

# Making Waves Academy

Impact Report

Academic Year 2020-21



*Learn. Graduate. Give Back.*



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## Dear Friends,

I am pleased to share the Making Waves Academy Impact Report for the 2020-21 school year! Conducted 100% remotely, the year seems like a long time ago now that we have been back on campus for three months. So much has occurred since schools closed in March 2020 in response to the pandemic — the important role they play in our society has been underscored, and while there were pockets of innovation and opportunities to learn in new ways, much social-emotional development and academic learning was missed for many students.

It is difficult to succinctly explain the effect of last year on the Making Waves Academy community. There was a palpable sense of loss due to the COVID-19 deaths of loved ones, societal upheaval, and isolation. There was also growth and perseverance. The Impact Report shares key highlights of the year through stories, profiles, and data. My hope is that you will see evidence of MWA’s values of *Community* and *Resilience* together with the overarching themes of patience, grace, giving, and compassion. We often led more with our hearts than with our minds.

Throughout the year, we worked from a set of evolving guidelines and requirements from the California Department of Education and Contra Costa County education and health officials. Once the state’s goal of minimizing the spread of COVID-19 shifted to figuring out how to bring students and staff back to campuses, a small group of us met multiple times per week to discuss how to be adaptive and responsive to the most up-to-date guidelines.

**My hope is that you will see evidence of MWA’s values of *Community* and *Resilience* together with the overarching themes of patience, grace, giving, and compassion.**

As vaccinations became available for those in education, we worked with our attorneys and our board of directors on policies that would mandate that staff be vaccinated (with provisions for limited exemptions). We correctly surmised that schools would be required to return to in-person learning in the fall of 2021 and were prepared, with over 90% of our staff fully vaccinated.

On the student side, we admitted another class of 168 5th grade students during the closure, with a still sizable wait list. These new 5th graders were not able to visit the campus in person, but we did our best to immerse them in our culture remotely, as we did with our rising 9th graders at the upper school.

At our “drive-thru” graduation, excited families in decorated vehicles celebrated the seniors of the 18th Wave. Students exited their cars near the outdoor stage to accept their diplomas, take pictures with key administrators and board members, and film a short clip on what

it means to be a Wave-Maker. There was genuine joy expressed for the milestone and also a degree of sadness about a year that was not exactly lost but was certainly atypical. A buoyant capstone was the unprecedented college admission success of this graduating class, our largest to date with almost 100 students: 17 students were admitted to UC Berkeley, four were admitted to UCLA and over 71 percent were accepted to four-year colleges overall, an historic achievement for our school.

Thank you for your continued support of Making Waves Academy as we mark our 15th year. Our accomplishments would not be possible without the dedication and persistence of our staff, faculty, leadership, board, parents and families, and of course, our Wave-Makers.

Sincerely,

Alton B. Nelson, Jr.  
CEO, Making Waves Academy





## Dear Making Waves Community Members,

*I am a Wave-Maker...I will not let anything get in the way of my success.*

This excerpt, taken from our Wave-Maker affirmation, was in many ways the theme of the 2020-21 school year. Our Wave-Makers and their families, along with our teachers, leaders, and staff, exercised a measure of perseverance and fortitude that enabled them to persist through one of the most challenging years for education. We are a site-based school, filled with teachers and leaders who signed up for site-based roles, and with families and students who chose a site-based schooling experience, nevertheless we survived a school year of remote learning, remote student support services, remote professional development, and remote family engagement, all with a measure of excellence. This reality



allows us to look back with pride that we upheld the spirit of our affirmation. Despite health concerns, bereavement, and compounding anxieties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with civil unrest and racial injustice that exacerbated feelings of helplessness, isolation, and distress, we found ways to thrive, to uplift, and to be a beacon of light and hope for our Wave-Makers and for the community at large.

