



Massachusetts



Bay



League



Strategic Plan



Massachusetts Bay League

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# Strategic Plan

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## The League's Mission

To further the sport of  
competitive and recreational sailing  
in secondary schools within the  
greater Boston metropolitan area.

## ***History of the League***

The Massachusetts Bay League is the largest and oldest local group of high school sailing teams in the country. First established in 1977 with seven teams, the League has grown to serve more than 400 kids from nearly 25 schools.

Sailing has long been considered to be a sport for the affluent. One need look no further than to Newport, Rhode Island, the site of so many races for the America's Cup, or to the many private yacht clubs in Massachusetts. In 1938, community leaders in Boston realized that sailing could and should be made accessible to the general public, founding a sailing program on the Charles River that has become a landmark for public sailing programs throughout the country. The Massachusetts Bay League is an outgrowth of that same philosophy.

High school sailing first developed in the Northeast at the prep schools of the affluent. In 1930, the Interscholastic Yacht Racing Association (IYRA) was formed by 14 prep schools, Choate, Hotchkiss, Kent, Lawrenceville, Middlesex, Morristown, Pomfret, Roxbury Latin, St. George's, St. Mark's, St. Paul's, Tabor Academy, Taft, and Westminster. While the IYRA grew to become the present day Interscholastic Sailing Association (ISSA), the early days of high school sailing were concentrated at the prep schools. Over the next ten years, Avon Old Farms, Belmont Hill, Cheshire, Deerfield, Florida-Adirondack, Governor Dummer, Hackley, Hill, Loomis, Phillips Exeter, Phillips Academy, Rye Country Day, St. Andrew's, Storm King, and Stuyvesant joined the original group.

The Massachusetts Bay League was the first concerted effort in the country to establish competitive sailing at public high schools. In 1977, seven schools in the Boston area worked together to form the Greater Boston League. With the addition of Cohasset HS and Scituate HS three years later, the League was renamed the Massachusetts Bay League. While schools have come and gone over the three decades since, more than half of the League's members have been, and continue to be, public schools.



## ***The League Today***

Today, the League is full of vigor and activity. Each spring, our teams vie for divisional honors with some sailing head-to-head in team racing and others sailing a season long fleet racing series. Our spring season of team and fleet racing concludes with the largest high school regatta in the country of nearly 80 boats over two afternoons, followed by another fun regatta of over 60 boats during the following week.

In addition to our full schedule of racing, the League hosts a clinic each spring, a fall regatta for novice and intermediate sailors each Columbus Day weekend, and at least one regatta each spring. These events are open to high schools teams and sailors throughout New England. A few of our teams have also hosted regattas on their own.

This past spring (2005), one of our teams, Hingham HS, won the New England Women's Invitational. Hingham also qualified for the New England Fleet Racing Championship, while Buckingham, Browne & Nichols qualified for the New England Team Racing Championship.

More details about are activities can be found on our web site, [www.mblsailing.org](http://www.mblsailing.org).







## ***Recent Accomplishments***

Much of our current success was born from a restructuring begun in 2001. Prior to the summer of 2001, the League had been a loose confederation of sailing teams governed by bylaws and procedural rules. Nearly all the teams in the League sailed at Community Boating, Inc. and all of the activities of the League were held at Community Boating. Teams that had opted to develop their own fleet and venue usually left the League. These departures included Belmont Hill, Boston College HS, and Milton Academy. A consequence of this dependence on Community Boating was that the League looked for Community Boating to provide nearly everything except coaching. Over time, as the League grew, more teams with more student-sailors wanted to do more – racing, learn-to-sail instruction, and recreational sailing – all at the same time. Even with the large number of boats at Community Boating, the desire to do “everything by everyone” often led to teams not being able to practice as a group, and even not at all, on a given day. Simply put, the League exceeded the capacity of the venue to accommodate everyone’s desires and this situation was made worse by poor management and cooperation within the League. This shortfall led to a degradation in the quality of the experience and much dissatisfaction from coaches, sailors, and Community Boating.

