

# Freshman Perspective:

## Coming From Charter

By Alexander Kerai, Freshman

### Introduction

Joe Perry's guitar woke me up. My alarm was going off; that shouldn't be happening. It's summer, I shouldn't be up at six thirty, I should be sleeping until noon, like usual. So I hit snooze. Five minutes later, Steven Tyler's voice came on. I looked at my clock, then the date and got out of bed, reluctantly. I got dressed and walked into my kitchen. I was tired, but there was nothing I could do about it. I couldn't sleep later, it wasn't summer. I couldn't wait until one thirty to get up, cause then I'd be late for school.

School. It starts in September, but it haunts you throughout the summer. "Get your summer reading done" or "Back to School Savings Here!" Those signs and phrases remind you that summer is only temporary. But school is important, and I like it. You need a good education to achieve anything, and that's the truth. You need words to speak, and you need to know how to read to do anything. So, it does help; and it is, rather fun.

However, this year is different. I'm one year older and that means a new grade, but this year it also means a new school. High school. It's one of those things that everyone is grooming you for. Eighth grade is preparation for high school, the classes, workload, reading, and essays. There's no missing work, you cannot redo. Aside from that, I was leaving the Marblehead Community Charter Public School; and for me (and the others leaving) it was a pretty big deal.

### Leaving Charter

We capped off our eighth grade year with a trip to Canada and two musicals. Canada brought some interesting times (our teachers dancing and a boat ride through rapids) and a farewell of sorts. When we came back, the two musicals were in full swing. *Once Upon a Mattress* (a new retelling of an old story) was having the finishing touches being put on it, while I was making sure my musical *Three Free Birds* (I was the writer, director, rhythm guitarist, and producer) ran smoothly. It did, and was performed on its opening/closing night to over a hundred paying patrons.

Then we came to the final week. Hurried projects were being completed for Charter's fiftieth Exhibition of student work. The Jazz Band and Honors Band (both of which I was a percussionist for) were preparing for their Music Night performance and the eighth grade was going to Abbot Hall weekly to ready itself for Graduation. Music Night came and went, and Exhibition came and was shortened for the Bruins' Stanley Cup win. Finally, there was graduation. Our year (or maybe it was five) had built up to this. A quick walk down the stage, a shake of the hand and a certificate received was our token out of eighth grade and into the *abyss* of High School. It was a long walk; but it capped off an amazing five years at Charter.

Two weeks before Graduation, everyone going to Marblehead High School from Charter took a math and science placement test, got our teacher recommendations, and then we met our mentors. We got a tour of the High School and a plan to get together over the summer with our mentors. Mine was (and still is) Max Levine. He plays saxophone in the band, and does lighting

for most of the High School's shows. We were a pretty good match; me a percussionist in Charter's Honors Concert and Jazz Band and guitarist on the side, and the director for Charter's first student written-directed-and run musical production and him a saxophonist for the concert and marching bands and the one who did lighting for Marblehead High's theatre productions. We met again over the summer where we went to Mino's and he gave me a tour of the High School, showing me where my classes would be and answering my questions about work load and clubs. I felt that I was ready.

### **Coming to the High School**

The first day of High School began on a Tuesday. I woke up to the sound of Joe Perry's guitar blasting through my room. I hit snooze and went back to sleep. Then Steven Tyler's voice and the piano of *Dream On* woke me up. I hit snooze again but knew that I had to get up at some point. Better now than never. I got up, got dressed, and walked to the kitchen. I grabbed a muffin and sat down to eat. I never had time to do this at Charter. At Charter I would have had to leave by (and no later than) seven fifteen, eat at Charter and wait for the doors to open. With Marblehead High, I would eat at home, and walk to school.

I finished eating and grabbed my backpack. I walked to the High School and saw some of my friends from Charter waiting in the foyer area. It was before school started and we were all waiting to get into the theater. We compared schedules to see if anyone we knew would have classes with us. I didn't. The clock hit seven fifty and the grade filed (okay, maybe it was more like a crowded surge to the entrance) into the theater. As we walked in, there was Mr. Weinstein standing with the Vice Principal near a podium. He welcomed us all to the next four years of our life. We clapped and listened.

There were new rules in place (hall passes) and ones that we had at Charter were gone (iPods, hats). It already seemed better. We filled out a survey and filed (this time there wasn't a mad dash) out into the hallways and headed for the gym. Arriving there I noticed many groups already in place. They held up signs with names of colors. I'd heard of this...color groups! Veterans had it and so did Village, Charter did not. All of us from Charter stood around, unsure of what to do. We hadn't been at the original open house for incoming freshman, so all the groups were new to us. We debated making our own group (gray) or just staying put. I saw Max and we were then shuffled into different groups. Mentors in that group answered our questions (there were few) and the guided questions (again, there were few). We debated playing duck duck goose, but time ran out.

All of us went to our homerooms next, and as I walked, I stared in awe at a building many times larger (and more complex) than Charter. At Charter, we only need to know five rooms: the math and science room (which could be our homeroom), the language arts and global studies room (which could also have been our homeroom), the music room, art room, gym, and where ever foreign language was going to be held. It was very simple. One floor. This: three floors, many wings, many more rooms. It was going to be confusing, but as Max (and everyone else I'd talked to) said: you get used to it after the first week. They were right.

