

Marblehead School Committee Draft Minutes

Chair: Al Williams

Meeting Date, Time & Location: Thursday, December 18th, 2025, 6pm,
MHS Library, 2 Humphrey Street Marblehead MA 01945

Members Present: Al Williams, Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda,
Melissa Clucas

Meeting Recording: [Link](#)

Public Comment and Student Representative Report ([00:00:00–00:07:00](#))

a. Public comment from Sarah Fox

- Raised concerns about alleged Mass General Law and ethics violations during a previous executive session regarding release of privileged information
- Expressed concern that ethics breaches could undermine public trust needed for school funding

b. Public comment from Sarah Palladino (Ida Road)

- Raised concerns about a Jewish teacher whose position was allegedly split one month after she spoke publicly about antisemitic incidents
- Called on the committee to demonstrate through actions that antisemitism will not be tolerated

c. Student Representative Report (read by Chair)

- Winter Concert held successfully; yearbook sales ongoing; senior Spirit Days well-attended
- Winter sports records provided for basketball, swimming, hockey, wrestling, track; skiing and gymnastics seasons beginning

Superintendent Update and Staff Recognition ([00:07:00–00:14:00](#))

a. Superintendent John Robidoux remarks

- Acknowledged recent tragedies in Australia and at Brown University; emphasized promoting acceptance and belonging

b. Health, safety, and district updates

- Cold/flu season active; lead nurse Megan Kalpin sent health notices; custodial crews performing extra cleaning
- Winter concerts successful; Village School mural created by artist Brendan Bataflan with students, coordinated by teachers Julie McCarthy and Gina Semple

c. Staff shout outs read into record

- Matthew LeVangie recognized Kyle Bodwin, Colleen English, Julie Frius (Veterans Middle School concert)
- Scott Williams recognized Joe Stoddard, Julie Frius, Nick Sears, Katie Freegod (Village School performances)
- Mary Maxfield recognized counselors Allison Eaton, Kara Elmer (family support)
- Michele Carlson recognized Kasia Johnson, Gina Hart (Making Ends Meet holiday assistance)
- Frank Kowalski recognized Alyssa Kendall, Eric Fargo (Glover Elementary)
- Julia Ferreira thanked all Marblehead music educators

Consent Agenda and Meeting Minutes Discussion (00:14:00–00:18:00)

a. Consent agenda amendment

- December 4th minutes removed from consent agenda due to seven identified issues requiring correction

b. Motion on amended consent agenda

- A motion was made by Jennifer Schaeffner and seconded by Melissa Clucas to approve the schedule of bills totaling \$814,799.87
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas

c. December 4th meeting minutes corrections identified

- Budget documents must be released to public simultaneously with committee presentation
- Point of order raised regarding unvoted executive session minutes
- Competency determination policy discussion incorrectly showed one motion; should reflect original motion followed by amended motion

d. December 4th meeting minutes tabled pending corrections

Advanced Placement Program Presentation (00:18:00–00:35:00)

a. Program overview

- Marblehead High School offers 21 College Board-approved AP courses across multiple content areas
- AP Capstone diploma requires scores of 3+ on Seminar, Research, and four additional AP exams

b. Student participation and performance data

- 59% of students in grades 10-12 (353 students) took AP exams in 2023-24, completing 829 total exams
- Pass rates and participation have increased; Marblehead compares favorably to DESE comparison districts
- 194 AP awards earned; school received AP Scholar Honor Roll gold award for equitable access

c. Committee discussion

- Member suggested surveying graduates about AP credit transfer to colleges
- Members commended large AP class sizes and guidance counselor support

Policy Approvals and Updates ([00:35:00–00:42:00](#))

a. Policy ECAB – Access to Buildings and Grounds (third reading)

- Motion by Jennifer Schaeffner, seconded by Henry Gwazda, to approve; passed 4–0 (Jennifer Schaeffner, Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas)

b. Policy EFDA – School Food and Nutrition Meal Modifications (third reading)

- Motion by Jennifer Schaeffner, seconded by Henry Gwazda, to approve; passed 4–0 (Jennifer Schaeffner, Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas)

c. Policy EFE – Civil Rights Complaint Policy for Child Nutrition Programs (third reading)

- Motion by Jennifer Schaeffner, seconded by Henry Gwazda, to approve; passed 4–0 (Jennifer Schaeffner, Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas)

d. Policy EHAA – District Security Relating to Technology (third reading)

