



## MWA CEO Report to the Making Waves Academy Board of Directors

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*December 2021*

### **Fall 2021 Updates**

This fall we experienced a variety of challenges in the form of Murphy's Law – what can happen will happen. Below are examples of some of the challenges that have really tested us thus far this year:

#### ***AUG/SEP***

- Last-minute teacher resignations right at the start of the year
- Short on teachers & substitute teachers some days, leaders and staff stepped in to teach classes
- School closure for a few days when short on teachers and staff for class coverage & supervision
- Campus vandalism due to pandemic effects & national social media craze posting vandalism acts

#### ***OCT/NOV***

- Additional mid-year resignations from staff (can provide verbal context)
- A couple of the heating units stopped working in a couple of the buildings
- A natural gas leak was found on and just outside the campus
- Staff concerns raised about resignations, campus safety, and morale

Since October, as we added more on-site substitute teachers and have begun to negotiate a sort of “new-normal”, we are feeling less stressed about having enough coverage for classes, but continue to be concerned about the following areas:

- Academic learning and cultural continuity in some grade levels and classes due to the conditions
- In-person community building (for students and staff) is difficult due to ongoing Pandemic safety measures (we are trying to make some shifts to accommodate this need)
- Student discipline and restorative practices for students (less Deans and more student issues)
- Teacher and staff retention – for the remainder of the school year and for next year
- Enough Deans, Social Workers, and clinicians to handle the increased case loads
- Student and staff social-emotional well-being in response to pandemic conditions
- Parent concerns and frustrations

Some of the **mitigations** (supported by budget shifts and changes) we are engaging in are:

- Hiring more on-site substitute teachers
- Approval to hire more deans and staff in critical need areas (temporary and ongoing positions)
- Offering a “stay bonuses” at mid-year (JAN) and end-of-year (JUN)
- Engaging staff about what it would take for them to stay

Community items to celebrate and acknowledge have included:

- Consistent and high frequency COVID testing resulting in early detection of very few cases
- “Fall Fest” student event (held outside) and open to upper school and middle school students
- Fall sports for all of our high school teams – men’s soccer and women’s volleyball, & cross-country
- Launch of middle school winter sports
- The men’s soccer team winning the school’s first ever North Coast Section championship
- Successful presentation to our charter authorizer (Contra Costa County Board of Education)

### **MWA Board Engagement with MWA Staff**

As the concerns and areas of frustration began to rise in the early fall (and after hosting a few different listening sessions and having some one-on-one meetings with various staff), I spoke with the MWA Board President, Alicia Klein, about forming a small group of MWA board members to engage with various staff groups directly to ask them questions about what is working well, what are pain points, and anything else they would like to share. Alicia and three other MWA Board Members hosted seven sessions with various staff groups. Examples include the operations staff, teachers, leaders, etc. Next steps include:

- sharing out key themes heard in the engagement with the whole staff
- sharing a detailed summary with executive MWA leadership
- a debrief with myself and the participating board members in the group
- a report out to the full MWA board
- a plan to take on tactical items that came up and a plan to grapple with the bigger themes raised

I think it was important for staff to be able to share pain points and things that are working well with an objective but interested and important member of the MWA community, our governance team. I think this engagement and insight will be helpful to us moving forward.

### **College Admissions Update**

MWA continues to prepare and expect all of our students to be college-ready and college-eligible. To this end, new features of our approach includes 1) the “Opt-In” process to receive support from Making Waves Foundation’s CAP (college success program) and 2) engaging our seniors about their interests and plans after graduating from MWA. Given these two evolutions in our approach, we are encouraged see that interests in pursuing college as a next step persists. Here are some highlights:

- We think about 78 students (of 84 seniors) are interested in pursuing four-year colleges
- As of 11/19/21, 56 (70%) had submitted four-year college applications at this point

Given the level of anxiety some seniors have expressed (e.g. returning to class, getting use to the workload, or the stresses of applying to college when they do not feel as academically prepared), we are happy that most are choosing to move forward with college as their choice as a next step post-MWA.

### **Strategic Plan Updates**

We are making progress on a scope and sequence framework and outline for “college access” Advisory programming. We have a little more work to do, and then we can decide what elements of the framework we want to choose to implement to “test and learn” next semester. It is clear to us that the framework will be a useful tool to make sure we are addressing the core principles and experiences we want students and families to have before they reach the 12<sup>th</sup> grade at MWA. We will continue to iterate on the content, with the core principles of the framework largely remaining the same. We can share the framework with the Board in the spring.

## **My Areas of Focus**

- Starting to look ahead at the budget for 2022-23
- Meeting with functional area leaders and staff to gain more insight into progress and challenges
- Support efforts to shore up campus safety and operations
- Identify ways to help support filling leadership gaps
- Prepare for tough conversations with staff and service providers about the 2022-23 school year
- Working in various places on campus in different locations on different days and times to help provide more visible leadership presence
- Supporting Patrick and the Program Core Team (PCT) on moving the strategic plan work forward

## **Progress to Goals for 2021-22**

*Goal #1 – Develop a core instructional approach that is consistent with the core identity of MWA’s past and provides forward-looking approaches that are responsive to more current and future teaching and learning challenges and opportunities.*

**Update:** Deprioritized for now given other concerns. I hope to pick up this work in the new calendar year.

*Goal #2 – Apply some of the recommendations of the Cal Berkeley Board Fellows in the area of further capturing and systemizing program and teaching innovation through a consistent “test and learn” approach.*

**Update:** Deprioritized with the exception of the college access scope and sequence work. Hoping to learn about areas for innovation in my meetings with MWA functional area leaders and staff.

*Goal #3 – Assess MWA programs to assess resource allocation levels for the near and medium term to support long term financial sustainability.*

**Update:** Wallace Wei (MWA CFO) and I (along with our Dir. of Finance and COO) are in agreement about an approach that would allow us to receive some feedback from budget managers over the next couple of months.