



MWA Board Report

March 2021

MWA Chief Executive Officer Report

Alton B. Nelson, Jr.

WHAT

We continue to persist and adapt to the extended remote work and distance learning approaches as a result of the pandemic. Our decisions continue to be based on our **three areas of optimization**:

1. *Safety*
2. *Teaching and learning*
3. *Social-emotional development and support*

We are at almost a year to the day that we closed campus for normal daily operations and the effects of the **pandemic** continue to cast a shadow over the school year. For the past few months I have met with upper school students, the newly formed Parent Council, and staff to learn more about the effects of the pandemic – what is working, what is not working, what the concerns, and questions. While I have heard a variety of responses, three consistent themes that come up are the sense of loss experienced at not having “normal” school, the loss of connection with one another in working remotely, and safety concerns. Vaccinations for COVID-19 provide optimism and a shift to thinking about WHEN we can go back to school versus IF we can go back to school. In talking to a variety of stakeholders, it is also clear that we are all navigating very different realities outside of the school community – living with and caring for health-compromised family members or partners, having our own health issues, trying to manage child care and home-schooling for our children, and in some cases, mourning the loss of family and friends to COVID or other health issues. It is amidst this mix of responsibilities, concerns, and feelings of loss that we are beginning to envision what it means to make the journey back some sense of on-campus routines, community, and connection. We still have a good ways to go, but I am excited to begin to methodically begin to head in the direction of campus life again.

The **general conditions and expectations from the state** seem aligned with a national sentiment to help schools move towards the campus re-opening, as soon as this spring. The state is offering financial incentives to encourage schools to open this spring, with a variety of conditions/expectations attached. We will take a look at all of the funding options, continue to monitor the local conditions, and implement our phased plan for re-opening that continues to optimize for our three areas of safety, teaching and learning, and social-emotional support.

I continue to be concerned about the overall **well-being of students and staff**. I think we have to do what we can to protect our current staff and faculty. One message I have heard consistently from students is that they have really appreciated and valued the support of their teachers. We have to make sure that we can come back to campus and keep the community in tact as much as we possibly can. Our phased approach will help us make informed decisions, while being considerate of various trade-offs. We want to avoid compromising the health and well-being of staff in the short term, **and** do what we can to help them feel good about the medium and long-



MWA Board Report

term [That our decision-making and phased approach this spring gives staff confidence about next year, when we assume we will be operating on campus all year]. Our phased approach will require some hybrid learning and mixes of on-campus and distance learning. We have to do what we can to make the workload manageable. Again, what we hear from students is that their teachers have been a real lifeline for them. We want to do what we can to make sure our faculty can continue to be a source of support as we begin to move back to on-campus learning.

SO WHAT

- **Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Work.** Our DEI service provider, *CircleUp Education*, began the third of and final round of scheduled trainings with MWA staff with a focus on discrimination and bias. I am excited to have this work underway as one of the things staff stated they wanted was more support for DEI training. Our DEI working groups are operational and beginning to build out their approach to working with colleagues on issues and topics of concern, some of which was taken from a recent staff survey related to DEI.
- **Student Well-Being.** Since the last Board meeting, I have met with more upper school students and the ASB. I have heard directly what their pain points are and I have taken action to try to address their major concerns. One of the concerns the ASB expressed is resulting in the launch of a student portal that will host easier-to-access information for students all in one place. I anticipate that some version of the student portal will be operational within the month of March.
- **Staff Well-Being.** Staff received trainings from *Seeds of Awareness* on strategies that promote healthy practices and mitigate some effects of stress. I co-hosted a space with Dr. Ward-Jackson to mourn the deaths of a former MWA faculty member and student alumnus. I have discussed with HR and Dr. Ward-Jackson, things we might offer to support staff through their sense of grief and loss this year.

NOW WHAT

- **Modifications to Phased Plan for Campus Re-Opening.** MWA leadership are working with Dr. Ward-Jackson and her team to support modifications to our Phased Plan that will help us optimize for what the County will allow and what we think is safest and most sustainable for us through the remainder of the year. We will be discussing this topic as part of our Board meeting.
- **Q3 Reflections.** As we near the end of Q3 (March 31st), I discuss with my team (executive leadership) their reflections on their Q3 objectives and one area of focus for continuous improvement in Q4. We will also discuss how we want to close out the year and prepare for our annual evaluations (June). In our desire to be a more “test and learn” organization, we are practicing utilizing a set of questions to reflect as a group after meetings, events, or initiative launches – 1) *What was supposed to happen?* 2) *What actually happened?* 3) *Why was there a difference?* 4) *What can we learn from this?* In the times we have practiced using these guiding questions it has been very helpful.



MWA Board Report

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, & alumni)

Goal #1 Updates

- **Progress** – Dr. Ward-Jackson led the final meeting with myself and the MOCHA Owners at the end of Feb. Each Owner presented their larger learnings and key takeaways from each of their initiatives, as well as providing some recommendations. As a next step, Dr. Ward-Jackson and I will discuss their key takeaways and recommendations, assess where we may want to learn more, and make any changes to the budget connected to any of the recommendations we want to move forward on. I am satisfied with the work done on these initiatives, the knowledge and insight gained through this process, and the timeliness in which we were able to complete this process. MOCHA Owners took the work seriously and found time to apply themselves within their respective areas.

Initiative	Essential Question/Task	Initial Key Takeaways
Black Stakeholders (Parents, Students, Staff, & Alumni)	<i>What is the experience (culture and conditions) for Black students, parents and teachers at Making Waves? What can we STOP, START & CONTINUE to improve the experience?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feel supported by staff • racial incidents impact their sense of belonging at MWA • more students self-identify as “Black or Af. Amer. than what is in PowerSchool (10) • more attention paid to students struggling vs. the ones doing well
Unified Vision for Instruction	<i>What does excellent instruction look like at Making Waves Academy?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There needs to be a more common vision for instruction • Faculty want a little more autonomy in the classroom
Innovation in Instruction	<i>To what extent to faculty and staff feel safe to innovate?</i> <i>What conditions support innovative planning and implementation?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a common definition for innovation • Faculty want a little less “red-tape” to try innovative practices
Social-Emotional Development & Support	<i>Create a framework for proactively addressing the holistic needs of faculty, students and guardians.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are doing a lot to support all stakeholders – students, parents, and staff • This area could benefit from some prioritization & focus • Need unifying threads & structures to organize various approaches under one “theory of action”



MWA Board Report

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

CAP Changes – In February and March, an integrated group of MWA and CAP leaders began to share with MWA staff and families the new proposed changes to CAP – 1) an “Opt-in” requirement for MWA students to participate and 2) a proposed change to the maximum award of the CAP scholarship (\$5,000) for students entering college in the fall of 2024. Thus far, the communication with stakeholders has gone well.

Shared Beliefs and Approach – In doing this work, Patrick and I agreed that it will be important for us to develop a set of shared beliefs across Making Waves. This document can support and inform decision-making, policies and practices, and initiative development. The PCT members have all had opportunities to review and refine the document. After another round of edits and revisions, I will bring share them with the MWA Board for review and input.