- Motion by Jennifer Schaeffner, seconded by Henry Gwazda, to approve; passed 4–0 (Jennifer Schaeffner, Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas)

e. Policy EHV – Data and Records Retention (third reading)

- Motion by Jennifer Schaeffner, seconded by Henry Gwazda, to approve; passed 4–0 (Jennifer Schaeffner, Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas)

f. Policy IKFE – Competency Determination (approval vote)

- Motion by Henry Gwazda, seconded by Melissa Clucas, to approve; passed 3–1 (in favor: Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas; against: Jennifer Schaeffner)
- Opposition noted regarding definition of passing grade for competency determination

g. Policies EFC (Free and Reduced Priced Food Services) and EFD (Meal Charge Policy) – updates reflecting universal free meals

- Motions by Jennifer Schaeffner, seconded by Henry Gwazda, to approve; both passed 4–0 (Jennifer Schaeffner, Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas)

Essex Agricultural School Appointment and Headlight Newspaper Discussion **(00:42:00–01:01:00)**

a. Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School District appointment

- Mark Stroud currently serves as Marblehead's representative and board chairperson; Superintendent John Robidoux and Town Moderator Jack Patrick recommended reappointment
- A motion was made by Jennifer Schaeffner and seconded by Henry Gwazda to reappoint Mark B. Stroud to a new three-year term commencing January 1, 2026
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas

b. Essex Tech and technical education discussion

- Committee requested Mr. Stroud provide update on school's lottery-based admissions process and enrollment capacity concerns
- Superintendent Robidoux noted early discussions regarding offering technical pathways (CNA, childcare certification) for students unable to attend Essex Tech

c. Headlight student newspaper discussion

- Marblehead Current has exclusive arrangement to publish the Headlight; other media sources have requested access
- Committee agreed this is a building-level decision for teacher advisor and students; administration will explore options and report back

Student Services Department Update **(01:01:00–01:33:00)**

a. Staffing updates

- New team chair (Stuart) hired for Glover School; Catherine P. hired as 0.6 administrative assistant at Brown School (increased from 0.5 due to need)
- 61 staff restraint trained (up from 53); BCBAs provided district-wide de-escalation training in November

b. Student population and placements

- IEP students decreased from 505 to 416; 504 plans increased from 226 to 279
- Out-of-district placements: 48 (2023-24), 53 (2024-25), 50 currently; foster care students decreased from 7 to 4; McKinney-Vento remained at 7

c. Programs and accountability

- Programs include inclusion services, language-based (grades 2-12), therapeutic (K-12), and ABA (pre-K through age 22)
- Achievement points for students with disabilities increased from 0/12 to 7/12 (non-high school) and 1/12 to 7/12 (high school)
- Chronic absenteeism received 0 points at both levels; being addressed through Cartwheel program, CSA partnership, and family outreach

d. Circuit breaker audit

- DESE audit confirmed district is owed funds; disbursement pending completion of all district audits

Budget Items and Copier Contract Discussion ([01:33:00-01:47:00](#))

a. Copier contract overview

- Current contract expires January 2026; district has 29 machines total; current annual cost approximately \$129,000

b. Vendor evaluation and recommendation

- Three vendors submitted proposals: Ricoh, Konica Minolta, and Canon
- Konica Minolta recommended: comparable cost to Ricoh, faster machines, true cost-per-copy billing
- Estimated savings of \$22,000/year (\$88,000 over 48-month term); includes Papercut print management software

c. Lease terms

- 48-month lease selected; 60 months deemed too long for school environment; requires select board approval under Mass General Law
- District locked into machines for lease term but can adjust at renewal using Papercut volume data

d. Motion and vote

- A motion was made by Henry Gwazda and seconded by Melissa Clucas to approve the vendor selection and contract
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas

