

A Review and Forward Look at MCA's COVID Response

For this edition of *The Herald*, Mr. Michael Reeves, our Lower School Director, and Dr. Jarrid Looney, our Upper School Director, were invited to give their perspectives and reflections on how our school divisions responded to COVID and how they look to the future as much as possible for what it means for our students. Here are their words.

Mr. Michael Reeves, Lower School Director

The past calendar year has presented a number of challenges for our nation and the world related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While we continue to deal with the effects of the pandemic, we are beginning to see improvements and advancements that promise a safe return to normalcy. As we anticipate these changes, it is important we reflect on how we as a school community overcame the challenges posed by such unprecedented circumstances.

On March 14, 2020, schools in North Carolina were shut down and did not open for in-person education for the remainder of the school year. Faculty members quickly developed a plan for remote learning, which had never before been implemented at MCA. Families and students quickly adapted to the new learning environment, and, together, we found ways to have meaningful learning experiences. The summer of 2020 brought worries about the unknown. How would school begin in the fall? Would we be online or could we return to the school building? What would we do to be safe? Once direction was provided by the state in July of 2020, MCA faculty and staff made the courageous decision to open in a hybrid model allowing students to choose between in-person or remote learning. At the time, MCA was one of the few schools in the state that opened the 2020-21 school year with students inside the building. We spent the weeks prior to school planning how we would support students learning in both environments. It was challenging, but we knew, in the end, it would be worth it if we could effectively teach each MCA student wherever they chose to learn. The undertaking was not perfect, and there were several times that we had to make adjustments along the way. For example, realizing the challenges of teaching in two different formats meant that we had to implement remote Fridays to allow teachers extra time to meet the needs of all students. This time has allowed teachers to prepare remote lessons in advance, make joint plans with other teachers, serve the individual needs of students, and carry out extra cleaning in the classroom.

Flexibility, collaboration, and tenacity have been key to meeting the challenges presented by the pandemic. All of us were motivated by the understanding that despite the profound disruption that COVID-19 represented, it was vital to the academic development of our students that we provide the best possible education and meet the difficulties head-on.

It is important that I add that none of this would have been possible without our wonderful families and students. More than ever, the school's success and our students' academic growth relied on your support. MCA could not have navigated the challenges this year presented without your hard work and perseverance. It may be difficult to see now, but this year will be one of the most important in your child's development because we, as a community, did not let the daunting conditions undermine our students' education.

We have continued to adapt to health and safety guidelines as they have changed over the course of the year. We continue to enact measures to keep children healthy and safe. We ensure that our students wear masks. We clean surfaces in high-traffic areas throughout the day. We have kept our students in cohorts and conduct the screening



Mr. Michael Reeves



process to limit potential exposure to the virus. We continue to work with families to make sure we are following the health guidelines.

As we move into next year, we will follow whatever guidance health experts propose and common sense dictates to ensure that our students return safely to school in the fall. Having a safe and healthy learning environment is our primary goal and a prerequisite to learning. We are navigating an evolving situation but will make decisions with your child's safety as our first priority.

Dr. Jarrid Looney, Upper School Director



Dr. Jarrid Looney

On March 14, 2020, schools entered into uncharted waters due to the closure of all in-person learning as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Come August, Millennium Charter opened with hybrid learning, physical distancing, and masked students and staff. Most prevalent in the halls, however, was a spirit of thankfulness permeating the atmosphere. By embracing these health protocols, we were able to get back to that which we know best — *paideia*, an all-encompassing education that instills not only facts but also a culture.

The storm of this pandemic is passing.

On April 12, Millennium Charter Academy will be able to welcome back all of our students who wish to return to campus. We know well that Remote Learning has been hard on students and teachers alike, and while we have done a splendid job adjusting to this digital system, it would do all of our hearts good to be able to establish healthy, strong relationships with human beings rather than computer screens. Information is passed easily online, but a sense of community passes with more difficulty. As we look forward to the

2021-2022 school year, we anticipate and hope for the return of many time-honored and beloved traditions: in-person honors celebrations, spectators at sporting events, and more opportunities to mix and strengthen our learning community. Moving in this promising direction, we will continue to follow all health and safety guidance from the medical field and the state. We will update our community as we learn more information going forward.

We appreciate everyone's commitment to fostering the safest, most delightful, and most informative educational community. I hope that everyone enjoys the promise of rebirth that comes with the Spring and Easter seasons, especially this year!

