

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY (LEA) NAME: Maya Angelou PCS

BOARD CHAIR NAME: Alise Marshall

SUBMISSION DATE: 4/28/2023

SUBJECT: Charter Goals Amendment Request

SCHOOL BACKGROUND AND PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Campus name(s): Maya Angelou PCS High School

Year(s) opened: 1998

Grades served: 9-12

Year the school will undergo its next charter review or renewal: 2027-28

Proposal summary:

Maya Angelou PCS High School requests the removal of the writing goal for three primary reasons:

1. Limited consensus regarding the best methods for assessing writing, particularly for high-stakes assessment.
2. We do not feel that our current assessment platform is suitable for the purpose of analyzing writing growth, and we have not identified another platform that meets our needs.
3. Desire to reduce the testing burden on students during critical learning times.

Year the school plans to adopt the proposed changes: 2023-24

When did the school's board approve the proposed changes? The board approved the proposed changes on April 28, 2023.

CHARTER GOALS

- 1. What are the school's current and proposed charter goals? If the school proposes revising only a portion of its goals, specify which charter goals are to be deleted or replaced, and which goals are new.**

Maya Angelou PCS High School currently has nine charter goals that measure student and school performance in the following areas: reading progress, math progress, writing progress, graduation rate, discipline, attendance, reengagement, social-emotional learning, and college and career readiness. This amendment requests the removal of the writing progress goal.

- 2. What's the rationale for the proposed charter goals? If applicable, provide a rationale for eliminating a goal or lowering a goal's target.**

Strong writing skills are critical to student success in all facets of their school day and beyond. Students rely on these skills to help them effectively communicate with their peers, teachers, families, communities, and current or future employers. In addition, writing allows students to freely express themselves in ways that speaking and other types of assessments do not allow. At Maya Angelou PCS High School, writing is embedded into instruction and student work in all core content areas, as well as utilized in the form of therapeutic journaling by our clinical counseling team. We view writing as an integral component of our curriculum, and one that needs to be assessed frequently through a variety of means.

As a reflection of the importance we place on writing, our 2013-14 charter included progress goals for three academic domains: reading, math, and writing. Since this time, however, the writing goal has proved problematic. We are requesting its removal for three primary reasons:

1. There is limited consensus regarding the best methods for assessing writing, particularly for high-stakes assessment.

First, it is important to note that Maya Angelou PCS is the only charter LEA in DC who has a charter goal related to writing progress and for good reason. While reading, math, and other academic domains can be assessed objectively through the use of rigorous assessments, writing is more challenging to assess in the same way.

In the field of education, there remains great scrutiny around what defines 'good' or 'successful' writing and what types of assessments adequately measure this. Despite the development of rubrics and work to improve inter-rater reliability in writing assessment, the interpretation of writing is undoubtedly colored by one's own beliefs and attitudes. Furthermore, as noted in the NWEA white paper on writing, "different audiences (e.g., writing teachers, researchers, testing organizations, and students) have different expectations and desires for writing assessments" (NWEA, 2022, p. 15-16)².

Much of the current literature highlights the use of formative writing assessments in the classroom, but little research has been done on the benefits of summative large-scale writing assessment. This is considered to be a growing field; however, few assessments exist, and psychometricians and policymakers in Washington, D.C. and surrounding areas have yet to encourage or mandate the measurement of student writing skills through high-stakes assessment.

In our own practice of educating students for the past 25 years, it is very clear that we must assess writing not only as a product, but also as a process. The current iteration of our charter goal does not allow for this. Students are

² NWEA. (2022). *Writing for all: NWEA stances on writing*. NWEA, https://www.nwea.org/resource-center/white-paper/48395/Writing-for-all-NWEA-stances-on-writing_NWEA_instructionalresource-1-1.pdf/

assessed based on their performance on one essay in the fall and one essay in the spring and are not given the opportunity to reflect, revise, and resubmit their essays. We feel that the current charter goal is not a true reflection of what our students know and can do, and we do not believe that the literature supports the use of this data for high-stakes accountability.

2. We do not feel that our current assessment platform is suitable for the purpose of analyzing writing growth, and we have not identified another platform that meets our needs.

When we initially negotiated this goal with PCSB in 2013, the field of computer-scored writing assessment was in its infancy, but proved promising. The software company who created our reading and math progress assessments, Scantron, was planning to launch a writing assessment, and we hoped to begin using it in 2013-14. However, after signing the charter agreement, the company determined that the assessment was not viable, and we procured another assessment for 2014-15, only for it to cease operations at the end of the 2014-15 school year. Since 2015-16, our goal has been assessed using MiWrite (formerly known as PEG Writing).

