

# The Mind of Millington

- Cassidy Alla

*The Marblehead High School main office is abuzz this Wednesday morning, full of the hustle and bustle of returning from winter break. Layne Millington is settled in his office sending off a word document. The brand-new principal, halfway through his first year at MHS, laughs about the days when he wasn't "working around the clock" to improve our school. From his first few weeks as leader of the school, Mr. Millington has shocked the community with proposals for sweeping changes. Some, such as the possibility of a new schedule cutting double-science blocks, have been controversial, while others, like the motion for open campus, have garnered fervor and excitement. In this interview, Mr. Millington discusses these issues as well as his goals for MHS. Get to know your principal a little bit better, because he has a message for his students.*

**CA: Okay, so the first question I want to ask is any personal facts about you that students might like to know: where did you grow up? What do you like to do outside of school?**

LM: Well let's see, born in Washington D.C., so I went to elementary school there. The rest of my time was spent up in Vermont, just north of Burlington, north of Lake Champlain.

**CA: And what hobbies do you have outside of school?**

LM: *(laughs)* Currently, or what did I used to do before I was working around the clock? Well, right up until this year, I was a mountain bike racer. I did a lot of the World Cup races that were happening around New England. I was also a national champion cross-country skier through college, so I continue to do that.

**CA: You were originally a physics teacher; why did you decide to become a principal?**

LM: I think it's funny, a lot of it at the time was financial. I was teaching at the time when my wife and I were having our first son, and my wife wanted to stay home to take care of the kids – that wouldn't have been really possible to do on only a teacher's salary.

**CA: But do you enjoy your position?**

LM: Oh yes, definitely! It was the right decision, a good fit for me. I had actually, at the time when I was teaching, been working a summer job at Mellon Financial. It was funny, at the end of the summer, they said "Hey, we've got this management style position open if it's something you would be interested in", so I stepped into that. The pay was great, but by the same token, I really missed the education piece. So I ended up coming back to a school environment trying to combine the two – the leadership I'd learned and had at Mellon and the education I loved. Getting back into a school was great.

**CA: So you're new at Marblehead this year – how do you like it so far? The town, the school, the students...**

LM: I think in comparison to, say, Swampscott, it's been a lot more work. But by the same token, it's nowhere near as stressful. The kids are good – what I like about them is that they're very outgoing. They'll come up and talk to you about anything just off-the-cuff. When they have issues or concerns, they come in and they're very... appropriate. Which is nice.

**CA: What is, as principal, your biggest goal for the school?**

LM: Right now, the focus is going through, probably for the next few years, what we do and how we do it and identifying areas where we're out of compliance with what the state or law is telling us to do. Also, just trying to identify areas of leverage. Areas that if we tweak this, or we tweak that, we're going to end up with a school that has better learning outcomes for the students.

That's what a lot of discussions which we're going to be having with the community at the end of the month are going to be about. So again, I find these things as we're looking through, and I bring them up and see how the community feels about them. If everyone in the community is on board, we move ahead, and if they're not, then, you know, we look at something else.

**CA: And do you think not everyone being “on board” could be a major road block?**

LM: It depends – I typically go along with what the overall community desires. If need be, I'd take a different stance, but I typically go along with whatever the consensus is. As a matter of fact, if there's resistance to stuff, that's not a bad thing because it means people are thinking about what's going on. Too often, in schools, people aren't involved or thinking about what's happening.

**CA: What a lot of people want to know is how you feel about open campus. You introduced it this year as a possibility for Marblehead High School. Why do you think it is a good choice for MHS, and what are some concerns you may have?**

LM: I've been at schools that have had it and I've been at schools that have not had it, and it really just comes down to the students. Marblehead has the right kind of students: they're mature and they generally follow the rules as they are set. I'm more on the side of open campus than I'm not. I like the idea of the students being able to have the ability to kind of test their wings and have a little bit of responsibility. We've definitely had some discussions on it, although it's been a little bit on the back burner because of scheduling discussions kind of taking a bigger focus right now. But it's not off the table, no way. It will come back, we will talk about it. I will probably roll it into whatever comes out of the scheduling decisions. But again, I am for it, I like the idea of giving the kids some responsibility.

**CA: So my main question for you today is this: what would you like to tell the students about how you plan to improve MHS, making it a better school and environment?”**

LM: I'd like to tell them that they're gonna be part of the process. There will be discussions, the big one over the science-extra-period decision is going to be happening on an assembly day on [January] 29<sup>th</sup>. I don't know if the students realize or not, but it's very difficult to get you all together at once. I could put a class at a time in the auditorium, but it's not big enough for the whole school. So that kind of hinders my communication with the student body, but the students will still be involved in all discussions and decisions. Possibly even through focus groups, surveys, or homerooms.

**CA: And my final question is, when you eventually leave MHS, what is your vision for the school at that point?**

LM: The potential here is great, but it could be a much better school than it is. Not that it's a bad school, because I don't want people thinking that I don't think highly of it. I think there are a lot of students performing *exceptionally* well, much better than expected, but I think with a few tweaks and some minor changes here and there, this could be a world class school. It can be a model, eventually, for other districts and other schools to replicate. We're not there yet, there's a lot of work to be done, but we've got the raw materials for it, and we can get to that point.

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