

# Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

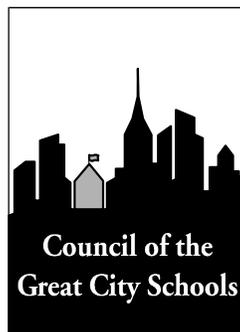
Report of the Strategic Support Teams  
of the  
Council of the Great City Schools

**Submitted to the**

Richmond Public Schools

**By the**

Council of the Great City Schools



December 2003

### Acknowledgments

The Council of the Great City Schools thanks the many individuals who contributed to this project to improve student achievement in the Richmond Public Schools. Their efforts and commitment were critical in presenting the district with the best possible proposals.

First, we thank Superintendent Deborah Jewell-Sherman. It is not easy to ask one's colleagues for this kind of review. It takes courage and openness. It also requires a commitment to the city's children that is uncompromising. She has that in abundance.

Second, we thank the Richmond School Board. Their leadership will be critical if the proposals in this report are to be put into place with conviction and integrity.

Third, we thank the members of the Richmond Public Schools staff who provided their valuable time and gathered all of documents and data the Teams needed to do their work. The staff's openness was critical to our understanding of the challenges that Richmond faces.

Fourth, the Council of the Great City Schools thanks the many groups, organizations, and associations with which we met. We particularly thank parents who gave generously of their time to help us understand their concerns. We apologize that we were unable to meet with everyone we know had something valuable to say.

Fifth, the Council thanks the cities and school districts that contributed staff to this effort. They included Boston, Chicago, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Columbus, Houston, Orlando, and Norfolk. The enthusiasm and generosity of these districts is another example of how the nation's urban public school systems are banding together to help each other improve student performance.

Sixth, the Council thanks Darla Marburger, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education. She has served as project director for this effort. Thank you.

Finally, I thank Council staff members Sharon Lewis, Janice Ceperich, Jeff Simering, Manish Naik, Julie Wright Halbert, and Beth Antunez whose skills were critical to the success of this effort.

Michael Casserly  
Executive Director  
Council of the Great City Schools

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## Introduction: Purpose and Origin of the Project

### OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The Council of the Great City Schools has prepared this report to summarize the findings and recommendations that the organization's Strategic Support Teams made during their visits to the Richmond Public Schools in the Fall, 2003.

These teams were requested by the Richmond schools' superintendent, Deborah Jewell-Sherman, and funded by the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>1</sup> Sherman asked the Council to review the school district's efforts to improve student performance and propose ways to accelerate it. She also asked the Council to review the district's federal programs to ensure their alignment with *No Child Left Behind* and to assess the district's special education operations.

To carry out its charge, the Council assembled three Strategic Support Teams (SSTs) composed of senior urban school managers who have worked in other cities with many of the same issues as Richmond.

The first team was composed of curriculum and instructional leaders from cities that had improved student achievement significantly. The second team and third teams were composed of federal program and special education directors who have impeccable records for program excellence. Council staff specializing in student achievement, Title I, special education, and other federal programs accompanied each of the teams.

Each of the teams devoted considerable time to interviewing district leaders, staff, parents, and others. They also reviewed scores of documents, analyzed data, and prepared recommendations. The last day of each site visit was devoted to synthesizing findings and developing proposals for improving the district's academic performance and program operations. The Superintendent was briefed at the end of each site visit about the groups' initial findings and recommendations. This report summarizes those findings and the teams' suggestions.

### PROJECT GOALS

The main goals of the Council's review were to—

- Review the instructional program of the Richmond schools and assess its potential for raising student achievement.

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Department of Education funded the curriculum and instruction team and the federal programs team, but did not fund the Special Education Team.

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- Propose changes, if needed, in the Richmond schools' efforts to boost student achievement.
- Review Title I and other federal programs operated by the Richmond schools to determine their overall alignment with *No Child Left Behind* and their ability to aid the district in raising student performance.
- Make recommendations, if needed, on how the district's federal programs could better support student achievement consistent with *No Child Left Behind*.
- Review the special education program of the Richmond schools to ensure that it comports with best practices around the country.
- Propose changes, if needed, to the district's special education programs that would improve operations, improve student performance, and serve students in the least restrictive environment.
- Identify expertise, resources, strategies, and materials that Richmond could use to boost student achievement and improve its programs.

### **THE WORK OF THE STRATEGIC SUPPORT TEAMS**

The first team, composed of instructional and curriculum leaders from urban school districts that have made substantial gains in student achievement, visited Richmond on September 8-10, 2003. This team analyzed the district's broad instructional strategies and programs. Special attention was paid to the district's reading and math programs. The federal programs team visited the Richmond Public Schools on October 6-8, 2003. And the special education team visited the Richmond schools on November 4-7, 2003.

The teams conducted interviews and meetings with Richmond school staff and outside organizations and groups. The teams also reviewed numerous documents and reports. And the teams conducted conference calls after their site visits, gathered additional information, and refined their initial recommendations.

This approach to providing technical assistance to urban school systems is unique to the Council and its members. The organization finds the use of teams of senior urban school leaders and managers effective for a number of reasons.

First, the approach allows the Superintendent or CEO to work with talented, successful practitioners from other urban school systems around the country that have developed strong track records for performance and excellence.

Second, the recommendations have validity because the individuals who developed them have faced many of the same problems faced by Richmond. It can not be said that

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these individuals do not know what working in an urban school system is like or that their proposals have not been tested under the most rigorous conditions.

Third, using senior urban school managers from other communities is faster and less expensive than retaining a private firm. The expertise of team members allows a rapid learning curve and permits services to be delivered in a faster and less expensive manner than could be obtained on the open market.

Finally, the teams comprise a pool of experts that the superintendent, school board, and staff can use to implement the recommendations or develop other follow-up strategies.

Members of the Strategic Support Teams included the following individuals—

### STRATEGIC SUPPORT TEAMS

<b>Curriculum &amp; Instruction Team</b>	<b>Special Education Team</b>
<p>Frances Bessellieu Independent Reading Consultant</p> <p>Francis Haithcock, Ph.D. Associate Superintendent Educational Services Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools</p> <p>Ricki Price-Baugh, Ph.D. Assistant Superintendent Curriculum &amp; Instructional Development Houston Independent School District</p> <p>Denise Walston Coordinator Math Department Norfolk School District</p>	<p>Harriet P. Brown, Esq. Director ESE Policy and Procedures Orange County Public Schools</p> <p>Sue Gamm, Esq. Former Chief Specialized Services Officer Chicago Public Schools</p> <p>Jane Rhyne, Ph.D. Assistant Superintendent Programs for Exceptional Children Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools</p>
<b>Federal Programs Team</b>	
<p>Charlotte Harris Director of Program Development Boston Public Schools</p> <p>Ron Stewart Supervisor of State and Federal Programs Columbus Public Schools</p>	

### CONTENT OF THIS REPORT

Chapter 1 of this report presents a brief overview of the Richmond Public Schools and the challenges they are facing. Chapter 2 summarizes the findings and recommendations that the Strategic Support Teams made to the district on strengthening its curriculum and instructional programs. Chapter 3 summarizes the findings and recommendations that the teams made for strengthening its Title I and other federal programs and better aligning them with *No Child Left Behind*. Chapter 4 summarizes the findings and recommendations of the special education team. The final chapter summarizes and synthesizes the report.

The appendices of the report include a number of items that may be of interest to the reader. Appendix A presents the results of the curriculum and instruction team's comparison of the Richmond schools with key practices of some of the nation's fastest improving urban school systems. Appendix B lists the people the teams talked to during their site visits. Appendix C lists the documents that each team reviewed. Appendix D presents brief biographical sketches of team members. Appendix E presents a brief description of the Council of the Great City Schools.

The Council of the Great City Schools has now conducted over 70 Strategic Support Teams in over 22 major cities in a variety of instructional and noninstructional areas. It has shied away from using a specific template to guide its fact-finding or its recommendations. The result is that each report by the organization is specifically tailored to each district and the particular challenges it faces.

In the instructional arena, however, the Council has used much of its own research to guide its proposals for districts that are not getting much traction from their own reforms. This research is systemic in nature and grounded in the organization's analysis of why some urban school systems improve and others do not.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, we should point out that we do not examine everything. We did not, for example, spend time looking at noninstructional operations in the Richmond schools. The Council has also deployed a transportation team to the district and filed a separate report on this area. Our focus in this report, instead, is exclusively on student achievement, special education, and federal programming in support of student achievement.

The project did not look explicitly at governance issues, although the team interviewed board members, reviewed board agendas, and attended one board meeting.

Finally, we did not examine the district's overall financial situation or review the district's operational efficiency.

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<sup>2</sup>Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., Herlihy, C., (2002). *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban Schools Systems Improve Student Achievement*. MDRC for the Council of the Great City Schools.

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### PROJECT STAFF

Council staff working on this project included the following individuals—

Michael Casserly Executive Director Council of the Great City Schools	Sharon Lewis Director of Research Council of the Great City Schools
Jeff Simering Director of Legislation Council of the Great City Schools	Janice Ceperich Research Specialist Council of the Great City Schools
Manish Naik Legislative and Research Specialist Council of the Great City Schools	Julie Wright Halbert Counsel Council of the Great City Schools
Beth Antunez Intergovernmental Specialist Council of the Great City Schools	

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Report of the Strategic Support Teams  
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**SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**CHALLENGES**

When Superintendent Deborah Jewell-Sherman took the reins of Virginia's Richmond Public Schools in August 2002, she was given a year to boost student academic achievement and reach accreditation benchmarks on the state's Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Her job security relied on it. More important, Richmond's children were depending on her to succeed.

More than a year later, she can breathe a sigh of relief, since the number of Richmond City schools that earned full accreditation on the SOL tests exceeded 20, the benchmark that she had agreed to reach in a year when she signed her initial contract.

Twenty-three of Richmond's 55 schools are now fully accredited, more than double last year's figure of 10. Eighteen elementary schools, two middle schools, and three high schools earned full accreditation. And only nine schools were accredited with warning, the lowest rating, down from last year's total of 23. The superintendent's contract called for no more than 12 to be accredited with warning. This year's results surpassed both benchmarks.

The recent gains in test scores were good news for a school district that has struggled for many years to improve student performance. But the news will have to be even better in the years to come if the Richmond schools are to teach all the city's children to the academic proficiency level its parents want and its children deserve. Student achievement in the Richmond Public Schools remains extremely low. Graduation rates lag behind the state and discipline continues to be a problem.

Another cause for concern is the ability of the Richmond Public Schools to meet the accountability targets set by the state under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The new federal law calls for states, districts, and schools to have all students proficient in reading and mathematics by the end of the 2013-14 school year. This goal is harder to reach than the state's requirements for accreditation, which has been based on having at least 70 percent of a school's students passing SOL tests in English, math, reading and science.

The Richmond schools are not close to meeting the federal goal of universal proficiency, however.

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The challenges facing the school district are significant. They are also shared by many urban public school systems across the country: low student achievement, high poverty rates, disparate funding, high dropout rates, and fragile public support. These issues are particularly acute in Richmond, however, where the school district plays an important role in revitalizing a city that is struggling to regain its economic footing.

But other major city school systems have faced many of the same challenges and are beating the odds. Atlanta, Boston, Cleveland, Fort Worth, Houston, Long Beach, Norfolk, and others have turned themselves around after years of neglect and have taken their rightful places in revitalizing their communities. Some of these districts initiated reforms on their own; others had the choices made for them by external powers. But none of these cities or others have regretted the path of reform and improvement they now pursue. Children are learning more. Test scores are up. Management has improved. And optimism is returning.

Richmond could look forward to the same progress. But first, it will need to change some bad habits. The school board has taken to fighting the superintendent rather than battling the forces of illiteracy. Until recently, the school system's administration had largely abdicated its responsibilities for spurring student achievement. The district's teachers are too often heard blaming parents. And the parents, for their part, have not been as actively engaged in the instructional process as they need to be.

The biggest challenge facing the Richmond Public Schools involves the system's ability to pull together and raise student achievement. The school district has a highly fractured program to boost student performance, the legacy of too many initiatives piled on top of one another over too many years. The district had, until recently, lost its focus. Its efforts had become incoherent and unintelligible; its moorings had loosened, and its unity of purpose had splintered. The result is a school district where almost anyone could claim that his or her work was consistent with the goals of the system no matter what that work was.

In short, **the Richmond school district has had trouble hitting its mark over the years because so many people in the system are aiming in different directions.** The result has been a slower pace of academic improvement than the public wants and students require.

To address these challenges, Superintendent Deborah Jewell-Sherman asked the Council of the Great City Schools to review the instructional program of the Richmond Public Schools and propose ways to improve it and to boost student achievement. The Council assembled a series of Strategic Support Teams, composed of senior managers from other urban school systems that have made substantial gains in achievement, to do the work. The teams looked specifically at the district's curriculum and instruction, its special education program, and its Title I and other federal programs.

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These teams visited the Richmond schools in the fall of 2003 and have prepared a detailed list of recommendations for the Superintendent and the school board. The proposals are summarized below.

### **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Strategic Support Teams are submitting proposals to the Richmond Public Schools in three areas: curriculum and instruction, federal programs, and special education. The following are highlights.

#### **A. Curriculum and Instruction**

The Council of the Great City Schools benchmarked or compared the instructional program of the Richmond Public Schools against those of other urban school districts that were making more rapid progress. The organization then drew up a set of recommendations to make Richmond's instructional practices more like those of districts seeing faster progress. For Richmond's programs to be more like these other cities, the district will have to take the following bold steps:

##### **1. Develop a coherent vision for what it wants to achieve.**

The Richmond Public Schools currently lack a comprehensive plan for improving student achievement. Developing one will require the school board and the superintendent to develop a shared vision for what they want the district to achieve and what they want the schools to look like. The district's leadership will need to—

- Convene to develop a broad vision for improving student achievement.
- Charge the superintendent with developing a comprehensive plan for boosting student performance.
- Stay focused on the attainment of the vision and the plan for a sustained period.

##### **2. Set measurable goals for academic improvement.**

The Richmond Public Schools currently lack a set of goals beyond those for attaining state accreditation. New goals tagged to meeting Adequate Yearly Progress requirements are needed to boost student achievement beyond its current objectives. The district needs to—

- Set specific, measurable goals for the district that are tied, at a minimum, to state student proficiency targets in reading and mathematics on Virginia's Standards of Learning tests and other appropriate assessments.
- Attach timelines for the district's attainment of AYP goals.

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- Set school-by-school academic targets that together would result in the district's attainment of AYP targets for student achievement.
- Rework the district's school improvement plans and "Charting the Course" plans to align with the attainment of school targets.

### **3. Establish a new accountability system for attaining academic goals.**

Academic goals for the improvement of the Richmond Public Schools are of little use unless they are accompanied by the means to hold people responsible for attaining them. The district currently holds only one person accountable, the superintendent. To devise an accountability system that works across the system, the district will need to—

- Begin placing senior staff on performance contracts tied to the attainment of districtwide achievement goals.
- Tie the evaluation of the superintendent and senior staff to progress in student achievement.
- Begin placing principals on performance contracts tied to school-by-school targets.
- Increase the latitude of principals to interview, select, and hire their staffs.

### **4. Standardize districtwide instructional strategies and curriculum.**

The Richmond Public Schools currently have scores of programs to boost student performance, many of which are selected and implemented at the school level with little coordination or alignment—and little evaluation as to which ones work and which don't. To create instructional cohesion and focus, the district will need to—

- Select and put in place a single, cohesive reading program that reflects the best scientific research.
- Ensure that the program is as closely aligned to the state's standards as it can be.
- Place a moratorium on the acquisition of all new programs, materials, models, and software until the district develops objective criteria for the purchase and retention of initiatives.
- Begin phasing out initiatives and models at the school level that are not proven effective or are not consistent with a new instructional program.
- Revise the district's Curriculum Compass and Treasure Chest to give teachers a more coherent set of resources and pacing guides to boost performance.

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### **5. Provide districtwide professional development on the implementation of the new curriculum.**

The Richmond schools currently have a very disjointed professional development program that largely reflects the incoherence of the instructional strategy. To be more effective, the district needs to—

- Adopt or implement a districtwide program for training principals and teachers on a new single curriculum.
- Curtail school-by-school professional development that is not tied to the curriculum's implementation.
- Ensure that professional development is differentiated, includes training on supplemental materials, addresses intervention strategies in reading and math—and that attendance is mandatory.

### **6. Ensure that reforms are implemented at the classroom level.**

The Richmond school system currently allows each school to pursue almost any programs or strategies it wants to. The result has been too many school-based strategies to be effective districtwide. The district not only needs to take primary responsibility for raising student achievement districtwide but also needs to—

- Assign a staff member at the central office to coordinate reading and math coaches at the school level.
- Revise the district's current "look for" system currently used to monitor classrooms so that it includes instructional items rather than operational or logistical ones.

### **7. Use data to monitor progress and decide on instructional interventions.**

The Richmond schools are getting more sophisticated in and committed to the use of data to decide on instructional strategies. But it is unclear whether the district's data tools are aligned to and consistent with its curriculum. The district needs to—

- Conduct a series of studies of its Edutest and Flanagan assessment systems to determine their alignment with the SOLs.
- Begin adopting a new quarterly assessment system if the current one proves unable to fulfill the district's needs.
- Upgrade the district's research unit and charge it with putting the district's programs on a regular evaluation cycle.

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### **8. Incorporate literacy reforms into the preschool program and extend them through the high schools, grade-by-grade.**

The Richmond schools have a large and longstanding early childhood program that needs to be upgraded and tied to reading and math reforms at the early elementary school level, and then extended grade-by-grade up through the system. The district needs to—

- Ensure that its new reading program has a preschool component.
- Develop an explicit, comprehensive high school reform plan.
- Begin double blocking at the middle and high school levels to boost reading and math skills.
- Phase out the district’s algebra readiness course in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and move it to the middle school grades.

### **9. Focus on the district’s lowest performing schools.**

Richmond has a number of schools that are unusually low-performing. Many urban school systems across the country are learning that they can improve their overall performance by targeting efforts on boosting the performance of its lowest achieving schools. The district needs to—

- Select five to ten of its lowest performing schools and develop a specific plan of intervention to boost their performance.
- Better coordinate the work of the state intervention teams (including PASS teams) at the district level.
- Eliminate pullout programs unless they are used for periodic grouping, regrouping, and re-teaching of necessary skills.

## **B. Title I and Other Federal Programs**

*No Child Left Behind* includes a number of explicit requirements and provisions that the Richmond Public Schools will need to address over the next few years. To better meet the letter and the spirit of the law, the Richmond schools will need to—

- Mesh NCLB’s adequate yearly progress goals with those proposed for the district and individual schools.
- Give principals greater latitude in the expenditure of Title I funds but target their use around a small set of district instructional priorities.

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- Continue to blend the district’s open-enrollment program with NCLB’s choice requirements.
- Require that supplemental service providers align their programs with the district’s new reading and math initiatives.
- Redeploy the district’s Title I parent set-aside funds to school-based activities.
- Link the district’s tuition reimbursement program to NCLB’s highly qualified teacher requirements.
- Overhaul the school-by-school Title I allocation system to give it more uniformity and fairness.
- Use a grade span allocation system to target Title I funds on elementary and middle schools where they can be more effective.

### **C. Special Education**

The superintendent has been particularly committed to making sure that the district’s special education program meets the requirements of IDEA, operates more smoothly, and addresses the issue of over-identifying students for special education. To achieve these goals, the Richmond Public Schools will need to—

- Explicitly address special education students in the district’s new strategy for improving student achievement districtwide.
- Establish clear and objective districtwide criteria for placing students in special education that rely less on subjective judgments.
- Continue to encourage placement of students in the least restrictive environment and collect better data, consistent with federal requirements, on how this is being done.
- Sharpen the district’s professional development to include strategies to help both general and special education teachers handle all identified disabilities and behaviors.
- Reorganize the district’s Exceptional Education department.
- Place greater focus more instructional strategies for special education and relatively less focus on compliance.
- Boost school-level capacity to conduct manifestation determinations.
- Prepare a districtwide special education policy and procedures manual.

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Student achievement has improved modestly in the Richmond Public Schools over the last two years, reversing a long period of stagnation in test scores. Many observers inside and outside the school district attribute the new gains to a superintendent who has significantly raised expectations for performance. Jewell-Sherman has started to streamline the system in ways that are in keeping with the concrete proposals in this report. She has also started to consolidate reading programs in ways that the Strategic Support Teams working on this project believe are necessary. The Council of the Great City Schools hopes that this report will help focus the district further on student achievement and accelerate the gains that it is already starting to see.

## CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND ON THE RICHMOND SCHOOLS

### LEADERSHIP

The Richmond Public Schools is governed by an elected school board of nine members. Each member is elected for a two-year term from separate regions of the city. There are no at-large members. The members of the board elect their own Chair, Vice Chair, and other officers. The board meets twice each month as a committee of the whole, but does not operate separate committees.

Over the past fourteen years the district has had six superintendents or about one every 2.3 years, including—

- |                                    |            |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| ▪ Albert Jones                     | 1989- 1991 |
| ▪ Lucille Brown                    | 1991-1996  |
| ▪ Patricia Conn                    | 1996-1998  |
| ▪ Deborah Jewell-Sherman (Interim) | 1998-1998  |
| ▪ Albert Williams                  | 1998-2002  |
| ▪ Deborah Jewell-Sherman           | 2002-      |

Deborah Jewell-Sherman, a career veteran of the school district, took office about one year ago, pledging that Richmond schools “would stand as a model for excellence in urban education.”

### STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The Richmond Public Schools enrolled about 26,840 students in the 2001-2002 school year or about 2.3 percent of the state’s total. Some 65.1 percent of Richmond’s students are eligible for a free or reduced price lunch, compared with about 29.3 percent statewide. The district enrolls about 5.6 percent of the state’s poor students.

In addition, 90.8 percent of Richmond’s enrollment is African American, compared with about 27.1 percent statewide. The district’s enrollment of English Language Learners is less than the state average, but the percentage of students with disabilities is more than the state average.

The district operates 31 elementary schools, ten middle schools, and nine high schools; employs approximately 2,000 teachers, and oversees an annual budget of approximately \$218 million.

