Marblehead School Committee
Chair: Al Williams
Meeting Date, Time & Location: Thursday, April 9th, 2026, 6pm, MHS Library, 2 Humphrey Street Marblehead MA 01945
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

Superintendent's Report and Shoutouts (00:00:00–00:07:00)

a. Superintendent John Robidoux provided updates:

- May 4th at 5:00 PM: MHS hosting "Drive to Stay Alive" informational night for seniors/parents, sponsored by Essex County DA's office, covering substance use, social hosting, and prom safety.
- Chief King, DA Paul Tucker, and Superintendent Robidoux drafted a joint letter on student safety; panel discussion scheduled April 14th at 7:00 PM at the Board of Health meeting at Mary Alley.

b. METCO and community engagement:

- Superintendent Robidoux and METCO Director Keisha Johnson attending METCO Advocacy Day at the State House; district piloting transportation collaboration with Swampscott for Boston-based students.
- Superintendent Robidoux participated in a COA panel with Select Board and department heads; approximately 30 community members attended.

c. Shoutouts from building principals:

- Principal Matthew LeVangie recognized MPS Technology Department for seamless whole-school simultaneous MCAS testing transition.
- Principal Scott Williams recognized Mary Davies for over a decade of service as tutor and substitute teacher.
- Principal Mary Maxfield recognized music teacher Dominique DeMoore for coordinating daily live music during March and directing evening concerts.
- Remaining shoutout from Principal Frank Kowalski deferred to next meeting.

Financial Update (00:07:00–00:09:00)

a. Assistant Superintendent of Finance & Operations Michael Pfifferling provided the monthly financial update:

- Unexpended, unencumbered balance at just under $2.1 million, approximately $614,000 less than the previous month.
- $1.5 million reserved for prepaid tuitions to subsidize off-district tuition line for the following year.
- Unexpected March expenses included HVAC costs at Glover Elementary, bus repairs, and elevator repairs.

b. Facility project updates:

- Veterans Middle School roof project expected to resume within approximately two weeks, completed within a month to a month and a half.
- Three Marblehead High School roof sections scheduled for completion over April vacation.

High School Spotlight: MAGIC Coalition (00:09:00–00:13:00)

a. Marblehead High School students Michael Labossiere, Max Collin, Dan Obisi, Caleb Sidman, and Lucy Molinari presented on the MAGIC Coalition (Marbleheaders Alliance for Growth, Inclusion, and Connection).

- Founded in response to a swastika drawn in a school bathroom on October 7th; student-led initiative to educate the community and foster inclusion.

b. Activities included full-school assemblies during MAGIC Block and suggestion boxes; planned a Village School assembly with 6th graders on the impact of hate.

Portugal Field Trip Request (00:13:00–00:19:00)

a. Kelly, lead world language teacher at Marblehead High School, presented a request for a student field trip to Portugal, April 15–24.

- Two base cities (Lisbon and Porto) with day trips; same travel company and tour guide as prior year.

b. The committee voted to approve the Portugal field trip request.

- A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Henry Gwazda to approve the trip request.
- The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Kate Schmeckpeper, and Al Williams.

FY27 Budget Line Item Review and Approval (00:19:00–01:00:00)

a. Superintendent John Robidoux provided a budget overview:

- FY26 budget: $49,120,287; approved FY27 reduced budget: $47,620,287, a $3,157,460 (3.05%) reduction achieved through cuts and revolving account shifts.
- 22 positions reduced (~18 FTEs); out-of-district tuition/transportation costs driven by state OSD rates, with consortium announcing 9.4% average (12% for higher-end programs where most Marblehead students are placed).

b. Assistant Superintendent of Finance & Operations Michael Pfifferling presented line-by-line reductions:

- Brown School: Level-funded supplies; reduced clerical to school-year only; reduced one custodian (vacant); shifted 1.24 FTE instructional assistants to grant funding; reduced pre-K Wednesday hours.
- Glover Elementary: Eliminated vacant teacher-in-charge stipend; cut vacant EL teacher; level-funded supplies; reduced one custodian; reduced pre-K Wednesday hours.
- Village School: Cut 1.75 FTE vacant EL teachers; cut vacant SPED teacher; cut one elementary teacher; reduced one of three full-time instructional assistants; level-funded supplies/PD; discussed cutting a part-time paraprofessional.
- Veterans Middle School: Cut math interventionist; cut one teacher (content TBD); level-funded supplies; cut paraclerical position.
- Marblehead High School: Reduced art teacher to 0.8 FTE; moved two teachers to Education revolving account (noted as unsustainable); cut three classroom teachers; level-funded supply/athletics lines.
- District-wide: Cut vacant fellow, ABA coordinator, HR generalist, SPED PTA positions; shifted portions of Assistant Business Manager and facilities assistant salaries to revolving/grant funds; reduced SLP to 0.6 FTE; paused curriculum refresh; reduced substitute budget ~$138,000; cut 1.0 maintenance employee; reduced utilities, contracted services, and supply lines.
- An additional $540,000 above budgeted increases required for out-of-district costs, meaning actual cuts exceeded $1.5 million.

c. Prepayment of $1.5 million in out-of-district tuition from FY26 surplus discussed:

- Reduces FY27 tuition line from ~$5.3M to ~$3.8M; eliminates one of three financial safety nets.
- Mr. Pfifferling stated preserving staff in front of students was prioritized over maintaining the reserve.

d. Of 22 positions reduced, 11 filled and 11 vacant; through transfers and reassignments, actual RIF could be fewer than 11.

