

Maggie L. Walker Governor's School for Government and International Studies School Advisory Council

Minutes from SAC meeting on September 16, 2020

The virtual meeting was called to order (via Zoom) at 7:37 a.m. by Chair, Michael Larkin

Members Present: Michael Larkin, Ed Coleman, Karen Townsend, Denise Rasmussen, Rachel Loving, Max Smith, Crista Hamilton, Gabriella Watson, Chase Gunlicks, Virginia Warren, Madison Kang, Rachel Gable, Karen Smith-Will, Lynn Pleviech, Leigh Anne Ratliff, Colleen Hall **Others Present:** Dr. Robert Lowerre, School Director

Approval of Minutes and Agenda

- There were no minutes for approval since the most recent SAC meeting took place in May and was followed by a June presentation to the Regional School Board of SAC accomplishments for the 2019/20 school year.
- The agenda for today's meeting was approved as proposed.

Introductions were made in turn by each member of the SAC Executive Board: Michael (Chair), Ed (Vice-Chair), Karen T. (Secretary), and Denise (Historian). New members to SAC this year are Rachel L. and Crista (Faculty & Staff), Virginia and Madison (Student), Rachel G. and Colleen (Parent PTSA members), and Karen S. (Director Appointee).

Director Update

Dr Lowerre spoke about the unique challenges of this school year and what SAC can do to help.

1. The most challenging piece is not being able to be in the room together. School is (virtually) open with sync days Mon-Thurs on Zoom, then Friday as an async day. Administrators have received a lot of feedback about how remote classes are going and will assess at the end of first two weeks. He is optimistic that MLWGS will be able to come back at some point this year and will be looking at Chesterfield, Richmond, and Henrico (the big districts) to see what they are doing and possibly following suit. Transportation will be needed. He noted that in-person freshman orientation (half of group in morning and half in afternoon) was held on August 25th and went well. Fewer than 15 kids did not show up and a mini orientation was held a few days later for about 8 who could not make the main session.
2. Second challenge is admissions process and the changes that Districts might make to their selections to have more equitable representation of under-representative groups. He stressed that the intent is not to change curriculum or lower standards, but for the school to be prepared to support students should they need assistance with subjects.

3. Third challenge is to ensure a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere on school campus. He has concerns about outside social media (Instagram, etc.) and divisive conversations going on there regarding politics and race.

Old Business

The school's new 5-year **Strategic Plan** was approved by the Regional School Board on August 20th. Michael spoke about serving on the Strategic Planning Committee last year along with Barry Bowers (previous SAC Chair). Some of SAC's ad-hoc committee work for this school year will be focused on objectives of **Goal 1 - Create a welcoming and responsive environment that celebrates and reflects the diversity the school districts we serve and fosters a sense of belonging for all.**

Objective 1 – Engage and educate our school districts about the opportunities available to them in our learning environment. Michael summarized the concerns that some people do not know MLWGS exists, and that there may be unfavorable baggage about the school's workload. We want kids to have preference for MLWGS over other schools.

Objective 2 – Create an environment that provides a sense of belonging and fosters student and family engagement. Michael stated that SAC should look at what structural barriers keep kids from participation, such as fees and transportation.

New Business

- Michael provided a slide overview of SAC mission and how it operates with monthly meetings, plus committee work in between. Committee leads are needed and there is an expectation that each SAC member will serve on at least 2 committees. Currently we have 19 members. We need 1 more faculty appointment and possibly 2 more director appointments, preferably from the alumni group working on diversity and inclusion.
- Michael stated that by dropping Policy and Handbook Review, SAC's three standing committees will be reduced to just two – Nominations & Bylaws and School Calendar. Recommendation is for SAC member to join the Director's Policy committee instead of having our own.
- Five ad-hoc committees were proposed by Michael. Denise asked about how SAC will be aligning with the multi-year implementation of the strategic plan. Michael answered that we start with awareness, thus need for a marketing plan first. Denise asked that multi-year committee membership be considered for SAC members who have multiple years of appt remaining. The five ad-hoc committees are:
 - Campus life during COVID – To address socialization and interaction challenges for the MLWGS "family" and make recommendations for COVID safety-compliant in-person activities.
 - SAC marketing and communications plan – to increase awareness of SAC, engagement with non-SAC members, and build a strategy for outside communications/notifications

- MLWGS strategic marketing plan – to address the diversity of MLWGS’ applicant pool by increasing awareness, changing negative perceptions, and driving a preference for families and students to choose MLWGS.
- Early engagement – to address the diversity of MLWGS’ applicant pool by engaging elementary aged-children, particularly in under-represented populations.
- Removing structural barriers to student engagement – to increase opportunities for under-represented student populations to participate in student organizations.
- Karen S. motioned that the 2 standing and 5 ad-hoc committees be accepted as proposed. The motion carried.

Announcements and Closure

There were no additional announcements from the floor. The meeting adjourned at 8:33 a.m.