



Learn. Graduate. Give Back.

MWA CEO Report to the MWA Board

MAY 2024

We are in the final stretch of the school year, with a little over one month to go. We want to finish on as strong of a note as we can to close out the year. This year, as every school year, we hope all students, staff, and families get through until the end of the year safely.

Highlights

Given my longer MWA Principles document I included in the Board Packet and with my summary of actions taken after the comments made by the students and staff, I am not adding anything in this section for this report.

Budget Right-Sizing

We reviewed a DRAFT of the budget with the Finance Advisory Committee of the MWA Board in late April. The budget realizes/proposes about a \$1.8M reduction in expenses as compared to the original budget for the current fiscal year, 2023-24. We still have another \$1.0M or so to go to get to our right-sizing target that will keep us in line with the long-term spending plan for Making Waves. We realized many of the reductions through non-faculty staff reductions in the central office and other approaches. We will take on another set of right-sizing proposals for the 2025-26 year starting in December of 2024. As a reminder, here are the right-sizing objectives:

We aim to engage in a resource allocation “right-sizing” approach that allows us to:

1. *Re-evaluate and reallocate resources aligned with determined areas of need and priority*
2. *Align resource allocation with our goals, mission, vision, values, and charter*
3. *Identify places where the return on investment is not commensurate with the expense*
4. *Identify areas we would like to reallocate resources towards new programs, innovation, and investment in our students and staff*

Vision Setting Documents

I completed the two vision-setting documents for MWA. I share one in a separate document in the Board Packet titled, *MWA Programmatic Principles*. This document serves as a summary of the core principles, systems, and values that inform our programmatic and operational approach. It also aligns well with the MWA charter and with the newly developed Instructional Playbook that Dr. Jackson and her team developed this year. This document can be a resource for prospective, new, and returning staff.

Reflections on the Feedback at the March Board Meeting

The feedback shared in the March 2024 Board meeting was hard to hear. I was surprised by the staff feedback since the Friday before the meeting, Dr. Jackson returned home early from an off-site PD opportunity in southern California in order to attend and facilitate a listening session with all staff. I debriefed with Dr. Jackson after her meeting with staff and she shared a variety of emotions and reflections. I would describe those initial reflections as appropriately self-critical in thinking about what could be better and how could she strengthen certain areas, based on the feedback. It was clear, from her reflections, that the supports and systems she was putting in place were meant to support everyone to be successful, with support and training. From my perspective, it was particularly hard to hear that some of the accountability measures put in place for safety reasons, equity, and to strengthen communication were received by some as acts of mistrust. Schools are responsible for other people's children – to keep them safe and educate them. I am not sure how we can do this effectively without clear, transparent, and equitable systems of accountability.

My heart went out to the two students who spoke to the Board. I value the courage they showed in sharing their thoughts with the Board at the meeting. My heart continues to break for them in terms of the experiences they said they are faced with on a consistent basis. I have talked with students, parents, and leaders (the deans in particular) about the various concerns Black/African-American students have about some of their experiences here at MWA. There is the rational response about the limitations due to federal, state, and local law about selecting students based on race and ethnicity and how the lottery system works in our charter, but what they are communicating are feelings of frustration, sadness, and some anger about what they are experiencing. There are no easy answers to what was expressed. While difficult, my conversations with parents and students are always helpful in helping me better understand.

Much of what my actions have been or will be are a mix of the following:

- I spoke to the staff about the history of MWA and how its origins continue to inform current practices; I also spoke specifically about my 100% vote of confidence in Dr. Jackson and the job she has done. I specifically, and honestly conveyed that in my conversations with Dr. Jackson, she really wants all staff to feel supported and wants them to succeed. A few staff members came up to me afterwards to share their thoughts. One of them stated the comments were not directed at Dr. Jackson.
- I spoke with our COO, Liz Martinez, about her approach to verify the things that were alleged. She did. She sought information from HR, our deans, and others to get clarity on what we knew of these situations and what was done. I was satisfied that what we learned through the process that we did not miss anything or let any student or staff member get away with something without it being addressed in a way that took into consideration equity.
- I discussed with executive leadership and the board about some strategies we could pursue to broaden the diversity of incoming MWA students. This will be addressed at the June meeting as part of our charter petition updates in preparation for our charter renewal.

Detailed Updates in Different Areas

Paused for this meeting, but will be updated in the June Report to the Board.