

Maria L. Baldwin School Council

85 Oxford Street, Cambridge, MA 02138

April 16, 2026

Baldwin School Council Minutes April 2026

7:30 - 8:45 a.m.

School Council Members in Attendance

Parent Members: Jackie Hayes, Matt Meyersohn, Jen Nigro, Eugenia Schraa Huh (virtual), Andrew Verardo (virtual), Chunying Yue (co-chair)

School Staff Members: Heidi Cook (principal chair), Ben Geiger, Elena Haro, Karin Kugel, Corianne LaBounty, Sara Oliveira, Susan Tiersch

Absent Members: none

Also in attendance: Sadia Aziz (principal intern), Lauren Begen, Michelle Curreri, Julie Curti, Alice Izumo, Allison Gullingsrud, Lillian Martinez, Kerry O'Connor, Megan Powers, Roz Sommers, Nicole Stone, Owen Woolcock

Representing Maria L. Baldwin Community Center: Phoebe Sinclair, Liana Chow, Gao Wen Shao, Taylor Mortell

Agenda

- Enrollment and Space for the 2026-2027 School Year
 - Overview of the incoming enrollment numbers
 - The challenge: accommodating a new 5th grade classroom
 - The effects and trade offs
- Discussion and community impact
 - Q&A regarding the space constraints and proposed plan
 - Gathering community advice and feedback to inform the principal's final space allocation decision

Housekeeping

Notes for the prior meeting were reviewed by co-chairs Heidi and Chunying. Meeting notes were included in the Baldwin Brief and posted to the district School Council [website](#).

To accommodate this meeting, there is a shift in the meeting agendas going forward. Today's meeting was originally slated to discuss supporting math learning. That topic will be moved to the next meeting, along with supporting literacy.

Gratitude

Thank you to *Friends of Baldwin*! Friends outfitted our entire study body and faculty in new t-shirts. They are beautiful and a lovely way to bring a community together. At the All-School Meeting on Friday, students and staff all wore their new shirts and gave a huge shout out to *Friends of Baldwin*. Special gratitude to Lauren Begen and Ashley Williams for their shirt design and ordering. We can't say it enough: we truly value our partnership with the *Friends of Baldwin* and our families.

Public Comment

Michelle Curreri, grade 4 teacher

Many times we hear the term, “we have to think about what is best for kids” as if anyone ever needs to tell the teachers in this building to put kids first. I've been putting the kids first here for 20 years. This building has shifted many times in my time here and this idea of adding classrooms in this incomplete plan from a decade ago is troubling. What was the complete plan for this expansion? It was halted at third grade a decade ago creating a strange model where three 3rd grade classrooms merge into two 4th & 5th grade classrooms. This lasted years. We added a third 4th grade this year and knew that we'd be adding a third 5th grade next school year. And now the problem is back. An added kindergarten. They stuff our school and they tell us because we are so good. Despite asking for teacher involvement and troubleshooting plans in advance of how our school will change, we are being told what we will lose when it is too late to fix it. Losing the art room is a huge loss. It is a carefully designed space meticulously planned by our community. More children walk through those doors than almost any other space in our building. Creativity lives there as does trying new things. Being told we are such a great school that we need to lose this intentional space doesn't make sense. Why burn tax dollars when the room exists just as it should. There is no plan to remodel this school. When you lose a space like, that's it. Why do we throw away a beautiful asset?

I'm concerned about our gym being cut in half – it limits curriculum and movement. Ask the kids, they don't like this.

This puzzle will only get worse with another cohort. Is there enough space in the middle school for these kids? What about recess sizes? No word about how classrooms will be supported appropriately. No one ever listens but class size is a huge factor in caring for children. We manage differences and challenging behavioral situations that interrupt teaching. We will need consistent support across all grades. Changes made to this school should be made to make it better. This plan does not put kids first.

Phoebe Sinclair, Co-executive Director of Maria L. Baldwin Community Center

I'm here today along with members of the organization. We represent the interests of the MLBCC in the desire to work together, however our mission is to support the afterschool. We have been in this space for 30 years. The space was built for our program. We have been a part of the community since the early 1970's. We are concerned about what these changes will do to our program. We are concerned because we are a small non-profit. To make extensive changes over the summer is problematic because we have Outback (summer camp), the busiest and most intense time of our year. There are a lot to consider about how to even do this logistically.

Gao Wen Shao, Board of Directors, Maria L. Baldwin Community Center

I'd like to express support for the teachers in the building as a former Baldwin parent. However, that is not currently my purview. I'm here for the MLBCC Afterschool and Outback. We are a small nonprofit that is losing money and we need to operate almost the whole year round. We have a week between the end of the summer and the start of school. That's our only time off. It is critically important to have our space available, up and running the entire time. We can't afford to take the summer to shift. We have 120 kids during the summer who are ideally at 20 Sacramento Street if the weather is nice, however we use the school when it is hot or rainy. We are licensed by a state authority so we don't have the ability to agree to a move as we need time to get the licensing process from early childhood, or would be in violation of the operating license.

