

## MINUTES

The Maggie L. Walker Governor's School for Government & International Studies  
Regional School Board Regular Meeting  
1000 N. Lombardy Street, Richmond, VA

Thursday, February 16, 2017

9:06 a.m.

### I. Call to Order

John Axselle, Chairman of the Maggie L. Walker Governor's School Regional Board, called the meeting to order.

### II. Moment of Silence

The Chair called for a moment of silence to include the family of Eli Greer.

### III. Pledge of Allegiance

The Regional School Board and visitors recited the pledge of allegiance.

### IV. Introductions

Each member is listed in alphabetical order by locality.

#### Present:

Ms. Martha Harris, *School Board*, Charles City Public Schools  
Mrs. Dianne Smith, *School Board*, Chesterfield County Public Schools  
Mr. John Wright, *School Board*, Goochland County Public Schools  
Mr. John Axselle, *School Board*, Hanover County Public Schools  
Mrs. Michelle 'Micky' Ogburn, *School Board*, Henrico County Public Schools  
Mrs. Linda Hyslop, *School Board*, Hopewell Public Schools  
Mrs. Harwood Hall, *School Board*, King & Queen Public Schools  
Mr. Kenneth Pritchett, *School Board*, Petersburg Public Schools  
Mrs. Valarie Ayers, *School Board*, Powhatan County Public Schools  
Mr. Reeve Ashcraft, *School Board*, Prince George Public Schools  
Mr. J. Scott Barlow, *School Board*, Richmond Public Schools  
Dr. David Gaston, **Superintendent**, Charles City Public Schools (late arrival)  
Dr. James Lane, **Superintendent**, Chesterfield County Public Schools  
Dr. Jeremy Raley, **Superintendent**, Goochland County Public Schools  
Dr. Michael Gill, **Superintendent**, Hanover County Public Schools  
Dr. Pat Kinlaw, **Superintendent**, Henrico County Public Schools  
Dr. Melody Hackney, **Superintendent**, Hopewell Public Schools  
Dr. Marcus Newsome, **Superintendent**, Petersburg Public Schools  
Mrs. Renee Williams, **Superintendent**, Prince George Public Schools  
Dr. Dana Bedden, **Superintendent**, Richmond Public Schools  
Dr. Jonathan Lewis, **Director**, Maggie L. Walker Governor's School  
Mrs. Barbara Marshall, **Clerk**, Maggie L. Walker Governor's School

Mrs. Megan Perez, **Deputy Clerk**, Maggie L. Walker Governor's School

**Absent:**

Mrs. Sarah Grier Barber, *School Board*, New Kent Public Schools  
Dr. Carol Carter, **Superintendent**, King & Queen Public Schools  
Dr. David Myers, **Superintendent**, New Kent Public Schools  
Dr. Eric Jones, **Superintendent**, Powhatan County Public Schools

**Also present:**

Michael 'Max' Smith and Dr. Wendy Ellis– MLWGS Administration  
Lynn Reed and David Bortz – MLWGS Staff  
Suzannah Stora – GS Foundation  
Peggy Feldmann – PTSA Advocacy Committee  
Leslie Hausser and Eric Lowell – School Advisory Council  
George Nyfeler – PTSA President  
Andrew McCullough, Christian Moore, Avery Gagne, Emily Martin and Leah Erwin – MLWGS Students. Other student names are inaudible on the recording.  
Kate Park and Ted Quinn - Parent

**V. Approval of Agenda**

On motion by Valarie Ayers, seconded by Martha Harris, the agenda for this meeting was unanimously approved.

**VI. Approval of Minutes**

On motion by Micky Ogburn, seconded by Reeve Ashcraft, the minutes for the reorganizational meeting of January 19, 2017, were approved with John Wright and Scott Barlow abstaining.

**VII. Recognitions**

The Regional School Board was recognized for their service during School Board Appreciation Month.

**VIII. Public Comments**

The Public Information Period shall not exceed thirty (30) minutes. Each speaker will be allotted three (3) minutes to make his/her comments. Individuals representing groups will be allotted five (5) minutes.

*The following remarks were provided by Mrs. Kate Park (parent of student)*

I am concerned that the culture and environment at MLWGS are toxic to the mental health of its students. Based on recent events and personal accounts, I think that the school (unintentionally) fails to create a sense of safety for students.