With considerable prodding by Community Boating, the League undertook a restructuring that has considerably improved our activities. To date, this restructuring has accomplished the following:

- Recognition by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt non-profit organization.
- Development of a formal contractual arrangement between Community Boating, the League, and the individual teams.
- Certification of all coaches at Community Boating as US SAILING Level 1 Instructors. While a few coaches decided to leave Community Boating or to leave coaching, this required training has dramatically improved the quality of coaching. An unexpected outcome of the Level 1 training was a much higher level of cooperation and teamwork between coaches.
- Development of other venues. As compared to Spring 2001 when 19 teams sailed at Community Boating and one at Upper Mystic Lake, half of our teams now use a venue other than Community Boating. These venues include the Courageous Sailing Center, the Lincoln Sailing Center, the Duxbury Bay Maritime School, Sherborn Yacht Club on Farm Pond, Lake Cochituate State Park, Lake Massapoag, the MIT Sailing Pavilion, and Boston University. Even though the League has grown by several new members, only 10 racing teams now use Community Boating as their primary venue, lessening the demand upon the facility.
- Development of a scheduling template that segregates activity at Community Boating according to the type and League Division. This has allowed us to take better advantage of the fleet and facilities at Community Boating.
- Development of a fall sailing season devoted to recreational and learn-to-sail instructional activities. In doing this, the spring season is dedicated to racing.

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- Shift from team racing to fleet racing by intermediate teams (C Division). This shift affords more opportunity for our student-sailors to sail and race at a more appropriate level of competition while building their skills.
- Expansion of the high school calendar at Community Boating from only weekday afternoons to include Saturdays on a limited basis.
- Establishment of a part-time paid position to act, on a daily basis during the spring racing season, as a Coordinator between the individual teams of the League and Community Boating.
- Revision of the League bylaws.
- Revision of League procedural rules.
- Restructuring of the League's annual dues in order to raise funds to replace and enlarge the fleet of high-performance 420s. This is discussed in more detail below.



## ***Strategic Issues and Objectives***

Today, the League is thriving and full of vigor. However, our future success depends on our ability to manage development of our student-sailors and growth in the size of the League and to secure the resources to support that development and growth. We have identified six areas for improvement and development:

- Shortage of High-Performance Boats
- Development of Better Sailors
- Development of New Teams
- Development of Other Venues
- Instability of Coaching for Some Teams
- Establishment of an Advisory Board

Before discussing each of these topics in detail, it is important to emphasize that although the emphasis of League is on sailing, our true mission is the development of young men and women and that sailing is merely the vehicle. By learning the technical demands of sailing and racing a boat, our students also learn much about teamwork, develop a strong sense of responsibility and sportsmanship, and increase their independence and self-confidence. Over the more than 25 years since the founding of League, thousands of kids have benefited from being part of a high school sailing team. While a few of our teams compete in the New England Championship regattas each year, occasionally advancing to the national championship regattas, most of our students are content to compete within the League. It is important to recognize that the vast majority of students will never win a championship, and that those who sail in relative obscurity are just as important as those that win a trophy. We hope that all of them continue to sail throughout their life. More importantly, we hope that the lessons learned while sailing and racing have also prepared them to pursue all manner of vocations and careers.







## Shortage of High-Performance Boats

The biggest single strategic issue that the League faces is a shortage of high-performance racing boats. This directly influences our ability to develop student-sailors that are more competitive outside of the League, within New England and the nation.

For the teams sailing at Community Boating, the growing number and the continuing development of our student-sailors have increased the demand on the fleet of boats available to us. In particular demand are 420s, a high-performance double-handed racing dinghy widely used in high school sailing. While there is a plentiful supply of Cape Cod Mercuries, a sturdy but slower boat, we currently have only 14 420s to share among 200 student-sailors. In addition, the 420s are showing their age – half were manufactured in 1989 and the others in 1993 – and heavy use by both the League and the summer youth program of Community Boating. As a result, these boats are becoming much more difficult to maintain and keep in good working condition.

Five years ago, 19 teams sailed at Community Boating, sharing 13 420s and 45 Cape Cod Mercuries. The League dealt with this shortage of 420s at Community Boating by restricting which teams could use them, leaving other teams to sail only Cape Cod Mercuries. Today, the League has developed a more effective schedule that allows all of our teams to use the 420 fleet on a regular basis. At the same time, a few teams have purchased their own boats and now sail at other venues. In addition, half of the new teams in the League sail in 420s at their own venue. Five years ago, only one team owned its own fleet of 6 420s, sailing at Mystic Lake. Today, ten teams sail at other venues with an aggregate of more than 75 420s.

