WLA Merger Committee Group #3

Members in Attendance: Rachel, Ashimi, Jessica, Jillian, Cloua, and Caroline

Housekeeping: Rachel reviewed the facilitation of the meeting and rules of meeting and how we would share meeting minutes with Dr. Mortensen and other group members.

Mission Discussion:

Rachel read through the Mission and Vision of WLA. Rachel confirmed the Mission for both WLA and MSA are accurately represented from their respective websites. (confirmed the sources).

Mission statements: Similarity: Both schools mission statements target a particular type of education. MSA’s mission statement describes many qualities that students need in order to be good leaders.

The Mission statements align on the rigorous curriculum, however, it is comparing K-8 versus 6-12 grades.

Difference: Core Knowledge curriculum is different from a Math and Science based education. Both have different strengths.

The group discussed that it is a little bit challenging to compare strategic priorities and mission/ vision for two very different age groups in two different programs. We would like to know how MSA defines “success for all students.”

If we are going to align with MSA’s Mission, how does that impact WLA’s academic programs and what is rigorous?

Jillian: WLA’s mission is robust versus MSA. Feedback stated both Mission statements supports the emphasis of both schools, respectively. WLA’s empahsis is has a more well-rounded that MSA. The humanities are offered more within WLA versus MSA.

Jessica: There have been rumors of diversity and inclusion issues at MSA. (Rachel confirmed that inclusion issues were documented). She values the diversity and inclusion for her child at WLA. The learning abilities of her children can be accommodated at WLA. If you’re telling her that they’ve accelerated in a type of academics, she needs to understand what type of- for example Saxton math? MSA does offer better mathematics program and it aligns with their Mission. WLA seems to be more aligned with readiness for schools such as Park High School.

Caroline stated MSA and WLA used the same company to establish their respective Mission and Visions. Caroline provided feedback on the comparison. WLA has a Core Knowledge for K-8. If WLA moves over to a K-12, we would have to build out Core Knowledge or another curriculum for 9-12. MSA has academic programs that are built from a teacher. If a teacher leaves MSA, the curriculum leaves with the teacher. There is a possibility curriculum could be duplicated, but there is definitely a gap between the teacher leaving and the teacher replacing the former. There is teacher autonomy and empowerment to allow the MSA teachers to set up their own curriculum and program.

Follow-up for WLA: There is a question on Math Core Knowledge programs where we used to have Saxton math and now we are on iReady Math. What mathematics does MSA use the transition for our kids at WLA to MSA would have a gap if we continue onwards with iReady? What are the plans to create a seamless transition if there is a merger, for example- would we place a set of WLA 6th graders and MSA 6th graders together in a classroom and follow their progress to see what we need to do about the transition and identification of gaps we need to fill and build upon? Would WLA adopt MSA’s math curriculum? Could we take WLA’s Core Knowledge and convert it to Classical academy (similar to St. Croix Prep Academy) and enforce that in this merger?

If we merge, WLA may need to set up a program to help 6th, 7th, and/or 8th grade students who are falling behind in result of the merger to catch them up in order to have a transition into MSA. There are concerns also for Science catch-up, especially because it seems like MSA would most likely have science laboratories as a 6-12 school versus WLA not having laboratories for more hands-on science curriculum because WLA is K-6.

Follow-up for WLA:

How would the merger change WLA math instruction for younger grades?

Would WLA take on some of MSA’s math/ science curriculum?

Do we need to set up science laboratories within WLA? Would we need to align here?

Does WLA want to put in the work to help build inclusivity at MSA, where they have had recent challenges?

How will a merger exercise fiscal responsibility with busing and building/ demos? (the group would like to see more numbers).

If the merger does not go through, will WLA take the stakeholder feedback to strengthen its own programs?

Is WLA willing to change educational strategies (math curriculum) from these focus groups regardless of the merger.

If no merger, can we have a clear strategic way forward with milestones to hit?

Are there plans to change the gym to a high-school regulated gymnasium? How would this be funded or how much would this cost?

Rachel- Can we see the financial comparisons for WLA merge versus not merging?

Will WLA be obtaining an independent council to vet this merger? Jillian- All conflicts of interest between administrations, attorney, and financial auditors?

Jessica- Will these questions be presented in their full? Will we get answers to our questions? When will we get answers to our questions?

Jillian- Can both schools share all conflicts of interest between administrations, attorney, and financial auditors?

Follow-up for both MSA and WLA:

What would a combined Mission statement look like?

Ashmi indicated the ratings for WLA have dropped in the recent years. Caroline indicated the growth of WLA increased at a rapid rate after the second building was erected. This was due to the need for funding to continue to support the school. The consequences of the rapid growth may have contributed to the drop in ratings for WLA.

MSA Homework Expectations (source: https://www.mnmsa.org/prospective-families/academic-agreements/):

Middle School: 1.5-2 hours a night

High School: 2-3 hours a night

WLA Homework Expectations (source: http://www.wlamn.org/parents/middle-school/):

Middle School: 1-1.5 hours a night

Follow-up: How will the homework hours to be aligned?

The group discussed the physical location of the schools.

Response from Caroline: The former location for WLA was physically in District 833. When the new building was built, it physically sits in District 622. The busing was able to be leveraged by the District 833 busing while at the former building, however, because the new is in District 622, WLA lost the busing provided by District 833. Because the new school sat in District 622, the enrollment was opened up to District 622 students and offered busing to WLA (WLA will cover financially).

Follow-up question: Has MSA/WLA received a written busing plan from either District 833 and/or 622 in response to the merger?

Follow-up question: Some group members felt it would be helpful to spell out the implications of having schools in two different districts. Which school district would the new merged school be in? Will it adopt both 833 and 622? Would it be only 833 and we would have to disenroll 622 students?

Would there be a re-evaluation of teacher requirements and qualifications, salaries, and how will the two schools set up a plan or have they set up a plan in order to avoid teacher/staff attrition?

How will the two schools align on their Core Virtues?

What are the financial estimates for a merger to happen? Can this be shared with parents and which school would be liable for the lift of each line item required to make the merger successful?

How would a merger impact participation in a hot-lunch program?

How would extra-curricular programs look like for this merger? Would we have sports programs, lego workshops, robotics, etc.?

Jessica, how we ensure all the questions from diverse committees are answered?

What is the roadmap in case of a merge or a non-merge?

Follow-up for MSA:

How do you define success for all students? For example, are all students including children with delayed learning and/or disabilities or students who excel in the arts versus mathematics or science?:

How does the leadership plan to merge the two very, different cultures? There are concerns regarding MSA’s discrimination against the students with learning disabilities (publicly shared). On a positive note, the exposure of this public case created opportunities for MSA to improve. How has MSA changed and addressed this publicly shared discrimination case? Are there any parent surveys for children with IEP’s /504s or learning disabilities submitted to collect honest feedback after the case? Does MSA have any data from families on how they are doing?

How does MSA maintain continuity of curriculum?

What is MSA’s humanities curriculum like?

Will WLA be expected to change their math curriculum?

Would MSA take on core knowledge for the middle school humanities?

How do we expect the two very different curriculums to seamlessly merge together? What will the merger years look like?

How does MSA differentiate instruction to meet the needs of different kids?

How will a merger affect MSA’s accountability for the findings related to disability discrimination?