Nicole Stone - Parent and an Art Teacher at Maud Morgan (and a teacher in Boston area schools for many years)

The creative culture at Baldwin is what drew me to the school. I got to see all the artwork on the walls, projects done in classes that were clearly informed by a deeper curriculum that I've now come to learn has long term and complex projects. Using their hands, touching materials, exposed to larger ideas that are culturally relevant. In our technological times, these things have to be done with more and more intention and planning. The physical facility of where that takes

place is critical to supporting the teachers who are teaching across the entire school, teaching every student. This is a significant impact but at the same time, schools face challenges, and how those are dealt with is what will impact the students. There are lots of creative ways of addressing problems and to minimize the impact on the students.

Liana Chow, Maria L. Baldwin Community Center Lead for 3 years

I'm not opposed to moving after school space but I'm very stressed about it. We work year round. We don't have a break. We go from afterschool to Outback to afterschool. I don't know where my time would be to set up a new space for afterschool. Our job is to serve the needs of students and families once children get out of school. We wear a lot of hats. Thinking about the office in the after school space, there is security where we monitor who is coming into the building and ring them in which unlocks the doors. Also the office is where we do behavior support, where we help with student regulation, conflict resolution, and our nurses station (first aid and med pouches). We haven't yet been able to think about the next best space in the basement where all these things are possible. We need to buzz parents into the secure building - not sure where that will go. Not sure where the nurses station will go. Transition between school and afterschool time is critical. We have students coming from 10 different schools to our afterschool. Currently, kids have to wait in the hallway a few days a week, waiting for the cafeteria. Where will the transition space be?

Lilli - Art Teacher at Baldwin for 17 years

So many things to say about this. I don't find it possible to communicate all that I've experienced in the last three weeks since I've been told the art room will be relocated to the afterschool room. Please reach out if you have questions. This is heartbreaking for our students. When I arrived at this classroom I was floored and I accepted a position at a school that I understood treasured art for students in order to give incredibly crucial hands-on programming. If you think about the space like a professional kitchen for a chef. Yes, you can make a chef cook on a hot plate and they will make a nice meal. And that's now what will happen here. We are doing this so fast, with no teacher input. I will still love your children and give them a high quality art education. But the soup keeps getting watered down.

We haven't yet talked about the timeline of the move. I'm expected to pack a room so it will be moved to the basement and then the district gives me a day of set-up at the beginning of the next school year. I have a loved person in hospice. I'm not going to be available over the summer.

Three weeks of fire. Families are just hearing about this. Classroom teachers have generously come forward and offered to take the afterschool room to avoid dismantling the art room. Our admin has said all the classrooms need to be on the same floor. As was so eloquently stated by Ms. Moylan (first grade teacher and district trainer for community building for classrooms) in a Faculty Advisory Meeting, proximity does not build community. I feel like we've been able to offer other solutions, but there is always a reason. No. Not possible. There may be something behind the scenes that I don't know or understand. In a district like ours, that the School Committee states is a well-funded district, I am confused about the entire thing. I am heartbroken that the place I wish I had as a kid and the place your children have that is a treasure, we are no longer going to have. It is so sad to experience this.

Please stop by the art room to see all the beautiful materials - chock full of possibilities and experience and future student creations. Please come by and say hello, and good bye to the art room.

Kerry O'Connor, parent and Friends of Baldwin Treasurer

I don't think the parents fully understand this. I've talked to a lot of parents. Did you hear that special start is leaving? Did you hear that the art room is moving? Personally, I've only heard from Sally and Ms. Lynne (former assistant, current sometimes substitute) because she is my neighbor. I heard from a woman at the bus stop who said that the second grade group chat was blowing up, all with questions and maybe not accurate answers. Parents don't understand what is happening. I bet 80% of parents have no idea. Respectfully, before a decision is made, parents would like to fully understand what is at stake.

PRESENTATION

Enrollment Shifts for Next Year

On March 26, information was shared with the staff that there would be an additional kindergarten classroom at Baldwin. During the kindergarten lottery, Baldwin was highly selected. We are losing our Special Start classroom. The new kindergarten will take over that classroom space. As far as the master schedule, that kindergarten will take the special start slots for specials.

We knew that we would be adding a third 5th grade classroom. Our enrollment this year is 393. Enrollment will go to 406 next school year. (Note: two years ago, we were at 350). Baldwin School is doing very well at serving students.

The space allocation for the new 5th grade has posed some challenges. The guiding principle is to continue to deliver our programming as successfully as possible - both academics and our creative offerings - for our students. The proposal will go to the district after the council discusses it here today. The challenge: We are squeezed - the cafeteria, the playground. Every solution has trade-offs given the overall crunch for space.

Goals:

- Keep all classrooms from the same grade on the same floor (that means putting the new 5th grade classroom on the 3rd floor)
- Center student needs: How can we deliver the same high quality service and instruction during and after school for all students?
- Which solutions are smart solutions given that things might change again in the next few years?
- Collaboration with all departments impacted to do what's needed to keep instruction at a high level (Arts, Special Education, After School, Health)
- Construction costs, feasibility and timeline

What are the spaces in our building that are large enough for a classroom space? The art room, the afterschool room (Hawaii Room), the ensemble room (OT/PT room) and the coaches room. The only room on the 3rd floor is that art room. The art room will become the new 5th grade classroom.