As Senior School Director, I am committed to providing the best educational experience possible for our students. I have seen what can happen when students, who may not otherwise have the opportunity, are given the chance to engage highly qualified talent, sufficient resources, and high expectations. Our Wave-Makers are equipped to compete with peers from the nation's top-performing schools and to realize their life dreams. The resilience and will that it takes to show up as a learner during a season of quarantine, to persist as a learner in virtual classes while simultaneously caring for siblings or working to contribute to the household, and to excel as a learner when you have special needs or stressful home dynamics is indescribable. As I reflect on the overcomers that our students have shown themselves to be, I also understand how meeting them with resources, talent, and opportunity yields world-changers who are prepared to make waves where ever they go.

As we move forward in recovery from the residual impacts of the pandemic, education faces a great challenge. Learning loss, unfinished learning, wellness of both students and teachers, effective pacing, management of change, and collaboratively crafting a new normal in real time while the impacts and unknowns of Covid-19 persist is truly a monumental task. This task tests school culture, exhausts resources, and causes trust and patience for various educational partners to waver. But there is good news: Making Waves Academy exists to interrupt the narrative of hopelessness and defeat. Because of the generous and unwavering commitment of our leaders and supporters, we have plans to recover learning, to holistically support our students and families through this unprecedented era, and to reestablish and revive all of the things that make our school community so unique and special. We will continue to innovate, to have high expectations, and to show up for our brilliant students who are so deserving of the very best that we have to give—they are the hope of our future.

Thank you for supporting our mission, and please enjoy learning more about all of the impact and progress we were able to make throughout the 2020-21 school year.

Dr. Evangelia Ward-Jackson  
*Senior School Director, Making Waves Academy*

**Our Wave-Makers are equipped to compete with peers from the nation's top-performing schools and to realize their life dreams.**



# Impact Report

We serve predominantly students of color from socioeconomically disadvantaged households in Richmond and the surrounding areas. We prepare students for college, career, and life success by helping them develop critical competencies, skills, and mindsets.

More than **1,100** students enrolled in MWA

**80%** of MWA students are from socioeconomically disadvantaged households

## Student Persistence and Resilience Senior Class of 2021 (18th Wave)

  
**88%**  
Graduation Rate

**90%**  
admitted to college (83 of 93)

**100%**  
of 18th-Wave graduates met the A-G requirements for UC/CSU eligibility

**100%**  
admissions to all nine UC campuses

**93**  
Graduates

**71%**  
committed to 4-year colleges

**34**  
commitments to a UC campus

**24**  
students committed to a CSU campus

**13** students committed to UC Berkeley

**Berkeley**  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

**4** students committed to UCLA



 **16** students committed to community colleges

 **11** students planned to move straight into the workforce



## Distanced But Still Together

According to the student yearbook contributors, “No one could have imagined the pandemic would have lasted this long. Together this year we have proven that even from a distance and sometimes behind black zoom boxes, we are still leveling up and making gains together! This year, we overcame what sometimes seemed never-ending and the impossible. Clubs have served as a lifeline for us this year. Clubs have helped us stay connected with each other, challenged us to grow and empowered us to advocate for change in our communities.” Despite the year of remote learning, students still collaborated on special gatherings online to celebrate and raise awareness, including the following:

- Black History Month
- Climate Justice Week
- Virtual Spirit Week
- 100 Day Celebration

### “You are brilliant!”

I am so proud of you and all that you have accomplished this year! You have excelled academically, connected together in solidarity, and you have breathed life into our Core Values: Community, Respect, Responsibility, Resilience, and Scholarship. This year, especially, the core value of Resilience resonates deeply as we persist in the face of a global health crisis, civil unrest, racial injustices, and political overwhelm. We are indeed in unprecedented times and the stressors are many, however nothing can compare to the fortitude of a Wave-Maker! Our affirmation says it best, ‘I will not let anything get in the way of my success!’”

*Remarks to the students from Dr. E. Ward-Jackson, Senior School Director, included in the school yearbook.*



The Associated Student Body (ASB) along with the following clubs came together throughout the year:

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (APIA) | GSA                      |
| Baseball Fan Club                      | Journalism and Media     |
| National Honor Society                 | Junior Committee         |
| Black Student Union                    | Kiwins                   |
| Brain & Psychology Club                | Life Hacks               |
| Climate Justice                        | Sangre Latina            |
| Dance Club                             | Senior Committee         |
| Future of Medicine                     | Yearbook Committee       |
| Girls Weightlifting                    | <i>(Incomplete list)</i> |



## Some Semblance of Normality Back in Their Lives

According to Athletic Director Jeff Hazel, COVID meant that the sports seasons were shorter than usual, all outdoors, high school only and included regular league games but no playoffs. As at most schools and in the community in general, the pandemic changed people's comfort level, impacted our students' ability to get to school for athletics, and necessitated that many of them work more to help support their families.