I believe there are four things that can be promoted easily by the school in order to help create a safe environment for young people where they can make mistakes and learn from them, where they can thrive and explore, and where they can be fully supported as they make the transition to adulthood.

- 1) Allow students to fail. We need to create an environment where making mistakes (of all kinds) is part of the job of growing up as well as learning. The key is to import that the world does not stop spinning when you fail. Everything at MLWGS seems to be “high-stakes.” We need to take that pressure off.
- 2) Stop the Advanced Placement course Mythology. There is a sense at MLWGS that because it offers so many AP course that the school is somehow unique. It is not. Many schools offer AP courses. This not only fails to distinguish MLWGS from its peer schools but also shows a lack of creative and innovative educational opportunity. MLWGS is situated between two college campuses and sits in the heart of Richmond City. The opportunities here are endless and unique. The VCU Dual-Enrollment program is a good start at something different. But it is just that, a start. In my opinion, AP courses are a thing of the past, not the future. Don’t we want the school we constantly tout as one of the best high schools in the country to be in the vanguard not an old tired dragon of the past?
- 3) Stop promoting being the best at everything. Presumably, every student here is extraordinary by definition of the school and its admissions process. Pointing out how our students won this or that is more about the adults than it is the kids. While I think it is great that students excel at competition there are so many ways kid’s hearts catch on fire and shoot to the moon. My youngest daughter joined a math competition team because she thought it would be exciting to hang out and do math with other students who are excited about math. The problem is that the process was mostly about how to win the competition and not really about the joy of math. I’m pretty sure that Albert Einstein’s mom and teachers were not telling him to do math competitions as a way to prove he was smart and capable at math. Wouldn’t it be great to get an email about a student’s volunteer experience or what it was like to run track after recovering from an injury? These are the stories I want to hear and quite frankly so do college admissions boards.
- 4) Take the air out. Check your own ego at the door every day. I say this to all adults who work with students and most especially to us parents. We need to make a daily practice of asking if our actions are ultimately for the benefit of students thriving in and exploring their world or are our actions about our own egos.

*The following remarks were provided by Ms. Emily Martin (Class of 2017)*

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Board, good morning and thank you for this opportunity. My name is Emily Martin, I am a senior from Chesterfield County, and I’m here today to speak to you about the unsustainable culture of stress and perfectionism at Maggie Walker. Over the past four years, both my and my friend’s experiences have taught me that it is the same qualities that make this school great – a unique group of engaged, passionate, hardworking students – that have contributed to the pervasiveness of unhealthy and unrealistic standards that students feel pressured to meet.

In my anonymous survey for a Jabberwock article about the “cult of perfection at Maggie Walker,” conducted this past fall, one student noted that it’s common to feel as if “[you’re] on a path to failure if you’re not pushing yourself to your absolute limits academically, even if doing so would be to your detriment.” 80% of 221 respondents felt there was an environment of perfectionism at the school, while over 75% said that this culture had driven them to tears. Many students commented that they did not feel adequate or “good enough” compared to their peers. These fears revolved around topics ranging from GPA to college admissions to extracurriculars, community service, and social life, demonstrating that these problems impact every part of our community. While I understand that these results contain some confirmation bias, they still highlight a real and pressing problem at this school.

To my knowledge, there has never been an official organized attempt to gauge student experiences with stress and mental illness, leaving the school with fractured and incomplete policies that fail to meaningfully address mental health problems student’s face. I believe an official study on the topic of student wellbeing would help the school better understand these issues and how to solve them. An advisory committee of students, staff, and parents could likewise help formulate long-lasting and effective policies to combat these problems. We have a responsibility to create a safe, productive, and supporting learning environment for each student.

I understand that these issues are not easily solved and that it will take continuous organized effort between staff, students, and parents to make these changes a possibility, but I believe that with the help of this school board, we could formulate policy and spark a conversation to help prevent any more students from feeling as if they are inadequate. I am sure that we all understand that this issue is of the utmost importance, and I urge you to act on it. Thank you.

*The following remarks by Ms. Leah Erwin (Class of 2017) are not recorded verbatim.*

Hello, my name is Leah Erwin and I am a senior at Maggie Walker and also one of the presidents of the Mental Health & Disabilities Awareness Club. Similarly to what Emily said today about what has happened during the last two weeks, it is really important that we start to reevaluate how mental health is addressed at Maggie Walker.

