

August 15, 2022

MSA Report Findings, Recommendations & Actions



This document summarizes key aspects of complaints shared with the board in April, 2021 and the subsequent investigation that began in April, 2021 and ended in March, 2022. The investigation was conducted by Ms. Nell Matthews, at the request of our authorizer. Ms. Matthews interviewed 36 people and reviewed dozens of documents, ultimately producing a lengthy report of findings and recommendations. They are summarized in this document, along with action the school has already taken or plans to take.

There were three major issues raised by the report: a) the structure of and governance practices of the Board of Directors; b) MSA's practices regarding students who are struggling in certain classes or are students with special needs; and c) the responsibility of teachers working with those students. The main concern about the dysfunctional structure and governance practices of the Board of Directors is that they prevent the school from operating to the benefit of students and making good on MSA's Mission and Vision. MSA's practices regarding students who struggle and students with special needs fostered poor practices. Combined with the governance issues, this allowed some teachers, including teacher board members, to act in their own self-interest, and to interfere with the school's operations. Finally, the combined issues described in this paragraph fostered an environment where certain operational and teaching practices had a disparate effect on students in a protected class. This is not the MSA we want and need to be.

To address these concerns, in the last school year MSA has done the following to ensure that teachers know and understand the obligations to their students with special needs, and carry out their responsibilities. MSA has already taken significant steps to correct the problematic school practices and board governance issues. To anchor the work, in December, the Board updated the school's Vision, Mission, and Strategic Priorities.

Vision: To be an innovative, sustainable model of academic excellence for all students that creates well-rounded, lifelong learners and global citizens.

Mission: We provide accelerated and inclusive curricula and instruction in all subjects, with an emphasis on math and science.

Strategic Priorities: success for all students, facilities and infrastructure to MSA Mission and Vision, organizational support to support MSA Mission and Vision.

The staff and administration have implemented a detailed strategic plan to align with MSA's Vision, Mission, and Strategic Priorities, that address the findings of the investigation. MSA has also hired Paula Forbes, J.D. of Forbes Consulting to conduct board training and work with the MSA Board of Directors and Staff to address many of the concerns raised by the investigation.

Additional MSA Actions Taken/Planned:

Board of Education Structure and Governance	
Actions Taken or Planned:	When:
The Board Chair is retaining his position for the 2022-23 school year.	Board voted at the June, 2022 board meeting.
The MSA School Board hired Paula Forbes to provide training to the board around the areas of governance, responding to concerns, and role of school, and board with students with disabilities, protective classes, and equity issues.	Training is scheduled for staff and board members beginning August, 2022.
A governance committee has been established. The Board Chair will chair this committee. The Board and administration has begun a review of the bylaws and policies as they relate to the findings of the investigation. The policy review will be housed with the governance committee.	Committee was formed in June, 2022. Monthly meetings started in August, 2022.
The Board Chair and school Executive Director will clarify procedures and expectations for minutes of board meetings.	Board Chair and Executive Director met with recorder in August, 2022 to clarify expectations.
Elections Policy has been updated and is expected to be approved by the board.	Board reviewed the policy at the August, 2022 board meeting and will approve it at the September, 2022 meeting.

The purpose, status, and organizational structure of Board Committees has been reviewed and revised. The Academic Committee will no longer be a board committee but a school committee, advisory to the administration. The Personnel Committee will consist of non-teacher board members to evaluate the Executive Director.	Board Committees were restructured at the June, 2022 board meeting.
The school Executive Director and Board Chair will train board members as to the role of the teacher board member. The teacher board members who engaged in these practices that were unprofessional no longer serve on the board.	<p>Training of new and existing board members will begin in the Fall, 2022. A comprehensive board binder was created and given to all board members at the August, 2022 meeting. The binder includes MSA Background; Board of Director information, roles, and responsibilities; Laws, Statutes, and Policies; and reference material.</p> <p>The teacher board members that were noncompliant were removed at the end of the 2021 - 2022 school year.</p>
The MSA Strategic Plan was revised to address concerns from investigation.	Completed April, 2022.
MSA's practices regarding students who are struggling in certain classes or are students with special needs	
Appropriate disciplinary measures and administrative action have been taken to address the finding that teacher board members have repeatedly acted in self-interest, failed to perform essential functions of their job, undermined professional administrators, misused their board member position, breached their fiduciary duties, failed to disclose conflicts of interest, or otherwise violated school policies and procedures.	The teacher board members that were noncompliant were removed at the end of the 2021 - 2022 school year.

