TO: MSA and WLA Boards of Directors

DA: October 3, 2022

FR: Dr. Kathleen Mortensen, WLA Executive Director

Mr. Randy Vetch, MSA Executive Director

Dr. Kate Hinton, MSA Principal

RE: **COMPARATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW**

Greetings,

This brief, comparative organizational overview, has been prepared for the MSA and WLA board members, as a starting point for conversations regarding the potential merger of the two schools. This document is intended as a clarification as to the current status of each of the organizations.

**INTRODUCTION**

With growing enrollment and the recent expansion of facilities at Woodbury Leadership Academy (WLA), as well as the current expansion plans for the Math and Science Academy (MSA), there is an opportunity for considering the idea of merging our two very successful charter schools. The information highlighted herein demonstrates some of the commonalities and differences between WLA and MSA, and can serve as a starting point for further discussion. There is also a specific process that the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has established for charter schools merging, and that process is referenced below.

MSA is a leader in academics for students in grades 6-12. Similarly, WLA has been a leader in academics for students in grades K-6, and launched a middle school four years ago. Currently, WLA parents are requesting that WLA expand programming to grades 9-12. MSA would also like to expand enrollment due to high demand and long wait lists. (MSA has doubled in size during the past ten years, and WLA has tripled in size over the past five years.) It is clear that the Woodbury community appreciates the presence of high quality, alternative, public, PK-12 educational settings. ***A merger between these two organizations would provide a continuous, high quality, educational program for students in grades PK-12.***

**PROCESS**

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) provides “Charter School Merger Guidance” which highlights the components of merger submissions and timelines. According to this timeline, the required documents and action steps need to be completed no later than July 1st for merger approval. Based on the current expansion interests of both schools, and the desires of our stakeholders, it would be prudent for both MSA and WLA to determine whether or not to further explore this option, in a timely manner. Furthermore, if MSA and WLA decide not to proceed with a merger, both schools need to move forward with their individual expansion plans.

**MISSION, VISION, AND STRATEGIC PLANS**

WLA Mission: The mission of WLA is to utilize leadership-based programs and strategies grounded in solid research, combined with the demonstrated success of Core Knowledge curriculum as a basis of a rigorous overall educational program that builds strong skills in math, reading, literature, writing, music, science, and technology.

WLA Vision: The vision of WLA is to be a school where students and graduates become exceptional leaders, and are prepared to take on the academic and leadership challenges they face as they transition into high school.

WLA Strategic Plan:

1. Exercise fiscal responsibility with sustainable growth, while maintaining quality facilities, ensuring competitive staff pay, and appropriating necessary instructional and operational supplies.
2. Provide a safe and healthy learning environment that celebrates our diversity and builds community.
3. Establish WLA as a respected destination school in the area, known for high academic achievement, and ranked nationally as a “Core Knowledge School of Distinction”.

MSA Mission: We provide accelerated and inclusive curricula and instruction in all subjects, with an emphasis on math and science.

MSA Vision: To be an innovative, sustainable model of academic excellence for all students that creates well-rounded, lifelong learners and global citizens.

MSA Strategic Plan:

1. Success for all Students
2. Organizational Support of MSA Vision and Mission
3. Facilities and Infrastructure

**OVERVIEW**

MSA

1. Founded in 1998, by parents and teachers
2. Premised on the belief for academic excellence, with a focus on math and science
3. Authorizer: Student Achievement Minnesota (SAM) since 2009, currently in 4th year of a 5-year contract.  Prior to SAM, MSA was authorized by the Minnesota Department of Education since 1998
4. Enrollment: 607 students in grades 6-12
5. Awards and Commendations: #1 High School in Minnesota according to US News and World Report and Niche
6. Facilities: 52,000 square feet spread between 4 buildings (2 leased and 2 owned)
   1. Currently in the planning stages to remodel or build a brand new facility
7. Staffing includes 35 teachers, 7 para professionals, 5.5 office support, vendor custodial services, 2.5 licensed support staff, 5.5 administrative support. Contracted services include landscaping, snow removal, special education (numerous contractors) technology (Justin Gehring) legal representative (James Martin) financial services (BergenKDV)
8. Academic achievement: Rated #1 High School in Minnesota (among public traditional schools, public charter schools, and private schools) based on SAT scores (U.S. News and World Report)
9. Financial Position: 45% fund balance
10. Board Governance: 9 members (4 teachers, 3 parents, and 2 community members)
11. Community Involvement: MSA enjoys a very active PTO, and utilizes volunteers as needed