From my personal experience, I’ve had issues with mental health my entire life but I’ve never had any trouble managing it until I came to Maggie Walker. I think that over the last 3 ½ years I’ve felt completely overwhelmed and felt like I couldn’t manage my mental health and still maintain academic success at the level that Maggie Walker felt was appropriate for me. I’ve talked to people from all grades here and have found this to be a uniform experience. So I think this does show that there is a culture surrounding this issue that everyone reinforces, knowingly or unknowingly. It’s really important that we start a discourse between faculty and students...everyone is taking this issue seriously, but no one really talks to each other and that’s where we run into trouble. The Mental Health Club is taking strides to create more resources in light of what has happened, but we need help. We need the administration to talk to us as we know they take this [issue] as seriously as we do.

I recognize this is a rigorous school and students know how competitive and intense the academics are when they apply and when they enroll, but I think when so many students feel like they have to sacrifice their mental wellbeing for academic success, where they feel that

choice is not open to for them to make, it points to a broader problem and culture at Maggie Walker that really does need to be addressed. Thank you.

The Chairman thanked all of today's speakers and stated their comments were meaningful and helpful. "We, by no means, what a culture here other than what is best for the students."

Dr. Lewis also thanked today's speakers and stated that the concerns expressed today have also been expressed to him personally and is something that is very important to all of us. He added that the faculty had already begun a conversation before his arrival about how we begin to take a look at the culture here and is it something that we want to improve. We are beginning to have these same conversations and hope that we have ongoing conversations among ourselves here, and more publicly with this body, as we keep you abreast on how we feel we are evolving and better managing the concerns expressed. Thank you, it is very important that we hear from you on these matters.

## **IX. Director's Report**

### **A. Verbal Updates**

- **Presidential Scholar Candidates from the Class of 2017:** Isha Gangal – Henrico, Andrea Medina – Richmond, and Kaan Sahingur – Henrico.
- **Science NHS promotes Science Day in participating division schools.**

SNHS is again visiting local title 1 elementary and middle schools that have afterschool programs. Our students bring science activities and lessons. February 8 SNHS went to ***Falling Creek Elementary*** in Chesterfield. Future schools (tentatively) include Seven Pines in Henrico and Holton in Richmond.

SNHS encourages other divisions to ask for their support. Contact Sponsor Anna Shore.

- **PTSA Invitation to Night of the Dragon February 25, 2017.**
- **MLWGS International Language Fair for Middle Schoolers, March 4, 2017.**

Similar to our previous International Language Fairs, the seventh fair will have a welcome ceremony, a variety of workshops led and designed by Maggie Walker students before and after a lunch break, a closing ceremony, and an international dessert sampling. Students will choose one language of interest, which will be taken into consideration when assigning workshops and to expose students to all languages, other workshops will be assigned via lottery. Pizza will be provided for students during lunch. Workshops will incorporate the following languages: Chinese (Mandarin), Japanese, French, Italian, Spanish, Latin, German, Russian, American Sign Language, and Arabic.

- **MW Drama Presents Pippin, March 2-4, 2017, 7:00 pm.**

*Pippin* is a Tony Award-winning musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and a book by Roger O. Hirson. The musical uses the premise of a mysterious performance troupe, led by a Leading Player, to tell the story of Pippin, a young prince on his search for meaning and significance.

**B. Coming Events**

February 16, 2017, through March 16, 2017 (see page XIII.b for details)

**C. Walker Model Congress Conference at MLWGS presented by Andrew McCullough ('17-Powhatan)**

This year marks the sixth annual Walker Model Congress conference. WMC is one of only a few high school Model Congress conferences on the East Coast and has grown exponentially since it began in 2012. Last year, WMC raised more than \$1,500 for its charity, Teach for America, and were proud to host more than 200 delegates from more than a dozen schools. We know that WMC 2017 will be even more successful.

The sixth Walker Model Congress will be held February 17-18 at the Maggie L. Walker Governor's School for Government and International Studies.

Governor McAuliffe will be speaking at opening ceremonies on February 17th.

**X. Unfinished Business**

None.

