



MWA Board Report

JANUARY 2020

MWA Chief Executive Officer Report

Alton B. Nelson, Jr.

WHAT

We met an important milestone in December – completing a full semester of distance learning. Below, I share some high-level highlights for the 2020-21 school year thus far.

- Consistent monitoring and engagement with state and county officials regarding the latest updates and changes for pandemic-related requirements for the operation of schools and for the potential opening of schools.
- Trying to consistently communicate with our stakeholders regarding updates and changes related to the pandemic, school operations, and important news.
- Distributing meals to families 1-2 times per week.
- Supporting students psychologically and social-emotionally through our service provider support model and with our deans and social workers.
- Arranging for the repair of student and staff laptops and resolving other IT issues safely.
- Addressing staffing vacancies mid-year.
- Training and supporting staff in a variety of areas including Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), supervision, and instruction.
- Launching our new organizational structure aligning the middle and upper school under a single, senior school director.
- Supporting our seniors (18th Wave) applying to college (without the opportunity for “overnight visits” and in-person college visits).
- Identifying potential partners to address needs in the areas of **Career Technical Education (CTE), coding, theater, and social-emotional support for staff**.
- Implementing Year 1 of a new strategic plan.
- Launching, adapting, and maintaining various initiatives to support teaching and learning.
- Preparing to assess students in the spring, per state mandate, for 2020-21.

On a positive note, the progress on the strategic plan is going very well. The goal of improving alignment across the school, alignment with CAP, and adding more innovation is going better than expected under these conditions (pandemic and working remotely).

A challenge has been the experiences of our students and staff during the pandemic. While some students have thrived in this learning model, many are struggling with attendance, isolation, and academic progress. Some staff appreciate the flexibility and opportunities to try new things, while others are not feeling as supported, finding it harder to get some of their questions answered due to new structures and the remote working arrangements, and having challenges working from home while balancing child care.



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SO WHAT

In an effort to better understand how students and staff are doing, I arranged for opportunities to hear directly from them in the following ways:

- **Quarterly Check-Ins with the Upper School Associate Student Body Officers.** These meetings with student leaders have been very instructive. I am learning so much about their general morale, pain points, and areas to address.
- **Staff Input Sessions in December.** With the support of Ms. Yarbrough, I hosted two staff input sessions. I asked them essentially four questions: *What's working? What's not working? Concerns? Do you feel supported?* Their feedback and answers were extremely helpful in learning more about how students are doing and how they (the staff) are doing. I heard both successes and pain points, as well as some questions. I have compiled their various responses and shared them with the staff and the Board. Next steps include asking them to rank order prioritize some of the items they would like addressed by the end of March, by the end of June, and those that will take longer to address.
- **Student Input Sessions January Through April.** With the support of Ms. Yarbrough and Ms. Macho, I have scheduled input sessions with each Wave in the upper school. I have already met with the junior class (19th Wave) and will be meeting with the remaining upper school Waves in the coming weeks. When this is complete, I will work to set up input sessions with the middle school Waves. For the upper school sessions, we hold them first thing in the morning after attendance is taken in advisory. Advisors stay in the meeting to offer support. When I have heard from all of the upper school waves, I will be sending out a summary of key takeaways and share them with the students and the staff.

NOW WHAT

I want to continue to listen to our students, staff, and parents to inform any additional support we can offer or things we might revise to be more responsive to the needs of our stakeholders. What is clear to me, thus far, is that despite the fact that we do some things really well, there are just some basic things we can improve upon that would help staff and students feel more supported and valued. In addition, I have heard the sense of loss some of us are experiencing right now. The causes for the sense of loss varies, but the impact is the same – signs of grief, frustration, anger, resentment, sadness, and confusion. More than just “fixing the problem”, the staff need us to validate concerns, acknowledge our mistakes, and offer them support in the grieving process. I look forward to helping us improve in this area in the days, weeks, and months to come.



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Goals & Updates for 2020-21

Goal #1

Discuss, develop, and agree on definitions, goals, and metrics in a set of cascading MOCHAs (a delegation framework – Managers, Owners, Contributors, Helpers, and Approver) in the areas of:

- *a school-wide instructional philosophy*
- *innovation in teaching and learning practices*
- *social emotional development practices*
- *insights into the experiences of our Black stakeholders at MWA (students, parents, staff, and alumni)*

Goal #1 Updates

- **Progress** – Dr. Ward-Jackson and I have met with the MOCHA Owners two times thus far. We plan to meet 1-2 more times before March. The MOCHA Owners have been consistent in providing updates on their progress.
- **Timelines** – The timeline has shifted slightly in that we will take whatever progress has been made by mid-to-late February to inform budget and program development.

Goal #2

Co-lead the strategic plan Program Committee Team (PCT), with Patrick, to meet Year 1 milestones and goals of the new strategic plan. Examples include expanding *college access* education in earlier grades at MWA (e.g. as early as 5th grade and with targeted programming for parents and students) and identifying unique instructional practices and innovations to be able to share with others.

Goal #2 Updates

I am so excited to see the progress that has been made on the strategic plan by the PCT. Alignment is being strengthened, potential programming shifts by MWA and CAP are occurring, and innovative ideas are being discussed and implemented in the spirit in which we are engaging in this work – “test and learn”. In this approach, we identify the “issue” or the goal we want to accomplish, we try a new approach, we set metrics to measure progress and success, we analyze the data and results, and then we either abandon it (if it does not work) or we refine it (if it shows promise or is effective). I am very excited to see where this new approach leads and the potential for being able to serve our students more effectively in realizing their dreams for themselves.