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**Table 1. Comparison of Richmond and Virginia Schools<sup>3</sup>**

Variable	Richmond	Virginia <sup>4</sup>
Enrollment	26,840	1,163,091
% African American	90.8	27.1
% Hispanic	1.7	5.5
% White	6.9	62.8
% Other	0.6	4.6
% Free/Reduced Price Lunch	61.0	29.3
% with Disabilities	16.0	14.1
% English Language Learners	1.1	3.2
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	15.5	13.0
Number of Schools	63	2090
Average Enrollment per School	426	557
Current Expenditures per Pupil <sup>5</sup>	\$8,357	\$6,841
State Funding Targeting Ratio <sup>6</sup>	0.50	--

The average school in Richmond enrolls about 426 students, compared with a statewide average of about 557 students per school. The district, moreover, has fewer teachers per student (15.5) than the average Virginia school (13.0). And the district has a per pupil expenditure of about \$8,357, compared with a statewide average of \$7,281 per pupil. The state, however, spends on Richmond only about 50 percent of what one might expect given the city's share of the state's poor children.

### STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Student achievement in the Richmond Public Schools is generally low compared with statewide averages. Spring 2002 testing results indicated that 54 percent of the city's third graders scored at or above the state-defined proficiency level on the reading portion of the Virginia Standards of Learning Assessment (SOLs) compared with 72 percent of the state's third graders. About 57 percent of the city's fifth graders scored at or above the proficiency level in reading, compared with 78 percent of fifth graders statewide. And 48 percent of the city's eighth graders scored at or above the proficiency level in reading, compared with 69 percent of the eleventh graders statewide.<sup>7</sup> (See Graphs 1-3.)

<sup>3</sup> Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary and Secondary School Universe Survey," 2001-2002.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia's figures include Richmond data.

<sup>5</sup> Data are for the 2000 fiscal year.

<sup>6</sup> The degree to which Virginia funds the Richmond Public Schools in relation to the district's proportion of the state's poor children. An index of 1.00 indicates that the state's funds are distributed in direct relationship to the district's share of poor children. An index above 1.00 indicates that a district gets more funds than what its share of poor students suggest. An index below 1.00 indicates that a district gets less than what its share of poor students suggest.

<sup>7</sup> The SOL was administered only to students in the third, fifth, and eighth grade levels in 2002.

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Math scores for 2002 were similar to those in reading. Some 60 percent of Richmond's third graders scored at or above the state-defined proficiency levels on the math portion of the SOLs, compared with 80 percent of the third graders statewide. About 50 percent of the city's fifth graders scored at or above the proficiency level in math, compared with 71 percent of the fifth graders statewide. And 42 percent of the city's eighth graders scored at or above the proficiency level in math, compared with 71 percent of the eighth graders statewide. (See Graphs 4-6.)

The long-term pace of improvement in Richmond's reading and math scores look more promising, with district students making gains at approximately the same rate as their peers statewide. Since 1998, when the SOLs were first administered, the percent of students passing in third grade reading has increased in Richmond from 35 percent to 54 percent in the spring of 2002.<sup>8</sup> The percent of students passing in the fifth grade in Richmond has increased from 46 percent in 1998 to 57 percent in 2002.<sup>9</sup> And the percent of students passing in the eighth grade has increased from 45 percent in 1998 to 48 percent in 2002.<sup>10</sup> (See Graphs 1-3.)

Progress on math scores has also been evident in Richmond over the long term. The percent of students passing the SOLs for Richmond's third graders has increased from 40 percent in 1998 to 60 percent in 2002.<sup>11</sup> The percent of fifth graders passing the math SOL has increased from 22 percent to 50 percent over this period.<sup>12</sup> And the percent of eighth graders passing has increased from 23 percent to 42 percent.<sup>13</sup> (See Graphs 4-6.)

The reading and math gaps between third graders in the city compared with those statewide, however, has remained unchanged at about 20 percentage points on the SOLs between 1998 and 2002. As of this date, the Virginia Department of Education has not posted the 2003 data on the state's website; nor has it posted data disaggregated by NCLB's subgroups.

The district also administers the SAT-9 to its fourth, sixth, and ninth graders. Data from the 2000-01 school year indicate that fourth graders in Richmond scored at the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile, on average, in reading and at the 39<sup>th</sup> percentile in math. Scores for sixth and ninth graders were in the same range.

Finally, the Council of the Great City Schools looked at the district's average SAT scores. Results showed that the mean SAT verbal score for all Richmond students tested was 357 in 2001. The district reported no students with verbal scores at or above 600 and only five percent of its test takers scoring at or above 500. About 70 percent of all SAT test takers scored below 400 on their verbal tests. In addition, the percentage of test takers scoring below 400 on the verbal portion of the SAT had increased from 55 percent in 1997 to 70 percent in 2001.

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<sup>8</sup> Percent of third graders passing reading in Virginia ranged from 55% in 1998 to 72% in 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Percent of fifth graders passing reading in Virginia ranged from 68% in 1998 to 78% in 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Percent of eighth graders passing reading in Virginia ranged from 65% in 1998 to 69% in 2002.

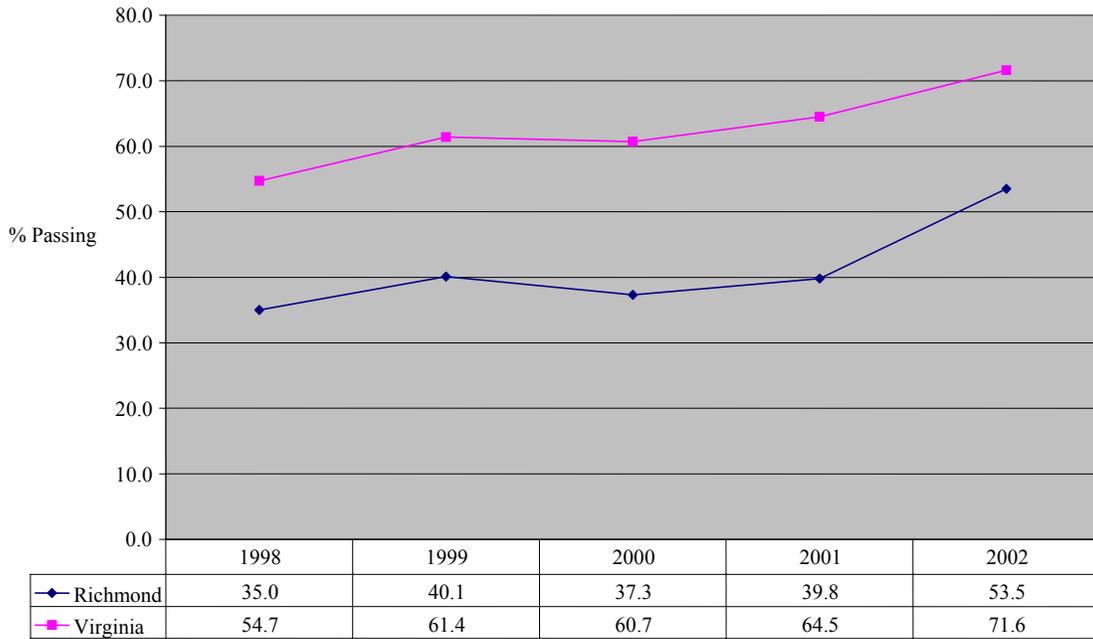
<sup>11</sup> Percent of third graders passing math in Virginia ranged from 64% in 1998 to 80% in 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Percent of fifth graders passing math in Virginia ranged from 47% in 1998 to 71% in 2002.

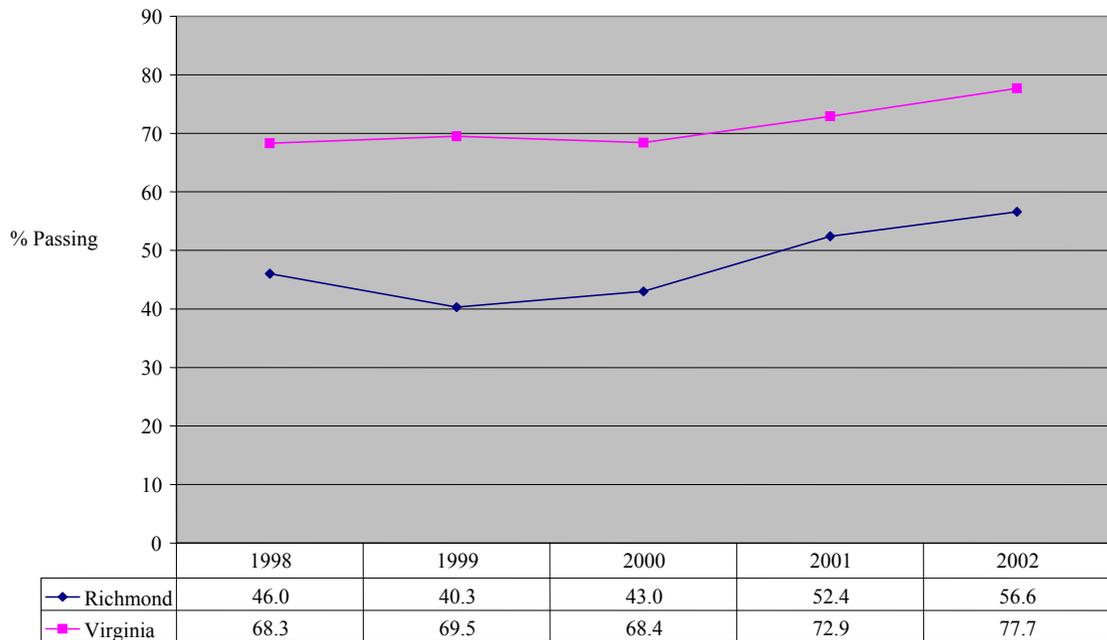
<sup>13</sup> Percent of eighth graders passing math in Virginia ranged 53% in 1998 to 71% in 2002.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

**Graph 1. Percent Passing SOL Reading for Richmond and Virginia 3rd Graders**

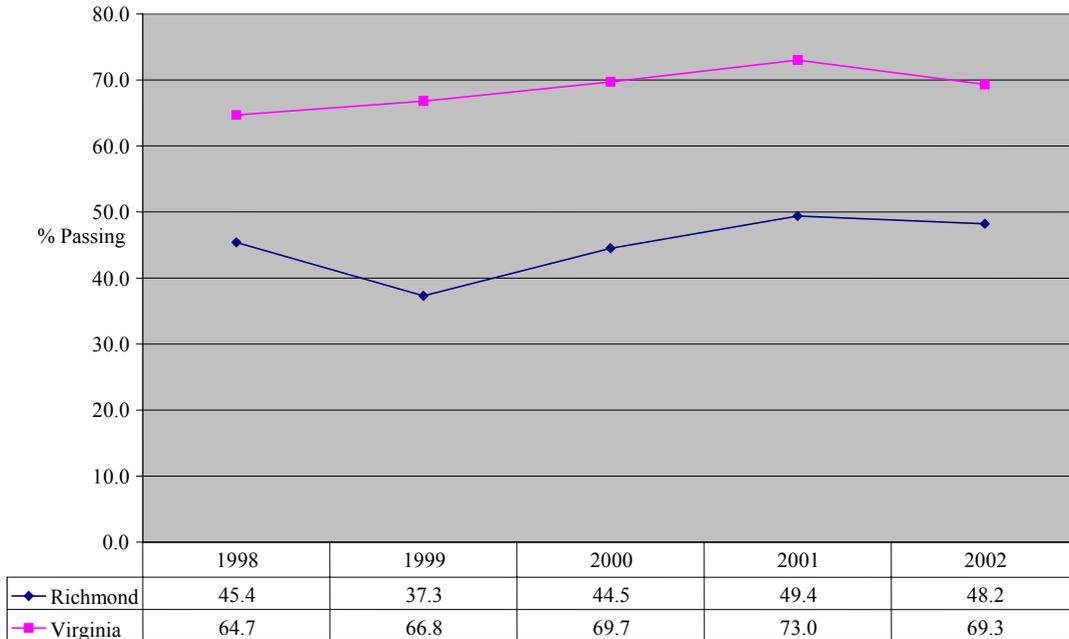


**Graph 2. Percent Passing SOL Reading for Richmond and Virginia 5<sup>th</sup> Graders**

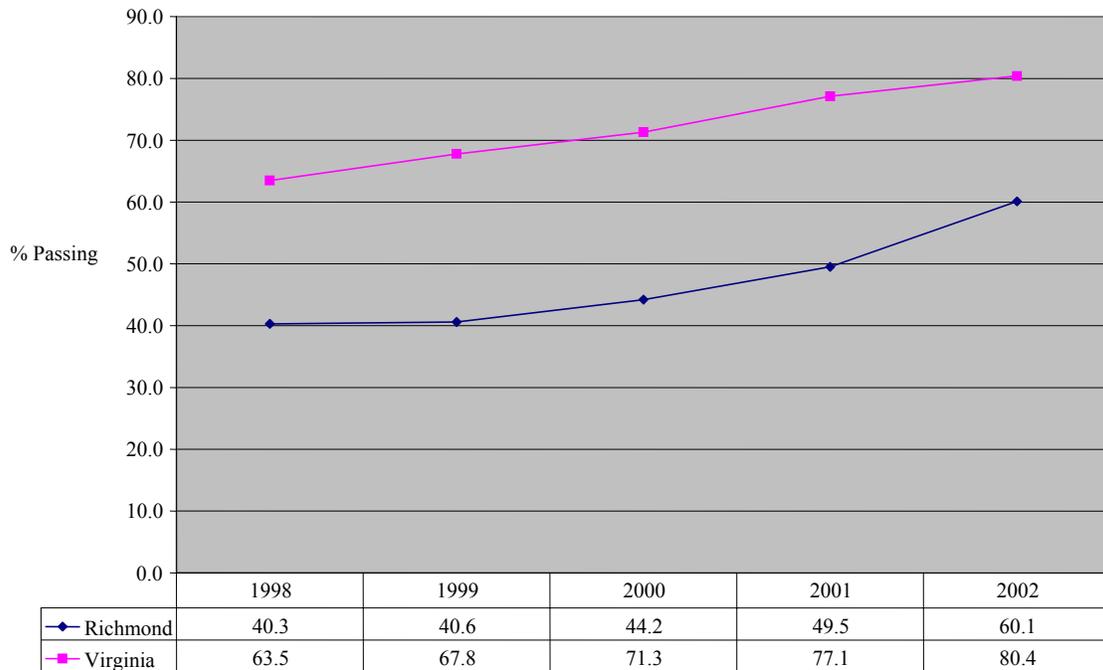


## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

**Graph 3. Percent Passing SOL Reading for Richmond and Virginia 8th Graders**

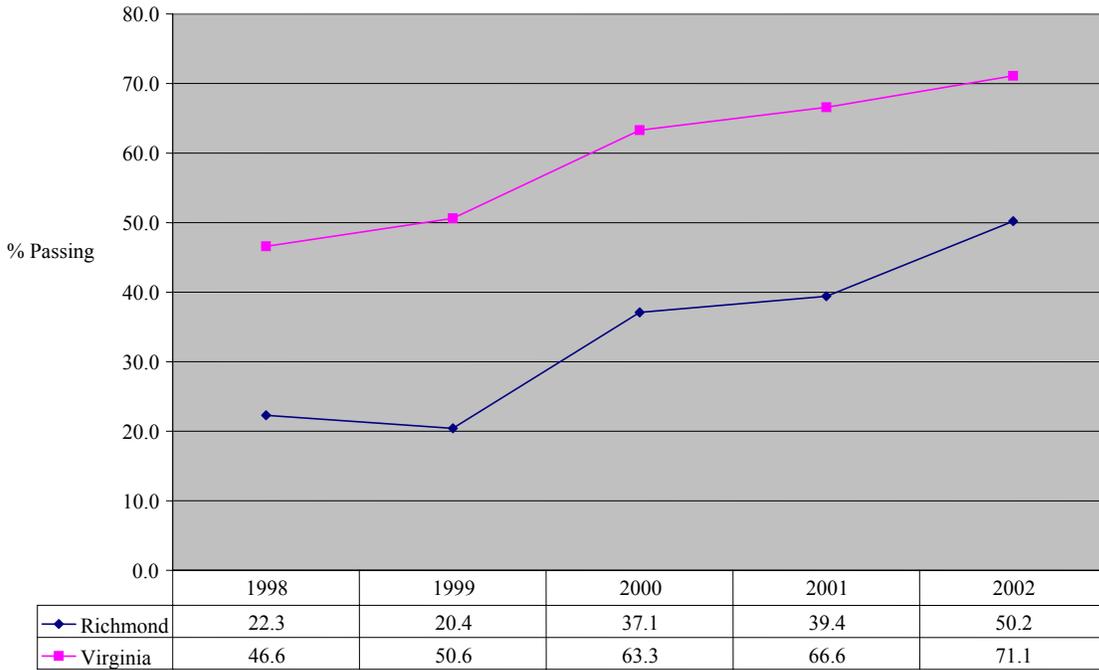


**Graph 4. Percent Passing SOL Math for Richmond and Virginia 3rd Graders**

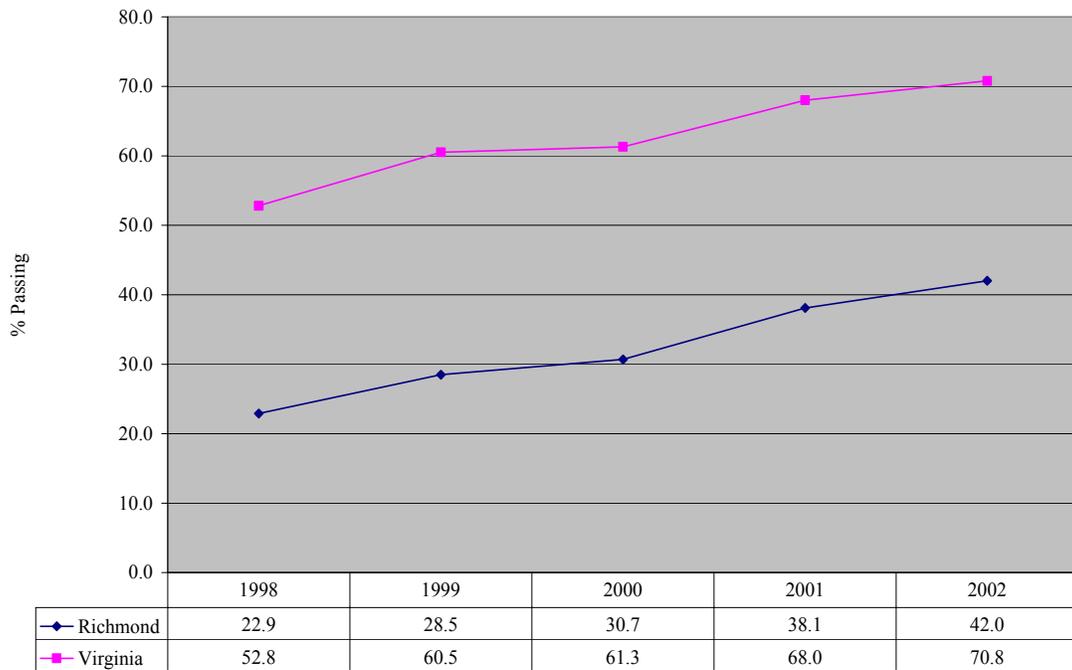


## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

**Graph 5. Percent Passing SOL Math for Richmond and Virginia 5th Graders**



**Graph 6. Percent Passing SOL Math Scores for Richmond and Virginia 8th Graders**



## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

The district reported graduating 1,201 students in 2001-02 (647 standard high school diplomas; 383 advanced studies diplomas; 27 special diplomas; 47 certificates of completion; 88 GED certificates; and nine special certificates). The percentage of students earning an advanced studies diploma decreased from 50 percent in 1997-98 to 32 percent in 2001-02.

Finally, the district reported an annual dropout rate to the state of 2.8 percent in 2000-2001, a level that had declined from 6.5 percent in 1996-97.<sup>14</sup> The truancy rate (defined as missing ten or more days) was reported by the district to be 14 percent in the elementary grades in 2000-01, 39 percent in the middle school grades, and 56% in the high schools—yielding a districtwide rate of 29 percent that year. The district, moreover reports an attendance rate of about 93 percent in its elementary schools and about 87 percent for its secondary schools.

### ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS

The Commonwealth of Virginia has set its NCLB proficiency bars for the 2003-04 school year at 61 percent proficient for all grade levels in reading and 59 percent proficient in math. Minimum subgroup size has been set at 50 students.

The district has approximately 43 Title I schools, all but five of which are schoolwide. Data from the 2002-2003 state testing indicate that Richmond has approximately 18 schools in stages I or II of school improvement under *No Child Left Behind*. Three schools are in school improvement (level I), meaning that they will be required to provide choice under NCLB. And fifteen other schools are in school improvement (level II), meaning that they will be required to offer choice and supplemental services. The district has 42 percent of all of the schools in the commonwealth that are under NCLB sanctions. Two of the level I schools made their AYP targets last year. No Richmond schools are in corrective action or reconstitution status.

**Table 2. Preliminary AYP Status of Richmond and Virginia’s Schools, 2003**

	Richmond	Virginia
<b>AYP Status</b>		
Warning	--	--
School Improvement I	3	20
School Improvement II	15	23
Corrective Action I	0	0
Corrective Action II	0	0
<b>Total</b>	18	43

<sup>14</sup> The district used the state’s dropout definition during this period.

## **CHAPTER 2. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

This chapter summarizes the findings and recommendations of the Strategic Support Team’s review of the instructional program of the Richmond Public Schools. The chapter is divided into two major sections, findings and recommendations. Each section is subdivided into ten subsections. These subsections are defined around themes that the Council of the Great City Schools has identified as critical to the academic improvement of urban school systems nationwide.<sup>15</sup> The themes include political preconditions and governance, goal setting, accountability, curriculum, professional development and teacher quality, reform press (or the ability to get reforms into the classrooms), assessments and use of data, low-performing schools, elementary schools, and middle and high schools.

### **FINDINGS**

The Council’s Strategic Support Team on Curriculum and Instruction spent considerable time and energy interviewing district staff, parents, and others and devoted substantial energy to reviewing documents and materials describing the academic program and results of the Richmond Public Schools. The Team searched for practices deserving praise and recognition as well as those that raise concern and merit change. Both types of findings are included below.

#### **A. Political Preconditions and Governance**

Urban school districts that have improved significantly over the last several years have a number of things in common. These commonalities also set them apart from urban school systems that have not seen significant improvement. One of these key features involves the political unity of the school board, its focus on student achievement, and its ability to work with the administration on the improvement of academic performance. The Strategic Support Team did not conduct a special analysis of the board’s governing structure, but did observe a number of things from watching board meetings and reviewing minutes that bear on the ability of the district to improve student achievement. The Team found things that were worthy of recognition and things that appear to hamper the district’s instructional reforms.

