



Board Report – February 2020

MWA CEO Report

Alton B. Nelson, Jr., MWA Chief Executive Officer

The Strategic Planning Process with *Bellwether Education Partners* is well underway. Members of their team conducted a site visit on Friday, January 17th. They observed classrooms and spoke to a wide variety of leadership, faculty, staff, and students. In addition, a cross section of MWA staff were asked to complete a quality review survey.

These key components are part of this initial phase of the engagement:

- The **school visit**
- The **quality review survey**
- **Review** of an extensive set of **MWA documents** on program, finance, organizational planning
- **Interviews** of internal and external folks who know MWA and the Richmond landscape

In addition, the Steering Committee and Program Advisory Committees will discuss Bellwether's findings and initial analysis. This analysis will support the work of Patrick and Alton in considering a direction, key objectives, and milestones moving forward – what is our vision, who do we serve, and how we will go about doing this work?

Board and Alumni Engagement Day occurred on January 16th. It was the best one to date. A mix of MWF and MWF Board Members, including John and Regina Scully, visited the school and engaged in the following mix of activities:

- **Classroom visits** – seeing teaching and learning practices and tech tools in action in the new facility spaces
- **Lunch talks** – opportunities to talk directly with students and key staff and leadership over lunch
- **College & Career Counseling Center (CCC) discussion** – opportunity to talk with the CCC team about their approach to college admissions
- **Holistic practitioners** – opportunity to engage directly with and hear from Deans and Social workers about our approach to trauma-informed discipline and social-emotional development

The **proposed charter revision**, that would allow us to add 4th grade, is tentatively scheduled for March 25th. This is due to the CCCOE staff being strategic and avoiding having us on an agenda with other controversial charter agenda items such as the John Henry charter renewal appeal. It is later than we wanted but gives us the best chance for the CCCOE Board to look favorably on the revision.

The **2020-21 Budget** planning and 2nd Interim meetings with budget managers have started. Wallace (the new CFO) and I are asking budget managers to stay at current spending levels while also identifying up to 10% of areas they could cut if they had to. In addition, Wallace sent out a survey to budget managers soliciting their feedback on areas of the budget that are most essential to our success. They were asked to force rank them from 1-9. Lastly, we will be adding a projected, net 60-70 more students. Next year will also mark the year with about 672 students in the middle school.

As part of our **long-range financial planning work**, Wallace and his team completed the following:

- 1) Conducted a non-faculty salary survey of charter schools from around the state
- 2) Identified core, holistic, and “nice to have” expenses within the current budget
- 3) Developed a financial model spreadsheet to achieve budgets that target philanthropic gap goals
 - e.g. 30% over public revenue – public revenue = \$10M means we could budget no more than \$13M



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Dr. Ward-Jackson began her tenure as the **Senior School Director** at the start of the semester earlier this month. She hit the ground running with a 30-60-90 Day launch plan. She is methodically establishing relationships with the upper school leadership, faculty, staff, and parents. Initial reception of her appointment has been very positive. The aim of this position is to begin to develop “one school” that is aligned instructionally and culturally across the school. Her leadership presence is having an immediate and positive impact on the school.

Q3 Objectives (JAN-MAR)

1. Arrive at an MWA staffing model for the 2020-21 school year.
2. Work with the CFO to project expenses for various staff models beginning in FY2021.

Successes

- So far, a good recovery from the staff reduction moves made before the end of 2019. The “dust is settling.”
- With the new CFO, a line of sight on cost projections is beginning to take shape. More work to do here but a promising start of where we can get to with full enrollment (including 4th grade).
- Opportunities and channels for feedback with Alicia, MWA Board Members, and myself continue to reinforce our commitment to hear from the parents and staff and engage in dialogue.
- Seeing some positive momentum in instructional practices and teacher development.
- See evidence of stronger alignment and collaboration between the middle and upper school divisions.
- Seeing a more supportive and responsive set of MWA leaders better understanding what we are trying to do and being responsive to feedback in these areas.
- Initial discussions to have our supervisors receive management training in the spring is looking promising.

Challenges

- HR-related issues and follow-up.
- Some bumps experienced as it relates to the implementation of Marlin Hour in the upper school. The complexities of running it as intended is being better understood so that we can take action.
- Uneven supervision practices that are not supporting more full accountability or productivity.
- Supervision and evolution of certain practices to adapt to the larger campus size is resulting in an impact on the culture and the perceived expectations for students. With more room to operate on campus (open learning areas and more places to “hide”), students are expected to function more independently and at a much higher level of responsibility.
- Continued effect of not having all of our faculty positions filled. A result will be, potentially, some uneven academic results on our end-of-year state tests, more discipline-related issues, and some sense of faculty and staff feeling a bit over-extended.