While this meant fewer participated in sports than in a typical year, those Wave-Makers who were able to get out of the house and feel some semblance of normality. Most teams played games against other schools, though a few were able to practice only. The coaches and students definitely enjoyed spending time with each other while improving their athletic skills!



- Baseball**
- Cross Country**
- Esports**
- Track & Field**
- Girls Soccer**
- Boys Soccer**

- Girls Softball**
- Girls Basketball**
- Boys Basketball (year off)**
- Girls Volleyball**
- Boys Volleyball**



## Words of Joy and Hope

"You really had to demonstrate your RESILIENCE this school year. I am proud of your diligence and effort to try to stay focused on your work, stay healthy, support your families, and take care of yourself social-emotionally. You will tell your children and your children's children about what it was like living through this experience.

Some of you are preparing to leave MWA to enter college, training programs, or the workforce. An adventure awaits you. We are excited for your journey that includes pursuing your hopes and dreams for yourselves. We are here to support you. You can do it."

*Remarks to the students from Alton B. Nelson, Jr, CEO, included in the school yearbook.*

## Planting a Seed for What Is Possible: Home Libraries Build Literacy and Opportunity

Through a long-running collaboration with the University of Chicago My Very Own Library (MVOL) program, in partnership with Scholastic Books and Making Waves Foundation, students at Making Waves Academy (MWA) receive free books to help create their own home libraries. Before COVID-19, students chose books at several book fairs held throughout the year, adding ten new books to their home libraries each year. The MVOL program also sponsored on-campus events where visiting authors and special guests engaged students in a read-aloud or interactive presentation followed by a Q&A session, a book signing, and—in most cases—a free copy of a book.

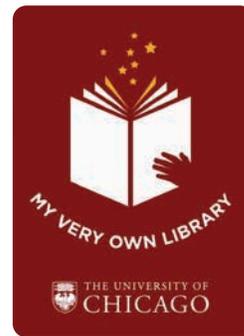


### Adapting to COVID-19

Of course, in-person book fairs and author events have not been possible since the transition to remote learning in March 2020. In response, MVOL has offered tools, links, and other resources to bolster literacy activities at home, including a Virtual Read Aloud video series. Recognizing the importance of building home libraries, the program has also strategized ways to safely distribute books to students. A few weeks ago, MWA received a shipment from Scholastic that included all 10,000 books for the year, and families were invited to pick up ten books at a drive-up distribution event with safety protocols in place. Dr. Evangelia Ward-Jackson, MWA's senior school director, acknowledges, "Things may have looked different this year, as students lined up in cars for a drive-thru book pick-up event, instead of spending time perusing books in a traditional Scholastic book fair. Still, we are proud to have prioritized getting books into the hands of our students, and we anticipate the day when we can once again gather and celebrate the joy of reading together."

For many students and parents, these books feel

especially important as they face the challenges of the pandemic. "We have so much going on in the world right now," says Ms. Langford, a 6th-grade parent, "For me, and especially for [my daughter], to get into a book takes her from all that is going on right now in the moment, and she can just use her



imagination and get lost in the book. It's good for an escape from the madness." Books also provide a much-needed break from the digital world of remote

school, as 5th-grade parent Ms. Baker notes, "It is very important for children to have access to books—not just on a laptop, but an actual book—to get their mind away from the screen." Sebastian, a high school senior, agrees with both sentiments: "Having a lot of books around has helped me because with technology right now, it can get pretty stressful, so reading is a good escape."

Dr. Ward-Jackson also recognizes the importance of books this year, noting, "Partnering with My Very Own Library to provide our students with books during distance learning has brought a sense of joy and uplift, which supports our social-emotional well-being efforts and provides an outlet for imagination and exploration."

