

Greetings from the MCNC Director

I hope everyone had a wonderful spring break. For this month's newsletter, we focus on student voices. I'm excited to share excerpts from interviews with four wonderful students who have been participating in our MCNC Student Leadership Initiative this school year. I am so impressed at how appreciative the students are for the care shown for them by their school teachers and counselors. Their sentiments underscore the importance of relationships for facilitating motivation and learning. Providing social and emotional support is one of our four *MCNC Design Principles* and it has always been a hallmark of our MCNC schools. The students' feelings of being productive and engaged, despite their need to "just keep swimming" during these unprecedented times, are both powerful and encouraging. Additionally, their reflections and comments about the Student Conference are introspective and noteworthy.

The Student Conference has been crafted, organized, and run by Terry Born for over 30 years, and it is a credit to her that she was able to gather students from around the country to talk about difficult, yet important topics, and engage the students to develop their own thoughts and commitments going forward. A special 'Thank You!' to all the principals and teachers who supported their students to become involved. The MCNC Student Leadership Initiative is truly a life-changing event for our students and I am excited and look forward to the new ways in which we can continually reimagine our Student Conference in a meaningful way, and in collaboration with our students. I hope you enjoy reading these students' voices as much as I did. For our monthly newsletters and other MCNC-related news, please visit our [MCNC website](#). *Terry Born*



Terry Born
Director, MCNC Student Leadership Initiative
Academic Coach, Institute for Student Achievement
Retired Principal, Wagner High School, Long Island City, NY

"Our MCNC Student Leadership Initiative's culminating virtual ceremony will take place on May 10th (3:00pm–4:30pm ET). The student ambassadors will present their own growth and next steps in relation to our Student Conference work over the past year. We've met regularly since October 2020, a group of about 30 students across 6 schools. We've had honest, deep conversations about issues that students felt were relevant in terms of society and their own lives (e.g., equality in relation to racial, gender, LGBTQ, environmental, voting rights and justice), and invited in guest speakers and facilitators."

"We typically met every two weeks on Zoom for an hour, as a whole group and then in breakout groups to further unpack a given topic. We also broke out into just pairs so we could really practice listening to each other; that was so powerful since the perspectives could be coming from two very different experiences. Students presented whiteboards or powerpoints to share what they researched or data they may have collected through a survey, and then reflected on the results and further implications. Just amazing work. My hope was that the student ambassadors – through this experience of meeting other students from different parts of the country and talking about important societal issues – would just begin to clarify their own feelings, and perhaps even struggle with and better understand justice and equality issues. And it was great to see that happen!"

"Our brilliant students inspire me to reimagine the MCNC Student Leadership Initiative. [Citizen University](#) is a nonprofit organization that aims to increase a strong democracy by supporting efforts that build responsible and powerful civic character awareness. They created a curriculum and sought applicants to implement this with high school students. I applied since it was so aligned with our student leadership work and our proposal was selected. We are looking for 15-20 students for our five-week, ten-session program. A smaller group of students will be selected at the end of the program to lead the focus, design, and planning for our 2021-22 MCNC Student Leadership Initiative, and all costs will be waived for these students. Please email me at tborn@mcnc.us if you have any students who may be a good fit for project! The applications are due April 30."



Sadeen
High School Sophomore
Greer Middle College
Greer, South Carolina

"Virtual learning has been okay for me, but I see how it affects others in that they're not doing as well in school. The teachers work twice as hard; they are working like two jobs. They're trying to help us do better and have been providing one-on-one or group tutoring sessions through Zoom. We started with hybrid learning while most other schools went completely online. And a few months later, we went to fully in-person, but much of the College was still remote. Some students have fully online classes and some have hybrid classes."

"I don't have any fully in-person college classes right now. I'm taking three college classes: Biology, English and Math 111. My biology class, including the lab and lecture, is completely online. This definitely took some getting used to since you're unable to do hands-on labs that you were used to doing before, so the way we learn and experience our class subjects has definitely changed. My biology professor has been really helpful and available to students, trying to help us succeed. But we're also not in the same environment where you can just easily ask the teacher for help. Students have to help themselves as well, so I think it's a matter of us all doing our part, working together to help each other."

"I'm at school three days a week and three Mondays a month, I'm at an elementary school as a 'Teacher Cadet' where I observe and assist in a classroom and earn hours that could be applied if I choose to become a teacher. I learned so much through this experience, including that I am probably not going to be a teacher. I love the kids and enjoyed being in the classroom but I would like to learn and explore more jobs and careers."

"For the fall, I'd really like our teachers to stay on the same trajectory and keep up their motivation. I know it sounds cliché but things will get better and the teachers are already helping us so much! They might not know it, but they're really helping us quite a bit. And to just keep fighting for us and fighting for our education like they have continuously been doing. Covid, everything... it's just been so hard for everybody. I realized that being thankful, just having that sense of security that I can get my education while many can't – it's such a privilege."

"I was a student ambassador last year as well, and I love every part of the Student Conference. This year, being together online has been amazing and it might not be exactly the same as meeting in-person, but it wasn't any less in terms of our conversations. Talking with other students from across the country about current, real-world issues, things that are actually impactful... it has been kind of like an outlet for me. I really liked the discussions around equality and I recognized that the way, the 'how,' we talk about things is so important."



Brendan
High School Sophomore
MCHS at Contra Costa College
San Pablo, California

"I thought remote school would be maybe a few weeks. When I realized it was going to be much longer, I was disappointed because I felt like I didn't get to do all the things I needed to do. But it has also helped in a way, especially with so many things going on; all of us became more aware of bigger problems and social injustice issues that need to change. But I'm very excited to go back to school full-time this fall because I feel like it gives me a sense of urgency to do and get stuff done. When you're at home and on Zoom for class, sometimes, you don't want to do anything. So, I'm looking forward to that sense of urgency again."