WLA

1. Founded in 2014, by parents and teachers
2. Premised on the belief for academic excellence, with a focus on Core Knowledge and leadership curriculum
3. Authorizer: Volunteers of America (VOA) since 2014, currently in 2nd year of a 5-year contract
4. Enrollment: 685 students in grades K-8
5. Awards and Commendations: Finance Awards every year since WLA inception (Minnesota Department of Education), Finance Award and Board Governance Award (VOA, 2022), Ranked within top 100 schools in Minnesota (Niche, 2019), Ranked 11th best middle school charter school in Minnesota and 14th best elementary charter school in Minnesota, (Niche, 2020) Ranked nationally in the top 1% of elementary schools and middle schools, (Niche 2021) Niche ratings are based on five categories including academic achievement, diversity, teacher quality and retention, extra-curricular activities, and parent satisfaction
6. Facilities: WLA bonded in the spring of 2021 and “owns” our facilities. (through our ABC) All of our facilities have been remodeled or are newly built, and include two buildings for a total of approximately 120,000 square feet. We are located on a nine-acre campus. The facilities include over 53 classrooms, common areas for students to gather, library, art, and music rooms, office areas, a large gymnasium (divided) with an elevated walking track, a stage area equipped with lighting and sound for theatrical and music productions, a high capacity concession area that can serve as a hot lunch service area, office areas, multiple flex spaces of all sizes to support lunches, conferencing, remediation, special education services,  parent-teacher organization storage needs, custodial and curriculum storage. Grounds include an irrigated soccer field, a kickball area, a naturalist walking path, playground areas, and an outdoor classroom. In the spring of 2023, WLA is planning on adding a large pavilion, a fitness track, and fencing to enclose the outdoor spaces.
7. Staffing: 97% retention of licensed staff members includes 51 teachers, 11 para professionals, 6 office support, 2 custodial services (plus a contracted evening cleaning crew), one licensed counselor, 3.5 FTE administrative support (Executive Director, Principal, Full-Time Dean of Students, and a Part-Time Dean of Students/Transportation Coordinator) Contracted services include landscaping, snow removal, special education (numerous contractors that have been committed to WLA for multiple years) technology (Justin Gehring) legal representative (James Martin) financial services (BergenKDV)
8. Academic achievement: Currently exceeds the state average in reading in grades 3-5, and 7. Grades 6 and 8 are 1% point below the state average. Currently exceeds the state average in math in grades 3-6, and 8. Currently exceeds the state average in science in grade 5. Grades 8 is eight points below the state average.
9. Financial Position: 30% fund balance
10. Board Governance: 9 members (3 teachers, 3 parents, and 3 community members)
11. Community Involvement: WLA enjoys a strong Parent-Teacher organization (PTO), various connections with area clubs such as K & S music, Young Rembrandts, and Soccer Shots to name a few. We also have established a partnership with the City of Woodbury Parks and Recreation Department

**NEXT STEPS**

Early October: At special board meetings, MSA and WLA will be introduced to the merger idea as one of the ideas for expansion. At the board meetings, if board members wish to proceed with gathering more information regarding a potential merger of the two schools, board members should commit to conducting stakeholder surveys, and define a means for addressing questions that board members will have, to assist them in determining how to vote on this issue. They should also confirm a timeline for making this decision.

Mid-to-Late October: At the regularly scheduled monthly board meeting, boards will discuss stakeholder survey results and specify added information that board members require.

Early November: Boards will potentially schedule a special board meeting to further discuss the additional information they requested

Mid-to-Late November: At the regularly scheduled board meeting, boards will determine if they have enough information to make a decision.

December: A decision to merge the two schools will need to be made by the end of December, and working committees will need to be defined if the decision to merge is confirmed. Suggested working committees may include:

1. MDE paperwork, authorizer paperwork and other required documents
2. By-Laws merged or redefined
3. Mission and Vision merged
4. Strategic Plans reviewed and merged
5. Determine authorizer
6. Finances reviewed and merged
7. Branding
8. Communications for all stakeholders as various committees address items
9. Policies merged
10. Facilities considerations including use of current MSA and WLA facilities as MSA designs and remodels or builds their new secondary setting
11. Programming considerations includes curriculum to be used K-5, and 6-12
12. Operations considerations and facilities managements plans
13. Staffing patterns per elementary and secondary settings
14. Parent Teacher Organization informed and asked for assistance across committees
15. Transportation (busing)
16. Sustainability (enrollment projections)
17. Extra-curricular and sports activities

January: Roll up our sleeves and get to work!