

Another Year, Another New Principal

- Grace Perry

Alas, another summer has passed and Marblehead High School (MHS) students have returned. School is officially in session. To the naked eye, our school may look the same, with its squeaky desks, hot classrooms and bustling hallways. Yet, MHS has changed immensely. A big part of this change is in the administration; we even have a new principal, Mr. Layne Millington. To start off this year, I interviewed our determined new principal to get to know him better as both an individual and as a leader. I also was able to get a behind the scenes look at some new policies and things to look forward to at MHS. The following is an interview with Mr. Millington from Friday, September 20th, 2013.

Q: What is one adjective you would use to describe yourself?

A: "Probably introverted, the reason is that, in terms of all the duties a Principal has to do, I tend to get caught up in the work piece a little bit more. It doesn't mean I don't enjoy people, I do. I do try and be out and about when I can, but the work piece always comes first for me."

Q: What are some of your hobbies outside of Marblehead High School?

A: "Actually, its funny. Since becoming a Principal, I haven't had many that I have been able to follow through on fully. I used to do quite a bit of scuba diving; I haven't done that in a year or so. I am an avid mountain biker. I used to do the races, still mountain bike quite a bit but I don't race anymore. And then cross country skiing. "

Q: How will you individually make Marblehead High School a better learning environment?

A: "And that's a tough one, because it is already a pretty darn good school. I think the big focus right now, and I think you guys realize this with the size of the study halls, is that we don't have enough teachers, which means you guys don't get the electives and things that would be beneficial to you. So the focus right now is to really up the staff we have."

Q: Tell me about your previous experiences as a Principal and how is has prepared you for Marblehead High School.

A: "Well I think Swampscott High School was in the same sort of situation to start. They'd had a lot of turnover, for about a decade prior to, with about seven or eight principals, before I came. They were turning over about the same number of superintendents as well. So, a lot of it was the work piece. When you've got a school with that much transition, a lot of just the basic planning and procedures and policies haven't been updated in forever. So they are out of date, they don't fit. So a lot of it was policy to procedural work. A lot of it was also the community building, because with that kind of change over, people get apathetic. So, is the direction we're moving towards now going to be something that is going to last? And so I am familiar with that. We had quite a bit of success over there, so I'm hoping that that previous experience will help me speed up the process over here. It took about three years at Swampscott, so I'm hoping to get a lot of that done within the first year and a half here in Marblehead. We'll see."

Q: What are some new policies put in place for Marblehead High School this year?

A: “The cell phone policy and the hats/hoodies is the same thing, learning is sacred in the classroom. But, outside of the classroom, students have the right to be individuals and express themselves. We are kind of striking that balance. The classroom is for learning, but when you are out and about in the building, it is okay. We are looking at attendance right now and of course recommendations right now. Those processes we're talking about them with the School Advisory Council. We did have a discussion about the open campus, which I think is moving forward.”

Q: How are you liking Marblehead and Marblehead High School? What are some things you have noticed about our school and community that is different from the previous schools you have worked at?

A: “It’s actually been comfortable. Obviously it’s a lot of work because of all the transitions that have happened. But, what is nice, is that the work is positive. Interactions with parents, when parents come in and have a concern, what’s different about Marblehead is that the concerns are usually for the greater good. Not, focused on solely what they can get for themselves or for their student. So that has been a nice change. And I think that people are positive, they’ve been warm and welcoming. They are looking for something good to happen and for things to be stable.”

Q: To aid the rumors, what is going on with the open campus situation? Could this be a new possible opportunity for Marblehead High School in the near future?

A: “ So the discussions have started out in the School Advisory Council and things have seemed positive. At the end of the last meeting, they wanted to continue the discussion. Now we were only looking at, you know, philosophically at the question of: ‘is this a good fit?’ So I think that that’s a positive sign that folks want to continue the discussion about it. If philosophically folks feel it is a good fit then we start to look at the logistics and get a full plan together. Then, that plan is then presented to the School Committee to decide if they want to make it a policy or not.”

Q: “ What is one thing you are nervous about this year as Principal?

A: “ I think the big thing is the work load. There is a lot of work to be done. So the biggest thing that I am nervous about is finding the balance between the work and being out an about to take the time to talk to students and faculty. That is always a difficult thing. Like for example, next week I will be starting the classroom walk through. I am trying to give time for the poor faculty to get settled in too! I should be in about half a dozen classrooms each day for at least five to ten minutes.”

Q: What is one thing you are excited to accomplish in your first year as Principal?

A: “ You know what, I’d like to make sure that the year is set up and when we kick things off, everything is smooth. This year, given the enormity of everything that was happening with the new student information and the turnover that happened, I think that the things that a lot of people did, outside of myself, things were actually very good under the circumstances. But, it needs to be smoother. So I’d like to get all the scheduling and master scheduling done and what not, have them happen this year. So that come day one, everybody knows where they're going and everything is perfect, the way that it is supposed to be. That is kind of the big goal. The more

visionary goal is to get the staff in to have those electives available to you guys, instead of sitting in those study halls all day long.”

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