

DRAFT

# Math & Science Academy Merger Committee

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022 at 8:00 a.m.  
Virtually via Zoom

Recording: <https://youtu.be/D1M88a9Q4tA>

1. Call to Order: 8:00AM (Maggie Burggraaff)
2. Roll Call

**Maggie Burggraaff, Caroline Maddux, David Johnston, Diane Thiegis, ~~Heather Krisko~~, Janice Erickson, Jamie Brodd, Jennifer Heydt-Nelson, Justin Gehring, Kate Hinton, Kristin Walters, ~~Lavanya Kanukurthy~~, Leigh Ann Ahmad, ~~Noah Yehalashet~~, Stephanie Luedtke, Steve Hoemann, Randy Vetch, ~~Surender Maddela~~, Teresa Ward, Wendell Sletten**

3. New Business -
  - a. (10 min) Discussion For BOD - Would a merger with WLA support the mission, vision, and strategic plan of MSA
    - WLA - Core Knowledge (<http://www.wlamn.org/about-wla/>)
    - MSA - Math/Science Focus (<https://www.mnmsa.org/about/our-vision-and-mission/>)They are both focused on student achievement.

## Committee Remarks:

They are not irreconcilable

WLA is a core knowledge school

Brodd – core knowledge is focused on getting in depth in certain areas (third grade is roman and Greek gods). It is like humanities. Your whole learning is core knowledge. Math is separate. Science has changed recently. Everything else is taught together. What is the intent of each school? Both missions and visions are great.

Both are focused on student achievement.

Very similar – WLA specifically acknowledges curriculum, MSA leans toward autonomy in curriculum. Both visions lead toward world leaders. They aren't too different, WLA specifically acknowledges curriculum.

Maddux – looking at the text of both there are slight differences. How it is IMPLEMENTED matters. Are we evaluating what it looks like on paper, or are we also needing to take into consideration how it is implemented at each school. Are we looking at combining the systems that come out of these.

Thiegs – had a student at both schools. Both are awesome schools. The focus on math and science at MSA is significantly different. MSA is a traditional accelerated curriculum, WLA teaches more at a standardized level across the grade vs. MSA's approach to teaching at an individual level. If we take away the uniqueness of each school would it NOT serve all students as well?

Luedtke – We provide accelerated and inclusive curriculum, it is possible to align these missions. While we are accelerated, we are also inclusive. That could be compatible together. One thing that I see is that the benefit at WLA is their focus on leadership and that within the curriculum – we want to be innovative and sustainable, and that aligns. We could benefit from some specific leadership approaches.

- b. (10 min) What does MSA need to know in order to support a merger approval
- Does it make sense
  - How are the mission vision /mission how are they operational organized in the schools through academics
  - Common across all schools - el ed curriculum is different from secondary....this may not create a misalignment

Alignment is possible  
Accelerated/all needs met by

A WLA focus that is positive is leadership  
MSA would benefit from this.

### **Curriculum should have its own full meeting**

Grade expansion - What is the impact of this? If we suddenly expand the school overall?

Will class sizes change with the increase of school size?

Are there budgeting concerns?

550-1400 is almost a triple in size

Mergers and acquisitions are a mess (SEL impact/academic impact)

How are the cultures compatible?

Would they work well together

Bussing? Building in another district?

Would we be able to keep up enrollment?

Additional debt?

What are WLA's goals and expectations of this process?

How many of these meetings are planned out? Add an OPEN COMMENT portion.  
Create a meeting for each topic.

Have we gotten the actual financial information? What about MSA's financial information? The merger seems to be clouding the expansion discussion?

1. BOD needs to have a concrete understanding of MDE Merger Guidance
2. Need WLA's input

Take a step back and look at the other information. What was the original objective of the expansion?

Small school feel

We have to look at how we can curate culture and community as a whole

What does the MS merger look like?

Conflict with expansion with what the expansion was for.

Rush is for financials

### **Committee Remarks:**

Maddux – How are the vision and mission statements for each of us actually operationalized and practiced in the school setting through curriculum, through the focus of the academic experience through the schools?

Burggraaff – This committee isn't about changing curriculum in a merger. That should be a separate committee. Currently the staff at MSA is looking at curriculum. it is constantly being audited. The state changes our requirements.