# Encouraged by Her Teacher, Making Waves Academy Student Published in *The New York Times*



**A**mong more than 11,000 entries from students worldwide, Making Waves Academy student America Leon was named within the 10 winners of *The New York Times*' 8th Annual Student Editorial Contest in June 2021. The contest prompted students to consider and write about issues that matter to them, in 450 words or fewer.

The 16-year-old student's award-winning essay published in *The New York Times*, Cheap for You. Costly for the Environment, covers complex topics like climate change and food waste, insightfully and practically.

"We walk into the bread aisle on our daily trip to the grocery store and are overwhelmed by the large, colorful signs advertising the deals of the day. 'Buy Two Loaves, Get the Third Free,' one sign reads. Of course, my mother does not pass up that kind of bargain; she quickly grabs the three loaves. Fast forward two weeks later, two of the loaves of bread, still untouched, have expired," America wrote in her essay.

In citing a study published in the *American Journal of Agricultural*

*Economics*, America further explained that the average U.S. household wastes 31.9% of the food they purchase annually.

"From your trash bin, our food waste's next home is the landfill," she wrote, citing 35 million tons of food ends up in landfills,

***"As one of the top contributors to climate change, the global food system undoubtedly requires changes in all aspects, including production, processing and supply, on top of consumption... and thus by reducing our household waste and, in turn, our carbon footprint, we are capable of reshaping it."***

making up 24% of total waste in landfills, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

## Connecting Students with the World

America's successful essay entry was made possible by her 10th grade English teacher, Benjamin Norton, who plans to incorporate the contest into his yearly curriculum planning.

"I strongly believe we have to keep connection to the world around us," said Mr. Norton, who started at Making Waves Academy as a substitute teacher before becoming a full-time teacher in the English Language Arts department

after completing the academy's Teacher Residency Program. The program develops highly effective teachers through training on areas such as instructional planning and student engagement, while also covering cultural competency, social-emotional learning, and growth mindset.

While exploring free teaching resources offered by *The New York Times*' Learning Network, Mr. Norton came across their student editorial contest. For weeks, Mr. Norton walked students through deconstructing essay examples from previous contest years and taught them the key concepts so each student could write their own essay.

Focusing on community-building and engaging with new ideas, Mr. Norton helps students get excited about reading and writing and in considering how language can influence others. "If I'm excited, the students will be excited," he said.

## Reshaping the Future

"As one of the top contributors to climate change, the global food system undoubtedly requires changes in all aspects, including production, processing and supply, on top of consumption...and thus by reducing our household waste and, in turn, our carbon footprint, we are capable of reshaping it," wrote America as she offered tips for better planning grocery shopping and being mindful of perishable foods.

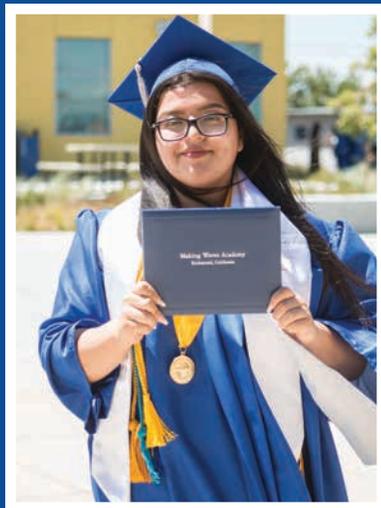
"The environment, like food, is precious and life-sustaining, so next time you go to the grocery store, think twice before taking advantage of that convenient two-for-one deal. It may be more costly than you think," she wrote in concluding her award-winning essay.

# Graduation Day

Nearly 100 students, the largest ever class to graduate from Making Waves Academy, celebrated their achievements at a drive-thru commencement ceremony.

## WATCH HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CLASS OF 2021 GRADUATION

In a year made especially challenging by the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the Class of 2021, the 7th graduating class since our founding, achieved truly remarkable outcomes. College admission rates continued the Making Waves Academy's six-year upward trend across different institution types. And based on commitment data, this class is expected to have the highest number of graduates completing college in the history of the school.