While the situation has improved, we would like to create more opportunity for more student-sailors to sail these high-performance boats, particularly for those teams at Community Boating. It is easy to understand how this shortage of boats affects how many teams can use them. It is equally important how often an individual student-sailor has the opportunity to sail these high-performance boats. To improve sailing skills, there is no substitute for time in the boat and we would like to see more student-sailors sailing 420s more often.

In January 2003, the League launched a multi-year effort to raise funds to purchase new 420s and to expand the fleet to 24. This is the first time that the League has undertaken such an ambitious effort in its 25-plus year history. While we are grateful for what Community Boating has done in the past by buying first a fleet of used FJs and replacing those with a fleet of used 420s, it is unrealistic to think that Community Boating can replace and enlarge the current fleet without our assistance, especially given the current financial position of Community Boating. The League has made a formal proposal to Community Boating to share in the cost of a newer and larger fleet. Such a replacement fleet of well-maintained used boats that are only a few years old is estimated to cost \$72,000. A fleet of new boats, which would cost at least \$130,000, is not under serious consideration at this time. While the general idea has been agreeable to Community Boating, we are still negotiating the specific terms of an agreement.

The first step in the fund-raising efforts of the League was to restructure the annual dues and fees that teams contribute so that funds accrue on an annual basis toward the purchase of

new boats. While this restructuring addresses our short-term need, it will also allow us to have funds available to replace and augment the fleet of boats on an on-going basis. This represents a radical change in the position of the League. Prior to the restructuring of 2001, the League would depend upon Community Boating for nearly everything. Today, the League is willing and able to buy boats and equipment on our own, lessening our dependence upon Community Boating. With the current structure of annual dues and fees, the annual contributions from the teams total slightly more than \$4,000. While some teams could likely contribute at a higher level, many of the public schools are limited by frugal school budgets. The current scheme balances the needs of the League with what our least affluent teams can afford.

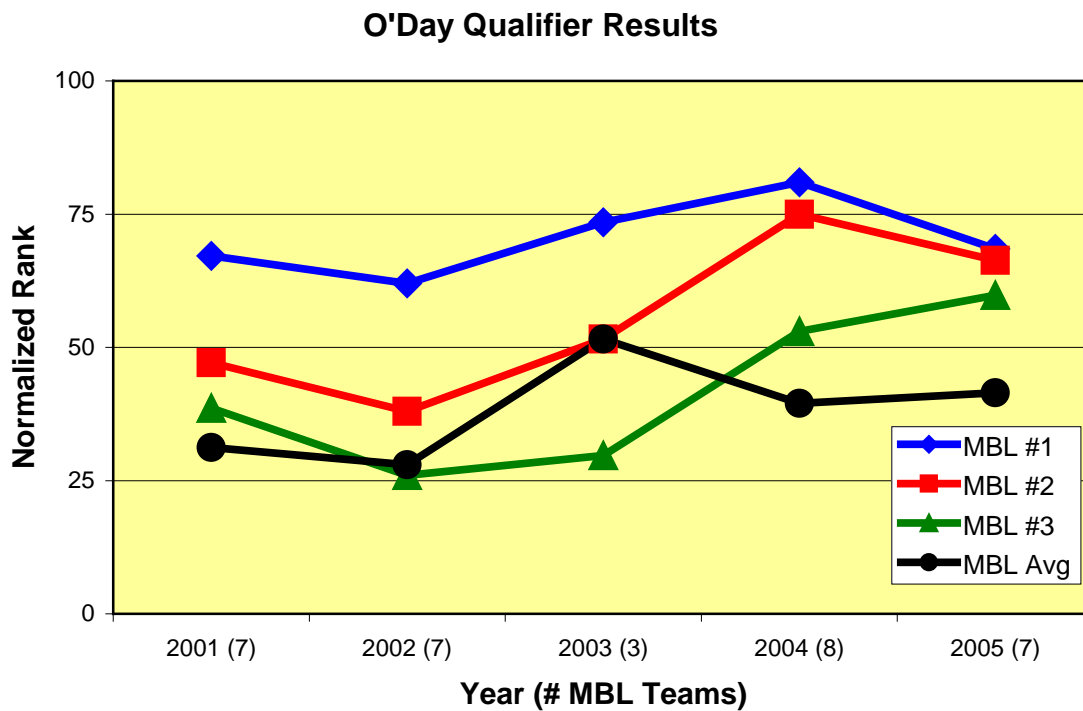
To augment our internal fundraising, the League is committed to raising funds from other sources. We plan to launch an appeal to alumni of the League and parents of past and present student-sailors. We also plan to appeal to companies in the Boston area that have previously supported or sponsored sailing activities. Several Massachusetts-based businesses have sponsored national and international sailing events and we would like to encourage them to sponsor competitive sailing on a more local level in their own community.



