

HORIZONS

Views and Perspectives from
WEST MICHIGAN
AVIATION ACADEMY

Fall 2020

The School Is Alive Again!

No one says it's easy or ideal. But face coverings and social distancing can't squelch the renewed buzz at WMAA. This feels like a school again.

What does education look like for our students this semester? We offered a choice of educational styles. Approximately 78 percent of our students chose to come to the building, and the rest opted for the virtual learning route.

"Our staff took on a tremendous challenge," notes Chris Williams, Director of Teaching & Learning. "They're now teaching a 100 percent live track while simultaneously teaching the same content via a 100 percent virtual model...which, by the way, involved learning a whole new technology platform."

Offering students a choice of learning methods is only one of the big changes we've made this year. "We also moved to an extended block schedule," notes Jaclyn Iacco, Dean of Academic & Student Services. "Our students have four class periods every day instead of seven, and the classes meet every other day. This allows students to dig into hands-on, project-based learning. It also means they are changing rooms less often, which decreases the health risk for everyone."

And how are we working with the students who are not in the building? The school day now ends earlier so that teachers have time to communicate with students who are learning in the virtual environment. Senior Korey Deans has chosen virtual learning this year. He says, "What really feels different as a virtual student is missing out on the opportunity to connect with my teachers daily, face to face." He adds, "There honestly haven't been any surprises thus far."

"The biggest impact is what we are able to do with our doors open," says Chris Williams. "Yes, this requires a lot of new thinking, but it's so good to have our students back in the building! Teachers and students are engaged in classrooms. Kids are getting school meals and can talk to their friends. They can participate in clubs and activities. The school is alive again!"

The students who are coming to the building agree. Junior Devon Chrisner comments, "I enjoy longer class periods because it allows for more time in lab classes and I enjoy focusing on one subject for a longer time. I think what is most consistent is the teachers' continual support and passion for their subjects. Even though they are teaching both in person and virtual students with many new protocols, they continue to be upbeat, excited, and engaging in class."

And what about overall health? "We are extremely fortunate," notes CEO Nicole Gasper. "Our students and staff are doing an exceptional job of following the guidelines to stay healthy." Senior Xander Brown echoes this sentiment. "When I am at school, I am not in a constant state of worry for my own health and the health of others like I thought I would be. I feel that the necessary steps have been taken to create as safe a learning environment as possible."



Students are thrilled to be hands-on this semester!



Living Into Our Educational Strategies



People often ask the question, “What makes WMAA different?”

Over time, the answer has become deeper and broader than aviation education alone. Our vision is to “provide an innovative, professional and welcoming environment that inspires growth and ignites a passion for lifelong learning.” Following are the three strategies we’re using to live into that vision, and an example or two of each one.



#1 Building Career Pathways

Active, hands-on, skill-based learning that prepares students for high-growth, high-demand fields in the real world.

Connecting Graphic Arts to Engineering

You have probably heard us talk about our focus on science, technology, engineering and math education. We also offer graphic arts courses to help students round out their skills related to engineering. “Drafting, computer-aided design and isometric sketches are all graphic arts skills,” notes Kaitlin Peterson of our engineering department. “The graphic arts, engineering and mathematical disciplines all intertwine with each other. For example, mathematic proportions and ratios are integral to architecture. Product design requires isometric sketches. The arts are essential to the rest of our education focus! Graphic arts also give students practical experience for internships or jobs.”

Linking Aviation & Engineering

We’ve combined engineering and aviation under the leadership of George Pavey. “Engineering is the design side, and aviation is the user side,” notes Josh Bakker, Aviation/Engineering Teacher & Flight Instructor. “Now we can combine these two fields seamlessly in hands-on projects. For example,

our engineering students could use software to modify the school plane. They could go out with a student pilot on a real flight, and then fly the same flight with their modified plane in the simulator to see how it works.”

This type of cross-over training gives WMAA students a definite advantage for college and technical education. “The engineering principles can be applied to almost any subject,” Josh observes. “There’s an engineering process, just like there’s a design process. Combining aviation and engineering leverages our aviation resources for even more students, without limiting them for the future.” Once the new Flight Training Center is completed, students will be able to go even further. “Our students will be able to take apart an active plane to see how it works. That’s a huge advantage for students who want to be aviation mechanics.”

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(Josh Bakker)





#2 Building Character

Strong academic requirements in addition to behavioral standards create a culture that promotes responsibility, respect and self-motivation.

CEO Advisory Council

This group of 10 students, representing all grades, is chosen by application and subsequent teacher recommendation. Their purpose is to represent student voice to the CEO. In the process, they learn teamwork, accountability, respectful dialog skills, and much more.

The students on the Advisory Council are in touch with their classmates and provide input to the CEO. “The adults may make the decisions, but students have influence here,” says Nicole Gasper, CEO. “For example, this Council suggested changes to our virtual learning last spring that made life much easier for the students. One example was standardizing the assignment deadline time to the end of the school day instead

of the calendar day. They also helped us identify centralized, logical places for bulletins and flyers, rather than having them all over the building.”