The art room will relocate to the afterschool room.

Currently, the afterschool room, besides being used by MLBCC afterschool, is used for grade 3 & 4 music and health class.

The current OT/PT space was designed back in 1995 as an ensemble room. OT/PT will be relocated and grade 3 & 4 music and health class will be relocated to the ensemble room. The small room between the afterschool room and the gym (piano room) will become the OT/PT room.

Where does the afterschool go?

They will have access to the gym and an upstairs space, spreading beyond the basement.

There was discussion to move art to the coaches room, however that will displace the math and literacy curriculum materials. The coaches room is the academic hub of our building. Students who are academically challenged need a space to service them.

Questions and Comments from the Council

Ms. Kugel: I'm wondering what will happen to hoops if the gym is divided.

Andrew: This seems to be 4 to 5 relocations to accommodate a new 5th grade room. Why not move the new 5th grade to the afterschool room?

Principal response: That came up in a FAC meeting as staff proposed that. Heidi made the decision that all classrooms from the same grade need to be on the same floor. They would not be receiving the same experience as their peers. How would parents feel about their child in a classroom with no windows and in the basement? There is no natural light. Adults have choices and a chance to take a break and go upstairs. Students don't.

Jen Nigro: Small non-profits have modest margins that impact its sustainability. How to communicate to the district and school committee that perhaps next year the art room can be moved back?

Principal response: CPP unfoldings may cause some impact. There is a possibility of creating more space by eliminating preschool classrooms. There has been no long-term district planning due to turnover of the superintendent. The rank choice placement of CPP led to a limited number of available seats in the kindergarten lottery. Our SES (socio-economic status) numbers are out of compliance, some of it that may be due to the fact that there is no afterschool care for CPP students.

Jackie: What level of input do we have? The new kindergarten is coming as it was announced. There is nothing we say or do that impacts that. As a parent of a rising 5th grade student, is there a 5th grade teacher willing to work in the Afterschool room? With the right vibe, it could work. There is also a small space behind the school building. Is there a way to enclose that?

Mr. Geiger (5th grade teacher): This is not a teacher's decision. However, I've offered to use any space available as the art room is a great room for art. Happy to go wherever, however, this is not a teacher's decision.

Jackie: We keep hearing about resources. Why can't we build something?

Chunying: I'm also a mom of a rising 5th grade student. I'm concerned that if two of the 5th grade rooms are on the third floor and one is in the basement, parents may be upset. If Lilli has been in the art room for 17 years, relocating the room may be very difficult. Could it be a temporary move for the art room? Although that does not align with the classrooms from the same grade to be on the same floor. I also have a child coming to kindergarten. Many families want to be at Baldwin. I'm also on the MLBCC board or directors. How do we better facilitate afterschool?

Principal response: If we would move art into the current OT/PT space, however, the afterschool room is much larger. It would mean other moves. Yes, the space is not optimal.

Matt: Please know that Lilli has the support and appreciation from the parent group. How do we rally the parents to help move the art room to make this as light a lift as possible? As a child, my favorite teacher was the art teacher and art was in the 'dungeon'. The space was created by the love and care of students. I know the same will happen here. Can the 5th grade classroom go to the coaches room?

Principal response: The coaches room (4th floor) is an academic hub. The staff thinks that the principal favors it. Yes, it is important to have space for teachers to come together and have a space for students that receive small-group instruction. We are bursting at the seams. We need spaces to help struggling students and we need privacy and space for that. There is also a book room off the coaches room and we need to maintain that.

Karin: We are always being asked to do more with less. No parking, no small group spaces. There are larger buildings in the district with empty classrooms. In all my years, we have larger and larger class sizes. Baldwin always will make it work, but at what cost?

Susan: How can the outdoor space behind the building be used more creatively, like it was during COVID?

Principal response: This will not be feasible for next school year as there are city ordinances in order to use that space.

Art Teacher Lillian (not on the council): Two of our 4th grade teachers graciously offered to move to the afterschool room. They offered to exchange kids so one classroom would not be in the basement all day. This would free up an adjacent 5th grade classroom on the third floor. That too was turned down. The art room will be gone. There is no likelihood that the art room will come back.

Matt: What is the timeline of this decision?

Principal response: This is the first and last time we will discuss this. There is no voting. The Principal needs to present the plan to the Superintendent as soon as possible. This is not an easy decision.

Next Meeting

Thursday, May 14, 2026

7:30 a.m.

Baldwin School Library

Agenda: Supporting student learning - math and literacy

School council meetings follow Open Meeting Law. Meetings are open to all.

For morning meetings, students are always welcome to come to the library and may go to the cafeteria for breakfast at 8:00 or they may stay in the library until the bell rings at 8:30. Parents are welcome to come when they can, leave when they wish.

School Council Meeting Schedule 2025-2026

May 14 - 7:30 a.m.

June 11 - 7:00 p.m. (virtual) - Agenda: Supporting Student Learning in Math