There were new people to meet, too. There were kids from Veterans, Hillel, Tower, and others including kids who moved here. At first, I stuck with people I knew from Charter. But that become hard since most of them weren't in my classes (they were in the ones that were in

the other block). So I become reacquainted with kids I had met from Pleon or from Glover. It worked, and I knew more people. I met other kids from clubs like Headlights and from the Sailing Team. It turned out to be a good first day.

### **Classes & Building**

The first week of school was confusing. Question: How many different ways are there to get to Biology? Answer: There are many. You can go behind the theater, you can take the main stairs, you can take the stairs right next to language, you can take the stairs near the gym, and there are probably others I haven't even found. That's one challenge of the building. Then there's the schedule. I, at Charter, was used to having set schedule written on the whiteboard (French first, then Language Arts...). Here, there is a four day, block dropping, rotating schedule. Luckily it's already written out for us. It's a nice idea, but it gets confusing for me. Coupled with the massive building (in comparison to Charter) and I have a complicated fiasco on my hands.

I got used to the schedule quickly. Then came the building. As long as I had some idea of where I was going, I would be fine. I went to the same classes, and only had to know those rooms, so that made it easier as well. Five minutes transition didn't seem like enough at first. The stairwells would be crowded and I'd have to run through the halls and make sure I didn't get lost on my way. And if I wanted to drop books off, I'd have to make sure I was going either to lunch, World Cultures, or English. Those weren't very frequent visits. Although, if I did forget something, I could get a pass, those were also (at times) hard to get. Teachers did not like it if you left their class. But passes did work. I could leave class to get something or use to prove I had a reason to be late.

However, I like all of my classes a lot, so why would I want to leave them or be late? I also think that have some great teachers that teach my classes. All of the teachers that I have make my classes interesting and at times very entertaining. They made sure that learning wasn't boring, but it is something that you would be interested in. Most of them did things that may be called unconventional but in reality, influence the outcome of a high school student's continuation with high school (sound effects, hats and Gilligan, slideshows, miter saws, build-an-atom sets, tangential conversations, and vicious dog pictures). I believe that in liking high school (as I do) you must have good teachers and classes, which I am lucky enough to have.

Still, the building makes everything much more complicated. For those of you who have been to the high school, how many times have you gotten lost? Did you go to the wrong stairwell or maybe the wrong turn at the wrong time. It's the various floors and corridors that they really mess with you. If you know where you're going, you'll be fine, but it takes about a week to get used to. At first, I had no idea how to get to biology; and it turned out that you have to go behind the auditorium to get to the second part of the school. I got there on time. However, I didn't have biology then, I had math and *afterwards* biology.

### **Progress**

The first week of high school flew by, and the second week came and went. After a while, it felt like I'd been in school for more than two weeks (more like two months). But in that time, I've made some progress. I've become reacquainted with some old friends, and made some new ones. I've been enjoying every single one of my classes and paying attention at every

quiz (there have been five in these weeks). Each day the daily bulletin is posted with listings of clubs, and I check it constantly for something that *might* interest me, but all the ones that do, I've found. So, the weeks have flown by, and while writing this I see high school through a new perspective: not one of a new student, but one of a student who has been here for not that long but already seems to know the school. It's quite amazing how that can happen.

In the few weeks since school has started, I've been checking out some of the clubs. At Charter we had enrichment, a time everyday after school where we would take forty-five minutes and just have fun with an extra-curricular activity. It could be baking or a musical (or even a study), but every one of them served a purpose. I've immersed myself in the clubs at Marblehead High, already a part of the Headlights newspaper (for which I am writing), the Contours literary magazine, Mock Trial, and I am planning to try out for the Jazz Ensemble within the next month. All of them have welcomed me with open arms.

The sports teams at Marblehead High School are award winning. The sailing team won the state championship last year along with girls' skiing, swimming, and boys' ice hockey. The sports at Charter occurred after school twice a week and there were games sporadically throughout the season. But the High School, by contrast, has set practices and set games each week. I am currently a part of the fall version of Marblehead High School's sailing team. We just had a regatta on Saturday, September 17 in Maine where we placed sixth without a full team (there were seven of us). Charter didn't even have a sailing team.

### **Closing**

High school is an experience. It is one that shouldn't mar the rest of your life, instead it should open the doors to greater knowledge and experience. That's what every high school should strive for and do what Marblehead High does perfectly. It's amazing the amount of opportunities that are present to everyone at Marblehead High School, the amount of clubs, sports, fine arts productions and everything in between are available for anyone at the school to do.

Coming from Charter was what seemed would be a difficult transition where, in retrospect, it was quite simple. There were drastic change all around, there was the schedule and the building, clubs and people, but it was easily handled. If I had a question I could ask anyone: peers, teachers or my mentor and they would have all gladly answered. That is the type of community that is built at Marblehead High School, it's the type of feeling that you want to get anywhere you go. You want to know that you can learn *and* have fun, that you can make friends and do whatever you'd like to (in terms of clubs, classes, and sports). Marblehead High School opened a window of opportunity which can only be closed with the completion of everything there; which is near impossible.

Charter opened doors for me as a student, and as I went on, I reminisced of how I could do without Charter. It didn't seem right. I'd been there for five years and they were great years. All of my friends from Charter thought that the transition was going to be harder and I told them just to stick together and go with the flow. That's my advice to anyone going anywhere new with someone who they might know: stick together and go with the flow. It worked for me. I already feel like I've been at Marblehead High for a year and a half, and I haven't even begun to explore the opportunities available. Luckily it's only the third week, and we're just getting started...