#### **Favorable**

- The district’s school board has had the same chairman for the last three years, providing a degree of leadership stability in the district.
- The board of education is receptive to the curriculum and instructional review being conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools.

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<sup>15</sup> Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., Herlihy, C., (2002). *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban Schools Systems Improve Student Achievement*. MDRC for the Council of the Great City Schools.

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

- The district and its board are beginning to talk more about curriculum and instruction than they have in the past.
- The district has a strong superintendent and chief academic officer who have a good sense of what will boost performance systemwide.
- The community and school district staff generally support the leadership of the superintendent.
- The superintendent is generally credited with raising expectations for student performance across the district. The superintendent also gets considerable credit for requesting this review.
- The school board is considering a retreat to help build greater cohesion and trust among the members.
- The board set goals for districtwide student achievement for 2002-2003.
- The board convened a group to develop a “A Community-Wide Vision” in 2002 that articulated general areas of priority for the school district.
- The district has good relations with the higher education community. The city has also formed a local education fund, headed by a former Richmond superintendent, that could help broker community leaders.
- The mission statement of the board and the district is straightforward and can be easily understood by the public.

### **Areas of Concern**

- The district lacks a sense of urgency to accelerate student achievement.
- The board does not have a coherent vision or agenda for improving student achievement beyond its stated goals for 2002-2003.
- The school board is fractured on a range of issues and does not have a consensus around improving student performance.
- The board lacks strong leadership focused on student achievement. Agendas of school board meetings do not reflect a consistent focus on student performance.
- The school board is reported to make multiple requests of staff below the superintendent level that often distract staff from their administrative assignments.
- The school board does not have clear expectations for staff or student performance.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

- Individual school board members fill the leadership void by pursuing their own agendas that sometimes correspond with higher student achievement but many times do not.
- The school board is more crisis-driven than strategic.
- The school board does not have a process for evaluating itself.
- School board support of the superintendent is fractured.
- The school board has a general plan for engaging the community in school improvement efforts, but it is not specific enough and has not spurred much action.<sup>16</sup>

### B. Goal Setting

Urban school systems that have seen significant gains in student achievement often see this improvement because they have a clear sense of where they are going. This clarity is exhibited in academic goals for the district at large and for individual schools. These goals are measurable and are accompanied by specific timelines for when specific targets are to be attained. The Strategic Support Team looked particularly at the goal-setting process in the Richmond Public Schools.

#### Favorable

- The district had systemwide achievement goals as recently as 2002-2003.
- District staff members generally know that what they are doing isn't working.
- The district has general improvement goals tied to state accreditation. The superintendent's evaluation is tied to these accreditation goals.<sup>17</sup>
- The school board involved stakeholders to some extent in the development of the district's "A Community-wide Vision" paper. (The document has not served, however, as the basis for much reform.)

#### Areas of Concern

- The district's staff lacks a sense of urgency about raising student performance.

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<sup>16</sup> *A Community-Wide Vision for the Future of the Richmond Public School System.*

<sup>17</sup> The superintendent's accreditation goals were met when the district saw 23 of its schools fully accredited this year, compared with ten last year.

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

- The district's school board, administrators, and teachers have low expectations for student achievement. Many staff and board members were heard to blame parents for low performance of students.
- The academic goals (for 2002-03) that have now expired were tied to the state's Standards of Learning (SOL) tests administered in grades 3, 5, and 8 and to accreditation benchmarks.
- The district lacks any "stretch" goals beyond accreditation or the SOLs. Accreditation is defined as having at least 70 percent of a school's students passing the SOL tests in English, math, reading and science.
- The district lacks any goals in the areas of graduation, postsecondary education, or high school improvement.
- There is little communication between the superintendent and the board about the district's academic goals.
- District board members, administrative staff, and teachers use family poverty and low parental involvement to explain poor student achievement in the city.
- The district lacks any departmental goals that feed into a broader set of district improvement goals.
- The school improvement plans have measurable goals tied to state accreditation but not to NCLB standards yet. (The 2001-02 school improvement plans were developed before the AYP provisions of NCLB took effect.)
- The district's efforts to secure outside grant funding are not directed at systemwide student achievement goals.

### **C. Accountability**

It is not sufficient for a school system, particularly an urban one, to have goals if no one is held accountable for attaining them. Urban school systems that have seen substantial improvement have devised specific methods for holding themselves responsible for student achievement, usually starting at the top of the system and working down through central office staff, principals, and teachers. The Strategic Support Team observed the following things about accountability in the Richmond Public Schools.

#### **Favorable**

- The superintendent's contract required her to ensure that 20 of the district's schools were fully accredited by the state by the end of the 2002-03 school year.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

- The district does have a process in place to improve individual schools--“Charting the Course.”
- The superintendent is committed to planning and acting on the proposed reforms made in this report.

### Areas of Concern

- Staff evaluations lack any accountability for performance.<sup>18</sup>
- The district has no mechanism for holding staff, principals, and teachers accountable for student achievement.
- There is no accountability for student performance beyond the SOL results or state accreditation standards. No one is held accountable for course-taking patterns, dropout or discipline rates, SAT scores, or the like.
- Priority is being placed on state accreditation rather than student performance more broadly. The focus on accreditation has a dampening effect on staff expectations about student performance.
- The district’s staff takes little personal ownership of student achievement or their department’s effectiveness.
- The district operates in silos with little sense of teamwork or shared responsibility for student achievement.

### D. Curriculum

Urban school districts that have seen substantial improvement in student achievement rarely have a curriculum that is fractured or incoherent. Also, these districts rarely permit their individual schools to determine or purchase their own curriculum. The Strategic Support Team looked at the curriculum that the district was using, particularly to teach reading and math, and found a number of facts, positive and negative.

### Favorable

- The organizational structure of the instruction and accountability unit of the school system is straightforward and raises no particular structural concerns. Job descriptions were generally well-done.

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<sup>18</sup> The district’s “Administrative Evaluation Criteria” assesses principals and administrative/supervisory personnel on administrative, management, leadership, human relations, personal qualities, and professional growth criteria.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

- The staff recognizes that the district has too many programs and that they are splintered and unfocused.
- The district has reduced the number of reading programs it is trying to implement from 29 to three over the last several years and is moving towards a more unified, cohesive curriculum.<sup>19</sup> Vendors are no longer as free to sell materials and reading programs to individual schools on their own.
- The district appropriately places Title I and Exceptional Education programs under the same instructional unit.
- The district has a single curriculum guide, “Curriculum Compass,” that has been widely circulated to school staff this year. “Compass” provides general alignment to Virginia’s Standards of Learning through—
  - (a) A uniform list of instructional objectives.
  - (b) A list of essential knowledge, skills, and processes.
  - (c) Teacher notes.
  - (d) A presentation of essential understanding for students.
  - (e) Key terms and vocabulary.
- The district has a Saturday Academy for students who are not attaining basic skills. Most schools participate in the program.
- The district is planning to put its lesson plans (Treasure Chest) and Curriculum Compass on-line to make them easier for teachers to access.
- The district mandates 120 minutes per day for reading and 70 minutes per day for math instruction.
- The district is coming up on a new textbook adoption cycle, which presents the school system with the opportunity to further unify its curriculum.
- The district has made rather creative use of “Read 180” to boost the reading skills of the city’s English Language Learners. The district also uses a Scott-Foresman ESL program for its English Language Learners.

### Areas of Concern

- A vision for the district’s instructional program does not extend beyond the superintendent and the Chief Academic Officer.

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<sup>19</sup> The district currently uses the Voyager 100% Literacy System, Nation’s Choice (Houghton Mifflin), and Treasury of Literature (Harcourt Brace) for reading.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

- The district lacks an overarching strategic plan for improving reading and math achievement.
- The district’s curriculum planning is program-oriented rather than strategic.
- District content area staff members, particularly in reading and math, are not as strong as they should be. This is particularly troubling since the district has an imperative to improve its academic performance.
- The district has no criteria for deciding among, selecting, monitoring, or retaining various commercially-available curriculum packages.
- The sequence of instruction delineated in the state’s scope and sequence guide is irregular and encourages teachers to alter the instructional sequence supported by the research and found in some of the district’s textbooks. Pacing guides are defined in monthly segments.
- Evaluations of the district’s various commercially-available curricula were not well-done and have yielded results with little meaning.
- The district’s curriculum does not extend beyond the state’s SOL standards for accreditation in reading and math.
- The district has no clear alignment between its curriculum and its various intervention strategies and programs.<sup>20</sup>
- There is also no clear alignment between the district’s curriculum and its various supplemental service providers.<sup>21</sup>
- Some of the district’s reading interventions are “scientifically-based,” others do not.<sup>22</sup>
- A large portion of the district’s ninth grade students are enrolled in Algebra I (part I)—an algebra readiness class. There is no districtwide plan for moving algebra readiness classes into the lower grades.

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<sup>20</sup> The district’s reading interventions include PALS Tutoring, Breakthrough to Literacy, Voyager Intervention, ANSWER, ARCH, University Tutors, Early Success, Early Steps, Book Buddies, Compass Learning, Toyota Family Literacy (PACT), and other programs depending on grade level.

<sup>21</sup> State approved supplemental service providers include: Cortz Management, Destiny Achievers, EdSolutions, Inc., HOST, Huntington Learning, I CAN Learn Systems, In-Agape Family Life and Education Center, Kaplan K12 Learning Services, Kumon North America, Inc., Lightspan, Inc., Little Scientists of Richmond, Mathematics and Science Center, One-to-One Virginia Academic Support Program, Park Place School, SMARTHINKING, Inc., Sylvan Learning Systems, The Princeton Review, Trust Tutors, University Instructors, Inc., and Voyager Expanded Learning.

<sup>22</sup> The district, for example, uses “Four Block”, a method recognized by the IRA and the VRA but is not considered to be “scientifically-based” by the U.S. Department of Education.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

- Very few students participate in upper-level or advanced courses, and the numbers are declining. Many schools lack advanced placement classes.
- The district’s reading and math curricula lack adequate grade-to-grade articulation or spiraling. (The district uses the VDOE scope and sequence guide, which the Team does not view as strong. See findings below.)
- The district has a limited systemwide summer school program for low-performing students that is largely funded by state and local funds. (Title I is not used to pay for summer school programming.) Attendance is generally low in the upper grades.
- The district’s curriculum selection and monitoring efforts are marked by poor planning and incoherence. There is no demonstrated alignment between the district’s curriculum documents (i.e., Curriculum Compass, Treasure Chest) and the district’s assessments (Edutest and Flanagan) or the SOLs.
- A review of Curriculum Compass suggests the following<sup>23</sup>—
  - (a) The district has not articulated adequate expectations for or instructions to teachers about the use of Compass during its professional development sessions.
  - (b) The order in which the objectives are listed in the guide are too linear in sequence to allow students to build connections among multiple objectives.
  - (c) The document serves more as a scope and sequence guide, and is not appropriately aligned with what research suggests about good curriculum design. The guide does not build in systematic review and spiraling within a course.
  - (d) Strategies listed in Compass do not include any reference to direct or explicit instruction.
  - (e) Differentiated instruction is not included in Compass for students who are performing above or below grade level.
  - (f) There is no direct tie to professional development, i.e. the district provides some training in the use of Compass but does not use the results of that training to shape subsequent professional development.
  - (g) Compass provides a useful tool for locating resources and materials but gives no indication about which materials have the greatest value or which are best aligned with the curriculum. There is also little information provided about how the resources ought to be used in the classroom.
  - (h) The technology integration section refers to generic web pages and software packages with little indication about which components of the packages are to be used.

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<sup>23</sup> The SST reviewed grade 5 of Compass. Similar observations and findings may not be the case in other grades.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

- (i) The field trip section identifies specific locations and resources for elementary math but lacks specificity in secondary mathematics. There is little indication of how this section is to be linked to instruction.
- (j) The district's curriculum objectives do not appear to provide additional objectives that extend beyond the SOLs.
- (k) The Treasure Chest lesson plans for grade 5 in math are not sufficiently refined to encourage the level of thinking required of students on the SOL. There is no unifying, systematic development of instruction or instructional strategies. Instead, the Treasure Chest is more a collection of ideas that are not aligned in a way that would produce higher student achievement.

### E. Professional Development and Teacher Quality

One of the other features that improving urban school systems have in common is the quality and cohesiveness of their professional development programs. They are often defined centrally, built around the district's articulated curriculum, delivered uniformly across the district, and differentiated in ways that address the specific needs of teachers. These faster-improving districts also find ways to ensure that some of their better teachers are working in schools with the greatest needs. The Strategic Support Team looked to see if the professional development program of the Richmond schools was similar to the programs of more successful districts.

#### Favorable

- There is a general recognition in the district that professional development needs to be strengthened.
- The district's Human Resources department has a good grasp of the system's "highly qualified teacher" needs.
- The district has three professional development days. (One day is citywide training devoted to the curriculum; and two days are school-based and determined by the schools.)
- The district has a reasonably large number of coaches and mentors available to support district teachers. All new teachers are assigned a mentor.
- The district has created a Richmond Public Schools University to provide professional development to all staff in the district. RPS University provides professional development online, afterschool, during workshops and conferences, school-based events, mentoring, peer coaching, portfolio development, and one-to-one support. Some of the coursework is offered in conjunction with Virginia State University, the University of Richmond, Virginia Union University, and other schools. Coursework is offered to instructional and noninstructional staff alike.

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

- Principals in the district can hire their own personnel to fill pre-set slots. The human resources office centrally screens candidates and sends them to the principals for interviews.

### **Areas of Concern**

- The district lacks a professional development strategic plan that is tied to student achievement or that includes any school-by-school follow-ups and support. A great deal of professional development in the district is not linked to any centralized plan to raise student achievement and is generally considered to be very weak.
- The district provides staff development on the use of the Harcourt, Voyager, and Houghton Mifflin reading programs and Brown's Writing Model at various times of the school year, mostly during September, October, and November. Some schools conduct staff development on more than one reading program at a time, a practice that detracts from the district's ability to focus its training on a few core programs.
- The district's professional development is fractured and "event" oriented.
- The professional development that does exist in the district is often defined around specific vendor programs, schools, curriculum packages, or grants. It lacks any strategic component.
- Attendance at the district's professional development session is poor and is loosely monitored. The district has no centralized facility for professional development.
- The district does not effectively monitor the quality of its professional development. The district has conducted no analysis of student performance by the professional development of teachers.
- The district's professional development lacks any differentiation, i.e., there is no specialized professional development for new teachers, teachers struggling to teach particular skills; or teachers who have been in the system for many years. There is also little saturation of professional development in areas of particular instructional weakness. Finally, the district lacks any "just-in-time" delivery system for its professional development.
- RPS University is trying to cover too much ground rather than trying to focus professional development tightly around a few district instructional priorities.
- The district does not offer extensive instructional professional development over the summer months, although there was some professional development offered in special education.

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

- Professional development is often relegated to principals meeting. Attendance at professional development sessions is not recorded or monitored.
- The district has a high teacher turnover rate.
- Only 45-50 percent of the district's math teachers have undergraduate degrees in mathematics.

### **F. Reform Press**

Urban schools that are improving student achievement are not waiting for their leadership-initiated reforms to trickle down into the schools and classrooms. Instead, they have figured out specific ways to drive instructional reforms into the schools and classrooms, and they find ways to monitor the implementation of reforms to ensure their integrity and comprehensiveness. The Strategic Support Team looked at ways that the Richmond Public Schools press their reforms into the schools.

#### **Favorable**

- The district has a fairly sophisticated three-year School-Improvement Planning process. Each school's plan includes a goal statement tagged to levels needed to attain accreditation; action steps; strategies; needed resources; person responsible for implementation; projected timeframes; evidence of progress; and status.
- The district encourages weekly teacher meetings to monitor school programs.
- The district does have a fledgling 'walk-through' procedure—or 'Look Fors.' This 'walk-through' procedure is generally designed to ensure quality control and to assess classroom supplies, behavior, and logistics.
- The district's "Charting the Course" material is used to assist teachers at the classroom level.
- The district assigns coaches and tutors to schools based on test scores.

#### **Areas of Concern**

- The school improvement goals for some schools are not measurable in terms of student achievement, particularly if they have already reached accreditation.
- School improvement plans follow a uniform format but lack a uniform set of goals or instructional strategies. The instructional strategies articulated in some schools' plans are vague and appear to lack a districtwide focus.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

- The district lacks any clear vision for what its classrooms ought to look like, what good teaching would consist of, or a coherent curriculum or plan to implement in the district's classrooms.
- The district's "Charting the Course" program does not feed into a districtwide accountability plan.
- The district's "Look Fors" lack any connection to best practices. Instead, they emphasize classroom organization and appearance, not instructional practice.
- The district does not have a mechanism to monitor whether mandated instructional time for reading and math is implemented.

### G. Assessments and Data

One of the most noticeable features of faster-improving urban school systems involves their regular assessment of student progress and their use of data to decide on the nature and placement of intervention strategies and professional development before the end of each school year. Data, moreover, were used to monitor school and district progress and to hold people accountable for results. The Strategic Support Team looked specifically at the Richmond schools' student assessment program, how it linked with the state testing effort, and how the district was using data to improve its achievement.

#### Favorable

- The district places at least rhetorical emphasis on data driven decision-making.
- The district does have a version of a "quarterly" assessment, showing that it understands the value of mid-school year testing.
- The state's Standards of Learning (SOL) test results are disaggregated into broad categories consistent with *No Child Left Behind*. SOL data are provided by school, race, disability, gender, limited English proficiency, grade, and subject.
- SOL data in reading/literature are also provided on word analysis strategies, understanding of printed materials, understanding of elements of literature, story writing, grammar and spelling. Data in math are provided on number sense, computation and estimation, measurement and geometry, probability and statistics, patterns, functions and algebra.
- The district has attempted to put a data system into place using Edutest, the Test of Higher Standards, and Flanagan.
- There is broad recognition at the district level that a data system needs to have a feedback loop to boost student achievement.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

- The district participates in a regional consortium of universities to conduct evaluations of efforts of regional interest.

### Areas of Concern

- The district uses PASSmark as the quarterly test in PASS schools and Edutest in non-PASS schools.
- There is virtually no evaluation of the district's academic programs. Evaluations that are conducted are often poorly designed and cannot tell the district what is working and what is not. (The evaluation comparing Voyager and AmeriCorp, for example, was not well-done.)
- The district lacks a functional research unit that could regularly evaluate instructional initiatives. The school board and district has been unwilling to devote the funds necessary to have a functioning research unit.
- The district's research and testing functions are not located in the same offices organizationally and do not collaborate as needed to improve the instructional program of the district.
- Edutest results are not fed back systematically to schools, teachers, or to the central office.
- Edutest lacks any demonstrated alignment with the state's SOL tests. Teachers also select their own items from Edutest and from SOL released items to develop their weekly tests. There is no monitoring of the uniformity of items selected or how they relate. (The district has not independently established the predictive validity of Edutest with the SOLs. The district should not depend solely on Lightspan's assessment of a link.)
- No staff members have been specifically assigned clear responsibility for monitoring, analyzing, or disseminating Edutest results. The district's reading and math directors claim not to be receiving Edutest results on regular basis. The research director and CAO do receive results.
- The district lacks any clear guidelines or criteria for when schools are to use Edutest vs. Flanagan. There is no central oversight of the use of either system.
- The district's testing department is not involved in Edutest's alignment, analysis, or dissemination.
- The district does not use its data to make regular decisions about the nature, placement, or quality of its curriculum or interventions.

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

- Teachers and schools report that they have irregular access to Edutest results, a commercially operated, web-based system. (The system is located on the Lightspan server and does not allow users to manipulate or compare data results.)
- There is no clarity about what happens to weekly test results (Edutest).
- District is relying almost exclusively on SOL data to inform curriculum, professional development, and interventions. The district does not make good use of results from quarterly exams, SATs, and other indicators.
- The district's disaggregated data are reported by percent of students passing/failing rather than proficiency levels.

### **H. Early Childhood and Elementary Schools**

It is often difficult for urban school districts to improve everything at once. The districts experiencing success in improving student achievement did not take on the entire system at once. Instead, these districts started their reforms at the early elementary grades and worked up to the middle and high school grades. The Strategic Support Team looked at the sequence of reforms in the Richmond Schools and their focus on the elementary schools.

#### **Favorable**

- The district operates a relatively large preschool program, including a district run program, Headstart (serving 542 children), and the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) (serving 656 children). The district runs the city's Headstart program. (The district also uses about \$210,000 of its federal Title I funds to support preschool efforts.)
- The district uses a screening/diagnostic tool ("Dial 3") in its early childhood programs to assess development skills among its pupils.

#### **Areas of Concern**

- The district does not have a cohesive reform plan with a starting point that is defined around either grade levels or content areas.
- The district's early childhood programs place little emphasis on literacy development or pre-reading skills. (Efforts in this direction are just beginning.)
- The district uses High Scope's pre-k curriculum for its early childhood program—a program that the Team did not think had a strong enough or well-enough tested literacy component. The curriculum is supplemented with "Ready Readers." Most professional development is focused on High Scope.

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- The district’s early childhood programs (pre-k) do not link to or articulate with the school system’s first grade programs or curriculum. (Cumulative folders are passed onto kindergarten and first grade teachers.)
- There have been no evaluations of the district’s preschool programs to assess their effects on student academic readiness.

### **I. Middle and High Schools**

While many urban school systems that are seeing gains in student performance focus initially on their elementary schools, they do not ignore their middle and high schools. There is not a national consensus on how to improve high schools, particularly in the nation’s urban schools, but the faster moving districts have put a number of tactics in place to ensure that students who did not learn the basic skills in the elementary schools do so before they graduate. The Strategic Support Team looked at the strategies that the Richmond schools were using to improve its middle and high schools.

#### **Favorable**

- The district has retained a young enthusiastic cadre of new high school principals. There had been a large turnover of principals districtwide over the last several years.

