

Good morning! I am Hana Reed, and I am a social studies teacher and a member of the MLWGS Faculty Council. In February, I was asked by our School Advisory Council chairperson to present the State of the School from the Teacher Perspective. Today, I am speaking as the voice of the Faculty Council. The following remarks were written by the Faculty Council and are based on feedback we solicited from faculty and staff as well as concerns brought to us over the last couple of years. First we would like to share with you the mission of the Faculty Council. Then we will share with you what we believe to be working well, and what is in need of improvement.

The five members of the Faculty Council are elected by all of the faculty and staff. The mission of Faculty Council is to address concerns of teachers and staff and to provide a forum for conflict resolution on matters that interfere with the delivery of instruction and professional growth. The MLWGS Faculty Council has served in this role for 20 years, and we try to do this

- by serving as a sounding board for ideas, proposals and concerns,
- by proposing recommendations and solutions to matters brought before the Council,
- by supporting and nurturing professional development, and
- And, by establishing a direct avenue of communication and participation between the faculty and the administration, and between the faculty and other following bodies such as PTSA, the MLWGS School Board, and MLWGS Foundation.

When asked about the best part of their job, faculty and staff overwhelmingly respond that they love the opportunity to work with a student body that is multi-talented and unique. The students' enthusiasm, motivation, and willingness to learn is refreshing, especially for those of us who have experience working in other school settings.

Apples don't fall far from the tree and, like the students, their parents are incredibly motivated and involved. The participation and support that they offer to teachers and staff alike is much appreciated and likely unparalleled in any school across the region.

Likewise, our colleagues share many of the same qualities that we cherish in our students and their parents. We all benefit from the varied experiences and interests that faculty and staff bring to the table. When empowered, teachers create unique and effective approaches to teaching and learning, ones that best serve our gifted population.

The faculty and staff at MLWGS are here because we want to work in this type of environment, one that is special and offers the distinctive atmosphere, courses, and opportunities that are worthy of the caliber of students we teach.

However, there is a growing sense of unease amongst the faculty and staff.

We are concerned that decisions are being made without adequate input from relevant parties. When input is solicited, it is often at the wrong stage in the decision making process or even after a decision is de facto final. Major decisions seem to be made without a comprehensive understanding of classroom or operational needs. In the past, we felt a sense of shared ownership of final decisions, however there is a sense now that we have been marginalized.

We are concerned about an overly bureaucratic chain of command structure ill-suited for a school for gifted students. Bureaucratic organizations need to facilitate efficient decision making and communication, and often do so through a chain of command structure. However, in a 21st century educational environment, these rigid structures do not work. Where a collegial system of educated discourse should operate, an atmosphere of mistrust has developed. Faculty and staff fear that their concerns could be targeted or ignored should they choose to express them.

Most importantly, we are profoundly concerned about the emotional health of our fellow faculty and staff members. We have heard much about the desire to increase student mindfulness, but the faculty and staff should be equally considered for emotional well-being.

While Maggie Walker has never been exempted from standard workplace stresses and challenges, the degree of stress and emotional exhaustion is far greater now than in previous years largely due to a lack of empowerment and political efficacy in the system as it stands. Our level of exhaustion is detrimental to our work and personal lives, and cannot be dismissed as a natural product of a high achieving environment.

As you know, a Climate and Culture survey was conducted Fall 2014. Due to foreseeable procedural errors, the results of the faculty survey were not released. In order to address the continuing concerns of the faculty and staff, the Faculty Council strongly advocates for a new approach that concentrates on the environment at Maggie Walker. We need a study that will allow for analysis of the working conditions at *our* school. A replication of the previous climate survey will not achieve this goal. We are special. We are unique. We need to focus not on how we compare to the surrounding counties, but instead on how we can continuously improve the quality of education expected of a governor's school.

Just over a week ago during the Alumni Showcase, over forty alumni came to regale us with stories of their post Governor's School lives and how our school helped them succeed. Their witness served as potent reminders of our roots: this school was created to give the gifted a place to flourish. We developed a well-deserved reputation for being a progressive community which enriched students and faculty alike. With some careful consideration of the points raised today, we are hopeful that the efforts of the faculty and staff will spark a renaissance to embrace our foundational roots as an open and vibrant school community.

I understand that we have a full agenda today, and as I am simply the voice for this report, I ask that questions and comments be directed to the Faculty Council at [facultycouncil@gsgis.k12.va.us](mailto:facultycouncil@gsgis.k12.va.us)