Marblehead School Committee
Chair: Al Williams
Meeting Date, Time & Location: Friday, March 27th, 2026, 10am, Mary Alley Municipal Building, 7 Widger Road, Marblehead, MA 01945 — Lower Level Conference Room
SC Members Present: A. Williams, J. Schaeffner, K. Schmeckpeper, H. Gwazda, M. Clucas
SC Members Absent:
Agenda/Materials: Link
Meeting Recording: Link
Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Henry Gwazda

Pledge of Allegiance and Public Comment (00:00:00–00:02:00)

a. Meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

b. Public comment:

- Mary McCariston (Pinecliff Drive) thanked the committee for budget work, expressed support for an override, and reported senior citizens are receptive to the need for one.

c. No additional public comments were made in the room or online.

FY27 Budget Discussion and Vote (00:02:00–00:41:00)

a. Budget subcommittee (Jennifer Schaeffner and Melissa Clucas) recapped Wednesday meeting with Assistant Superintendent of Finance & Operations Michael Pfifferling and Finance Committee members.

- Pfifferling validated town benefit cost figures across six line items; his calculation and the town's were within ~$45,000.
- Total school-attributed benefit cost ~$13.3 million (after removing $152,500 OPEB excluded by select board), including a $462,000 health insurance buffer (5% cushion per Finance Director Aleesha Benjamin).
- Two budget options presented: $47,620,287 (with buffer) and $48,095,896 (without buffer, administration's recommendation).

b. Pfifferling recommended removing the $462,000 buffer, with the school committee agreeing to reimburse the town from its general fund if actual health insurance costs exceeded the budgeted amount.

- Level-funded FY26 school budget of $49,120,285 plus town-side benefits yielded ~$62.43 million total; 63% revenue share produced ~$60,948,000, creating a ~$1.486 million gap aligned with the town's requested $1.5 million reduction.

c. Melissa Clucas argued for retaining the buffer; Jennifer Schaeffner supported excluding it and asked the minutes reflect her support for $48,095,896; Henry Gwazda and Kate Schmeckpeper supported including the buffer.

d. Committee agreed that for FY28, health insurance costs should reside in the school department budget, the school committee should seek PEC representation during current benefit contract negotiations (expiring June 30), and earlier communication with the town on benefit costs should be established.

- A motion was made by Henry Gwazda and seconded by Kate Schmeckpeper to approve the FY27 school department budget of $47,620,287.
- The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Al Williams, Kate Schmeckpeper, Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, and Melissa Clucas.

Override Planning and Working Group Discussion (00:41:00–01:03:00)

a. Select board voted to pursue a joint town-and-school override using three tiers: Tier 1 ("Restore"), Tier 2 ("Stabilize and Build"), Tier 3 ("Invest and Improve"); highest tier receiving >50% becomes the override amount.

- Town Administrator Thatcher Keezer tasked with establishing a working group (two school committee members, two select board members, Finance Committee members, town department representatives), meetings expected the following week.

b. Committee debated scope of tiers — which cuts would be restored, meaning of "Restore" relative to level-service vs. level-funded budgets; efficiencies identified during budget process would not be restored.

- Tier 2 suggestions included full-day kindergarten and special education programs to reduce out-of-district tuition costs.

c. Superintendent John Robidoux stated he and Assistant Superintendent Michael Pfifferling needed time to develop a line-item budget reflecting the approved $47,620,287 figure and identify restoration, stabilization, and investment across tiers.

- Administration committed to returning next meeting with line-item budget and override planning update; select board planned Town Administrator Keezer to return April 8; Finance Committee warrant hearing scheduled April 6.

d. Capital outlay article raised — Finance Committee zeroed out general fund capital for FY27; Pfifferling confirmed school capital needs are in town plans but was seeking clarification from Finance Director Aleesha Benjamin on specifics.

e. A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Melissa Clucas to move forward with the select board on a joint override and to have the chair coordinate the committee's participation in the Town Administrator's advisory working group.

- The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Melissa Clucas, Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Kate Schmeckpeper, and Al Williams.

Correspondence and Adjournment (01:03:00–01:04:00)

a. No correspondence items were raised.

b. A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Henry Gwazda to adjourn.

- The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Melissa Clucas, Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Kate Schmeckpeper, and Al Williams.

c. The meeting adjourned at 11:05am.