#### **Areas of Concern**

- The district lacks a coherent strategy or initiative for improving its middle and high schools.
- Average performance at the middle and high school levels is very low.
- An unusually large number of students are taking watered-down math and pre-algebra courses in the middle and high schools.
- The average RPS graduate does not have college-entrance examination scores or courses that would qualify them for entry into a competitive college or university. The district graduates very few students with SAT scores over 500 in either verbal and math areas. (The national average SAT verbal score is 507 and the national average math score is 519.)
- The district needs to have a better systemwide initiative to improve “character education” and improve discipline and safety. Discipline problems continue to be a problem in the district

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### J. Low Performing Schools

Finally, urban school systems that are seeing substantial improvement in student performance have a targeted strategy to intervene in and boost achievement in their lowest-performing schools. This is often done differently from city to city, but it is done in almost every case. The Strategic Support Team looked at Richmond's strategies to boost achievement in its lowest achieving schools.

#### Favorable

- The district participates in the state-developed PASS system and other state teams to focus on the Commonwealth's lowest performing schools. About 20 schools in Richmond participate in the program.
- PASS provides teams to individual schools to help improve performance. Team members come from the state and/or from schools that the state has matched with a PASS school. (Richmond schools report varying expertise among teams.)

#### Areas of Concern

- The district does not have a coherent strategy or plan for boosting the performance of its lowest-achieving schools. The district has left the task to the PASS teams.
- The district is not directly involved in the operation of PASS programs in its individual schools. There is little coordination of PASS groups and others working in the schools. The district itself also does not coordinate PASS with the state. There is also no plan for evaluating the effectiveness of PASS in the district.
- The district has too many disparate programs in its schools to accelerate student achievement.<sup>24</sup>
- The district does not have any mechanism for assessing and boosting the achievement of individual students in the district's lowest performing schools.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Strategic Support Team makes a number of recommendations to the Richmond Public Schools to accelerate student performance and to improve systemwide achievement. These recommendations are presented in the same categories in which the

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<sup>24</sup> PASS schools, for instance, appear to use a range of disparate programs. Blackwell Elementary School, for instance, uses tutors, in-school remediation, Lightspan, Compass Learning, Homework Assistance, University Tutors, SOAR, and extended day programs. Chimborazo Elementary school uses Lightspan, Early Bird Math, tutors, in-school remediation, Americorps, Howard Street, University Tutors, ANSWER, ARCH, SOAR, Saturday remediation, Math Buddies, extended day programs, Early Success, and Book Buddies.

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team presented its findings: political preconditions and governance, goal setting, accountability, curriculum, professional development, reform press, assessments and data, elementary schools, middle and high schools, and low-performing schools. The proposals made by the Team are based on practices that research is demonstrating make a difference in improving student performance systemwide in urban school districts and what the Team believes that Richmond needs to do to be more like districts that are getting strong achievement gains.

### **A. Political Preconditions and Governance**

1. Convene a school board retreat as soon as possible that is facilitated by someone all members agree on to develop a broad vision and goals for improving student achievement in the Richmond Public Schools. The retreat should also focus on team building, board roles and responsibilities, codes of conduct, and methods for resolving conflicts. Finally, the board should develop or adopt a process for evaluating itself on the goals that it has set for the district. (The board might consider retaining the Center for the Reform of School Systems to help with this task. Richmond might also want to talk with the school boards in Detroit and Buffalo, who have recently pursued similar activities.)
2. Charge the superintendent and staff with translating the vision and broad goals set by the board into a five-year, districtwide strategic plan for improving performance. The Strategic Plan should be reviewed and updated at least annually to ensure that the district stays on the right course but can modify tactics as new information arises.
3. Articulate—at the board and superintendent level—a sense of urgency and immediacy for the goal of improving student performance districtwide. The message should make clear that the district expects high achievement and will not make excuses for poor performance.
4. Devote some portion of every school board meeting to student achievement and progress on it.
5. Retain an outside facilitator or consultant to observe school board behavior and decision making in order to ensure the board’s focus on student achievement and broad policy-making over the next year or so.

### **B. Goal Setting**

6. Develop from the ground up a clear, districtwide strategic plan for the improvement of student achievement in the Richmond schools. The plan should include the following—
  - Clear, measurable academic goals for the school district built around “proficiency” on the SOLs and aligned with the proficiency levels required to make AYP.

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- Academic targets for each school that in total will result in attainment of districtwide goals.
  - Academic goals by subgroup (race, language and income) that are also aligned with subgroup targets required to make AYP.
  - Specific baseline indicators and targets for accreditation, SOL proficiency, student attendance, SAT averages, algebra course-taking rates, and AP participation rates, dropouts, special education referrals, disciplinary actions, and suspensions.
  - Specific long-range and short-term timelines and year-to-year targets that are aligned with state AYP goals under NCLB.
  - Staff responsibilities for attaining goals and targets.
  - Instructional strategies districtwide.
  - Budget allocations.
  - A communications strategy for involving school and community stakeholders.
7. Convene a senior staff retreat to ensure that everyone is on the same page and to focus the superintendent's cabinet around the academic goals.
  8. Name a "Project Management Oversight Committee" (PMOC) comprised of senior staff to monitor the development of the strategic plan. The committee should meet on at least a weekly basis to review progress on the plan's development.
  9. Ensure that the plan's goals stretch the district beyond its initial accreditation targets. Districtwide and school-by-school targets should be tied to state goals established under *No Child Left Behind*.
  10. Charge department heads with developing plans for their units that tie into the district's new strategic plan for academic improvement.
  11. Rework school-by-school improvement plans to tie into the districtwide strategic plan for raising student achievement. Ensure that Title I school improvement plans and "Charting the Course" plans tie into the broader districtwide strategic plan for improvement.
  12. Ensure that the districtwide and school-by-school plans outline specific action steps towards meeting each goal and target and has a detailed component for monitoring implementation.
  13. Schedule a twice-yearly review and update on the plan before the school board.
  14. Establish a process for involving the community in the development of the district's strategic academic plan. Community forums might suffice. The district might ask the newly formed Richmond Education Foundation to broker these forums.
  15. Involve the Richmond Education Association, parents, and community groups at the outset of the planning process.

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16. Ensure that the plan is developed in a timely enough fashion that it can begin rolling out during the 2004-05 school year if not sooner.

### C. Accountability

17. Begin revising personnel contracts to place the superintendent and senior level staff on performance contracts tied at least in part to the district's new academic goals and targets.<sup>25</sup>
18. Tie the evaluation of department heads to the progress that each is making on attaining the districtwide academic goals and targets established in the strategic and department plans.
19. Begin placing principals on performance contracts tied in part to their attainment of school-by-school academic targets.
20. Explore the use of bonuses, professional incentives, awards, recognition programs, public recognition, and the like to serve as incentives for meeting and/or exceeding districtwide and school-by-school targets. The incentives do not necessarily have to be monetary. They could include such things as attendance at regional or national conferences, subscriptions to professional publications, stipends for instructional or classroom materials, personnel letters, recognition in Public Service Announcements, and the like.
21. Arrange for senior level staff, union leaders, and school board members to travel to districts that have made substantial progress over the last several years to see how effective reading and math programs operate and to see how systemic reform evolves.
22. Consider using a "balanced scorecard" approach to monitor progress on the strategic plan and to track academic performance. (See samples from Charlotte-Mecklenburg.)
23. Begin considering allowing principals to interview and/or select teachers and staff with greater latitude since the principals will be held more accountable for the results of their team.

### D. Curriculum

24. Put into place a single, cohesive reading model districtwide that would include—
  - A core program based on scientifically based reading research (SBRR).<sup>26</sup>
  - Supplemental materials aligned to the curriculum that fill in gaps between the core program and state performance standards.

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<sup>25</sup> The superintendent has been held accountable already for the number of schools that attained state accreditation.

<sup>26</sup> Including reading components articulated by the National Reading Panel—phonemic awareness, systematic phonics for decoding, comprehension, fluency development, vocabulary, and motivation.

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- Interventions before and after school that are aligned to curriculum and designed to address the needs of students who are not attaining requisite skills.<sup>27</sup>
  - Instructional strategies for accelerating student achievement beyond grade level.
  - Assessment results reported in such a way that they can drive placements, diagnosis, and intervention decisions.
25. Consider one of the following reading basals as the district's main adoption—
    - Breakthrough to Literacy (2002), Houghton-Mifflin
    - Open Court Reading, SRA/McGraw Hill
    - Trophies, Harcourt Brace
  26. Conduct a districtwide inventory of all instructional models, software, programs, and materials that the district now uses.
  27. Place a moratorium on all new program acquisitions at the district and school level.
  28. Curtail the latitude of individual schools, principals, and teachers to purchase their own instructional curricula, materials, or tests.
  29. Develop specific, objective criteria for the selection, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and retention of programs, materials, and professional development districtwide and in the schools. This process should include the articulation of a specific plan for evaluating the effectiveness of district programs.
  30. Carefully reanalyze all reading and math assessment data by school and subgroup to ensure that the new adoption, supplemental materials, and interventions are tailored to address the academic needs of all students. Include testing staff in this analysis.
  31. Begin phasing out all programs, models, software, training approaches, and materials that do not meet the criteria for retention and that cannot be demonstrated by hard data to have improved student performance.
  32. Collaborate with teachers and principals to develop a detailed schedule for rolling out the district's new reading (and math) reforms so that teachers, principals, and others know what to expect.
  33. Begin the process of assessing the vertical (pre-k to 12) alignment of the district's adopted textbooks, materials, and state performance standards. The district's testing staff should be involved in this process.
  34. Develop or begin implementing a pacing guide to accompany the new reading and math programs. Pacing guides should be week-by-week or every two weeks rather

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<sup>27</sup> Ensure that the interventions have three different levels: (1) individual tutoring before and after school that is tailored to results on student assessments or diagnostic tools; (2) small group interventions focused around skill deficits that students in the group share; and (3) professional development for teachers having trouble with specific skills, lesson plans, data, or groups of students.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

than month-to-month or quarter-to-quarter. The district wants to use a consultant to get this process started or simply use the pacing guides that accompany the new adoption. Either way, the pacing guides will need to be tagged against the state's scope and sequence document and against the SOLs to ensure that tested skills are not taught after they are assessed.

35. Revise the "Curriculum Compass" resource lists to indicate where textbook materials need to be supplemented and how to do so for deeper alignment with the SOLs.<sup>28</sup> The district also needs to more clearly articulate its expectations for the use of Curriculum Compass.
36. Revisit the district's "Treasure Chest" of materials to determine the degree of alignment between lesson plans and samples and the district's new adoptions. Revise or rewrite as necessary and include differentiation strategies for teachers working with students of different skill levels. Create a feedback loop for teachers who are developing, testing, and sharing lesson plans.
37. Consider implementing "Accelerated Reader" or similar programs to encourage and monitor outside reading.
38. Aggregate funding from the district's disparate grants to support the district's new academic priorities. (See next chapter on Title I and other federal programs.)
39. Implement a districtwide, comprehensive program focused on positive behavior support (e.g., George Sugai at the University of Oregon—see [www.pbis.org/english/default.htm](http://www.pbis.org/english/default.htm)).

### E. Professional Development and Teacher Quality

40. Develop a standardized and comprehensive districtwide professional development plan, whose main components are tied to the new academic strategic plan, that addresses the training needs of central office staff, principals, and teachers.
41. Make certain that the professional development plan is aligned to the district's curriculum and tied to the districtwide and school-by-school academic goals and targets.
42. Focus the professional development plan initially on the implementation of the core curriculum, then the supplemental materials, then use of test results, then on intervention strategies. This sequence should be followed at each grade level.
43. Ensure that the professional development plan differentiates training by teacher experience level, previous professional development, and by student performance. It

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<sup>28</sup> District instructional staff might want to consider additional training on deep alignment. Betty Steffy, Fenwick English, Carolyn Downey, and others provide such training.

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

should also include explicit components for special education and bilingual education.

44. Make sure that the new professional development plan includes training on how the curriculum is aligned with state standards and tests (and where it is not) and on how curriculum implementation and student performance will be monitored.
45. Ensure that the professional development plan is explicit about the nature of follow up and support to principals and teachers.
46. Upgrade the district's new teacher support program (and incentives) to include components of the strategic academic plan and the professional development plan.
47. Explore the possibility of delivering professional development in alternative forms, e.g. study groups, chat rooms, email, independent study, college coursework, video tapes of model teaching, etc.
48. Mandate attendance at professional development sessions in key instructional areas and articulate consequences for absenteeism.
49. Tie the evaluation of professional development to student achievement data.
50. Explore the use of differentiated staffing to provide instruction in math, particularly in grades 4-5.

### **F. Reform Press**

51. Have the Superintendent or Chief Academic Officer meet regularly with executive directors and principals to review achievement data and intervention strategies.
52. Assign a staff member at the central office level to be a districtwide reading and math coach coordinator. (Content specialists could handle this.) This staff member should be located in the curriculum office and be charged with the ongoing coordination and focus of the coaches on the new reading and math instructional plan.
53. Charge the coach coordinator with creating a process for weekly contact with reading and math coaches by grade level and subject. The coach coordinator should also be charged with the development of a process for evaluating the effectiveness of the reading and math coaches.
54. Revise the district's "look for" or "walk through" procedures to focus more on curriculum, alignment of classroom practice to curriculum, content in each block, and status on the pacing guides, rather than on classroom appearance, arrangement, and other logistical features of classrooms.

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55. Identify and conduct ongoing training for principals, assistant principals, department heads, mentors, lead teachers, and coaches—to support and monitor consistent implementation of the district’s new reading and math curriculum and other instructional efforts. The monitoring system should include a feedback process.
56. Charge principals with leading a uniform, consolidated districtwide school improvement planning process. Alter the current school improvement planning process to include—
  - School and student performance data.
  - School performance targets and timelines.
  - Activities designed to meet school goals.
  - Professional development activities.
  - Parent involvement strategies.
  - Item analysis of SOL and interim tests.
  - School goals tied explicitly to NCLB benchmarks.

### G. Assessments and Data

57. Conduct a districtwide inventory of school-by-school uses of Edutest and Flanagan.
58. Conduct a serious study of the alignment, reliability, and predictive validity of the district’s Edutest and Flanagan assessment systems. Alignment and validity should be benchmarked against the SOL.
59. Revisit the question about the value, utility, uniformity, and frequency of the weekly test results based on the study of Edutest and Flanagan.
60. Begin adoption of a new quarterly assessment system—if the study of Edutest and Flanagan indicate that they are not providing adequate data—tied to the new reading and math curriculum. Several of the new reading programs, including those highlighted in this report, come with their own embedded quarterly assessments. These embedded assessments might provide the district with a better way to measure progress uniformly than the current system of disparate weekly tests. If the curriculum that the district selects does not have embedded quarterlies, the district ought to secure the services of an external consultant to begin the process of developing them with the assistance of district teachers. Whichever way the district decides to go, the quarterlies should be—
  - Scored and returned to the district or scored internally and returned to the schools within ten days of testing.
  - Disaggregated by school, subgroup, and teacher in a way that identifies student deficits in specific skills.

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- Used to target additional interventions and professional development to schools and teachers.
61. Develop a wall-size monitoring board with achievement data from every school and group so that the superintendent and senior staff can see, at a glance, the status of schools on their academic targets.
  62. Ensure that the “Charting the Course” documents have their data points tied to the district’s new strategic plan.
  63. Ensure that the district’s professional development plan includes training on the use of achievement data and how to use intervention strategies with students lacking requisite skills.
  64. Transfer part of the outside grant dollars provided for program evaluation to the research unit to begin conducting regular program evaluations. Use some of the funds to hire additional staff or retain interns from local universities.
  65. Charge the research unit with putting all district programs on a regular three-to-five year evaluation cycle.
  66. Use uniform, district-developed assessment tools (pre-post) to assess the district’s supplemental service providers. The district could also use its quarterly exams for the same purposes.
  67. Begin conducting customer satisfaction surveys of the community so that the superintendent and senior staff have a clear understanding about perceptions of the district. The results should be built into the data warehouse. (See next item.)
  68. Begin the development of a district data warehouse that would house real-time data tied to the strategic plan.

### H. Early Childhood and Elementary Schools

69. Conduct a thorough review of the district’s pre-k curriculum and explicitly link and spiral it to the district’s first grade curriculum—by skill and content area.
70. Ensure that the district’s new reading adoption has a preschool component. Begin implementing this component in the district’s preschool program.
71. Explore using *Circle* or other similar programs with explicit age appropriate literacy components.
72. Eliminate the practice of Title I pullouts in the elementary grades unless they are used for periodic grouping, regrouping, and re-teaching of necessary skills.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

### I. Middle and High Schools

73. Develop a comprehensive high school reform plan as part of the strategic plan that includes—
  - Measurable targets for tracking and improving dropout rates, attendance, course taking patterns, suspension rates, high school graduation rates, etc.
  - A timeline for placing AP classes in every high school in the district.
  - End of course exams in key content areas, e.g. English, math, and sciences.
  - Increased numbers of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in Algebra and decreasing the numbers enrolled in the algebra readiness class.
  - Training for principals on alternative scheduling procedures that would accommodate double-blocking and relooping.
74. Begin double-blocking reading and math coursework for middle and high school students who have not attained basic skills at the elementary level.
75. Require and pay for all 9<sup>th</sup> graders to take the PSAT and use results to improve course-taking patterns in the high schools.
76. Ensure common teacher planning time and networking districtwide, particularly for 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers.
77. Conduct an analysis of high school course rigor districtwide and then begin upgrading course content by back-mapping from 12<sup>th</sup> grade AP-level content to 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
78. Move algebra readiness courses to the 6 – 8<sup>th</sup> grades rather than offering them in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.
79. Institute a special summer bridge program for incoming high school students.

### J. Lowest Performing

80. Establish a “Rapid Support Team” comprised of the district’s Director of Instruction, Executive Directors for Elementary or Secondary Schools, Directors of Math and Reading, Title I, and accountability that would articulate the immediate needs of the district’s lowest performing 5-10 schools and develop a plan for giving them extensive support. The team and the principals should meet weekly.
81. Charge the team with developing an intervention plan for the lowest performing schools that includes incentives for the best teachers in the district to work in them, additional resources for lower class sizes (if possible given resource constraints), and more regular assessment. The Edutest system might be better deployed to conduct mini-assessments for the lowest performing schools than as a districtwide quarterly assessment system.

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82. Begin developing and implementing individualized student reading and math improvement plans for students in the district's lowest performing 5-10 schools.
83. Open discussions with the state on how to better integrate state support for low-performing schools with district reform efforts rather than leaving the responsibility for improving schools solely up to the schools. Ensure there is not a duplication of efforts that leaves individual schools with more hoops to jump through.
84. Assign a lead staff person from the central office to coordinate PASS and other state intervention activities districtwide.
85. Increase the number of low performing schools the district focuses on over time.
86. Develop an "equity plan" for realigning resources to the district's lowest performing schools. The plan should include the following components—
  - Administrative support levels.
  - Teacher/student ratios.
  - Support staff.
  - Special education and ESL programming.
  - Staffing qualifications.
  - New teacher support.
  - Bonuses to teach in toughest schools (stipends for coursework, advanced degrees, extra pay, etc.)
  - Facility capacity.
  - Instructional materials.
  - Computers and technology.
  - Library books.
  - Co-curricular programs.

## CHAPTER 3. TITLE I AND OTHER FEDERAL PROGRAMS

This chapter summarizes the findings and recommendations of the Strategic Support Team’s review of the main federal programs of the Richmond Public Schools. The chapter is divided into two major sections, findings and recommendations. Each section is subdivided into nine subsections. These subsections are defined around areas that are critical to the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). The areas include supplemental services, choice, parental involvement, uses of funds, highly qualified teachers, school improvement, budgeting and program allocations, and other federal grants.

### FINDINGS

The Council’s Strategic Support Team on Title I and other federal programs spent considerable time and energy interviewing district staff, parents, and others and devoted substantial energy to reviewing documents and materials describing how the Richmond Public Schools were implementing their major federal programs. The Team’s review searched for both practices deserving praise and recognition as well as those that raise concern and merit change. Both types of findings are included below.

#### A. Use of Title I Funds

The federal Title I program is designed to spur student achievement in communities with poor children. School districts receiving funds under the program use them, however, in a variety of ways.

#### Favorable

- The Richmond Public Schools operate 43 Title I schools and twelve non-Title I schools. Thirty eight (26 elementary schools, nine middle schools, and three high schools) of the 43 Title I schools operate on a “schoolwide” basis and enroll about 13,737 students. Five schools (two elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools) operate as “targeted assistance” schools and enroll about 1,669 students. The district also operates twelve non-Title I schools (three elementary, four high, and five special schools).
- The district receives \$9,979,219 in federal Title I funds this school year, up from \$8,034,397 last year. Title I funding is expected to increase by about \$1 million next year depending on poverty counts.
- The district uses approximately \$4.5 million of its Title I allocation for teacher salaries (98 FTE); \$682 thousand for paraprofessional salaries (33 FTE); and \$160 thousand for the salaries of tutors and coaches.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

- The district allocates about 67 percent of its Title I allocation to schools and reserves 33 percent for districtwide functions. These include—
  - (a) Central office Title I administration 3.6%
  - (b) Indirect costs 3.4%
  - (c) Tutors, coaches, consultants 1.5%
  - (d) Professional development 0.9%
  - (e) Supplemental education services 14.9%
  - (f) Choice and transportation 4.9%
  - (g) Parental involvement 1.0%
  - (h) Supplies and equipment 0.9%
  - (i) Pre-k and early childhood 2.0%
- Each school generally shapes its own Title I program depending on its own school improvement plan.
- The district spends a considerable proportion of its school-based Title I funds on reading and math coaches and afterschool remedial instruction. Each school has one or two reading and math coaches funded by Title I. Coaches rotate from class-to-class and teacher-to-teacher; teach classes; conduct small-group instruction, afterschool programs, and Saturday Academies—and report to four content specialists in the central office. (Coaches are supported by both Title I and II funds.)
- Title I funds are used to support the weekly collection and management of school-level test data to help decide on needed interventions.
- The district also uses its Title I funds to assess, regroup, and assign students.
- Title I funds are used, moreover, to provide professional development and direct instruction in core content areas.
- The district’s Title I staff members are generally strong, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic about their duties and responsibilities. The Title I administrative staff is not top heavy.
- The district’s “Local Instructional Strategic Planning Academic Review” is useful for articulating Title I activities in each school.
- The state uses Title I school improvement set-aside funds to support the district’s PASS schools.
- The district has no coherent strategy for using its Title I funds to improve performance in its middle schools.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

### Areas of Concern

- The district has three schools in school improvement I and fifteen schools in school improvement II under NCLB. The district has no schools in corrective action or restructuring under NCLB.
- The district itself is also in “district improvement” status.
- Title I achievement goals are stated in terms used by the Commonwealth of Virginia accreditation process. Indicators include the SOL, Edutest, PALS, and other assessments. As a result, it is difficult to understand whether Title I achieves its NCLB goals.
- The district retains a number of reading and math specialists with its Title I funds but does not have a fully-developed coaching program supported with federal funds.
- Most of the district’s Title I schools are “schoolwide” schools, but they do not always operate according to the principles for schoolwide schools articulated in the federal regulations.
- The district’s Title I application does not specify the scope of services or activities that the district will provide with Title I funds, i.e., numbers of staff or student participation rates.
- The district’s Title I program and activities descriptions lack specificity, e.g. there are no test score data accompanying the documents that point to what the program is trying to change or improve.
- Principals have very little discretion over the use of their Title I funds, except for their Title I professional development set-asides and materials. Most school-based Title I funds are devoted to personnel, which are determined at the central office level. Professional development funds are handled at the school level, but Title I teachers do not appear to receive any separate or specialized professional development. Board policy allows principals discretion to move up to \$10,000 in non-personnel funds, but the action requires as many as four signatures to do so.
- The district uses a Comprehensive School Reform grant of about \$750 thousand to procure reform models in 12 identified schools. There is little research, however, to demonstrate that the models are effective in raising student achievement.
- The district does not use the flexibility it has under the Title I transferability provisions of NCLB to tailor its programs to special needs.