"My dad has really helped to keep us all on a regular schedule which I appreciate. Usually, I try to wake up around 6am or 7am, get ready, eat, and review my work so I'm ready for my classes. I'll have breaks, do homework, go exercise, do what I need to do. I have about 3-4 classes each day, including one college math class that I take. I enjoyed online classes at first, but now, it's a struggle to stay motivated. However, my schedule has been more flexible and I'm able to do things that maybe I haven't done and I've learned that I need to tackle certain things to know myself better. I'm able to socialize on social media and meet with friends at the park so that's been good."

"Even though we're virtual, I feel like I've gotten to know my teachers well, especially my homeroom teacher. She oversees the MESA program which prepares students for college and careers in STEM. She's helped us a lot with math and she's really interactive. I've definitely gotten to know the other teachers well too because they try to get us engaged with talking about current events. For my college courses, the teaching has been more fast-paced because they've had to cram stuff. Some of the classes mainly had recordings like modules and Youtube videos, so you might only see the instructor every few weeks for Zoom. It actually worked out well for my college drama class. We had to perform monologue scenes and record them in Flip Grid and submit. The instructor would then, reviewed your video and provide feedback, and then the videos were shared with other students so they could also give feedback."

"The MCNC Student Conference this year, honestly, I have only good things to say, because I wanted to come to a place where I could talk about certain issues and this has been exactly that. I've been able to interact with other students and it's been enlightening to meet kids from different backgrounds and different areas – south, north, east – and hear from their perspectives on various things."



Matthew
High School Senior
Greer Middle College
Greer, South Carolina

"A couple students and I were charged with picking out a graduation quote and one of the quotes we were thinking about is 'just keep swimming' from *Finding Dory*. Those 3 words sum up what our senior class in particular, had to go through. It exemplifies how much we persevered and how resilient we were. We just stuck together and kept pushing and moving forward. Like college applications was more of a struggle but we made it through. I applied to a lot of state schools and I chose Wofford College because they offered me a full ride on tuition and room and board so I'm definitely excited about going there."

"I have three college classes. My biology class is all in-person and it's been okay because we're able to social distance in the class. But my theater and history class meet just once a week online and I can tell the professors feel rushed to cover a lot of material and that kind of gap in material then falls on us to cover it by ourselves. There is a convenience to being virtual in that you can just roll out of bed and hop on Zoom, but I find I procrastinate more or maybe I'm just a bit lazier. In my room, it's way easier to get distracted; whereas, for an in-person classroom setting, you're able to focus on your schoolwork more. I have classes that are more discussion-based and it can be awkward to type on a discussion board; if we were face-to-face in class, it would allow for more natural conversations back and forth."

"Part of the reason I came back for in-person school was just wanting to see my friends since I haven't seen them in a while. Finding a balance between being social and being safe isn't easy. People my age – we want to go out, we want to have fun, we want to dance, do whatever, and we haven't really had that opportunity for a year. And I can tell people are getting tired of it, so that makes me a bit nervous. We just need to be a little more patient because we can now see light at the end of the tunnel, and hopefully things will start to feel a bit more normal come this fall."

"I really liked being able to meet students from different parts of the country through the Student Conference – to talk and work with them and compare what California and New York are like versus South Carolina. We'd have these awesome discussions online and when we returned back to our home lives, I would think about where I stood on different issues. The racial justice session was most impactful to me because it brought to light something I wasn't necessarily thinking a lot about before. I want to be more active in the community this fall. Trying to understand the world from someone else's perspective is so important."



Anahi
High School Senior
MCHS at LaGuardia College
Long Island City, New York

"This school year has been... I constantly have polarizing thoughts because it was a time of suffering, yet other people truly flourished by benefitting from a different type of instruction and having time to connect with themselves. I firsthand saw grief and loss – people losing their jobs, my family and my friends' families being affected. I also missed that environment at school. Having a flexible schedule helped in that if you felt overwhelmed, you could just go to a corner for a bit and say, 'Okay, I'm out of school.' But I know some students also felt that they were always in school and there was no space to actually remove themselves."

"I am currently taking two college classes: chemistry and calculus. I have House once a week, Seminar twice a week, and a gym class. I'm also part of the Yearbook and participate in the Student Conference group. I also had college applications it was all stressful! But my counselor was such a great support. She helped me search colleges, fill out financial aid forms, and just knew where I was coming from. I also had to get my portfolio done for college admissions. This whole new virtual learning experience actually showed me how much our school cares about us. We have a very good school where the people really care for us and email to check on us regularly. And they sent out surveys just to ask us how we're feeling and doing, and to ask how classes and instruction could be improved to support us."

"The Student Conference has been such a learning experience for me. You just get into conversation with others and you learn something new. We also talked a lot about minority struggles; it was such a safe space where I and many other students could speak. And at a time like this, to meet with other students from around the country was great."

"I don't know how to explain it. I feel like I've done nothing, and yet I've done everything! I've been really productive this whole year; it's kind of incredible how my mind has been running like never before. I was into the whole process of watching the debates and campaigns because my government teacher engaged us to be involved. So many things happening... like Black Lives Matter and the recent horrible hate crimes against Asians. It's disappointing and exhausting to witness such violence during a pandemic where people's priority should be staying safe, but instead, have to continue to fight for basic human rights. It truly makes you feel so small, against a big world. To encapsulate what I felt during this pandemic is hard to explain... sometimes, there is no need to even explain because some things are just meant to be felt."