle School (00:02:00–00:19:00)

- a. Seventh-grade science students presented gummy bear diffusion lab results
- Students demonstrated cell membrane concepts by measuring gummy bear mass changes (3.3g to 8.2g after water soaking)
 - Extra credit experiments using Diet Coke showed 2.17cm additional growth compared to water
 - Students used laboratory equipment and developed hypothesis formation and measurement skills
- b. Eighth-grade students presented sonnets from "Windows and Mirrors" reading assignment
- Students wrote 14-line sonnets in iambic pentameter based on books reflecting their experiences or different cultures
 - June Crawford presented "Labels and Prints" and Chloe Steiner presented "The Other Side"
- c. Letters About Literature program achievements recognized
- Veterans Middle School had 10 semifinalists and 3 finalists statewide
 - Melissa Baller earned first place statewide for letter to poet Naomi Shihab Nye about how "Kindness" inspired her to interview strangers and develop empathy
 - School receives personalized responses from authors including Jacqueline Woodson, Hillary Clinton, and Julia Alvarez

School Committee Commendations and Student Representative Report (00:19:00–00:22:00)

- a. Committee commended Veterans Middle School's cross-curricular academic excellence
- Eighth-grade student ranked first in state for letter writing
 - School achieved top state rankings in eighth-grade scores over recent years
 - Recognition given to teaching team and staff
- b. Student representative reported on high school activities and events
- AP exams scheduled approximately one month away in digital or hybrid format
 - Senior project work begins after third quarter ends March 15th
 - Senior prom permission slips distributed; ticket sales start week of April 28th for State Room Boston event
 - National Art Honor Society Chipotle fundraiser Tuesday 4-8 PM
 - Culture Feast tickets on sale during lunch with music performances
 - School musical "Hadestown" performances April 11th-13th, tickets available online
 - All Springs concert scheduled that evening at 7 PM
 - Spring sports seasons began with girls lacrosse first game previous week

Public Comment Period (00:22:00–01:22:00)

- a. Committee recognized Mary Maxfield for organizing science fair, performing arts teachers for recent concerts, and Sports Shop for uniform partnerships; extended public comment period to accommodate 13 speakers
- b. Flag policy opposition and support:
- Jeannie Lampkin urged committee to reconsider being "gatekeepers of culture" and slow policy development
 - Margaret Clark and Karen Clark criticized broad "symbolic displays" language as unimplementable and violating First Amendment rights
 - Sharon Rich supported limiting to only U.S. and Massachusetts flags to avoid conflicts
 - Emily DeJoy advocated for flags representing all students to maintain inclusive environment
- c. Antisemitism concerns and investigation:
- Sarah Palladian expressed dissatisfaction with investigation findings and described personal antisemitic incidents affecting her family
 - Yael Magen criticized investigation for not adopting IHRA definition of antisemitism and announced intention to run for school committee

- Karen Traeger noted Israeli flag removal from high school cafeteria

d. Teacher concerns about policy impact:

- Diane Gora (30+ year teacher) opposed policy as undermining teacher rights and classroom environments
- Kristin Anzaro warned policy could lead to broader classroom censorship
- Brent Speed (attorney) warned of legal risks from broad language and selective enforcement

e. Additional perspectives:

- Andy Harrison criticized policy as poorly drafted and unconstitutional
- John DiPiano supported policy as necessary for inclusive environment
- Frank Kashner suggested conflict resolution strategies instead of restricting expression
- Shauna King defended teacher accused of antisemitic behavior
- Mary McCarriston announced Jewish flag delivery to school administration

District Updates from Superintendent (01:22:99–01:32:00)

a. Spring activities and key dates:

- MCAS testing, report cards, sports, concerts, and field trips underway
- April 23-25 confirmed as school days requiring parental notification for absences
- Last day of school June 25th (half day students, full day staff) contingent on no weather issues

b. Budget and upcoming events:

- FY26 budget received unanimous Finance Committee recommendation for approval
- Kindergarten orientation April 10th 6:00-7:00 PM at Glover and Brown schools
- Third grade parent night April 15th 6:00 PM at Village School
- High school musical "Hadestown" April 11-13th with showtimes at 7:00 PM, 2:00 PM, and 2:00 PM

c. Professional development and community activities:

- Project Reboot tech-healthy households training funded by PTOs/PCOs with parent workshop April 10th 7:00-8:30 PM at Veterans Middle School
- Author visits: James Riley at Village April 12th, Jarrett Lerner at Brown April 20th
- Documentary on October 7th experiences showing May 9-11 with various times

d. Facility improvements and personnel updates:

- Village School shed replaced and track repairs scheduled for April 21st week
- Rick Lemieux retired after 23 years as Village School custodian
- Frank Kowalski appointed as full principal at Glover School following successful interim role

Consent Agenda and Scheduled Bills (01:32:00–01:33:00)

- a. Meeting minutes still unavailable in draft form; alternative preparation process being considered for resolution before next meeting
- b. Motion by Alison Taylor to approve scheduled bills totaling \$196,632.70 for the month; seconded by Brian Ota; motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Al Williams, Jenn Schaeffner, Alison Taylor, Brian Ota
- c. Transitioned to school committee communications; next item involves request for use of Marblehead High School field house as polling station for June local elections

Polling Station Request Discussion (01:33:00–01:40:00)

- a. Fire Chief Jason Gillen requested use of High School field house as polling station for town elections due to current location's infrastructure problems (elevator overheating, stalling, lighting issues) and need for centralized, ADA-accessible location in 4.4 square mile town
- b. Implementation considerations discussed:
- Safety protocols would prevent voters from accessing other school areas
 - Floor coverings needed to protect gymnasium floor
 - Parking consolidation required for teacher and voter spaces
 - Coordination needed with athletic director, PE teachers, and administrators
 - Gym unavailable during setup/breakdown periods
- c. A motion was made by Alison Taylor to approve the request to use the Marblehead High School field house as a town-wide polling station for the June 10, 2025 elections with plans to discuss permanency going forward
- The motion was seconded by Al Williams
 - The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Al Williams, Jenn Schaeffner, Alison Taylor, Brian Ota

Superintendent Evaluation Survey Development (01:40:00–02:23:00)

a. Survey development and structure

- Three separate surveys created for administrators, staff, and community members with role-specific questions
- Administrative and staff surveys will be anonymous; community survey non-anonymous to prevent duplicate responses
- High school students included as respondents using community survey format
- Demographic identifier added requiring selection of student, parent, or community member status

b. Survey revisions and timeline

- First community question changed from yes/no to 1-5 scale rating
- Question four revised to ask how support for students with disabilities changed under superintendent's direction
- District culture improvement question added with rating and explanation components
- Surveys distributed week of April 7th, closing around April 16th
- Next meeting scheduled April 17th to review results before conducting evaluation

c. Data collection and analysis process

- Raw survey data provided to all committee members for individual evaluation use
- One member will create summary analysis by April 17th while preserving detailed response access
- Committee must post notice for next meeting to approve final survey versions before distribution

Flag Policy Discussion (02:23:00–03:00:00)

a. Committee reviewed draft flag policy (IMDb) from school counsel establishing school committee's sole authority over flags, banners, and symbolic displays as government speech

- Required flags: United States, Massachusetts state, POW MIA
- Additional displays reflecting district mission/values determined by committee
- Superintendent may recommend displays at committee's discretion

b. Committee discussed policy revisions and implementation concerns

- Suggested striking "similar symbolic displays" and adding "affixed to school district property" for clarity
- Superintendent expressed concerns about personal views influencing recommendations
- Debated timing of recommendations (annual August vs. flexible scheduling)
- Clarified superintendent would only recommend items aligned with district mission/values
- Discussed excluding student achievements, sports banners, and personal items from restrictions

c. Motion by Sarah Fox, seconded by [Name] to enable chair to work with legal counsel to draft reply to MEA demand letter for cease and desist