Enrollment Update and Trends Analysis ([01:47:00-02:05:00](#))

a. Enrollment data and trends

- Julia Ferreira and Superintendent John Robidoux presented enrollment analysis showing negative 3.8% change from 2019 to present
- Declining enrollment is statewide due to low birth rates; no grade level currently exceeds 200 students
- Graduation-to-entry gap exists annually with larger classes graduating than entering

b. Student transfers and alternative schools

- Last year: 56 students moved out of state, 6 enrolled in homeschool
- Resident students attending alternative schools: Epstein Hillel Academy (32), Marblehead Charter Schools (82), Pingree (41), St. John's Prep (78), Essex Tech (35)
- Approximately 81-83% of resident students attend public schools, consistent with similar districts
- Committee member requested distinguishing between students who moved versus those remaining as residents but attending private school

c. Regional factors and next steps

- Pioneer Institute identified Marblehead as having second-lowest birth rate in state; limited new housing and aging population contribute to decline
- District reduced approximately 1,000 students over ten years; staffing adjustments complicated by high-needs student distribution
- Administration examining transition years for retention strategies and conducting class-by-class enrollment reviews for budgeting

Bargaining Subcommittee Appointments and Liaison Updates

(02:05:00–02:23:00)

a. Bargaining subcommittee formation

- A motion was made by Henry Gwazda and seconded by Jennifer Schaeffner to appoint Kate Schmeckpeper and Melissa Clucas to the bargaining subcommittee for negotiations with BCBAs, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and related staff
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Al Williams

b. Bargaining team appointment

- A motion was made by Henry Gwazda and seconded by Melissa Clucas to approve the bargaining team composition (two subcommittee members, Town Administrator, and Superintendent John Robidoux in advisory capacity)
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Al Williams

c. Goals subcommittee appointment

- A motion was made by Al Williams and seconded by Henry Gwazda to appoint Kate Schmeckpeper and Al Williams to the goals subcommittee
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Al Williams

d. Liaison updates and correspondence

- Jennifer Schaeffner reported on substance abuse prevention meeting with select board member, Chief of Police, and District Attorney Paul Tucker; DA's office offered juvenile/restorative justice resources
- Chair clarified correspondence inclusion in packets is at Chair's discretion due to volume

e. Executive session and grievance waiver

- Chair read purposes for executive session: potential litigation, step three grievance regarding lead teacher stipend, and collective bargaining strategy
- Union representative stated teacher waived right to executive session and requested public hearing

Procedural Guidelines and Correspondence Discussion ([02:23:00–02:35:00](#))

a. Grievance hearing format

- Union representative stated teacher waived right to executive session, requested public hearing
- Committee discussed consulting legal counsel before proceeding

b. Executive session motion

- A motion was made by Al Williams and seconded by Henry Gwazda to enter executive session to discuss the procedure around whether the grievance would be heard in executive session or public meeting
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas

c. Motion to hear grievance in open session

- Upon return from executive session, a motion was made by Jennifer Schaeffner and seconded by Henry Gwazda pursuant to Chapter 38, Section 21A2 purpose 1 to conduct a collective bargaining session with the Marblehead Education Association specifically to hear a step 3 grievance regarding the lead teacher stipend in open session
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas

**Step Three Grievance Hearing Regarding Lead Teacher Stipend
([02:35:00–03:46:00](#))**

a. Grievance presentation by Prajit Carnes, English teacher at Marblehead Veterans Middle School

- Served as sole lead English teacher since 2008 (16 years); position split June 2024, approximately one month after she spoke publicly about antisemitism in Marblehead Public Schools
- Alleges discrimination based on being Jewish and a Zionist, and retaliation for speaking out; split affects current salary and retirement calculations (\$3,500–\$4,000 annual stipend)

b. Historical context and legal representation

- Ms. Carnes stated English position was only one split in 2024; CBA and job posting indicate five lead teacher positions at Veterans Middle School, one per subject
- Attorney Yael Berda argued timing suggests retaliation; stated MCAD complaint would be withdrawn if grievance resolved favorably

c. Superintendent John Robidoux's response

- Noted grievance filed with new principal a year after split; found nothing compelling to indicate antisemitism motivated decision; stated splitting stipends is past practice district-wide

d. Committee discussion

- Ms. Carnes confirmed no union representation during grievance process; stated she does not feel safe at work and has experienced social isolation since speaking out

e. Motion to enter executive session

- A motion was made by Henry Gwazda and seconded by Melissa Clucas to enter executive session for multiple purposes including deliberation on the step three grievance, collective bargaining strategy, potential litigation, and compliance with open meeting law requirements
- The motion passed 3–1, with votes in favor: Al Williams, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas; vote against: Jennifer Schaeffner
- The committee entered executive session without intent to return to open session