Marblehead School Committee
Chair: Kate Schmeckpeper
Meeting Date, Time & Location: Thursday, October 15th, 2026, 6pm, Marblehead High School Library, 2 Humphrey St., Marblehead, MA 01945
SC Members Present: A. Williams, AM. Jordan, K. Schmeckpeper, H. Gwazda, M. Clucas
SC Members Absent:
Agenda/Materials: Link
Meeting Recording: Link
Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Henry Gwazda

Opening, Tribute to Owen Coyne, and Commendations (00:01:00–00:04:00)

a. The meeting was called to order at 6:01 PM, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

b. A tribute was given to Owen Coyne, class of 2027, who passed away unexpectedly earlier in the month, and a moment of silence was held.

- His track and field coach Nolan Ramos was quoted as saying "he is the best of us."
- Community members were encouraged to read tributes from Owen's family and friends.

c. Commendations were offered to Principal Michele Carlson, Director of Counseling Christine Tchaikovsky, Allison House, Assistant Principals Dan Richards and Sean Sweetie, school resource officers, and school counselors for their support.

Public Comment and Student Representative Report (00:04:00–00:05:00)

a. The committee opened public comment, and no one signed up to speak either in person or on Zoom.

- Student representative Alex Murray reported the school is in a pretty good place overall.
- Alex Murray noted there were still ongoing problems with the roof.

Superintendent and District Updates (00:05:00–00:10:00)

a. Superintendent John Robidoux presented the superintendent update, expressing pride in serving the community and acknowledging community support for the Coyne family.

- The Brown School Monster Mash was postponed from Friday to the following Friday, the 23rd, due to weather.
- Glover School will hold its annual trunk-or-treat next Friday.

b. District highlights included school programs and donations.

- Glover received new PTO-donated playground equipment, described as wildly successful; Village School continues the Marblehead Youth Reader Program reading Scavenger by Jennifer Chambliss-Bertman, with the author visiting the district, and holds its annual vocabulary parade October 29th.

Enrollment Update (00:10:00–00:34:00)

a. The committee received an enrollment presentation comparing the end of the 2025-26 school year to the start of 2026-27 and to current data as of October 12, supported by enrollment data slides by school, an enrollment by grade level slide, and a total district enrollment narrative slide.

- Marblehead High School ended last year at 613, grew to 778 at the start of the year following 185 graduates, and stood at 768.

b. It was reported that 26 students have left the district since the school year started.

- Of those, 9 went to private school, 11 to public schools in-state, 4 moved out of state or country, and 2 out of district.

c. The committee discussed factors affecting enrollment.

- Kindergarten numbers may rise next year when kindergarten becomes tuition-free.
- Trends were attributed to low birth rates, an aging population, and limited new family housing in Marblehead.

d. Long-term district-wide enrollment projections were reported to remain fairly consistent over the next 8 to 10 years, with a slight increase expected toward the 8-to-10-year mark.

e. Action items identified:

- A committee member requested additional analysis of enrollment patterns between kindergarten and first grade, including whether students leave the district at that transition. Superintendent Robidoux agreed to look into the data.
- A high school open house is being set up in the next few weeks; Essex Tech will present to middle schoolers soon.

District Assessment and MCAS Data Presentation (00:34:00–01:46:00)

a. Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning Julia Ferreira presented a district assessment update and the high school MCAS data, filling in for Principal Michele Carlson, who is recovering.

- The presentation was linked to the District Improvement Plan and the district's multi-tiered systems of support and professional learning communities.
- Elementary leaders will present their MCAS data in two weeks.

b. The committee reviewed the assessment tools used to screen and monitor students.

- Universal screeners include DIBELS, iReady, and IXL; a Universal Number Sense Screener was added for math.
- K-3 reading comprehension ended last year with 87.1% of students at or above grade level across both schools.

c. IXL growth data was reported for grades 4-8, with a target of roughly 100 points of growth per year.

- Grades 4-6 math averaged over 106 points of growth; 8th grade showed 86 points in math and 75 in ELA by January.

d. High school PLC time has been doubled to at least two hours per month, compared with one to two hours weekly at the K-8 level.

e. District-wide MCAS results showed grades 3-8 above the state average in every subject area, with growth in science at grades 5 and 8 and strong 8th grade civics results.

- A new science, technology, and engineering curriculum in its first year was credited with the science gains.

f. Committee members raised concern about a downward trend in high school ELA results, particularly writing and essay scores.

- Ferreira noted the decline began before the 2024 policy change ending MCAS as a graduation requirement, citing percentages of 67, 80, 76, 53, and 49.
- Released student essays will be analyzed by teachers to identify patterns.

g. Student Representative Alex stated that MCAS data may no longer be accurate because many students, including high performers, did not take the test seriously after it stopped being a graduation requirement, and that the Adams Scholarship was not a sufficient incentive.

- Superintendent John Robidoux said student input should inform what incentives or changes could shift that mindset.

h. Ferreira reported that the district was previously classified as needing assistance at the high school level due to attendance and low participation but has since moved out of that status, with only moderate progress toward growth targets overall.

i. Subgroup results under the 2024 Student Opportunities Act plan were reviewed, covering 19 English learners and students with disabilities.

- Special education scale scores were above state averages, with higher averages at Brown and Glover; members asked how those gains would be sustained in later grades.

j. Veterans Middle School Principal Matthew LeVangie reported growth across ELA, math, science, and civics.