- Superintendent Robidoux requested union extension on April 15 transfer notification deadline.

e. Committee member Jennifer Schaeffner asked whether principals were collaboratively involved; Superintendent Robidoux confirmed involvement since October/November.

- Ms. Schaeffner raised concern that most cuts were student-facing; Superintendent Robidoux responded every category was examined and reductions align with longer-term right-sizing.

f. The committee voted to approve the FY27 line-item budget as presented.

- A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Henry Gwazda to approve the line-item budget as presented by the administration.
- The motion passed 5–0, with votes in favor: Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Kate Schmeckpeper, and Al Williams.

Override Request Discussion and Vote (01:00:00–01:41:00)

a. Superintendent John Robidoux presented the proposed override request:

- Structural budget gap driven by Proposition 2½ limits, health insurance increases (11.17%), pension increases (over 8%), rising out-of-district special education tuition (12.6% for FY27), and contractual salary obligations.
- Free cash no longer available from the town; FY27 budget reflects $3.2 million total reduction including 18.25 FTE positions.

b. Three-tiered override structure presented:

- Tier 1 ($6.2M/3 years): FY28 $4.3M, FY29 $1.9M — contractual salaries, special education tuition restoration, revolving account positions returned to general fund.
- Tier 2 ($7.2M/3 years): FY28 $4.98M, FY29 $2.2M — adds technology lease and eliminates full-day kindergarten fee.
- Tier 3 ($8.5M/3 years): FY28 $5.2M, FY29 $3.3M — adds curriculum/PD refresh, in-district 18-to-22 special education program, and school building capital fund.
- No tier restores the 18.25 FTE positions due to projected enrollment decline.

c. Jennifer Schaeffner raised concerns:

- Cautioned that advocacy language in the document could constitute potential campaign finance violations; school department may inform but cannot advocate for or against an override.
- Noted FY29 contractual figures are conjectural with potential bad faith bargaining implications.
- Superintendent Robidoux agreed to review the document's language.
- Schaeffner departed before the vote due to a prior obligation.

d. The committee voted to approve the three-tiered override request as presented.

- A motion was made by Melissa Clucas and seconded by Al Williams to approve the three tiers of the override as presented: Tier 1 at $6.2 million, Tier 2 at $7.2 million, and Tier 3 at $8.5 million (three-year totals).



- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Kate Schmeckpeper, and Al Williams.

e. Kate Schmeckpeper summarized a draft MOU developed by the working group:

- Articulates 62-38 revenue split, commits no additional general override until at least FY30, establishes fiscal reporting requirements, addresses surplus/deficit allocation, and includes commitments to publicize tax relief programs and build stabilization fund to 5%.

f. The committee voted to approve the draft MOU subject to final numbers being added.

- A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Melissa Clucas to approve the draft MOU subject to the override structure numbers being added.
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Kate Schmeckpeper, and Al Williams.

Public Comment (01:41:00–01:44:00)

a. A commenter stated the committee should have heard public feedback before voting and should have amended the agenda to indicate votes would be taken.

b. The commenter noted collaborative out-of-district tuitions and transportation costs rose unexpectedly, triggering additional position cuts:

- She asked the committee to identify what additional cuts were made.
- Superintendent John Robidoux confirmed reductions went from 14.75 FTEs to 18.25 FTEs, drawn from a contingency list of deeper reductions.
- The commenter noted this was a roughly 28% increase in personnel reductions and expressed concern no committee member questioned the additional cuts.

c. No additional public comments were offered in person or online.

Consent Agenda, Surplus, Donations, and Administrative Items (01:44:00–01:56:00)

a. Consent agenda approved.

- A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Melissa Clucas to approve the consent agenda.
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Kate Schmeckpeper, and Al Williams.

b. Superintendent John Robidoux presented a request to declare surplus athletic equipment identified by Athletic Director Ken Wheeler, valued at approximately $1,100–$1,200.



- A motion was made by Kate Schmeckpeper and seconded by Henry Gwazda to declare the athletic equipment outlined in Ken Wheeler's memo as surplus.
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Kate Schmeckpeper, and Al Williams.

c. Superintendent Robidoux presented a $515 donation from Tomo Tackle for the Bornedale trip.

- A motion was made by Henry Gwazda and seconded by Melissa Clucas to approve the Tomo Tackle donation.
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Kate Schmeckpeper, and Al Williams.

d. Chair Al Williams stated that on March 19, 2026, the school committee reviewed executive session minutes from September 12, 2025, and October 10, 2025, and determined that the executive session purposes cited for both sessions still warranted nondisclosure.

e. Scheduling changes:

- June 18th meeting moved to June 11th; April 16th meeting canceled and rescheduled to April 30th.

f. Subcommittee/liaison updates:

- Henry Gwazda reported high school roof work begins over April break; long lead-time items on track; CORI approval for contractors underway.
- Kate Schmeckpeper reported the Wellness Advisory Committee completed its wellness policy revision.

g. The meeting adjourned at 8:00pm.

- A motion was made by Melissa Clucas and seconded by Henry Gwazda to adjourn.
- The motion passed 4–0, with votes in favor: Henry Gwazda, Melissa Clucas, Kate Schmeckpeper, and Al Williams.