In the past seven years, it has become clear that MiWrite is not an ideal tool to use in summative assessment. As noted by MiWrite itself (Measurement Incorporated, 2019)³:

- MiWrite is limited by its lack of human review and it “cannot adjust to nuances or those essays that do not match the norm.”
- MiWrite does not have the ability to discern context and cannot identify all errors due to the complexity of the English language.
- MiWrite cannot “recognize content... nor can it make sense of content concepts.”
- MiWrite “is a machine, not a brain, and can only do what it is trained to do. It would be very unfair to assign a grade to a student based on its evaluation of an essay...MI Write was designed to help students practice their skills in writing and to improve them based on feedback. This is a great tool, but it is not the only tool for teaching writing nor for assessing it... Substituting MI Write for a teacher-assessed essay does not make a dependable summative grade.”

At its heart, MiWrite is a formative classroom assessment tool. It is not intended to provide summative assessment or to be used to measure student progress for high-stakes accountability. Because MiWrite is not designed to measure growth, MAPCS and PCSB determined our own definition of growth in the absence of data at our school and nationally.

MiWrite assigns a score of 1-5 in six writing traits: Conventions, Ideas, Organization, Sentence Fluency, Style, and Word Choice. Together, we

³ Measurement Incorporated. (2019). *Why You Shouldn't Use MI Write Scores as Grades*. Measurement Incorporated, https://support.measinc.com/sites/default/files/MIWrite_ScoresGrades.pdf

established that annual progress for a student equated to a one point gain in three or more categories. In reviewing the annual data, it is clear that our population of students are improving their writing scores; however, they are not meeting the definition of growth that we established together.

Percent of 9th and 10th Grade Full Academic Year (FAY) Students who Demonstrated Growth on the MiWrite Assessment

	SY 2017-18	SY 2018-19	SY 2021-22
% meeting charter goal definition of growth	24%	24%	24%
% with gain of 3+ points in total score	46%	62%	44%
% with overall gain in total score	71%	89%	68%

Due to these challenges, our academic and data teams researched additional writing platforms in hopes of finding one that meets the following needs: rigorous, norm-referenced, culturally appropriate, developed with the purpose of summative assessment, is valid and reliable, has an established definition of annual growth, and is flexible enough to assess growth for our population of students who are often writing below expected grade level. Based on our research, we do not believe there is a product that can meet these needs.

3. Desire to reduce the testing burden on students during critical learning times.

If granted, the removal of this requirement would also decrease the testing burden that our 9th and 10th graders face. In the same 7 week period in the spring, our 9th and 10th grade students are asked to complete 8 assessments: PARCC, DC Science, the Health and Physical Education Assessment, NWEA MAP Reading, NWEA MAP Math, MiWrite, and two social-emotional learning assessments, RSCA and Panorama. With the elimination of the requirement to administer MiWrite, students would receive additional classroom instruction time that is critical to closing out the school year, and we hope that participation rates in the remaining assessments may improve.

With our request to remove the goal, this does not mean that the school intends to lower the focus on writing; on the contrary, the school plans to partner with an

organization in 2023-24 to strengthen its teacher training in the field of writing and to find innovative ways to weave writing further into the curriculum. Student progress will be measured through a variety of formative and summative assessments aligned to best practices, and we will continue to ensure our students are building their skills in this critical area.

4. How will the proposed charter goals better measure the school's mission fulfillment?

We do not believe that the removal of the goal will impact our mission. We remain committed to building our students' writing skills through a variety of approaches within our classrooms.

5. Describe how the school will monitor and report on its progress toward charter goal attainment. Note: all schools must report on charter goal attainment each year in the Annual Report.

Maya Angelou PCS High School monitors its goal attainment with school teams and network leadership through a series of monthly data discussions called Achieving Excellence at Maya (AEM), as well as additional internal meetings as needed. Annual figures will be reported to DC PCSB in the Annual Report and will be validated yearly with PCSB according to the data collection and validation cycle.

6. Attach the proposed charter goals chart the school negotiated with DC PCSB staff to the end of this application. If approved, DC PCSB will include this chart in the charter agreement amendment.

N/A

**RESOLUTION TO APPROVE CHARTER AMMENDMENT APPLICATON FOR
MAPCS AGREEMENT WITH DCPCSB**


Be it resolved that on April 28, 2023, the Board of Trustees of the Maya Angelou Public Charter School (MAPCS) approved of the application to amend its charter agreement with the D.C. Public Charter School Board; MAPCS is proposing to remove the writing goal from its list of High School charter goals.



4/28/2023

Approved by Alise Marshall, Board Chair

Date

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4/28/2023

Approved by Thomas White, Board Secretary

Date