<p>School policies and practices need to better align with the school's focus on equity, its authorizer contract, and applicable non-discrimination and equal opportunity laws.</p>	<p>Completed a much improved 2022-23 staff handbook that addressed this concern. Approved by board June, 2022 board meeting.</p> <p>Revised student/parent handbook, academic expectations, the procedures for AP assigning AP classes, - June, 2022.</p>
<p>MSA staff will participate in a Special Education Training. The training will focus on the mind shift necessary to develop a full continuum of support for students (the <i>why</i>), the legal nature and requirements of Special Education (the <i>what</i>), and the resources available to support the adult learning to support the student learning (the <i>how</i>).</p>	<p>Training will take place in August, 2022.</p>
<p>Follow up professional development will be available throughout the school year to support the learning of and the implementation of best practices to support our students with special needs.</p>	<p>During the 2022-23 school year.</p>
<p>Changed the procedures for assigning students to AP classes to eliminate arbitrary aspects.</p> <p>Re-vamped the old academic exclusion process to become an academic intervention process.</p> <p>Revised the grading handbook to include more welcoming language, that makes grading at MSA more equitable.</p> <p>Implemented Character Strong, a social emotional learning curriculum for all students. Will provide more training and support to teachers for 2022-23 on this.</p>	<p>Procedures were changed and will be implemented for the 2022-23 school year.</p> <p>Processes were changed and will be implemented for the 2022-23 school year.</p> <p>Handbook was revised and approved at the July, 2022 Board Meeting.</p> <p>This program will be introduced during the 2022-23 school year.</p>

Improve the system of student support to further implement the Student Support Team (SST) process that began in 2020-21, to better support teachers, and clarify expectations by providing them a process of problem solving, intervening, and documenting progress.	Additional training for the SST process will be provided to staff in August, 2022 and will be implemented during the 2022-23 school year.
Continued implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) which was started under the previous administration. Research shows that when students are taught the expectations for how to show their Focus, Integrity, Respect, and Excellence in all of the learning environments, and the environment is set up for their success, they can achieve at higher rates. When PBIS is not in place some kids cannot achieve.	Additional training for the PBIS program will be provided to staff in August, 2022 and will be implemented during the 2022-23 school year.
Completed a much improved 2022-23 staff handbook to address barriers to focusing on the recommendations of the investigation.	Approved by Board June 2022.
Revised Student/Parent Handbook for 2022-23 (July 2022) and Academic Expectations document (Winter 2021) to clarify the supports available to students and families and the ways MSA will intervene when a student struggles and partner with parents around student success.	Student Handbook and Academic Expectation Document was revised in Winter of 2021. The handbook was approved by the Board at the July 2022 meeting.
Teachers' Responsibility for Working with Students with Special Needs	
The Teacher Evaluation system was revised to address the previously stated concerns.	Implemented 2022-23 school year.

Administrative Walkthroughs will take place to be in classrooms more regularly.	Implemented 2022-23 school year.
Teachers will be trained in MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) to help educators provide academic and behavioral strategies for students with various needs.	Implemented 2022-23 school year.
<p>Department lead teachers will be trained on how to lead PLC (Professional Learning Community) meetings.</p> <p>Teachers will be trained on PLC meetings to provide an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.</p>	<p>Training will take place in August, 2022.</p> <p>Implemented 2022-23 school year.</p>
Hired full time Special Services Coordinator and strengthened the administrative approach for Section 504 and Special Education Services.	Hired in August 2021.
Build staff awareness of disparities. Provided data in the first month of school on MSA's achievement gaps (with students of color and students with disabilities) and have continued to provide opportunities for staff to dig into the data by various groupings. Have spent a day of professional development on equity including deep dives into data, and learning about culturally responsive teaching.	Training took place in August, 2021. This training will be revisited in August 2022.