We congratulate Valedictorians Benjamin Sanchez and Johanna Figueroa, headed this fall to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and UC Berkeley, respectively. Also heading to UC Berkeley is graduate Gabriel Arteaga, who made us proud with perfect attendance for all eight years of our program, the first student to do so in our history.



“The resilience shown by our Wave-Makers and the commitment to their academic achievement, mental health, and socio-emotional growth demonstrated by our faculty, staff, and school leadership consistently inspired me throughout this difficult year.”

ALICIA MALET KLEIN,  
BOARD PRESIDENT

# Donor Appreciation

**We wish to thank the following donors for their generous contributions during fiscal year 2020-21:**

(Gifts received between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021.)

## **\$1,000,000 and Above**

John H. and Regina K. Scully Foundation

Fullerton Family Foundation

## **100,000 and Above**

Suzannah and Peter Scully

## **\$1,000 to \$10,000**

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Cheryl Charlillo

Krishna Cowen

Kelly Crosby

Judith Cunningham

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David Marshak

Ann and William Moon

Jose and Marlin Quintanilla

Dinora Sanchez

Randy Soso

Arthur Vedder

Carmen Velarde

Evangelia Ward-Jackson

\*Board member

# Thank You

**“Donors, contributors,  
and community  
members like you,  
who have caught  
the vision, who  
invest in our mission,  
and who believe  
that every student  
deserves to engage  
in an equitable and  
excellent school  
experience, are true  
difference makers.**

**We appreciate you,  
and we honor you  
for aiding in our  
very important and  
valuable work; impact  
would not be possible  
without you.”**

**DR. EVANGELIA WARD-  
JACKSON  
SENIOR SCHOOL DIRECTOR**

## **WAVE-MAKER CIRCLE**

We are grateful to the following alumni for their gift in support of our students this year:

Claudia Alvarez  
Shawn Boykins  
Krisha Cowen  
Karla Diaz  
Tammy Foster  
Corina Garcia  
Ajani Jackson, M.D.  
Jovita Jordan  
Andres Orozco  
Marlin Quintanilla  
Sarah Souksamphan  
Kenvin Tran

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Fidelity Charitable  
Marin Community  
Foundation  
The University of Chicago  
My Very Own Library  
Program  
TRUiST by Frontstream

For comments or updates to your recognition, please contact us at [development@making-waves.org](mailto:development@making-waves.org).

# Fiscal Summary

**M**aking Waves Academy had \$22.8M in operating expenses in fiscal year 2020-21 (FY21). Although we are a tuition-free public charter school that receives government funding, those federal, state and local dollars are not sufficient to fund the equitable resources our students deserve. Last year, approximately 43% of our budget was unmet by government sources – the generosity of individuals and foundations covered that gap.

Philanthropic support allows us to provide our students with the rigorous academic instruction, robust socio-emotional support, and intentional college and career services needed to prepare our students for the post-secondary pathways of their choice.

The information below is derived from our FY21 unaudited financial records. For more detailed information, please contact Chief Financial Officer Wallace Wei at [wei@mwacademy.org](mailto:wei@mwacademy.org).

## FY21 Making Waves Academy

### Assets

Long Term Assets	305,896
Total Assets	7,891,806
Net Worth	5,683,834

### Revenue and Support

Government Grants	15,525,918
Contributions	10,647,002
Total	26,172,920

### Expenses

Personnel	15,902,538
Non-Personnel	4,443,421
Contract Services	2,405,541
Total	22,751,500



# Silver Linings, Grit, and Resilience

Crisis, especially prolonged ones, test an institution's core values. The five core values of Making Waves Academy — community, resilience, respect, responsibility, and scholarship — have been the school's superpower throughout the past year. Community and resilience, in particular, showed students, faculty, and staff how essential core beliefs are to an institution. For Teacher Appreciation Month, we spoke with four faculty members who have seen every day through the trying 2020-2021 academic year how core values keep an institution strong.

Despite starting at the Academy during the pandemic as a 5th and 6th grade history teacher, **Natalie Crespo** said, "I've always felt that I can reach out to my grade level leads, my content leads, whoever it is, even if it's just by a quick text. It's all one big happy family in a sense."