- 7th grade ELA 59% and 8th grade 71% meeting or exceeding; math 64% and 74%, an increase of 16 points in 8th grade.
- Science was 62% (+14) and civics 66% (+8); IEP student growth rose in both 7th and 8th grade.

k. The committee identified several follow-up items.

- Ferreira will investigate benchmarking other districts' IXL and assessment data, and will look into biology MCAS performance by course level.
- High school educators will use the November 3rd PD day for MCAS work and Wayfinder training; Ferreira will return with an updated presentation on MCAS trends and additional metrics.

Consent Agenda and Action Items (01:46:00–01:48:00)

a. The committee took up the consent agenda and action items, consisting of three items presented for a single vote.

- The identified schedule of bills totaled $644,354.19.
- Also included were meeting minutes from October 1st, 2026 and October 8th, 2026, and a donation of playground equipment from the Glover PTO.

b. During discussion, two edits to the October minutes were requested and accepted.

- Because the minutes were drawn from a YouTube recording that started late, a note was added that the meeting was called to order at 6 PM.
- A link to the Metco video referenced in the minutes was added, as the minutes discussed it without providing a link.

c. A motion was made by Al Williams and seconded by Henry Gwazda to approve the schedule of bills totaling $644,354.19, the meeting minutes from October 1st and October 8th, 2026, and a donation of playground equipment from the Glover PTO.

- The motion passed 5-0.

Superintendent Formative Evaluation (01:48:00–02:03:00)

a. The committee held an informal round of individual verbal feedback on the superintendent's formative evaluation, going goal by goal.

- Committee members informally discussed progress on the superintendent's goals, with several members describing progress as proficient and suggesting exemplary performance in family and community engagement. No formal evaluation rating was adopted during the discussion.
- Committee member Al Williams requested more quantitative data, such as surveys, to measure the impact of learning walks.

b. Suggestions were offered on broadening the measures used for the goals.

- Al Williams suggested academic measures beyond MCAS, including ACT, PSAT, and SAT scores.
- Al Williams asked that teacher retention data be followed by improvement plans and feedback from all employees, not only licensed educators.

c. Members praised the superintendent's role in passing the override funding and community engagement work, including anti-discrimination and student safety efforts, and requested continued data-driven updates, particularly on teaching and learning growth trends.

FY Budget Planning Process (02:03:00–02:24:00)

a. Superintendent John Robidoux outlined a proposed FY budget planning roadmap, which the committee broadly agreed to as a framework.

- The process would run roughly seven formal meetings from budget subcommittee review through town meeting.
- The district now knows its available funding, so no pie-in-the-sky or level-funded alternatives were needed.

b. The committee discussed when members not on the budget subcommittee would first see the proposed budget.

- Concern was raised that a January first look was late; agreement was reached to share information earlier if possible.
- A subcommittee member noted she planned to step away for about a month for family leave; the timeline would stay flexible.

c. The committee agreed to involve FinCom earlier than in prior years, building on last year's foundational work.

- Quarterly MOU review meetings with FinCom and the select board were expected to address some concerns in advance.
- Members noted this year would not require the level of rebuilding work done last year.

d. Members asked that budget presentations include storytelling and context behind the numbers, not just spreadsheet figures.

- Robidoux noted the district was not facing a scenario such as cutting $4.7 million from the budget.
- Action items: finalize allocations with Michael Pfifferling and Kristin Morello before Pfifferling leaves; schedule the first budget subcommittee meeting the week of November 9th; and ask how many students use pay-to-ride transportation.

MASC Conference Delegate (02:24:00–02:26:00)

a. The committee considered whether to appoint a delegate for the MASC conference coming up in early November, an item it had not previously taken up.

- Superintendent John Robidoux explained the committee typically votes one member as delegate to speak on behalf of the committee regarding conference resolutions.
- He noted the resolutions document, usually about four pages, is normally sent ahead of time but that he had not seen it.

b. The committee discussed the process and ultimately declined to name a delegate.

- It was noted that reviewing the resolutions in advance of the conference is customary practice.
- No member volunteered to serve as delegate, and the Chair indicated a consensus not to appoint one.

Subcommittee and Liaison Reports (02:26:00–02:29:00)

a. The Communications Subcommittee reported on a newsletter planned for release the following week.

- The newsletter will cover a student services update, student safety and well-being, and other stories, but not goals.
- Timing depends on principals' schedules; a committee member will get in touch about when it should go out.

b. The committee discussed whether to include messaging about the recent tragedy in the newsletter.

- It was agreed to share the statement made at the beginning of the meeting as a newsletter update, as school committee business.
- The statement will be sent for inclusion in the newsletter.

c. A SEPAC liaison update was given.

- There has been difficulty connecting with representatives, and SEPAC has not met since September.

Correspondence and Closing (02:29:00–02:31:00)

a. The committee reviewed correspondence received.

- Emails from other school committees expressing condolences regarding Owen were included in the packet.
- Outreach from area superintendents was described as significant and heartening.

b. The committee discussed ongoing support for those affected by the loss.



- Continued support was noted as needed for students, staff at the high school, and the family.
- A conversation was held about additional support for high school staff; siblings at other schools may need continued support.

c. A motion was made by Henry Gwazda and seconded by Melissa Clucas to adjourn.

- The motion passed 5-0.

d. The meeting adjourned at 8:30.