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### B. Choice

*No Child Left Behind* also requires that parents of children enrolled in schools that have not made adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years be given the option to transfer to a higher-performing school that is not in need of improvement.

#### Favorable

- The district's staff understands the choice provisions of NCLB and what will be required. The school board has also approved the district's choice plan.
- The district has budgeted approximately \$506 thousand for NCLB transfers this school year (about 5 percent of the district's Title I allocation).
- The district sent out letters to parents offering transfers to higher performing schools not in "school improvement" on November 24. Parents have from November 24 to December 15 to respond with a choice. (The dates coincide with the district's open enrollment program.) A second letter will be sent to parents in the Spring.
- Parents of children in elementary schools are offered the choice of transferring their children to higher-performing schools within their attendance zones. They may also choose a school outside their zone if the choice within the zone is not available.
- The district determines priority for choice based on income and a student's prior-semester grades in English and math. The district has also established a waiting list should additional seats open up. The district, moreover, has plans to offer supplemental services to students not able to transfer.
- The district is offering parents choices of schools that are clearly higher performing. Schools that are only partially accredited by the state or whose accreditation is under review were not placed on the list of choices that parents could select from.
- The district is working to link its open enrollment plan with the NCLB choice options. The district sent its initial choice letters to parents to coincide with its open enrollment program.
- The district reached out to the neighboring school districts of Chesterfield, Hanover, and Henrico counties asking them to accommodate RPS choice students. All neighboring districts declined.

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### Areas of Concern

- The state did not finalize its list of schools in school improvement until November 11, 2003.
- The 18 schools that have been designated for school improvement I or II enroll approximately 7,857 students.
- Approximately 331 students requested a transfer this school year. About 199 students have actually transferred to ten other schools so far this school year, up from about 30 students transferring in 2002-03. (It was unclear what happened with the other students.)
- The district offers parents only one choice of schools, while U.S. Department of Education guidance requires at least two options.
- The district does not take credit for the transportation costs of students already moving from low-performing to higher performing schools. The law allows this to occur.
- The letter offering choices to parents is accurate and contains all the information required by law, but the narrative could be clearer and more straightforward.
- The letter to parents about their options to transfer has no information on their rights.
- The district uses a limited number of methods for informing parents about their choice options. The district has relied almost exclusively on letters.
- The small number of schools in the district that have made adequate yearly progress has constrained the number of options available to parents. The district estimates that it had 209 open seats, not all of which were in the same grade spans as students requesting transfers.

### C. Supplemental Services

*No Child Left Behind* requires that students in schools that have not made adequate yearly progress for three consecutive years be offered tutorial and other instructional support services to students. Parents are permitted to choose services provided by an assortment of organizations approved by the state.

### Favorable

- The Richmond Public Schools were one of the first school districts in the Commonwealth to provide supplemental services according to NCLB.

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- The district has budgeted approximately \$1.5 million for NCLB supplemental services this school year. This amount plus the district's \$506 thousand allocation for choice equals 20 percent of the district's Title I allocation this school year.
- The district sent out its letters offering parents their choices of supplemental services on June 16. Letters accompanied student report cards. Parents had from June 16 to June 30 to make a selection of providers.
- The district expects to provide supplemental educational services to about 1,100 students under NCLB this school year.
- The district has approximately twenty state-approved supplemental service providers from which parents may choose. (See footnote on page 30 for list of approved providers.) The district also estimates that the approved providers should be able to accommodate all students seeking services this year.
- The district also provided a vendor fair for potential supplemental service providers last May. (The fair was not heavily attended, however.)
- The district has existing relationships with a number of vendors who were on the state's list of approved providers. Many of the providers approved by the state already provide regular-day or after school services throughout the district.
- Supplemental service providers are allowed to provide their services on school grounds.

### **Areas of Concern**

- The letter that the district sent out to parents about their choices of providers did not have any information on the providers themselves. Parents were presented with a checklist of approved providers but no information on the nature of their services.
- There is no demonstrated alignment between the services of the supplemental providers and the district's curriculum. The state has indicated that all providers were aligned with state standards, but the team saw no evidence that that was possible except in the most general ways. There also was no process established by Richmond to determine the degree of alignment with district or state standards.
- The district is offering supplemental services to more students than the district can handle financially under Title I in the future.
- The district did not have a rate structure in place when the team visited for charging supplemental service providers for the use of facilities.

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- The district was also unclear at the time of the team's visit about the maximum per pupil amounts that supplemental service providers could charge.
- The district was not ready to issue contracts to the supplemental service providers when the team made its site visit. (The district has finalized some contracts now.) Contracts were still being discussed by legal counsel.
- The district did not have a clear mechanism for evaluating its supplemental service providers. It also lacked any criteria by which providers would be evaluated.
- The district was uncertain about how it was going to coordinate its own afterschool program with the programs of the supplemental service providers.

### **D. Parental Involvement**

Federal law requires that monies be set aside from the federal Title I program to support and encourage parental involvement in the schools.

#### **Favorable**

- The district reserves about \$110 thousand, or one percent of its Title I funds, for parental involvement activities.
- The district collects comprehensive data on parent participation rates in various district programs.
- The district has convened a number of meetings to inform parents about the state's academic standards and the Standards of Learning tests (SOL).
- Parents are involved in the monthly meetings of the School Planning Management Team (SPMT).
- The district has a number of partnerships and efforts to reach out to parents and the community about school activities (e.g., churches and libraries).
- The district has created a centralized parental outreach effort to coordinate its IDEA, Title I, and ESL programs.
- The district is attempting to refocus its parent involvement efforts to focus on student achievement.

#### **Areas of Concern**

- It is not clear that the district has parent/school compacts as required by NCLB.

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- The district does not have a districtwide parental advisory committee at this juncture.
- Parents are not always involved as much as they could be in the school improvement planning process.
- The state had not issued its NCLB district-by-district or school-by-school report cards when the team made its site visit.
- The district uses most of its Title I parental involvement set-aside for central office outreach staff.

### E. Highly Qualified Teachers

*No Child Left Behind* requires that school districts staff their classrooms with teachers that are highly-qualified by the 2005-06 school year. Research is clear that teacher quality is critical to the academic performance of schoolchildren.

#### Favorable

- The district's instructional arm and its human resources office are making a concerted effort to meet NCLB's highly-qualified teacher requirements by the law's deadline and have good data on which the district's progress is being measured. The team was told that the district is ahead of the state in terms of percentage of teachers meeting the federal definition of highly qualified teacher.
- The state requires 60 hours of training for paraprofessionals and uses "ParaPro" to assess paraprofessionals. The district has a partnership with Reynolds University to provide its paraprofessionals with the requisite coursework.
- The Richmond schools receive about \$2,318,791 from federal Title II monies this school year. Funds are used centrally to support activities for increasing the numbers of highly qualified principals, teachers, and paraprofessionals districtwide and to reduce class sizes. Title II professional development funding is used for content training, mentors, licensure support, and principal leadership training.
- The district has strong partnerships with VCU, Reynolds, and other universities to prepare and train teachers.
- The district also has a program to reimburse or subsidize university coursework for teachers who are not yet fully qualified. The program is designed to help teachers pass the PRAXIS. Teachers are given three years to do so. The district honored 900 requests for reimbursements last year.

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- The district is using part of its federal Title II funds to bring its substitute teaching pool into compliance with NCLB's highly qualified teacher requirements.
- The district has five teachers that are National Board Certified and twelve who are sitting for certification.

### **Areas of Concern**

- The district spends about \$1.3 million of its Title II monies for class size reduction but does not have a strategy for allocating this money to the district's highest-need schools or PASS schools.
- The district does not have a process to ensure that the university courses teachers are taking through the tuition reimbursement program are aligned with district needs or with requirements to have teachers highly qualified under NCLB.

### **F. School Improvement Planning**

Federal law has a number of requirements that schools and school districts engage in a formal process of planning for the improvement of individual schools. This process is designed to ensure that each school in need of improvement conducts a thorough analysis for the reasons for low achievement and identifies a systematic series of steps for increasing performance.

### **Favorable**

- The district does have a school improvement planning process and planning committees that meet regularly to review and revise each school improvement plan.
- The district also has a single, consolidated school improvement planning document.
- The SPMT process used by the district is a useful framework for driving school improvement planning.
- The district is moving towards a consolidated NCLB application and is trying to integrate professional development into the school improvement plans.
- Some Title I schools use weekly or biweekly test data to group and regroup students for targeted instruction.

### **Areas of Concern**

- There does not appear to be any districtwide improvement plan or any central office support for the school-by-school improvement planning process. The

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individual schools tell the district how they will use funds to improve performance.

- Individual school plans do not sum up to a broader districtwide plan for improvement.
- School improvement plans are tied to the state’s accreditation system but are not yet explicitly tied to NCLB goals.
- It is generally the responsibility of principals to link the school improvement planning process to the PASS process.
- The school improvement plans districtwide do not include strategies for reaching highly qualified teacher requirements at the building level; strategies for effective transitioning from pre-k to kindergarten; strategies for improving teachers’ use of data to inform instruction at the building level; or the use of disaggregated data at the building level.

### G. Allocations to Schools

The federal law and its regulations specify a general set of procedures for how Title I funds are to be allocated to individual schools within any school district. The school districts have some latitude in how this is done, however.

#### Favorable

- The district is using its Title I funds in ways that are generally consistent with NCLB. (See below for exceptions and concerns.)
- The district is generally reserving the appropriate set-asides under NCLB. (See below for exceptions and concerns.)

#### Areas of Concern

- The district’s use of the Title I allocation system does not faithfully allocate funds to schools in rank order by poverty as it is required to do. (Allocations range from \$449 per child to \$128 per child.) Instead, funds are allocated to protect staff positions. The result is a system of highly-inequitable allocations to schools and allocations that are spread too thinly to do much good. The following are examples of per pupil allocations at schools presumably ranked by poverty—

(a) Elementary Schools (k-5)

Norrell school	Rank # 20	Title I per pupil allocation \$779.92
Mason school	Rank # 1	Title I per pupil allocation \$441.10

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### (b) Middle schools (6-8)

Boushall school	Rank # 24	Title I per pupil allocation \$364.87
Chandler school	Rank # 17	Title I per pupil allocation \$285.81

### (c) High schools (9-12)

Kennedy school	Rank #34	Title I per pupil allocation \$238.89
Franklin school	Rank #35	Title I per pupil allocation \$423.94

- The district's use of the Title I allocation system does not allow schoolwide projects to plan for the use of their allocations. Instead, the central office determined funding for school-based positions, leaving school principals with the authority to plan for the smallest possible fraction (two percent or so) that remains after salaries and benefits are deducted.
- The district's Title I allocation system does not allocate funds equitably across grade spans (elementary, middle, and high school) or within grade span. There are 28 different per pupil allocations at the elementary school level alone.
- The general and categorical budgets do not reflect the 5 percent set aside for the non-highly-qualified teachers provisions under NCLB.
- The district's Title I allocations to middle and high schools is not substantial enough to provide a meaningful level of services.

## H. Other Federal Grants

No Child Left Behind contains a number of other major components besides Title I and Title II (highly qualified teachers). Title III of the program provides funds for English Language Learners. Title IV provides funds for safe and drug free schools. Reading First provides funds to spur reading performance.

### Favorable

- The district's Title III bilingual education program is well-defined and making progress with the district's small number of English Language Learners. (The district only receives about \$35,741 in Title III funds.) The program provides services to about 418 students from 29 schools. Funds pay for two instructional aides and a parent liaison. The district has about 244 immigrant students who have been in the district for three or fewer years.
- The district's Title IV Safe and Drug-free Schools program operates with about \$400 thousand in federal Title IV funds. Funds are used for staffing and a variety of character education and anti-violence initiatives (e.g., Get Real About Violence, peer counseling, and drug and alcohol counseling). No schools in the

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district were identified as “persistently dangerous” under NCLB. The district collaborates extensively with other agencies across the city in data collection under the Safe and Drug-free schools program.

- The district recently secured a second-round “Reading First” grant estimated to be about \$490,000. (The Richmond schools was rejected in the first round of grantmaking.)
- The district receives about \$285,569 in federal technology grants (Title II-D) and about \$1,342,301 in federal E-Rate funds.
- The district uses its \$260 thousand in Title V funds for alternative education, dropout prevention, and library and media services districtwide.
- The district has a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning grant of about \$385 thousand that it uses for community learning centers in two schools (George Mason and Mosby), after school programming, tutoring, and cultural enrichment.
- The district receives about \$300 thousand in Medicaid reimbursements to support its programs for students with disabilities. (See next chapter.)
- The district has a large number of other private grants for a variety of different purposes, including grants of about \$65 thousand from the Beaumont Foundation; \$200 thousand from Philip Morris; and \$50 thousand from Toyota of America. The grants support activities such as closing the digital divide, life skills, and family literacy centers.

### **Areas of Concern**

- The district is not looking systemically at its grants and how they could be used jointly or in tandem to spur student achievement. There is little coordination of grant funds to meet district priorities.
- Program planning under Title I and other grants is done in isolation from the general fund and from district priorities.
- The district does not have a process in place to assess its needs or to inform itself about what grants it ought to pursue and what grants not to seek.
- The district has no regular method for assessing the effectiveness of its external grants.
- The district’s “Reading First” grant from the state is not equivalent to the district’s Title I share, as is required under NCLB.

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- Neither the district nor the state has any language-appropriate testing yet as part of its Standards of Learning (SOL). All testing is done in English.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Strategic Support Team has a number of recommendations about the federal programs in the Richmond Public Schools. The proposals are made in the same areas in which the team had findings and are designed to bring the district into better alignment with NCLB.

#### A. Use of Title I Funds

1. Replace Title I goals as currently articulated by the district with SOL and AYP goals as articulated by the state's accountability plan approved under NCLB.
2. Provide lump sum allocations of Title I funds to principals to spend to meet school performance targets. Principals should have more discretion over how to allocate personnel dollars as well, but expenditures should be guided by school district priorities on reading, math, school improvement plans, and teacher quality.
3. Develop a template for how principals could use Title I funds in alignment with district priorities on reading and math performance.
4. Revisit current regulations on schoolwide planning to ensure program is in alignment with federal guidelines.
5. Ensure that all of the district's Title I professional development set-side funds are coordinated in a way that supports the district's new professional development plan. (See previous chapter.)
6. Conduct a detailed analysis of how Title I funds could be better used in the district's middle schools.

#### B. Choice

7. Simplify the letter the district sends to parents on their choice options.
8. Continue working to coordinate the district's open enrollment policy with the NCLB-related choice program.
9. Begin counting current, eligible transportation costs against NCLB choice-related transportation set-asides. (The purpose of this recommendation is to reduce multiple transportation payments and keep non-instructional costs as low as possible.)
10. Resend letters to neighboring districts asking them to accommodate additional choice students each year.

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11. Send out additional letters to parents in August about their choice options. The district should also offer two or more choices of schools into which to transfer.
12. Ensure that the NCLB choice window is open as long as the district's open enrollment window – or ensure they are the same window.

### **C. Supplemental Services**

13. Encourage VCU and Virginia Union University to seek eligibility to be supplemental service providers for the district.
14. Continue to explore district provider status for supplemental services, depending on district-improvement status.
15. Amend the district's Title I applications to prioritize the definition of who is eligible for supplemental services.
16. Develop and disseminate to parents a uniform set of descriptions of available supplemental service providers.
17. Ensure that supplemental service contracts contain language protecting the district on—
  - quality control
  - amount of time and money for services (per session)
  - student attendance
  - alignment with district curriculum
  - match between child needs and curriculum
  - rental fees for use of facilities, including utilities
  - evaluation of effectiveness of services (link to quarterly tests)
18. Contact the state for the appropriate information on the maximum per pupil limits that supplemental service providers can charge.
19. Encourage supplemental service providers to align their services with the district's new reading and math programs and standards.
20. Assign staff at the school level to document student attendance at supplemental service provider sessions (when done on school site).
21. Market the district's own afterschool program (once it is developed more fully) – regardless of the district's status as a supplemental service provider.

### **D. Parental Involvement**

22. Expedite the development and naming of a districtwide parent advisory council.

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23. Redeploy the district's one percent Title I parental involvement set-aside to individual schools to spur parental involvement. (Focus parental involvement on SOLs, student achievement, choice, and supplemental services.)
24. Consider paying for the district's new parent center out of district's Title I administrative funds.
25. Develop and disseminate an informational brochure on NCLB to parents throughout the city.

### **E. Highly Qualified Teachers**

26. Develop and articulate a plan for using the amount of Title II funding designated for class-size reduction purposes in high-need schools only.
27. Link the district's program providing tuition reimbursement for teachers to district priorities for meeting "highly qualified" requirements under NCLB.
28. Ensure some measure of quality control over education courses offered by the universities receiving tuition reimbursement from the district, how the courses are aligned to literacy goals, and how they link to "highly qualified" teacher priorities.
29. Develop a plan for assigning some of the most highly-qualified /effective teachers to the poorest schools. (This is a required LEA assurance under NCLB.)

### **F. School Improvement Planning**

30. Overhaul the school planning process to reflect new district-wide proficiency goals and targets, including 10 components of schoolwide planning.
31. Ensure the district's School Improvement Plans are consistent with NCLB and tied to district goals by including—
  - needs assessment of student achievement
  - professional development (survey of teacher needs)
  - parental involvement
  - teacher qualifications
  - reform strategies in core academic areas (i.e. instructional materials and approaches).
  - grouping for instruction
  - goals and targets based on AYP
  - timelines
  - instruction by highly qualified teachers
  - attracting highly qualified teachers
  - early childhood
  - coordinated use of resources (state, federal, local)

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32. Perform achievement gap analysis of disaggregated data to see how the district can address and improve subgroup performance.

### **G. Allocations to Schools**

33. Overhaul current Title I allocation system to schools so that it follows the Title I regulations. This should be done by using—
  - uniform per-pupil allocations
  - or
  - higher allocation per pupil in highest bands of poverty
34. Stop using the reallocation of Title I funds to cover salary slots in each school.
35. Start using grade span grouping to establish priorities for school allocations.
36. Drop Title I allocations to high schools until such time that a high school improvement plan is developed and implemented. (Under federal law, the district will have to provide Title I funds to any high school whose poverty rate exceeds 75 percent, e.g. Armstrong High School.)
37. Redeploy the approximately \$500,000 currently being used in high schools districtwide to meet the district’s highly-qualified teacher set-aside requirement (5 percent) in NCLB, if not otherwise met.
38. Support the districtwide instructional reforms with the elementary/middle school Title I program (and use non-Title I federal funds to conduct the same reforms in the three elementary schools whose poverty rates are under 35 percent.)

### **H. Other Federal Grants**

39. Review the federal E-Rate rules and uses of funds to ensure that the district is receiving its maximum reimbursement. (The district received about \$1,342,301 in E-Rate support this year.) Resources from the E-Rate program should also be used to assist the district with its various special education needs. (See next chapter.)
40. Redeploy the district’s Title II-D technology funds into items such as hardware, software, professional development, etc. (In other words, the district should use Title II-D funding for allowable items that cannot be purchased with E-Rate funds.)
41. Integrate the general budgeting timelines with those for external budgeting.

## CHAPTER 4. SPECIAL EDUCATION<sup>29</sup>

This chapter presents general findings and recommendations. Findings are divided into areas that the Strategic Support Team thought were worthy of acknowledgement and areas of concern.<sup>30</sup>

### FINDINGS

The Strategic Support Team divided its observations, good and bad, into the following categories—

- ★ Systemic Planning
- ★ Over identification
- ★ Service Delivery Models
- ★ School-based Personnel
- ★ Organization of Exceptional Education Department
- ★ Curriculum and Professional Development
- ★ Discipline
- ★ Parental Involvement
- ★ Online IEP
- ★ Communications and Articulation

#### A. Systemic Planning

Urban school systems that have been able to make gains in student achievement among all groups have clear districtwide goals focusing on performance. All components of the system have comprehensive plans to attain the districtwide goals.

#### Favorable

- The district received about \$3,908,060 in federal IDEA funds this school year.
- The Exceptional Education Department is organized and placed appropriately in the district's Office of Instruction and Accountability.
- The Virginia Department of Education released a Special Education Monitoring Report in February 2003 on Richmond's compliance with the state's *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia*. (The items cited in the state report were typical of compliance problems found in other large urban school districts.) The district has submitted a corrective action plan to remedy items found in the report and is beginning to implement its plan.

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<sup>29</sup> What is generally referred to as Special Education nationally is referred to as Exceptional Education in Virginia.

<sup>30</sup> Support for the Special Education team came from the Richmond Public Schools rather than from the U.S. Department of Education.

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- The district has conducted its own internal audit to identify practices that need corrective action.
- The need for a special education policy and procedures manual has been recognized and is in the process of development.
- The district appointed a former state department official to serve as its Director of Exceptional Education in August 2003. The new Director has the full confidence of the district and the state.
- The district has a relatively low number of cases requiring litigation involving services to students with disabilities, and for the most part, has been able to resolve these cases without formal due process. The board attorneys as well as current and former Exceptional Education directors are to be commended for this.