Hinton – What is common across all school systems is that the elementary curriculum is generally quite different from secondary curriculum. That may not cause a misalignment.

Students are coming in now with a whole variety of curriculum, including from WLA and they do not perform any differently from other students in their grade.

Erickson – I feel strongly that each question here should be given an equal amount of time, we need to allow every person to speak and not everyone has been able to and it feels rushed. We don't make good decisions when we are in a rushed state of mind. I also hear a lot of people speaking of curriculum – this should have its own full meeting as well, to ensure we are covering all. This is probably one of the most important aspects. We are pushing culture to the very end – we may run out of time.

Walters - What is the emotional and educational impact of a change this big? How would change management be handled? Are we tracking the impact of size change on this year's 9th grade? Will class sizes change? Is there an accompanying budget for teacher hires, para hires, busing?

Ahmad – People have a lot to say and a lot to feel on this topic. It really is first and foremost about the culture.

Maddux – What are WLAs goals and expectations of this process? We need to see that there is open communication. We can talk about compatibility, but if we are unable to reconcile our needs with theirs – as a committee we need that information as well. Is this merger idea compatible or not?

*At this point, it was suggested that everyone be given an opportunity to speak in more of an open forum format.*

Johnston – I am listening to hear different points of view. I agree culture is an important aspect, tied to mission and vision. As we discuss – opening it up to all three questions on the agenda could be helpful so people can speak to what's on their mind and possibly cross topics.

Thiegs – Knowing both sides there are so many questions. Culture, curriculum and whether they are complementary. Bus rides, buildings in different districts, how does that affect students on both sides. Are people ok with shuttling between campuses? She worked hard on the expansion. It was really hard keeping up with growing so fast. This is the largest debt that we would take on. We'd have more income, but is that something we need to look at as well. It feels like we are just getting started.

Erickson – Agrees that it feels like we are just getting started. How many of these meetings are planned, so that we can know we aren't being rushed into a decision. Would also love to have an open comment meeting at the end so that voices can be heard. Would be nice if each meeting had a specific topic we could focus on, so that we can have a meaningful discussion and move forward in a good way.

Burggraaff – Intent was to briefly touch on topics, at the end we will touch on future topics and meetings. This is not one and done, This meeting is just to get discussion started.

Brodd – Have we taken a step back and gotten all of the relevant financial information? We have looked at options, but what about a deeper layer of financial information. We don't have the clear original data. We are a math and science school, let's look at the data. We need to take a few steps back and look at why we are doing it. Do we need to do it? Emotions get in there real quick, as do opinions. It would be helpful to start with some of that base data.

Heydt-Nelson – Mostly here to listen. Liked comment earlier that we added 50 new 9<sup>th</sup> graders and is wondering how that is going. Tripling in size is overwhelming. One of the reasons she wanted to come teach is because of small class sizes, because of a sense of community. That is so important, and what is unique about this school. She loves the community. Maggie is doing amazing and this is hard task to take on.

Gehring – Coming at it pragmatically. Board needs to have a concrete understanding of charter school merger guidance from MDE. (Put into chat: [https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_FILE&dDocName=MDE074053&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary#:~:text=Merger%20Guidance%20Overview&text=Two%20or%20more%20charter%20schools,district%20number%20for%20that%20school](https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE074053&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary#:~:text=Merger%20Guidance%20Overview&text=Two%20or%20more%20charter%20schools,district%20number%20for%20that%20school)) Give everyone a clear understanding of that. There are a lot of questions that need to be answered, many can't be answered without WLA, so when it comes to recommendations he is ready.

Hinton – Mostly here to listen, very excited to have a lot of parents here to bring forward questions. Much of this hasn't been explored beyond potential. On the financials, we've gone through it and have that data, she would be happy to share.

Walters – Feels that "small school feel" is being misrepresented in the materials. There is a big difference between 550 and 1400. Also would like to understand the original objective of expansion - Is that documented and available for the community to view?

Ahmad – (having technical difficulties.) We need to revisit what does the math look like? With their debt to income ratio, they may have different plans for how they'd like to use the money. Put question into the comments.

Luedtke – We both have middle schools. What does that part of the merger look like? A benefit would be in arts and electives. Opportunities to expand means offering different types of electives. Last year, her job was restricted by space. If we had more opportunity for staffing and space, we could offer so much more in the elective realm.