When she started college as a biology major, Natalie was not sure what career she wanted. She eventually switched to her true love, history. She comes from a family of educators in Panama but hesitated about the field. She briefly tried other jobs before committing to Teach for America's program. "I love that teaching allows me to have the opportunity to have a different day every single day. And what I especially value about teaching here is the autonomy, which allows you to develop your teaching philosophy

**"I love that teaching allows me to have the opportunity to have a different day every single day."**

and become the teacher you want to be."

Zoom fatigue has nagged at everyone, Natalie said, but how the students have handled it has inspired her. "The days when I feel burnt



out, I just think about the students and how they are being engaged in this impossible setting, and there's background noise, and their siblings are yelling at them — and yet they show up. I appreciate and respect them so much because they're teaching me so much about that core value, about resilience.

"And although I haven't met my students in person yet, I feel like I know them, and this year has allowed me to grow stronger in building those relationships, because it's so important right now. Over Zoom you have to do so much more to get kids engaged, and because of that I feel it's created greater opportunity to know students on a deeper level. Those moments of connection are what I'm really focusing on."

**Joshua Amey**, a 7th grade math teacher, came to teaching by working with kids in summer and after-school basketball programs. Joshua participated in the Teacher Residency Program in 2018-2019, and he is currently finishing up his second full year in the math department. "I was given a lot of love and support by my mentors here," he said, "and that really helped me grow as a teacher."



For children of color, representation by their teachers is a powerful example. Joshua himself had a black male math teacher in 6th grade, as well as positive role models in his own family. "My big brother decided to go to college and get his master's, and that made it seem real to me. It told me I could do that too."

The conditions imposed by the pandemic have in a way led to richer, more holistic relationships with students, Joshua said. Seeing them through a computer screen in their home settings has been important for relating to them as individuals, he said. Some have to babysit or cook for a younger sibling, for example, but "they're still able to focus. You understand how resilient they are."

Read more from *Silver Linings, Grit, and Resilience* here.



## Meet Wave-Maker Jamaya Walker

As a member of Making Waves Academy's first graduating class, Jamaya had her heart set on attending a historically Black college or university (HBCU). When she earned her B.A. in English with a minor in social work from Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU), she became the first person in her family to receive a college degree and the first MWA Wave-Maker to graduate from an HBCU. While taking a full course load, Jamaya published her first book, *Unspoken Words from a Daddyless Daughter*. She also founded an organization to help other "daddyless daughters"—girls and women who have lost their fathers in both the literal and figurative sense. She is now in her final year of a Master of Social Work program at the University of Houston.

She says that the title of her next book, a writing and reflection journal for daddyless daughters, comes directly out of her experience discovering poetry at Making Waves: "My new book is called *Pain, Pen, Power*," she explains. "I had pain, and RAW Talent gave me a pen, and then I became this very powerful being."

Once she graduated from Making Waves Academy and left California for college at PVAMU in Texas, Jamaya became a part of CAP, Making Waves' college success program. During college, she received one-on-one support from her CAP coach, Dr. Kristina Wright, a Richmond native who worked at the Making Waves Education Program when Jamaya's older brother was in the 9th Wave. "She literally watched me grow up,"

*The title of her next book, a writing and reflection journal for daddyless daughters, comes directly out of her experience discovering poetry at Making Waves*

Jamaya reminisces. "Being able to talk to her was more like having a second mom or an auntie who could be extremely real with me. If I was being too blunt or too outspoken, she would say, 'Okay, Jamaya, we're going to teach you how to refrain from being so blunt but stay true to who you are.' I can't love her enough because she's so supportive but also gives me that tough love."

Dr. Wright, who now serves as coaching services manager at CAP, reflects, "Jamaya has blossomed into an amazing writer and an advocate for others who have grown up in her community and have experienced similar life situations. It's been inspiring for me to be part of her life and her journey. I am extremely fortunate to have continued our relationship during her graduate years and am excited about witnessing her graduate with her master's degree in the coming months!"

*Read more about Jamaya's story.*



Special thanks to the Academy and Making Waves Foundation staff for their collaborative and thoughtful contributions.

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