### **Areas of Concern**

- The district does not have a unified goal for student achievement that includes the needs of students with disabilities.
- Currently, the primary office taking ownership for the performance of students with disabilities is the Exceptional Education Department. When the Transportation Department, for instance, had a problem transporting students with disabilities, the Exceptional Education Department was expected to address the issue. The Transportation Department should handle these issues with the support of the Exceptional Education unit.
- The Exceptional Education department is not always included in districtwide planning for facilities and classroom space. The Director of Exceptional Education, for instance, has to walk through buildings with an Executive Director to find space for self-contained classrooms.

### **B. Over-identification**

Over identification refers to the problem many school districts have with the designation and placement of students with disabilities, sometimes specific disabilities, at disproportionately high rates. It can also refer to the tendency of some school personnel to place racial minority students into special education classes at disproportionate rates. Appropriate early intervention and assessments can often ameliorate over identification.

### **Favorable**

- Richmond school staff acknowledged that the over identification of children as disabled was a concern.

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- At least two schools in the district are piloting Instructional Support Teams (ISTs) aimed at reducing referrals to Child Study through problem solving, research-based intervention, and differentiated instruction.

### **Areas of Concern**

- The Richmond City Public Schools identifies a disproportionately large number of students with disabilities (about 15.4 percent). The national average is between 12 and 13 percent.
- This over identification is particularly acute in the areas of Mental Retardation (23.9 percent of students with disabilities, vs. a 10.8 percent national average) and Emotionally Disturbed (10.1 percent of students with disabilities vs. an 8.3 percent national average).
- The district lacks systemwide research-based interventions or data aimed at reducing inappropriate referrals to Exceptional Education.
- The district lacks clear criteria for the identification of certain disabilities, resulting at times in an over-reliance on the opinion of psychologists. The result is both over identification and inconsistent identification of children for Exceptional Education services.
- The district lacks sufficient variety of or differentiation in its general instructional options to address the differing learning needs of some students. The result is that Exceptional Education serves as the sole alternative for students having difficulties with behavior or grade-level reading.
- There is a lack of leadership from psychologists and school designees on the appropriate identification of and recommendation for services to students with disabilities during IEP meetings.

### **C. Service Delivery Models**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that students with disabilities be served in the least restrictive environment, meaning that they should be provided instruction with their non-disabled peers as much as possible. This practice requires considerable coordination between general education teachers and teachers who have training and experience in instructing students with disabilities.

#### **Favorable**

- There is a general recognition among district staff about the value of educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

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- There are some excellent school-level practices, including co-teaching by Exceptional Education and general education teachers, that can serve as models to other schools as the district implements a systemwide inclusive service delivery model that emphasizes services in general education classes with specialized support.

### **Areas of Concern**

- The district lacks a comprehensive plan for having all schools serve students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.
- The district lacks the systems, including professional development and data collection systems, to serve students with disabilities in the most inclusive settings, as appropriate.
- Richmond City Public Schools places an unusually large number of students with disabilities into separate classes and private schools.
- For the most part, students with disabilities are included with their non-disabled peers in general education electives, science, and social studies, but are not included to the same degree in math and reading.
- Current state regulations defining Level I designations for students with disabilities receiving specialized services less than 50 percent of the day and Level II designations for students receiving services more than 50 percent of the day are not sufficient to track placement in the least restrictive environment against national data.

### **D. School-based Personnel**

School-based personnel are general education teachers, teachers of students with disabilities, principals, and all support and administrative staff at the building or site level. These individuals share responsibility for the academic achievement of all students, including students with disabilities. The district's central office is responsible for the professional development and staffing of schools.

### **Favorable**

- The Richmond City Public Schools have a good understanding of personnel needs and has been able to target recruitment resources on meeting these needs.
- Richmond City Public Schools pays its interpreters for hearing-impaired students the same salary as teachers.
- The district's teacher salaries are competitive with surrounding districts.

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- Every new teacher in the Richmond City Schools is paired with a mentor teacher based at the same school. The district has a systemwide mentoring program for all new teachers
- The district has several varied and productive recruitment strategies, resulting in 82 percent of the district's current teachers meeting federal definition of highly qualified, compared to a statewide average of 80 percent.
- Under the leadership of the Human Resources Director, every teacher not meeting the highly qualified definition must meet one-on-one with central office staff to devise and sign onto a plan to become highly qualified.
- There are conflict-resolution teachers assigned full or part-time in all the district's middle schools.
- The Exceptional Education Department has aggressively addressed staffing shortages by communicating these shortages to parents and planning make-up services where appropriate.

### **Areas of Concern**

- There are staffing shortages at all levels of Exceptional Education—central office, teachers, and related service personnel, especially speech language pathologists—that adversely affect services to students with disabilities.
- A complicated state point system, coupled with an ineffective Online IEP, renders the calculation of Exceptional Education staffing needs nearly impossible.
- There is minimal cross-categorical teaching occurring within the district, which negatively effects staffing as well as placement of students in least restrictive environments. Outdated state licensing and staffing mandates contribute to the problem.
- Despite the efforts of the Human Resource Department, there are a large number of provisionally-qualified teachers serving students with disabilities in the district who have substantial gaps in their knowledge about special education.
- Both general and Exceptional Education teachers do not have the depth of knowledge needed to adequately address the range of disabilities in their classrooms.
- Partly due to restrictive state regulations and partly due to districtwide inability to calculate and plan for students with disabilities based on the current Level I and Level II designation system, the Richmond City Public Schools buses students with disabilities away from their home schools because of the lack of categorical space on teachers caseloads.

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### **E. Organization of Exceptional Education Department**

The Exceptional Education Department is responsible for the instruction of approximately 3,885 students with disabilities in the Richmond City Public Schools. The department also has responsibility for compliance and monitoring responsibilities pertaining to federal and state regulations governing special education services.

#### **Favorable**

- The Director of the Exceptional Education Department is providing strong leadership for the Richmond City Public Schools.
- For the 2003-2004 school year, the Exceptional Education Department has reassigned their instructional specialists so they cover elementary or middle or high schools, rather than the entire K-12 system.
- The district has begun claiming Medicaid reimbursements and has assigned a person within the Exceptional Education office to lead that effort. (The district receives about \$300 thousand annually in federal Medicaid funds.)

#### **Areas of Concern**

- The Exceptional Education Department is generally understaffed, compared with other major urban special education departments.
- Richmond City Public Schools' Exceptional Education Department devotes more of its time and efforts on compliance issues than on the instruction of students with disabilities.
- Staff members within the Exceptional Education Department have little interaction with their counterparts in the Curriculum Department, even though they are organized within the same general unit.
- Ten-month contracts for the majority of staff within the Exceptional Education Department inhibits planning and operations.
- Staff members within the Exceptional Education Department often lack adequate expertise in low incidence disabilities, content instruction, and behavioral and reading interventions to provide appropriate leadership.
- The district lacks an adequate number of instructional specialists at the central office working with schools on the academic needs of students with disabilities.

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### **F. Curriculum and Professional Development**

As Richmond City Public Schools moves to educate all students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, all teachers, including general education teachers and those who have traditionally instructed only students with disabilities are expected to instruct students using the same academic curriculum. To do this, they require appropriate professional development and instructional materials.

#### **Favorable**

- The SOL scores of Richmond's students with disabilities exceed state averages for students with disabilities.
- Beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, continuing over the summer and into this 2003-2004 school year, there was a substantial amount of professional development on Exceptional Education. This was instituted by the former Exceptional Education director, and carried through by the current one.
- Staff development for personnel at all levels of the district includes Exceptional Education.
- The district has begun to reduce the number of reading programs used in schools.
- Richmond City Public School staff members understand the need for research-based reading programs.
- Adequate yearly progress scores for students with disabilities are exceeding the state averages for such students.

#### **Areas of Concern**

- The district lacks a comprehensive reading plan that could help keep students from being identified as disabled.
- The lack of a single, comprehensive districtwide reading program results in confusion among schools and contributes to inconsistent information coming from the central office.
- There is no consistent approach to or criteria for disabled students taking alternate assessments.
- In some instances, students with disabilities are being pulled out of general education classrooms for reading blocks that are shorter than the reading blocks in the general education classrooms.

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- Exceptional Education teachers and staff have been excluded on a number of occasions from the ordering of instructional materials at the school and district level.
- There is a large number of students with disabilities who do not participate in the state assessment system for reading and math.
- There are no standards or criteria for the selection or retention of instructional materials that include students with disabilities.

### **G. Discipline**

There are a number of special disciplinary considerations when handling students with disabilities. For instance, school staff must determine whether a behavioral infraction is a manifestation of a disability or not. There are specific monitoring requirements around tracking suspensions and expulsions. Urban schools that have successfully addressed discipline issues have done so through comprehensive districtwide plans that emphasize early and consistent interventions.

#### **Favorable**

- At least two schools in the district are using positive behavior support approaches to discipline.
- The Richmond City Public Schools has conflict resolution staff at every middle school in the district.
- There are peer mediation and conflict resolution programs in a number of schools.
- The district has dedicated one central office staff person to address compliance issues at the school with the most severe behavior and discipline problems (Wythe High School).
- The Exceptional Education Department has two staff members dedicated to discipline and behavioral troubleshooting in the schools.

#### **Areas of Concern**

- There is a very high number of suspensions (of both general education students and students with disabilities) in a number of schools.
- Exceptional Education Department Instructional Specialists participate in all manifestation determinations, thus drawing significant time from the instructional components of their jobs.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

- Data are not being used universally to target resources and guide interventions to students with disabilities.
- The high number of suspensions depresses student achievement because they take students out of school.
- The lack of in-school and out-of-school options for alternative placement contributes to the high rate of suspensions. (There are not an adequate number of alternative programs.)<sup>31</sup>

### H. Parental Involvement

School districts across the country must work especially hard to maintain positive, non-adversarial relations with parents of students with disabilities. The nature of Individualized Education Plans requires teachers and others to collaborate with parents in designing the most appropriate educational services for their child and to communicate constantly with parents about the progress their children are making.

#### Favorable

- The Parent Advisory Committee meets regularly and focuses on unmet needs in the district.
- Parents feel that they have a positive working relationship with the new director of Exceptional Education.
- The Parent Advisory Committee seeks to provide disability awareness in the community.
- When a child is initially referred for an evaluation by a Child Study Team, the parent is contacted by the Parent Resource Center and formally invited to participate in the Child Study meetings.

#### Areas of Concern

- There is a feeling among parents of students with disabilities that they have to push for proper placement and services for their children rather than seeing the school system providing services on their own initiative.
- Parents sometimes feel that there a lack of respect from the schools for the needs of their children and a disregard for what parents think are appropriate placements and services.

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<sup>31</sup> The district's STARS, RAP, Educare, and Bridge programs provide services to students with behavioral problems.

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

- Parents sometimes feel intimidated by the number of district staff at IEP meetings.

### **I. IEP Online**

School districts across the country are moving to electronic filing and maintenance of IEPs as a means of reducing paperwork and time and of monitoring program compliance. Districts face challenges, however, as they work to adapt off-the-shelf electronic IEPs to their needs, ensuring that hardware and software are in place in every building, and training staff on these electronic packages.

#### **Favorable**

- The Richmond City Public Schools have initiated a system for the electronic filing and maintenance of IEPs.
- The district designated an Online IEP manager and has set a target date for full implementation of the program.
- Staff members at all levels of the district believe that once the Online IEP is fully implemented it will increase efficiency and compliance.

#### **Areas of Concern**

- There is a lack of technology (computers, memory, and wiring) at some school sites that prevent full implementation of the Online IEP.
- The contract to develop the Online IEP does not include a number of components, such as:
  - Calculation of caseload levels according to Virginia's regulations on weighted caseloads.
  - Features to ensure compliance, such as not allowing teachers to close an IEP without completing all its requirements.
  - Simple editing tools, such as Spellcheck, that would increase the professionalism of IEP documents.
- There are problems with the district's ability to merge its data from the Online IEP with its data management system, AS400.
- Teachers are frustrated with the online IEP system because of technical problems. They are also resisting the district's directives to re-enter handwritten IEPs onto the electronic system due to the time-consuming nature of the task.

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

- Teachers cannot access the Online IEP from locations other than their classrooms.

### **J. Communication and Articulation**

Articulation refers to the transfer of students and their records from elementary to middle school, and middle schools to high. It is particularly important for special education students that this articulation is well done. Students with disabilities often have unique needs, characteristics, and services that must be articulated from one level of schooling to the next if these children are to succeed.

#### **Favorable**

- The new Director of the Exceptional Education Department is well liked and works amicably with Executive Directors, other Department Heads, and school-level staff.

#### **Areas of Concern**

- Records (including IEPs) do not always follow students in a timely manner.
- There is little-to-no communication or articulation as disabled students go from elementary to middle to high school.
- School-based Exceptional Education personnel are provided inconsistent information and are required to submit different documents depending on their Instructional Specialist.
- There is a gap in services between early intervention services for zero to two year-old children with disabilities and the school system's services beginning at age three.
- The district lacks a procedural manual for the Department of Exceptional Education.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. Systemic Planning**

1. Create a districtwide plan for student achievement for all students, including students with disabilities. (See chapter on curriculum and instruction.)
  - a. Create, implement, provide professional development, and monitor the student achievement plan.
  - b. Communicate this plan to all members of the staff and community.

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

- c. Delineate in the plan a comprehensive, research-based reading program for all, including students at risk for academic failure and students with disabilities.
  - d. Incorporate into this plan a comprehensive behavior component that would emphasize the prevention of suspensions, the reduction in the over identification of students with disabilities, and positive behavior supports and interventions. (The Team recommends [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org) as a starting point.)
  - e. Embed Exceptional Education into all components of the instructional plan, including measurable goals and targets for academic performance, participation in testing, for placing students in the least restrictive environment, increasing graduation and attendance rates, and reducing retention and suspension rates.
2. Hold all district staff accountable for the success of the plan and ensure that progress towards the goals is measurable.
  3. Expand collaborative planning time between personnel in the Exceptional Education unit and their curriculum counterparts at central office.
  4. Include Exceptional Education in “Charting the Course,” the district’s data-driven school improvement tool.
  5. Include the Exceptional Education Department when planning facilities and classroom space allocations.

### **B. Over-identification**

6. Create and implement a research-based plan to institutionalize intensive interventions for reading and behavior prior to referral to Child Study. This plan should include implementation of Instructional Support Teams (ISTs) at every school with members of the Team trained in differentiated instruction, support strategies, problem solving, research-based interventions, and curriculum-based assessments.
7. Establish clear criteria for the identification of disabilities. Provide training to school psychologists on the new criteria and on the use of assessment instruments to determine eligibility, appropriate services, and exit criteria for students with disabilities.
8. Identify and charge key staff with special expertise in providing informal assessments, early interventions, and appropriate eligibility determinations with training members of the Child Study Teams, school designees (possibly the current Special Education coordinators), teachers of students with disabilities, and other related service personnel, and ensuring that appropriate services are included in IEPs.

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

9. Hire a consultant to review assessment instruments and procedures being used to determine identification as mentally retarded for validity and reliability (including racial bias).
10. Disaggregate Exceptional Education data by race/ethnicity, gender, disability, assessor, instrument, school, etc. to determine patterns and potential biases. Use data to determine which schools are over identifying students and to determine priority areas for training.
11. Provide training on cultural diversity to all central office and school-based staff.

### **C. Service Delivery Models**

12. Encourage placement of children in the least restrictive environment by setting high standards and expectations for students with disabilities, including participation in standard assessments and inclusion in general education classrooms.
13. Create a districtwide plan with measurable goals for increasing the numbers of students served in the least restrictive environment over the next three years.
14. Incorporate the goals for serving students in the least restrictive environment into schoolwide plans and goal setting--including measurable goals and timelines for moving from self-contained classroom instruction to team teaching.
15. Provide substantial professional development to school-based staff, including both Exceptional Education and general education teachers, on serving students in the least restrictive environment. Professional development should emphasize co-teaching methods, accommodations, and strategies.
16. Ensure that all homerooms specifically designated for students with disabilities have been eliminated, except for those in separate schools.
17. Collect data over and above state requirements for Level I and II program participation by also collecting placement data using federal definitions on private placements, self-contained classrooms, inclusion, and consultive services in order to better track placements in the least restrictive environments.

### **D. School-based Personnel**

18. Ensure that new Exceptional Education teachers are paired with mentors who teach students with disabilities—preferably those requiring the same or similar services.
19. Work with the state advisory committee to simplify requirements that students with disabilities have to be served by teachers certified specifically in those disabilities for specified portions of the day. The district should also work with the state on cross-

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

disability certification and teaching requirements. These areas would help reduce transportation costs, improve staffing efficiency, and serve students in the LRE.

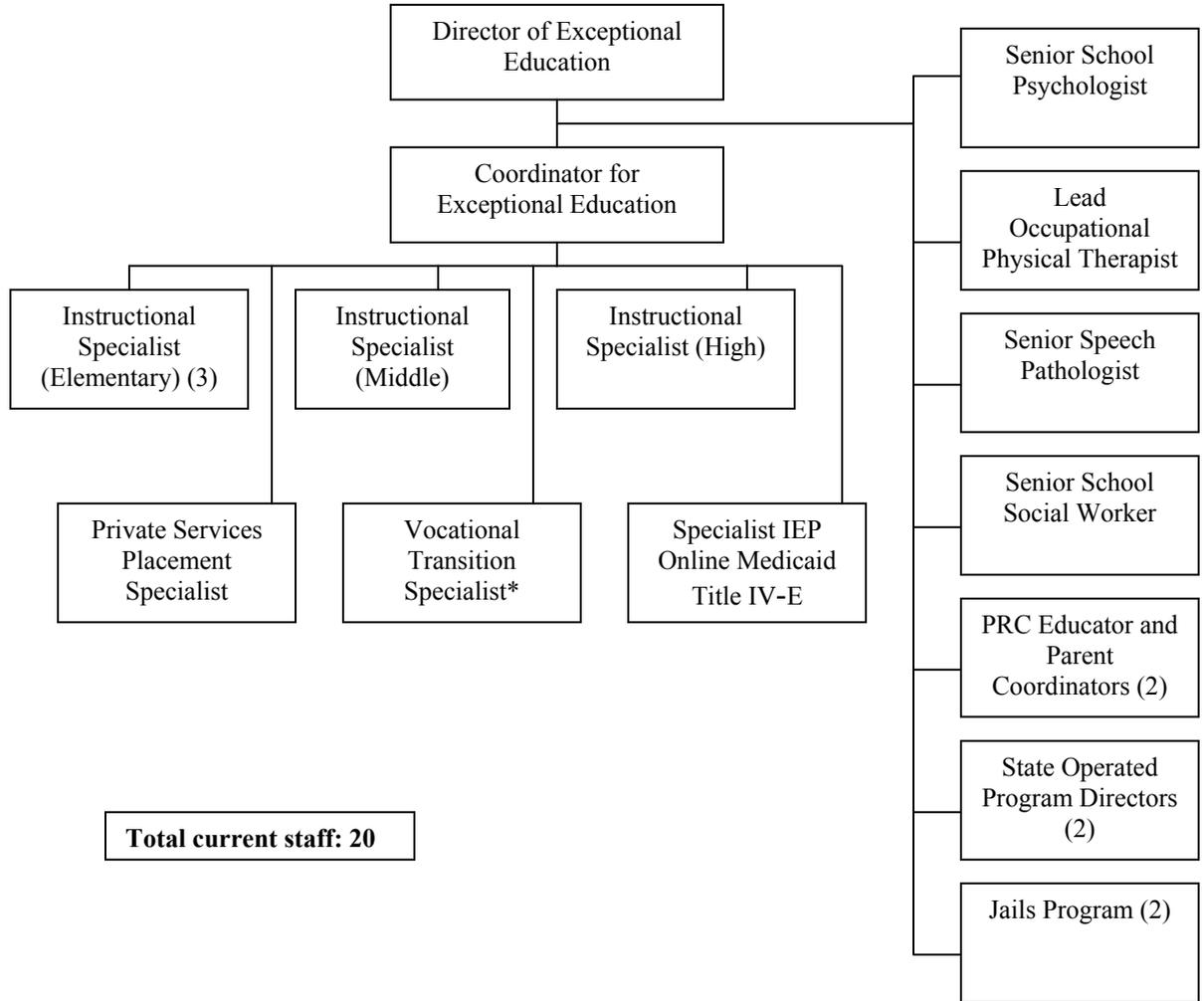
20. Train the current conflict resolution staff to help in the implementation of positive behavior supports and intervention.
21. Provide districtwide training on appropriate strategies to effectively educate students with various disabilities. Consider drawing upon current school and district staff with expertise in particular exceptionalities to provide this training.

### **E. Organization of Exceptional Education Department**

22. Hold school-based staff responsible for the compliance monitoring currently being done by the instructional specialists. This shift would enable instructional specialists to focus more on instruction. Consider paying stipends to the current Special Education Coordinators to conduct this monitoring.
23. Reorganize staff in the Exceptional Education Department according to the figures on the subsequent pages.
24. Charge the Coordinator for Accountability and his or her staff with the responsibility for Vocational Transition, Medicaid, Online IEP, and compliance with procedural IDEA issues.
25. Charge the Coordinator for Instruction and Related Services with ensuring that the districtwide reading program is implemented in Exceptional Education programs for students with disabilities, professional development is provided and used, and teachers have the necessary supports to provide effective instruction to students with disabilities.
26. Ensure that the Elementary, Middle and High School Instructional Specialists reporting to the Coordinator for Instruction and Related Service have content and categorical expertise.
27. Keep the Jails Program, State Operated Programs, and Parent Resource Center as they are, reporting directly to the Director.
28. Create a position for an Instructional Specialist focusing on models such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) within the office of Curriculum and Instruction. This person should work closely with the Exceptional Education Department but be responsible for implementing PBIS districtwide.
29. Redeploy the middle school conflict resolution staff to implement PBIS districtwide.

**Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

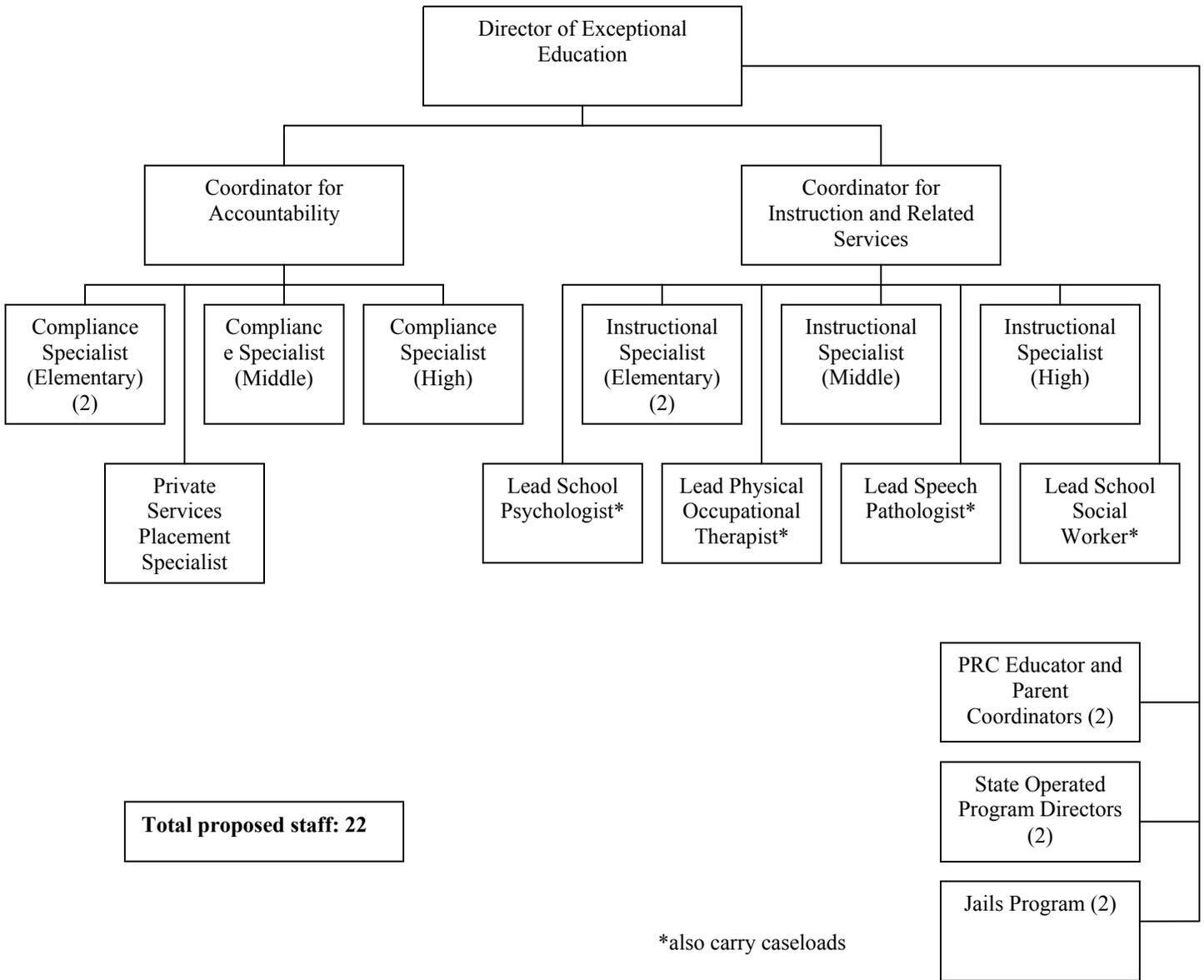
**Figure 1. Department of Exceptional Education: Current Organizational Chart**



\* It was indicated to the Team that this position was becoming a middle/high school instructional specialist with responsibility for vocational transition.

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**Figure 2. Department of Exceptional Education: Proposed Organizational Chart**



## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

### **F. Curriculum and Professional Development**

30. Provide professional development systemwide and update it annually to ensure that staff members at all levels of the organization have knowledge of Exceptional Education in relation to student achievement. This professional development should include the board, superintendent, central office administration, principals, all school personnel and parents.
31. Adopt a functional curriculum aligned with Virginia's Standards of Learning.
32. Establish formal procedures for the Exceptional Education and Curriculum Departments to work together, including but not limited to school walk-throughs, school level reviews, and professional development planning.
33. Provide common planning times for general education and Exceptional Education teachers.
34. Develop a systemwide strategy with measurable targets to improve assessment participation rates for students with disabilities.
35. Always include materials for students with disabilities when the district and schools order instructional materials.
36. Allow equal or greater reading block time for students with disabilities, compared with general education students.
37. Provide professional development to general and Exceptional Education teachers on how to analyze and interpret IEPs, how to follow pacing guides, and how these pacing guides align with the district's scope and sequence and the state's Standards of Learning.
38. Consider adapting pacing guides to accommodate students with disabilities.
39. Ensure that all professional development is continuous and that staff members are held accountable for implementing the training they receive.

### **G. Discipline**

40. Build school-level capacity to conduct manifestation determinations. Central office personnel should be present for manifestation determinations only in extraordinary circumstances.
41. Provide intensive training to school-based special education coordinators to lead manifestation determinations.

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

42. Incorporate measurable, numeric behavioral targets and interventions for students with disabilities into the district's new systemic instructional plan.
43. Create an exit strategy for the central office staff person assigned to monitor compliance at Wythe High School.

### **H. Parent Involvement**

44. Continue expanding lines of communication between central office and parents, such as is being done with the Parent Advisory Committee.
45. Involve the Parent Training Center and the Exceptional Education Parent Advisory Committee as partners.
46. Engage parents of students with disabilities in various aspects of systemic planning.
47. Reinforce Parent Advisory Committee's priorities by providing training and support.

### **I. Online IEP**

48. Enable teachers to access Online IEP from home or other locations.
49. Prioritize the installation of wiring, memory, etc. so that Online IEPs can be accessed by every teacher in his or her classroom.
50. Work with the IEP Online contractor to make cost effective, supplemental modifications to the system so that it is to the district's satisfaction.

### **J. Communications and Articulation**

51. Create and implement a process to facilitate articulation within feeder schools, including regularly scheduled meetings and mandatory document review.
52. Ensure that Instructional and Compliance Specialists provide consistent information districtwide and across years.
53. Enhance communication and outreach between early intervention services and the school system to ensure appropriate services are delivered to pre-K children with disabilities.
54. Complete a districtwide Exceptional Education policies and procedures manual. (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, and Orlando have volunteered to share their procedures manuals.) Provide training to staff on this manual, and hold staff accountable for its use.

### CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

The Richmond Public Schools have made some important strides over the last year or so, suggesting that the district is ready and willing to take the next critical steps to improve student achievement and strengthen the public’s support.

The Strategic Support Teams that reviewed the instructional programs of the Richmond Public Schools found many positive features of the district and its staff, including—

- A superintendent that is committed to the city and the school system under her charge.
- Many talented senior staff people who are skilled in their areas of responsibility.
- Teachers and principals who are working hard outside the public’s eye and without much appreciation to care for and educate the children of the city.

Still, the district is clearly working under a number of constraints that everyone in urban education understands, including—

- High rates of family poverty and student mobility.
- Declining enrollment and a fragile local tax base to support the schools.
- Rotating leadership in the superintendent’s office.
- School discipline problems.

At the same time, the teams found a school district that had not made the situation much better for itself. The school board was marked by a fair amount of internal squabbling. The district did not provide the level of instructional direction and support for its schools that characterize other faster improving urban school districts. The district’s instructional programs had become incoherent and subject to “program-creep.” The district’s staff members were not always well-versed on the latest reading and math research or prepared to implement it.

The fact that the district had no strategic plan for improving student achievement was as emblematic of the challenges that Richmond faces as anything the teams saw.<sup>32</sup> The lack of direction undercuts the district’s ability to accelerate student performance citywide. It also undermines the smooth operation of the federal programs we reviewed.

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<sup>32</sup> The district saw the document, *A Community-Wide Vision for the Future of the Richmond Public School System*, as a strategic plan. The Strategic Support Team did not.

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

Finally, it puts senior staff in the position of being “compliance police” rather than “assistance providers.”

If the priorities and recommendations in this report make sense to the district and the public, then the school board and the superintendent could start by jointly developing a strategic plan for the city’s children. The board, acting in the best interest of the entire district rather than its individual regions, need only agree on the broad framework at first, then charge the superintendent with beginning to fill in the details. And the superintendent should name a top-level “swat” team that coordinates the plan’s particulars and works out staffing patterns, funding, and timelines.

The plan, as it evolves, should incorporate the broad themes outlined in this report—measurable goals, strong accountability, cohesive curriculum, aligned professional development, persuasive classroom implementation, regular assessments, special focus on the lowest performing schools, and proper sequencing of reforms.

At the end of the planning process, the board and the administration ought to be working off the same page and owning the same strategy for accelerating student achievement.

The Richmond Public Schools have reached a critical intersection. But the signs point to opportunity for the city’s schools to become one of the nation’s finest Great City Schools. It need only decide to do so.

**APPENDIX A. BENCHMARKING RICHMOND**

The chart below presents the average scores of the curriculum and instructional Strategic Support Team on a tool developed by the Council of the Great City Schools to benchmark school districts against the practices and characteristics of faster-improving urban school systems on domains that the organization’s research shows are instrumental in boosting student achievement districtwide. Scores range from 1.0 (lowest) to 5.0 (highest).

Preconditions for School Reform							
School Board Role							Richmond Score
1. Board is fractured and most decisions are made with split vote.	1	2	3	4	5	Stable working majority on the board and board in general consensus on hold to run the district.	<b>1.0</b>
2. Board spends the majority of its time on the day-to-day operation of schools.	1	2	3	4	5	Board spends the majority of its time on policy issues.	<b>1.0</b>
3. Board devotes a majority of its time discussing non-academic issues.	1	2	3	4	5	Board sets raising student achievement as first priority and devotes majority of its time to those efforts.	<b>1.0</b>
Shared Vision							
4. Board did not set initial vision for the district and encourages superintendent to set vision.	1	2	3	4	5	Board sets initial vision for district and seeks superintendent who matches initial vision.	<b>1.0</b>
5. Board does not set annual measurable goals for superintendent/ district.	1	2	3	4	5	Board sets initial goals then Board and superintendent jointly refine vision and goals.	<b>1.4</b>
6. Board and superintendent	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent	<b>1.2</b>

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experience repeated turnover.						have stable and lengthy relationship.	
<b>Diagnosing Situation</b>							
7. Board and superintendent often make decisions without analyzing factors affecting achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent jointly analyze factors affecting achievement.	<b>1.6</b>
8. Board and superintendent do not assess strengths and weaknesses of district prior to reform initiatives.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent assess strengths and weaknesses of district prior to reform implementation.	<b>1.4</b>
9. Board and superintendent act quickly on reform initiatives without considering district options and strategies.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent have a plan and act methodically and consider district options and strategies before moving forward with reform.	<b>1.2</b>
10. Board is heavily involved in day-to-day operation of district.	1	2	3	4	5	Board entrusts superintendent to run district.	<b>1.0</b>
<b>Selling Reform</b>							
11. Board and superintendent have no concrete or specific goals for district.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent identify concrete and specific goals for district.	<b>1.6</b>
12. Board and superintendent do not seek input from the community when developing a reform plan.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent meet regularly with community leaders and listen extensively to community needs.	<b>2.2</b>

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13. Board and superintendent move forward with reform plans without community input.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent sell goals and plans to schools and community before moving forward.	<b>1.8</b>
14. Board and superintendent continue to give excuses for poor student performance and do not exclaim an urgency or quest for high standards.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent exclaim urgency, high standards, and no excuses.	<b>1.6</b>
<b>Improving Operations</b>							
15. Central office business operations function to the exclusion of student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	Central office revamps business operations to be more effective to schools.	<b>2.0</b>
16. Central office is not viewed as a support to schools.	1	2	3	4	5	Central office develops new sense of customer service with schools.	<b>2.0</b>
17. Central office operates on a schedule that does not consider schools' immediate problems.	1	2	3	4	5	Central office is designed so that it moves to fix schools' immediate problems.	<b>2.0</b>
<b>Finding Funds</b>							
18. District moves forward with its reforms without attracting new funds.	1	2	3	4	5	District has a plan to build confidence in reforms in order to attract funds.	<b>NA</b>
19. District pursues and/or accepts funds unrelated to reforms & priorities.	1	2	3	4	5	District pursues and only accepts funds to initiate reforms and launch priorities.	<b>NA</b>
20. District does not make budget adjustments shifting funds into	1	2	3	4	5	District shifts existing funds into instructional priorities.	<b>NA</b>

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instructional priorities.							
Educational Strategies							
Setting Goals							
21. District sets more general goals and lack specific targets for principals.	1	2	3	4	5	District sets specific performance goals and principals.	<b>1.4</b>
22. District moves forward with reforms without considering best practices of similar districts.	1	2	3	4	5	District spends time considering what works elsewhere and incorporates “best practices” in their reforms.	<b>2.2</b>
23. District goals lack specific timelines for meeting goals and targets.	1	2	3	4	5	District goals are “SMART” – Stretching, Measurable, Aspiring, Rigorous, and have a Timeline.	<b>1.2</b>
24. District focuses its attention on the “problem of the day”.	1	2	3	4	5	District focuses relentlessly on goal to improve student achievement.	<b>1.2</b>
Creating Accountability							
25. District focuses on the state’s accountability system.	1	2	3	4	5	District develops an accountability system that goes beyond state requirements.	<b>1.4</b>
26. District has no formal mechanism for holding senior staff accountable for student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	District puts all senior staff on performance contracts.	<b>1.0</b>
27. District has no formal mechanism for holding	1	2	3	4	5	District puts principals on performance	<b>1.2</b>

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principals accountable for student achievement.						contracts tied to goals.	
28. District has no formal mechanism for holding the superintendent accountable for student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	District puts superintendent on performance contract tied to goals.	<b>3.2</b>
29. District has no formal mechanism for rewards & recognition for principals and senior staff.	1	2	3	4	5	District has a highly publicized system for rewards & recognition for principals and senior staff.	<b>1.2</b>
<b>Focus on Low Performing Schools</b>							
30. District treats all schools the same and has no formalized method of focusing on lowest performing schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District creates system for improving the performance of lowest performing schools.	<b>2.5</b>
31. District has no formalized process to drive schools forward. School Improve Plan exists on paper only.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses school improvement planning process to drive school forward.	<b>1.8</b>
32. District lacks detailed interventions for lowest performing schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District has bank of detailed interventions for lowest performing schools.	<b>2.5</b>
33. District provides the same support and funds to all schools regardless of need.	1	2	3	4	5	District shifts extra help, funds and programs into lowest performing schools.	<b>NA</b>

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34. District lacks plan to improve quality of teachers in lowest performing schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District improves quality of teachers in lowest performing schools.	<b>1.8</b>
35. District has no formalized process for monitoring schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District closely monitors schools throughout the year.	<b>2.3</b>
<b>Unified Curriculum</b>							
36. District has multiple curricula with contrasting instructional approaches.	1	2	3	4	5	District adopts or develops uniform curriculum or framework for instruction.	<b>2.0</b>
37. District’s reading and math curriculum permits teachers to decide how to teach students.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses more prescriptive reading and math curriculum or tight framework.	<b>2.5</b>
38. District does not provide additional time for teaching reading and math.	1	2	3	4	5	District provides additional time for teaching reading and math.	<b>2.3</b>
39. District does not differentiate instruction for low-performing students.	1	2	3	4	5	District differentiates instruction for low-performing students.	<b>2.3</b>
40. District curriculum relies heavily on textbooks and is not tied to state standards and assessments.	1	2	3	4	5	District curriculum is explicitly aligned to and goes beyond state standards and assessments.	<b>2.4</b>
41. District aligns a “cluster of grades”, e.g. grades 3-5, to its reading and math curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5	District has clear grade-to-grade alignment in curriculum standards.	<b>2.0</b>
42. District uses a	1	2	3	4	5	District uses	<b>1.8</b>

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

reading program that is not scientifically-based.						scientifically-based reading curriculum.	
43. District has no way to ensure that classroom teachers are covering the curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5	District has a formalize system (pacing guides) to ensure that teachers are covering the curriculum standards.	<b>3.0</b>
<b>Professional Development</b>							
44. District has no formalize way to monitor implementation of the curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5	District closely monitors curriculum implementation through frequent visits to classrooms by curriculum leaders, principals, and other administrators.	<b>1.8</b>
45. District permits a majority of a school's professional development to be determined locally with very little, if any, time for district activities.	1	2	3	4	5	District has uniform professional development built on curriculum needs with a moderate amount of time allocated for school needs.	<b>1.8</b>
46. District focuses the majority of its professional development on topics not related to classroom practice.	1	2	3	4	5	District focuses the majority of its professional development on classroom practice.	<b>2.3</b>
47. District has no way to support classroom teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	District has formalized way to provide classroom	<b>2.0</b>

## Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools

						teachers supports when needed.	
<b>Pressing Reforms Down</b>							
48. District reforms are not implemented in a majority of the classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5	District monitors reforms to ensure implementation in all classrooms.	<b>1.5</b>
49. District has no way to determine if reforms are being implemented.	1	2	3	4	5	District has system of encouraging and monitoring implementation of reforms.	<b>1.4</b>
50. Central office leaves instruction up to individual schools.	1	2	3	4	5	Central office takes responsibility for quality of instruction.	<b>1.6</b>
<b>Using Data</b>							
51. District does not have a system in place to monitor system or school progress.	1	2	3	4	5	District has comprehensive accountability system that uses data extensively to monitor system and school progress.	<b>1.6</b>
52. District does not have a formalize way to assesses student progress throughout the school year.	1	2	3	4	5	District assesses and reviews data on student progress throughout school year.	<b>1.8</b>
53. District does not disaggregate data.	1	2	3	4	5	District goes beyond the requirements of NCLB in disaggregating school, staff, and system data.	<b>2.4</b>
54. District does not use student assessment	1	2	3	4	5	District uses annual and	<b>2.0</b>

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and other data to shape intervention strategies.						benchmark data to decide on where to target interventions.	
55. District does not provide training or provides one-time training in the use of test score results.	1	2	3	4	5	District provides ongoing training in the use of test score results to all principals and teachers.	<b>1.4</b>
56. District provides professional development to schools and teachers where they “think” it is needed.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses data to target professional development.	<b>1.6</b>
<b>Starting Early</b>							
57. District has no strategy for where to start their reforms or how to roll them out districtwide.	1	2	3	4	5	District starts reform efforts in early elementary grades and works up.	<b>1.2</b>
<b>Upper Grades</b>							
58. District has not given any thought to how to teach older students.	1	2	3	4	5	District has fledgling strategies to teach older students.	<b>2.0</b>
59. District has no interventions at the middle and high school levels.	1	2	3	4	5	District has some research-based middle and high school interventions.	<b>1.6</b>
60. District does not provide additional time for teaching basic skills to students who are behind.	1	2	3	4	5	District doubles up on teaching basic skills to students who are behind.	<b>2.2</b>
61. District lacks plan to introduce AP courses in all high schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District offers AP courses in most if not all district high schools.	<b>1.0</b>

**APPENDIX B. INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED**

**Individuals Interviewed by the Curriculum and Instruction Team**

- Deborah Jewell-Sherman, Superintendent
- Ernestine Scott, Title I Coordinator
- Dr. Olanrewaju, School Board Chairman
- Reginald Malone, School Board Member
- Dr. Wayne Scott, Principal, George Mason Elementary
- Sherry Wharton-Carey, Principal, Bellevue Elementary
- Harley Tomey, Director of Exceptional Education
- Gloria Graham-Johnson, Coordinator of Exceptional Education
- Rosa Atkins, Director of Instruction
- Dr. Ann Allen, Coordinator of Research & Evaluation
- Richard Staton, Director of Reading
- Ronald Bradford, Director of Mathematics
- Dr. Beverly Braxton, Executive Director for Support Services
- Joyce Cosby, Early Childhood
- Jane Green, Coordinator of English Language Learners
- Richard Williams, Manager of Testing and Data Systems
- Heather Kister, Teacher, Richmond Community High School
- Donnell Williams, Teacher, John F. Kennedy High School
- Jennifer Hacker, Teacher, Woodville Elementary
- Samara Booker, Teacher, Redd Elementary
- Joyce Wilborn, Teacher, Mosby Middle School
- Stephanie Douglas-Jackson, Teacher, Binford Middle School
- Ronald Carey, Executive Director of Elementary Schools
- Dr. Barbara Chapman, Principal, Elkhardt Middle School
- Ronald Rodriguez, Principal, Lucille Brown Middle School
- Priscilla Green, Principal, Open High School
- Carl S. Vaughan, Principal, Armstrong High School
- Dr. Nannette Smith, Interim Associate V.P. for Academic Affairs at the J.S. Reynolds Community College
- Wanda Payne, President Richmond Council of PTAs
- Dr. Lucille Brown, Richmond Public Education Foundation
- Dr. Weldon Hill, Dean VUU
- Dr. Boshier, Dean VCU
- Vashti Mallory-Minor, REA
- Reverend Willie Woodson, Living the Dream Fund
- Dr. Irving Jones, Executive Director of Secondary Schools

## **Charting a New Course for the Richmond Public Schools**

### **Individuals Interviewed by the Special Education Team**

- Deborah Jewell-Sherman, Superintendent of Schools
- Yvonne Brandon, Chief Academic Officer
- Harley Tomey, Director, Office of Exceptional Education
- Gloria Graham Johnson, Coordinator of Exceptional Education
- Harold Fitrer, Director of Human Resources
- Tom Sherran, Chief Financial Officer
- Renata Henderton Jones, Instructional Specialist for IEP Online, Medicaid Reimbursements, and Transportation
- Elaine Shine, Elementary Instructional Specialist
- Ronnie Whiles, Lead Occupational Physical Therapist
- Waltina Pride, High School Instructional Specialist
- Judy Hallot, Middle and High School Instructional Specialist
- Deborah Andrews, Senior Speech Psychologist
- Diane Russell Moseley, Pre-K Instructional Specialist
- Harold Mitchell, Senior School Psychologist
- Mary Timmons, Middle School Instructional Specialist
- Brad King, School Board Attorney
- Kim Smith, School Board Attorney
- Conrad Davis, Principal, Blackwell Elementary
- Regina Farr, Principal, Swansboro Elementary
- Victoria Oakley, Principal, Ginter Park Elementary
- Sandra Nance, Principal, Reid Elementary
- Bradford Fellows, Principal, Hill Middle
- Thomas Beatty, Principal, Thompson Middle
- William James, Principal, Boushal Middle
- Brenda Walton, Principal, Binford Middle
- Earl Pappy, Principal, Wythe High
- Betsy Roberson, Principal, Thomas Jefferson High
- John Lloyd, Parent
- Vicky Beady, Parent, Chair of Special Education Parent Advisory Committee
- Vonnetta Wilson, Parent
- Antoinette Smith, Parent
- Kim Credich, Parent
- Joan Mims, School Board Member
- Carol Wolf, School Board Member
- Jannie Laursen, Assistant Principal, Blackwell Elementary
- Cathy Randolph, Assistant Principal, Ginter Park Elementary
- Frank Williams, Assistant Principal, Reid Elementary
- Katrina Gill, Hill Middle
- Constance Peay, Guidance Counselor, Thompson Middle
- Cheryl Mangum, Boushal Middle
- Marjorie Valentine, Teacher and Department Chair, Binford Middle

