



College and Career Counseling Board Reports

School-Wide

Analysis of College and Career Counseling Strategy Pilots

Jon Siapno, Director of College and Career Counseling

What?

Last spring, the Curriculum and Instruction Review Advisory Committee (CIRAC) vetted and approved a proposal that allowed the College and Career Counseling team to try new strategies for reaching “hard-to-reach” students. Specifically, through this strategic pilot, we applied a “test and learn” approach to five areas:

- **We changed our value proposition.** We enhanced our messaging to appeal to a wider continuum of students, including those interested in post-secondary pathways other than college. As a result, this year’s graduating class has committed to a wide range of pathways – more so than prior years – signaling a more inclusive advising approach, without compromising on our commitment to college access. (Nearly 90% of seniors were admitted to a four-year college or university this year).
- **We developed a publicly-available knowledge base.** Our new website allows community members to directly access resources on commonly requested topics. In the past, people would need to connect with a teacher or a staff member to have resources shared, causing delays between when the information is needed and when it is received.
- **We launched an online appointment system.** Community members can now self-schedule appointments as early as same-day or next-day. Use of Calendly has nearly eliminated the time-intensive process of manually making appointments, while also reducing the number of no-shows with its integrated automated reminders.
- **We experimented with marketing automation.** Email campaigns increased the volume of communication with students and families, particularly for retained students or those in danger of retention. In some instances, students have individually received 50+ messages from College and Career Counseling over the course of the last year.
- **We experimented with artificial intelligence.** We developed a chatbot that can give instant guidance through text messaging, providing a proof of concept for conversational support at scale.

Taken in combination, these shifts allowed us to engage with 1,677 unique users, or approximately 60% of all students, families, faculty, and staff members Academy-wide, far exceeding our previous capabilities.

So What?

We believe this model has the potential to be packaged and shared with other communities outside of Making Waves Academy.

Over the last six months, Patrick O'Donnell, CEO of Making Waves Foundation, and Aiyana Mourtos, VP of Impact at Making Waves Foundation, have followed the development of this pilot and see its potential to advance Making Waves’ growth strategy to significantly increase the college attendance and graduation rate for students from low-income backgrounds in Contra Costa County.

Now What?

Of the five “test and learn” efforts, the College and Career Counseling office at Making Waves Academy plans to incorporate the following three as part of its ongoing practice:

- Maintaining an inclusive value proposition that affirms multiple post-secondary pathways

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- Further use and development of its website, a publicly-available knowledge base
- Continued use of an online appointment system for meetings

Jon Siapno, together with Patrick O'Donnell and Aiyana Mourtos, are seeking funding that can allow the approach to scale across Contra Costa County and beyond. If successful, then the following efforts will continue at Making Waves Foundation:

- Developing a public knowledge base of college access and success content that is relevant for college-goers at any high school
- Building a digital college advisor that uses artificial intelligence and marketing automation to give students and families instant guidance along the entire college-going journey

MWA Alumni Engagement

Atieris Adams, Associate Director of Alumni Engagement

What?

June concludes the second year of Alumni Engagement in the College and Career Counseling department at MWA. Within the last two years, we have been able to build the infrastructure for Alumni Engagement, engage graduates in new ways, and collaborate with our College and Alumni Program (CAP) resulting in greater organizational alignment. Upon reflection, we can see evidence that we have made progress in creating new opportunities for Alumni to serve and engage with the Academy.

In the first year, we began providing opportunities and touchpoints for our Alumni to stay connected. Some examples include:

- Rapid User Experience Study to capture alumni experiences and hear feedback on the kinds of programming and communications our alumni prefer;
- CAP/MWA Alumni Working Group to align on defining alumni, alumni engagement metrics and progress to goals;
- MOU with CAP to access MWA alumni contact information and enrollment status to reach more grads;
- Strong Start Programming collaboration with CAP Coaching Services to reduce Summer Melt for recent graduates; tracking and case managing spring commitments to fall plans;
- “Beyond Academics Week” panels of alumni sharing on topics they wished they’d learned more about in high school (i.e., the college experience, leaving the nest, empowering BIPOC voices); and
- Transitioning to Adulthood Programming for Students who didn’t opt-in to CAP

In the second year, we continued our efforts and deepened student engagement with the following efforts:

- Campaign for Alumni interested in Education to learn more about work at Making Waves Academy, including info sessions for MWA openings and MWA Teacher Residency Program
- E-Newsletters through Constant Contact as the primary digital communication method
- Virtual events like the Winter Alumni Mixer with alumni, faculty and staff
- “Club Connect” opportunities for Alumni to speak to younger Wave-Makers through campus clubs
- Wave-Makers at UC Merced talked to current admitted students to encourage enrollment and connection at UC Merced
- Student and Alumni Panel during College and Career Summit Week at MWA
- Engagement with rising graduates throughout the year, especially during college selection and application season

So What?

Our most successful collaboration for long-lasting impact was with the MWA Talent Team on hiring Alumni. In the beginning of the year, we saw an opportunity to hire from the community and the same demographics as our students. We sent waves of email communications, marketed a series of hiring events and did targeted outreach in collaboration with the CAP Career and Alumni Coach. Our alumni, particularly those interested in Education, were excited about these opportunities for meaningful engagement with our community. Currently, we have five new Making Waves Academy Alumni working on campus in various positions, which is an example of Wave-Makers fulfilling our mission to learn, graduate and give back. Two of these alumni started as substitute teachers and will begin the teacher residency program this summer.

Now What?

We are interested to learn more about the perspectives of Alumni coming back to work in the community. We are continuing to surface lessons learned that could impact future Wave-Makers who learn, graduate and give back in this way.