## Development of Better Sailors

A common thread through all of our strategic issues is the desire to develop student-sailors that are more competitive within New England. While the League has been able to field teams that are competitive with the best teams in New England from time to time, it has not been able to do so consistently. While many factors contribute to a high level of competitiveness, the four most prominent are: access to high-performance boats, experienced coaching, racing against better teams, and racing during the summer.

Prior to 2002, the League was quite insular with the teams racing among themselves but not racing other teams in New England very often. In 2002, the League instituted a formal policy that all teams are encouraged to race outside of the League and that all the team-racing teams, nearly half of the League, are required to do so. Although many factors are probably at play, there seems to be a modest increase in the competitive caliber of the League. One measure of this is evident in the results of the New England Fleet Racing Qualifiers as shown in the chart below. In 2002 and 2003, only one team in the League finished better than the average (Rank=50) of all the participating teams while six teams finished below the average. In 2004 and 2005, three League teams finished above the average and the average of all League teams has increased modestly. We need to continue this increase in competitiveness so that the League is vying for the New England championships on a regular basis.





Teams that are competitive within New England share a common trait – many of their student-sailors race in summer youth programs. Unfortunately, many student-sailors in the League do not participate in any such program. It is difficult to build sailing skills, if the students sail only during the 8-week high school sailing season. Students that sail another 8 to 10 weeks during the summer are able to gain experience that is difficult to get any other way. Another aspect of this is that many areas in New England have well-established Optimist racing programs where young sailors can develop much experience and skill before reaching high school. Teams that are able to tap into students that regularly sail in a summer racing program or who sailed Optimists before joining the team clearly have an advantage. While Community Boating has a modest and intermittent racing program within its summer youth program, there is little other opportunity for youth racing in the Boston area. Unfortunately, no Optimist program exists in Boston or the western suburbs where many of our teams are located. An ancillary aspect is that many of our student-sailors live in the western suburbs and getting to Boston in the summer can be problematic. It is in the best interest of the League to foster more intensive racing activities in the summer youth programs near and in Boston. We hope that a larger 420 fleet at Community Boating will encourage the development of a better racing program there. If an existing summer youth program were interested in developing an Optimist program, the League would be interested in working with them, including helping them secure the capital funds to start them program.





## Development of New Teams

Over the history of the League, many schools have been members of the League. Recruitment of new members has been largely a passive effort, reacting to inquiries from parents and students that are interested in forming new teams. While this has served the League well, a more active approach would allow the League to grow in a more purposeful direction.

While we will continue to encourage nascent teams to join the League, some members have expressed an interest in attracting teams that would be more competitive. In response to that desire, the League has recently welcomed Duxbury HS to join our ranks for the spring of 2006. Furthermore, we plan to invite at least one and perhaps two more teams with a sustained history of competitiveness in team racing to join the League. If we are successful, it is likely that we will need to consider forming a third team racing division in order to maintain the size of each racing division at a manageable size.

Another effort that we have just begun to undertake is the development of a composite team. Each year, the League receives inquiries from parents and students seeking to form new sailing team. For some, they are ready and able to form a new team with little assistance. In other cases, the number of students at the school is low and there is not yet enough enthusiasm or budget from the school to form a new team. This is often due to the school never having had a sailing team before. To lower the threshold to sailing, the League has decided to work with the parents and officials from a handful of schools to form a composite team, pooling students from these schools to form a single team. We hope that this will lead to an increase in enthusiasm at each participating school, that critical mass and momentum can be built, and that new independent teams will be formed. This approach is based upon the very successful efforts of the Lake Champlain Community Sailing Center in northern Vermont.