The Council builds up a corps of WMAA student ambassadors. “We emphasize the importance of being ladies and gentlemen,” Nicole notes. “We invite these students to present at our board meetings, giving them a chance to develop the poise needed for public speaking. We know we can call on them to represent us well and engage with visitors to the school. I’ve done some of the same leadership training with them that I do with my staff, helping them examine their personal core values to understand how those influence perspectives and actions.”



#3 Building Access & Opportunity

Intentional promotion, open admission, and a suite of supportive services cultivate a diverse student body.

Robust Mental Health Support

As high schools go, WMAA is on the small side. But for us, being small is a definite advantage. “Our counselors offer a different level of service here,” says Jaclyn Iacco, Dean of Academic & Student Services. “Yes, we provide strong college and career planning support. We start working with students in 10th grade. We also emphasize military options. We can administer the military entrance exam. We also have a military recruiter on site several times per week.”

However, high school is about more than “what’s next.” Jaclyn points out, “One of the things that’s special here is that when

we see a need, we address it. If a senior who is going to an interview can’t afford professional clothing, we help find the right outfit. If a student doesn’t have a winter coat, we procure one. We see and know each student as an individual person. That personal knowledge has been invaluable this year as our students have coped with unusual grief and stress related to COVID and its effects on their lives and families. Our team is well-trained in brief counseling and has helped students work through many issues. This keeps students on an even keel and able to succeed.”

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(Jaclyn Iacco, Dean of Academic & Student Services)



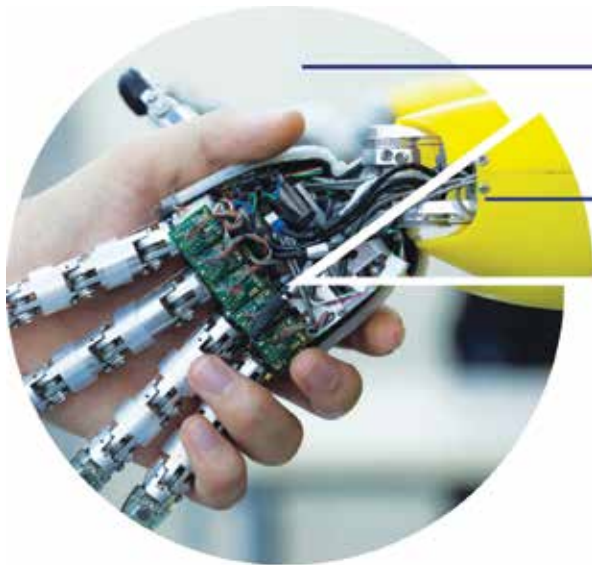


Your Gift Matters

As a public charter school, West Michigan Aviation Academy receives a per-pupil stipend which covers the traditional courses. However, the Academy provides educational opportunities above and beyond what can be found in other high schools. The per-pupil stipend we receive from the State of Michigan only covers about 90 percent of the programs and support we offer to our students. Those opportunities require an investment of approximately \$1,500–\$2,000 per student, per year.

The Foundation’s role is to cultivate donors and private philanthropy, raising the additional money needed to fund priorities set by WMAA. Gifts from generous donors who believe in our mission make it possible for us to provide extras such as:

- Airplanes and flight instruction
- New Student Orientation
- Hands-on classes like Build a Plane
- Teacher development opportunities like Curriculum Camp
- Fully-equipped lab spaces for tinkering and building
- Robotics/engineering program support



➔ 90%

State funding for core subjects

➔ 10%

Philanthropy to fund advanced programs



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How can you support WMAA?



Online Gift

You can make a secure, online gift at wmaafoundation.org.



Planned Gift

You can leave a legacy through a bequest or other common planned giving mechanisms.



“Soaring Together” Program

Your recurring gift of \$1,000 or more is an annual commitment to educational and experiential excellence at WMAA.



Sponsorship

Sponsors underwrite 100% of the cost of our events, so that the dollars raised can go directly toward student experiences.



Match at Gala

In years past, the Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation has offered a matching gift opportunity.

If you have any questions about how to get involved, please contact Meggan George at (616) 446-8886 x112 or mgeorge@wmaafoundation.org.



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New WMAA Flight Training Center Underway!

In 2018, the WMAA Board approved an ambitious project to accomplish three important objectives for our school:

-  **Expand** our flight training capacity with our own hangar, a third plane and classroom/lab space for aviation.
-  **Reconfigure** our existing building to make room for our popular and growing engineering course offerings.
-  **Provide** supportive resources related to aviation scholarships, teacher retention and student services.

That project is underway, and we are excited to report that construction on the new WMAA Flight Training Center will be starting in November! If you drive by the school, you might see some new fencing installed or site work in progress.

We'll communicate more as the project continues to move forward. If you would like to learn more, please contact Meggan George at 616.446-8886 x112.