- Passed 5–0: Al Williams, Brian Ota, Sarah Fox, Alison Taylor, Jennifer Schaeffner
- First reading of flag policy; two additional readings required before final vote

Special Education Academic Discovery Report Presentation (03:00:00–04:08:00)

a. External vendor conducted comprehensive special education review through administrator meetings, document reviews, focus groups, classroom observations in 11 classrooms, and surveys examining program organization, student identification, service delivery, instructional practice, staff development, and stakeholder engagement

b. Key findings:

- 28.5% of K-12 students have disabilities (state average: 20.2%)
- Students with disabilities show higher absenteeism, dropout rates, lower advanced course completion
- MCAS performance better than state average but below district peers
- Higher discipline suspension rates for students with disabilities

c. Areas of promise include strong staff collaboration, effective data use, compliance protocol establishment, specialized program training (Orton Gillingham, LIPS, Project Reed, RABO), and effective early intervention collaboration

d. Growth areas identified: professional development needs in co-teaching, inclusion strategies, MTSS, de-escalation; caseload analysis required; service delivery inconsistencies across schools; communication improvements needed with parents

e. Significant compliance progress reported: restraints reduced from 72 to 49 to 5 incidents; all BCBA's new with safety care training; monthly staff training sessions implemented

f. Stakeholder feedback shows improvement: 59% of parents, 78% of staff rate services as moderately to extremely effective; 85% of staff feel supported by administration

Independent Investigation Report on Anti-Semitism Allegations (04:08:00–04:26:00)

a. Investigation scope and methodology:

- Independent investigator examined allegations of anti-Semitism, discrimination, harassment, and unprofessional conduct against personnel
- 26 individuals interviewed; 450 pages of documents reviewed including business records, correspondence, IT audits, and newspaper articles
- Applied federal Title VII and state MGL Chapter 11B legal framework with preponderance of evidence standard
- Examined 39 separate allegations; investigation limited to personnel matters

b. Only two allegations substantiated:

- One party knowingly or neglectfully misrepresented facts in violation of staff conduct policy
- District violated grievance policy in fall 2023 investigation that was not conducted adequately or fairly
- Most allegations could not be corroborated due to lack of witness corroboration, inconsistent statements, contradictory documentary evidence, or implausible claims
- Insufficient evidence found for discrimination, harassment, retaliation, administrative indifference, or interference with free expression rights

c. Committee member questioned interviewing former school committee member given legal prohibition on personnel involvement; anti-discrimination committee will continue addressing incidents, reviewing curriculum bias, conducting climate surveys, and developing professional development

Sixth Grade Overnight Trip Approval (04:26:00–04:35:00)

a. Bourndale program overview and educational components

- Decades-long interdisciplinary program culminating students' first years in district
- Six core classes: Adventure (team building), marine science with dogfish dissection, engineering design with rocket building, pond studies of freshwater ecosystems
- Afternoon programs: reptiles presentations, lobster studies, recreational fishing
- Family-style meals to teach cooperation and sharing

b. Staffing and program logistics

- 60-70 chaperones accompany trip (overnight and day participants)
- Cross-grade teaching opportunities when teachers unavailable
- Village Experience program for ~12 students remaining at school includes Crane Beach visits, Great Estate activities, Spur gardens, Taste Buds Kitchen, Boston Balance programming
- Program continues despite facility ownership changes with same director

c. A motion was made by Sarah Fox to approve the overnight trip to Bourndale and seconded by Alison Taylor

- The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Sarah Fox, Al Williams, Jenn Schaeffner, Alison Taylor, Brian Ota

Meeting adjourned at 10:35PM

DRAFT