## Development of Other Venues

Closely allied with increasing the number of 420s at Community Boating is the development of other venues for our member teams. Despite the support of Community Boating, it is foolhardy to depend upon a single venue for all of the activities of the League. Prior to 2001, the League did depend upon Community Boating for nearly everything and this often led to tension and disagreement. While the League will always be dependent upon Community Boating – there is no other facility that can accommodate our large number of sailors – we need to augment the resources of Community Boating with other smaller venues.

Since 2001, six teams, Boston Latin, Dover Sherborn, Lincoln Sudbury, Hingham, Notre Dame, Wellesley, and Winsor, have moved from Community Boating to other venues. In addition, Brookline has used Boston University on a part-time basis to supplement Community Boating. This movement has alleviated the demand on the fleet and facility at Community Boating, allowing the remaining teams more access.

Over the same period, six new teams have joined the League. Fortunately, three of these teams sailed at venues other than Community Boating. We expect that the League will continue to receive inquiries from schools that want to start new teams or to invigorate their teams by joining the League. We can not expect to accommodate new teams without the development of new venues. It is critically important that we manage this growth while not exceeding the capacity of Community Boating and our other venues.

At this time, the League is unaware of any venue, with high-performance boats such as 420 or FJs, that is not being used already for high school sailing. Any team that would like to use a venue other than Community Boating would need to buy a fleet of at least six new or used boats and a coaching/safety launch. This is certainly within reach of some teams, either on their own or in partnership with a yacht club. Some of our existing venues, such as Lake Cochituate, Lincoln Sailing Center, and the Courageous Sailing Center, might be expanded with the purchase of new boats by individual teams or the League. Another interesting possibility is Pleasure Bay in South Boston. A summer youth program, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Resources, already operates on Pleasure Bay and could serve as a foundation for an expansion to include high school sailing.



## Instability of Coaching for Some Teams

An issue that the League has struggled with is the turnover of coaches. While most of our teams have coaches of long tenure, a handful look for new coaches every year. There is no doubt that teams with consistent and good coaching have a better opportunity to successfully develop sailors with better skills that are more competitive. The turnover is due in large part to the limited availability of qualified coaches. While many individuals may have the sailing and teaching skills to be a good coach, far fewer are available since they are unable to take weekday afternoons away from their jobs. It is no surprise that most of our coaches are educators or retirees. Many of the coaches that leave are often in situations that are temporary and so are available for only a season or two.

While there may be little that the League can do to directly address this issue, the League should be sensitive to the problems that the turnover of coaches can cause. Finding and hiring a coach is largely the domain of a school's Athletic Director and the needs of the sailing team can be overshadowed by the many other sports at a school. The League welcomes the participation by the athletic directors of our schools. For those who attended one of our meetings, their advice has been valuable and appreciated. A handful of school administrators have come to see their teams sail or get into a boat with the students during a practice. To assist schools in finding coaches, we recommend posting free ads on two electronic bulletin boards hosted by the Interscholastic Sailing Association (ISSA) and the Intercollegiate Sailing Association (ICSA). These two job boards are widely monitored by sailors interested in coaching and have been quite fruitful in the past. To avoid the frenzy of trying to find a certified coach at the last minute, we urge all schools to post an ad as soon as they know they have a coaching vacancy.





## Establishment of an Advisory Board

During the last five years, the League has transformed itself from a loose confederation of sailing teams to a more formal tax-exempt non-profit organization. One result of this transformation is that the goals of the League are now more expansive and concrete. At this point in the development of the League, an Advisory Board could help the League by helping to identify potential areas of improvement, identify pathways to achieve those improvements, assist in raising funds, and provide advice to the officers.

This Advisory Board should start as a small group of no more than six. The individual members of this group should be representative of Boston, sailing, and youth. While it would be easy to find six well-known people in the sailing community, this would be far too narrow a focus. Some members should be well-recognized people from the business community in Boston. At least one member should be someone with a deep interest in adolescent development or education.





## ***Concluding Remarks***

The Massachusetts Bay League is a thriving organization serving more than 400 students each year. While the League has experienced change, some radical, some subtle, it is the better for it. As we look forward, we are confident that we can meet the challenges discussed in detail within this Strategic Plan. We welcome all interested parties to join us in fulfilling our mission so that more children can learn to sail and race as part of their high school experience.

For more information about the League and its activities, please visit our web site at [www.mblsailing.org](http://www.mblsailing.org).