**XI. Consent Items**

On motion by Linda Hyslop, seconded by Martha Harris, the following consent items were unanimously approved: personnel actions, fiscal status report of December 31, 2016, and the donations report of December 31, 2016.

**XII. Action Items**

**a. Policy Proposal**

The following was submitted by the Policy Steering Committee for Board approval:

Policy No. 4032 – Student Publications

Proposed policy is grounded in a model policy of the Virginia School Board Association with a few changes made as discussed last month.

On a motion from John Wright, seconded by Reeve Ashcraft, Policy 4032 for Student Publications was unanimously approved.

## **b. Contract for Copier Services**

Three companies presented bids for the copier contract referenced. All companies that submitted bids have been contacted and their copier recommendation examined. Local references were also provided.

Canon has been selected to provide MLWGS with a 3-year lease and maintenance agreement for a model #8595I. This was the middle bid of the three. The justification for choosing Canon is three-fold. Most importantly, the unit offered by Canon produces copies at a rate of 95 pages per minute versus the low bid unit at 75 pages per minute. MLWGS has been very satisfied with our earlier model Canon currently in use and the accompanying maintenance agreement. The Canon #8595I also came with a fax board installed as an added value over the low bid. The cost difference between the Canon bid and the low bid is ~\$81.17 per month.

On a motion from Valarie Ayers, seconded by John Wright, the Regional School Board unanimously approved a contract award to Canon for copier services.

## **XIII. Materials for Board Review and/or Discussion**

### **a. Policy Proposal**

The following was submitted by the Policy Steering Committee for Board review:

Policy No. 5065-R14 – Civic Leave

Proposed policy is typically grounded in a model policy of the Virginia School Board Association with a few changes made so this policy is more consistent with MW values.

Approval will be requested at the March 16, 2017, meeting of the Regional School Board.

## **XIV. Information Items**

- Finance Committee Minutes, February 2, 2017
- MW ‘We the People’ Teams Wins 19<sup>th</sup> Regional and State Championship Title
- MW Academic Team Wins 2A East Regional Scholastic Bowl Championship
- Walker Senior Represents School at Poetry Out Loud Regionals
- Senior Grace Young Signs Letter of Intent with The University of Akron
- Senior Sabrina Daghish Signs Letter of Intent with Loyola University
- Walker has 2 Regional Diving Champions
- 2016-2017 Scholastic Art Awards: Southeast Region At-Large

- Lisa Williams (English Dept. Chair) Wins Taylor Teaching Award
- 2017 MW Athletics Hall of Fame Inductees

**XV. Superintendent’s Steering Committee Report**

Dr. Gill disclosed from the morning meeting with seven superintendents, that Dr. Lewis presented his proposed budget.

Regarding the full-time director’s search, the period for applications closed this past Monday, [February 13<sup>th</sup>] at midnight and we are moving on to the screening phase and first round of interviews. As the board previously approved, the screening phase will include two superintendents and two board members for participation. Dr.’s Gill and Myers will represent the superintendents, and Dr. Jones has agreed to serve as their back-up. Mrs. Barber previously agreed to serve representing the RSB, leaving one seat and one alternate seat open. In the interest of disclosure, Dr. Gill stated the time commitment will include screening of 40 ± applicants that have been previously HR screened, and assume 2-3 hours for this work. The first round of interviews could involve 1-2 days, depending on the number of applicants selected.

The Chair offered to serve as alternate if needed; however, with a call for volunteering Micky Ogburn stated she has volunteered for this task, with John Wright also offering to serve. By mutual agreement between the two, one agreed to work on the screenings and the other will participate in interviews.

**XVI. Closed Meeting**

None.

**XVII. Certification of Closed Meeting**

None.

**XVIII. Announcements/Additional Discussion**

VSBA Board Development for the MLWGS RSB is scheduled for April 20, 2017 at the conclusion of the regular business meeting.

**XIX. Adjournment**

On motion by Kenneth Pritchett, seconded by Reeve Ashcraft, this meeting was unanimously adjourned.

**Next Meeting**

March 16, 2017, at 9:00 am. MLWGS, 1000 N. Lombardy St., Room 153, Richmond, VA 23220. 804-354-6800 x2190.

---

John Axselle III, Chairman

---

Jonathan Lewis, E.D., Director

---

Minutes Recorded by:  
Barbara Marshall, Regional Board Clerk