Hoemann – Also here to listen, appreciates involvement. This is the big unknown, we are exploring possibilities. Agrees with Justin. We need to have representatives from the other school here in order to really, truly collaborate. Echoes what Stephanie says – the opportunities this creates for students is very exciting. New classes, new activities that we can offer to make our school even better than what it is.

Vetsch – Likes what Steve just said. This has been a roller coaster since we started looking at options. We want to provide what is best for the students. Excited to see involvement because we need everyone on the same page – so that where we head is with everyone together, collaboratively. Both in MSA and if there is a merger, with the other school as well.

Ward – Here listening to parents. The culture has evolved and changed since 2008. There are some consistencies, but depending on what we're doing in a particular year, the staff and students, the parents. It has evolved and changed so many different times and in different ways. Even in classes, each one has its own personality. We can continue to think about culture, but know that it will change. Curriculum – teachers are definitely wanting to talk about how that will align, if or as we merge.

Sletten – As a teacher, wants to dive into the concept of what a small school feel is. He has been in a school the size of MSA, he has taught in a district with 2000 students and the same small school feel was there. That was harvested by what we can do with extracurriculars, with electives, what we can do with our community. We need to look at how we can curate culture and community as a whole.

Gehring – Recommendation that the board reform this committee as a joint exploratory committee. (From chat: Recommended that the BOD reform this committee as the Joint Exploratory Merger Committee, with the objective of answering the questions of both communities, reconciling differences between the two, and coming up with a plan for how a merger would be executed, with the idea that each organization could approve, request modification to, or stop a merger at regular checkpoints in designing the plan along the way.)

Burggraaff – We in no way touched on all of the topics on the agenda.

Ahmad – There may be some conflict due to things like inflation throwing a curve. The plan going forward was based on a different marketplace. If part of the rush is due to financials, we need to know that. Otherwise it feels like a rush that feels like a campaign that not all of us feel about. We need to better understand what the pressure is on the board's end.

Gehring – Asked if anyone is opposed to forming a joint committee.

Maddux – Expressed that before we move to a joint committee, there are a few things our committee needs to hash out.

Sletten – The feel of there being more questions, if there are more please forward to Maggie. If we keep saying there are more questions, we will cause more conflict. Please forward to Maggie.

Hinton – Part of the issue is board meetings only happen once a month. If we don't form the committee, we are losing the ability to move forward and answer the questions everyone has.

Gehring – One reason we have these questions is we don't have the party in the room that can answer them. We need WLA in the room to answer that. On top of that, there has been a lot of miscommunication between the schools because we are not meeting jointly.

Vetsch – what are the questions we have for MSA? What do we have for WLA? Can we separate them into two different buckets? It may be helpful for us to have those organized.

Burggraaf – Likes Justin's recommendation that we have questions for WLA, and that we need that exploratory committee. However, we also need to answer some MSA-specific questions.

Thiegs – What is next step? Will this committee meet again?

Burggraaf - Committee meetings for the board can meet as often as needed, but must be announced.

Erickson – We need to make a list of the most important topics, most pressing concerns. And then each one gets its own meeting. For example, financials – we bring in the expert. Curriculum, we bring in the experts from each school. So each meeting gives us a direct way to move forward.

c. (10 min) What does MSA gain/lose if a merger is approved.

How different are the cultures?

The culture does change and evolve over the years.

Gain = expansion means more elective opportunities with staffing and space

This could potentially create new opportunities for our students - new classes, new activities

d. (10 min) Recommendations For the BOD

We were unable to touch on all areas of the meeting.

**Recommended that the BOD reform this committee as the Joint Exploratory Merger Committee, with the objective of answering the questions of both communities, reconciling differences between the two, and coming up with a plan for how a merger would be executed, with the idea that each organization could approve, request modification to, or stop a merger at regular checkpoints in designing the plan along the way.**

What questions does MSA have for MSA?

What questions does MSA have for WLA?

#### 4. Next Meeting (5 min)

Burggraaff – The current plan is to send out a Doodle to help schedule further meetings. This will take place after the next Board meeting. These meetings can focus on timelines and questions and answers.

Please forward questions to Maggie.

Adjourn at 9:14. Will bring proposal to board.

#### 5. Adjournment