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- Earl Pappy, Principal, Wythe High
- Donna Branch Harris, Teacher, Swansboro Elementary
- Linda Jaeger, Teacher, Ginter Park Elementary
- Erika Clark, Teacher, Reid Elementary
- Decardra Jones, Teacher, Hill Middle
- Sarah Anzelmo, Teacher, Thompson Middle
- Patricia Logan-Reilly, Teacher, Boushal Middle
- Pat Winston, Teacher, Binford Middle
- Helena Easter, Teacher, Wythe High
- Dorothy Williams, Teacher, Thomas Jefferson High
- Sandra Ruffin, Office of Fed. Program Monitoring, VDOE
- Sheila Miller, Office of Fed. Program Monitoring, VDOE

### **Individuals Interviewed by the Federal Programs Team**

- Dr. Deborah Jewell-Sherman, Superintendent
- Dr. Yvonne Brandon, Associate Superintendent
- Dr. Ronald Carey, Elementary Education
- Dr. Irving Jones, Secondary Education
- Dr. Beverly Braxton, Support Services
- Mrs. Rosa Atkins, Department of Instruction
- Dr. Harold Fitrer, Human Resources
- Dr. Ernestine Scott, Title I Director
- Mrs. Diane Watkins, Title II Grant Program
- Mr. Larry Everette, Title IV Grant Program
- Mrs. Cozette McIntyre, State and Federal Grants
- Mrs. Jane Green, Bilingual Education
- Ms. Susan Hogge, Budget Office
- Ms. Peggy Heath, Finance Office
- Cheryl Burke, Principal, Chimborazzo Elementary
- Victoria Oakley, Principal, Ginter Park Elementary
- William James, Principal, Thomas C. Boushall Elementary
- Regina Farr, Principal, Swansboro Elementary
- Denise Fourman, Title I Math, Whitcomb Court Elementary
- Roberta Walker, Title I Regional Instructional Specialist, Richmond Public Schools
- Maria Crenshaw, Title I Regional Math Instructional Specialist, Richmond Public Schools
- Jean Davis, Title I Reading, Summer Hill School
- Dawn Cobb, Title I Math, Ginter Park Elementary
- Robin Claiborne, Title I Reading Coach, Chimborazzo Elementary School
- Valerie Harrison, Adult Facilitator, Patrick Henry Elementary
- Josie Alexander, Adult Facilitator, Summer Hill
- Vanessa Patterson, Educational Specialist, Science Museum of Virginia
- Earlene Smith, Parent, Patrick Henry Elementary

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- Delores Bagby, Parent Liaison Specialist, Richmond Public Schools
- John Bunting, Coordinator, Math and Science Center
- Jim Popp, President, University Instructors, Inc.
- Shady Clark, Title I Director, Virginia Department of Education
- Cathy Howard, Virginia Commonwealth University

## APPENDIX C: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

### Documents Reviewed by the Curriculum and Instruction Team

- Organization structure for Richmond Public Schools and current Curriculum & Instruction Department
- Relevant Job Descriptions for Curriculum Staff
- Job Descriptions of the Executive Director of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Ethnic Statistics by Membership, 2001-2002 Individual Schools Ratio
- Ethnic Statistics 2002-2003 Fall Membership Verification Report by Grade
- Free & Reduced Lunch Totals by School
- Preliminary Subgroup Report, Testing and Data Systems, August 2003
- Elementary, Middle, High and Alternative School Membership as of 3/15/02
- Virginia Department of Education: Number of Days Taught, Average Daily Membership, Average Daily Attendance and Percent Attendance 1997-2002; Combined Term High School Graduates by Document Type 1997-2002; Richmond Public Schools' Dropout Rates 1996-2001; Richmond Public Schools' Truancy Rates
- SAT I: Reasoning Test Takers 1997-2001 by School
- Meet the School Board
- Richmond Public Schools, School Board and Superintendent Goals 2002-2003
- Board Goals
- School Board Actions Memo
- Richmond Public Schools. School Board Report. January 7, 2003.
- Richmond Public Schools. School Board Report. March 18, 2003.
- Richmond Public Schools. School Board Report. May 20, 2003.
- Richmond Public Schools. School Board Report. August 19, 2003.
- Richmond Public Schools. School Board Report. September 3, 2003.
- Richmond Public Schools. School Board Report. September 16, 2003.
- Richmond Public Schools. School Board Report. October 6, 2003
- School Board of the City of Richmond Agenda for Monday, August 18, 2003
- *A Community-Wide Vision for the Future of the Richmond Public School System*
- Education Foundation, Inc., Purpose, Mission, Goals and Objectives
- Approved School Calendar for the Year 2003-2004
- District System-Wide Student Assessment Schedule 2003-2004
- Sample Reporting Forms (Virginia SOL Student Performance by Question Division Report, Virginia SOL Division Summary Report Grade 3 Tests, Virginia SOL Student Performance by Question School Report, Virginia SOL Division Summary Report Grade 5 Tests, Virginia SOL Student Performance Report Grade 8 Tests, Virginia SOL Report to Parents, Virginia SOL Analysis of Subgroup Performance Grade 5 Tests, Virginia SOL School List Report Grade 5 Tests)
- *Schools Needing Improvement*, Timesdispatch.com, August 16, 2003
- PASS Schools Intervention and Remediation Programs for 2002-2003 Academic Year
- School Improvement Plan Title I
- District-wide Professional Development Schedule

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- New Employee Orientation *Pamphlet*
- Enhancing Education through Technology, Professional Development, EDTECH – ESEA Title II – Part D
- Mentor Teacher Program, 2003 New Teacher Institute
- Detailed Staff Development Scheduling
- Richmond Public Schools Head Start Program, Curriculum
- Richmond Public Schools Head Start Program, Supplemental Materials
- Reading/Language Arts Textbook and Intervention Services
- Mathematics Curriculum Information (Intervention Programs, Textbooks, & Supplemental Materials)
- Information about the Richmond’s Small Learning Communities
- AP Information/Dual Enrollment Program
- Guidelines for Selection and Procedures for Review of Instructional Material, Appendix A, Standards of Quality 12 – Item 4
- *A Review of Transportation Operations of the Richmond City Public Schools*, Council of the Great City Schools, June 2003
- Math & reading/language arts test score data for the 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003 school years by school and subgroup
- Table 8: Number of Days Taught, Average Daily Membership, Average Daily Attendance and Percent Attendance 1997-2002 for all Divisions in Virginia
- Virginia Department of Education, Report of Graduates 2001-2002 Combined Term High School Graduates by Document Type 1997-2002 for all Divisions in Virginia
- RPS University, 2002-2003 Offerings At a Glance *Catalogue*
- RPS University, Professional Development Opportunities for Summer 2003 *Catalogue*
- Leadership Institute, Richmond Public Schools, August 4-7, 2003
- Richmond Public Schools Exceptional Education *Notebook*
- Richmond Public Schools, Curriculum Compass, Elementary – Language Arts *Notebook*
- Richmond Public Schools, Curriculum Compass, Secondary – Language Arts *Notebook*
- Richmond Public Schools, Curriculum Compass, Elementary – Mathematics *Notebook*
- Richmond Public Schools, Curriculum Compass, Secondary – Mathematics *Notebook*
- Richmond Public Schools, Program of Studies 2003-2004 *Catalogue*
- High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, *Educating Young Children*
- Richmond City Public Schools Head Start Program, Presentation to Committee on Great City Schools, September 8, 2003
- Richmond Public Schools Head Start, COR Item Selection Directions
- Effective Teaching Look Fors . . . in High School: *Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Classrooms*
- Charting the Course Log, *Middle School*, Second Port on the USS Excellence
- Virginia SOL Released Items, *End of Course*, Earth Science, Biology, English: Reading, English: Writing, Chemistry, Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry
- Virginia SOL Released Items, Grade 3 and Grade 8

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- 3<sup>rd</sup> Nine Weeks Test, Kindergarten, English, Richmond City Public Schools, (Flanagan)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Nine Weeks Test, Grade 1, Mathematics, Richmond City Public Schools, (Flanagan)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Nine Weeks Test, Grade 2-4 and 6-11, Reading, Richmond City Public Schools, (Flanagan)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Nine Weeks Test, Algebra I, Richmond City Public Schools, (Flanagan)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Nine Weeks Test, Algebra II, Richmond City Public Schools, (Flanagan)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Nine Weeks Test, Geometry, Richmond City Public Schools, (Flanagan)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Nine Weeks Test, Science: Chemistry, Richmond City Public Schools, (Flanagan)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Nine Weeks Test, Science: Earth Science, Richmond City Public Schools, (Flanagan)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Nine Weeks Test, Science: Biology, Richmond City Public Schools, (Flanagan)
- *Closing the Achievement Gap: A Framework for Excellence*, Department of Instruction & Accountability, August 1999
- Explore, Profile Summary Report, Thomas C. Boushall Middle School, Fall 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Test

### Documents Reviewed by the Special Education Team

- Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Fall Membership Counts by School in Richmond City Public Schools, 2003-2004
- Richmond Public Schools Special Education Children by Ethnicity and Gender, Number and Percentage
- Richmond City Public Schools Ethnic Statistics by School
- Budget for Exceptional Education Program
- Student Count by School, Exceptionality, and Level of Service
- VDOE Report on the LEA Implementation and Plan of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
- Local Improvement Plan and Report on Implementation
- Plan for the Implementation of the LEA Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
- VDOE's Procedures for Participation of Students with Disabilities in the Assessment Component of Virginia's Accountability System
- School by school information on disciplinary actions for Regular and Special Education Students, 2002-2003 and 2003-2004
- Organization Chart for Office of Exceptional Education
- Richmond City Public Schools General Organization Chart
- Job Descriptions for Selected Positions within the Office of Special Education and Student Services Department
- Number of Related Services Staff, by Job Title
- Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia
- Richmond City Public Schools Breakdown of Students by Grade, Age, and Disability
- Virginia's Special Education State Improvement Plan

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- Obtaining Success in the Least Restrictive Environment, Delineation of complaints, findings, and corrective action plan for 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school year
- Obtaining Success in the Least Restrictive Environment, 2003-2004 Richmond City Public Schools Corrective Action Plan
- Special Education Monitoring Report, Prepared by VDOE for Richmond City Public Schools
- Sample IEP Form
- IEP Amendment Form—Extended School Year
- IEP Amendment Form—Assessment Review
- IEP Amendment Form—Manifestation Determination
- IEP Amendment Form—Behavioral Support Plan
- Section 504 Plan Form
- Virginia State and Richmond City Public Schools Summary Attendance and Graduation Rates
- Virginia Statewide and Richmond City Public Schools Achievement Results for 2002-2003 in Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics
- Richmond City Public Schools Special Education and Related Services Revised Policies and Procedures
- Memo from Harley Tomey to Building Administrators on Students Referred for Comprehensive Evaluations
- A Guide to the Child Study Process and Operating Procedures for Child Study Committee, Richmond Public Schools Exceptional Education Department
- Procedures for Child Study Committees Operating in Virginia, VDOE
- Exceptional Education Audit Report, Richmond Public Schools Internal Audit Services
- Memo on FY2002 Annual School Report
- Richmond City Schools' Commitment to Resolve OCR Submission, dates 8/16/2001
- Sample student data sheet from AS400 data management system
- Preliminary notes from Council of the Great City Schools' Curriculum and Instruction Student Support Team Visit to Richmond City Public Schools
- Sample Minutes of IEP Meeting
- Information on Partnership for Achieving Successful Schools (PASS) Initiative
- Virginia Alternate Assessment Program, 2002-2003, Division Summary Report by Age Level for Richmond City Public Schools
- Conducting Functional Behavioral Assessments and Developing Positive Behavioral Intervention Plans and Supports, from VDOE and American Institutes for Research

### **Documents Reviewed by the Federal Programs Team**

- Richmond Public Schools. School Board's Adopted Budget, FY2003-2004. June 2, 2003.
- Richmond Public Schools Accreditation Status. Revised 1/7/03.
- Phase I. No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. PL 107-110. Title I, Part A, Improving Basic Programs. Individual Application. July 1, 2003-September 30, 2004. Virginia Department of Education, Office of Compensatory Programs.

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- Phase II. Revised Title I, Part A, Improving Basic Programs. Individual Application. July 1, 2003-September 30, 2004.
- Richmond Public Schools, Title I Schools, 2003-2004.
- Supplemental Educational Services Providers, Richmond Public Schools.
- Instructional Strategic Planning, Elementary Language Arts, 2003-2004 Staff Development.
- Mathematics Professional Development, Strategies for Improved Achievement in Mathematics
- Instructional Strategic Planning, Elementary Academic Review.
- Our Accomplishments for FY 2002-2003. Richmond City Public Schools. Department of Finance & Operations. Topic: Grant Resources.
- Instructional Strategic Planning. Elementary Language Arts. 2003-2004 Staff Development.
- Annual Report. Status of Implementation of Three-Year School Improvement Plan.
- Richmond Federal Grant Estimates
- Richmond Public Schools. Leadership Institute. August 4-7, 2003.
- Directions for Completing Three-Year School Improvement Plans.
- Data Disaggregation Tools-EDC. Richmond City. NCS CD Data. Fall 2002.
- The Parents' Exchange. A publication for the parents of Richmond Public Schools. Summer, 2003.
- NCLB Choice Letter to Parents.
- Richmond Public Schools, Pupil Personnel Services, Pupil Placement Office. Request Form for School Placement under "No Child Left Behind Act" 2003-2004.
- Richmond Public Schools. No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Important Facts.
- NCLB Supplemental Services Letter to Parents.
- Handbook for Evaluation of Principals, Administrative/Supervisory Personnel. September, 2000.
- Phase II. Title II, Part A. Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund. Application. August 2002.
- Phase II. Title V, Part A, Innovative Programs. Individual Program Application. August 2002.
- Phase II. Title III. Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students. Individual Program Application. August 2002.
- Phase II. Title IV. Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities. School Division Application. 2002-2003.

**APPENDIX D: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES**

**Ricki-Price Baugh**

Ricki Price-Baugh is the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum in the Houston Independent School District. She is responsible for strategic planning and the design implementation, and evaluation of the district's curriculum and instructional initiatives for eight departments: English/language arts, fine arts, early childhood education, foreign language, health/physical education, mathematics, science, and social studies. Since beginning her work thirty years ago at the Houston schools, Dr. Price-Baugh has served as a teacher, department chair, resource coordinator, project manager, and director of curriculum services. Her major accomplishments include a districtwide effort to align curriculum, textbook, and assessment systems, and a substantial increase in student achievement scores in the district. She is a certified curriculum auditor for Phi Delta Kappa and is a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Dr. Price-Baugh has her doctoral degree from Baylor University, a master's degree in Spanish literature from the University of Maryland, and a B.A. (magna cum laude) from Tulane University.

**Frances Bessellieu**

Frances Bessellieu is now a consultant to SRA/McGraw Hill but was a consultant to the U.S. Department of Education's Reading Excellence and Reading First programs when she served on this Strategic Support Team. In this role, she works with State education officials nationwide in implementing comprehensive, scientifically-based reading programs, and advises senior Department staff on related policy issues. Prior to this position, Frances spent two years as Director of Reading for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (CMS) in North Carolina. Her key accomplishments at CMS included implementing a new process for selecting and sustaining scientifically-based reading curricula for grades pre-k-12 and introducing this curriculum, using new methods to assess children's reading skills, coordinating professional development for thousands of teachers in the district, and employing new methods of program evaluation. During her tenure, teachers' skills at teaching reading increased, district-wide reading achievement rose, and the achievement gap between subgroups of students decreased. Frances has also served as Lead Teacher in Direct Instruction and Behavior Management for New Hanover County, NC and spent several years teaching students with behavioral, emotional, cognitive and hearing difficulties in Southeastern North Carolina. In 1999, she earned an M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington.

**Harriet Brown**

Harriet Brown has been the Director of Policy and Procedure for Exceptional Student Education in Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, FL since 1993. In that capacity, Ms. Brown is the district representative in due process hearings and the contact person for complaints with the school district, the Florida Department of Education including

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mediations, and the Office for Civil Rights. She is responsible for trainings on discipline, compliance, Section 504 accommodations and modifications, Extended School Year, Least Restrictive Environment and Individual Education Plans and all components of special education, and is the coordinator for the McKay scholarships. Prior to joining Orange County Public Schools, Ms. Brown worked at the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities in the State of Florida, representing families of students with disabilities, and the Advocacy Center for the Elderly and Disabled in New Orleans, LA. She started her career as a speech language pathologist for Chicago Public Schools. Ms Brown has a Bachelor's degree in Speech Pathology and Audiology from Hampton Institute, a Master's from Case Western Reserve University, and a J.D. from Tulane University Law School.

### **Michael Casserly**

Michael Casserly is the Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of some 60 of the nation's largest urban public school districts. Casserly has been with the organization for 26 years, twelve of them as Executive Director. Before heading the group, he was the organization's chief lobbyist on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. and served as its director of research. He led major reforms in federal education laws, garnered significant aid for urban schools across the country, initiated major gains in urban school achievement and management, and advocated for urban school leadership in the standards movement. And he led the organization in the nation's first summit of urban school superintendents and big city mayors. Casserly has a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland and a B.A. from Villanova University.

### **Sue Gamm**

From 1995 to 2003, Sue Gamm was the Chief Specialized Services Officer for the Chicago Public Schools, the third largest school district in the nation. In that capacity, she oversaw a budget of \$600 million and was responsible for: the identification, evaluation, provision of services, and procedural safeguards for 57,000 children with disabilities, including management of a Federal class action settlement agreement on the education of children with disabilities in the least restrictive setting; management of alternative schools for students who have been expelled or have chronic disruptive behavior; management and coordination of the district's Homeless Education Program; and management of pupil support services for all students in the Chicago Public Schools, including an aggressive Medicaid/Children's Health Insurance Program outreach and "Healthy Kids...Healthy Minds" initiative; and coordination of violence prevention, crisis intervention, and the district's alternative safe schools program. Ms. Gamm has received numerous awards and served on many national committees relating to her knowledge and service to the Special Education community. In 2002, she made a special presentation to the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education. Prior to her current position, Ms. Gamm worked in the Elementary and Secondary Education Division of the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. She was also a Special Education teacher in the Chicago Public Schools. Ms. Gamm holds a B.A. from the University of Illinois and a J.D. from the DePaul College of Law.

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### **Francis Haithcock**

Francis Haithcock is the Associate Superintendent for Educational Services in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Public Schools. She has been in this position since 2000. Before her move to Charlotte, Dr. Haithcock was the Deputy Superintendent for Educational Program, Student Support, and Human Resource Development with the Broward County (Florida) Public Schools. Her responsibilities there included educational program budget development and supervision, professional development for 20,000 employees (including 12,000 teachers), program administration, technology, and other areas. Dr. Haithcock has substantial experience in strategic planning, student services, business/administrative operations, personnel, program financing, coalition building, legislative affairs, and communications. She has also been a principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, and classroom teacher. Dr. Haithcock has a B.A. from the University of North Carolina, a master's degree from Florida Atlantic University, and a doctorate from the University of Miami. She also holds post graduate certificates from Florida Atlantic University and Harvard University.

### **Charlotte Harris**

Charlotte Harris is the Director of Development for the Boston Public Schools, and has been responsible for grants administration for the district since 1985 and for grants development since 1995. She has written and won \$117 million in competitive grants, coordinated and supported the development of many more millions in competitive grants, and been responsible for preparation of applications and administration for state and federal reimbursement, pass-through, and formula grants that for the 2001-2002 school year totaled \$117,387,481. Since 1985, external funds awarded to the Boston Public Schools have increased from \$32 million to an anticipated \$132 million in FY 2003. External funds – grants and reimbursements – comprise 16.5 percent of the revenue for the Boston Public Schools. She also served on the federal Title I Negotiated Rulemaking Team for the Council of the Great City Schools during implementation of *No Child Left Behind*. Ms Harris's experience includes 14 years teaching art and English K-12 in Connecticut; a mixed year administering a new testing program for the Connecticut State Department of Education and writing case studies for the Kennedy School of Government; and a year developing policy for a gubernatorial candidate in Massachusetts and consulting in labor and work plan design issues related to administrative reorganizations in Massachusetts and New Jersey, and three years in central administration in personnel, finance and administration in Boston. Ms Harris is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, holds a Masters of Education from the University of Hartford, and has completed the course work and qualifying paper for a doctorate in Administration, Planning and Social Policy from Harvard Graduate School of Education.

### **Sharon Lewis**

Sharon Lewis is the Director of Research for the Council of the Great City Schools, where she is responsible for developing and operating a research program on the status

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and challenges of the nation's largest urban public school systems. Ms. Lewis maintains a comprehensive database on urban public schools and is considered a national expert on assessment. She has served as an international educational consultant to the U.S. Department of Defense schools, and has been a State of Michigan delegate to the Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of China. Ms. Lewis has served on numerous state and national committees including the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing; the National Academy of Sciences, NAEP Evaluation Committee; the National Academy of Sciences, Appropriate Use of Test Results Advisory Council, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Center for Educational Statistics Advisory Panel, the U.S. Congress Technical Advisory Board on Testing in Americas' Schools; the National Center for Education Study on the Inner Cities; and the Technical Review Committee of the Michigan Assessment Program. She also worked for 30 years in the Detroit Public Schools and served as its Assistant Superintendent for Research and School Reform.

### **Jane Rhyne**

Jane Rhyne is the Assistant Superintendent, Programs for Exceptional Children in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Charlotte, North Carolina. She is responsible for the coordination of the district wide program for over 14,000 students with disabilities, ages 3-21 years. In that capacity, she manages a 74 million dollar budget and provides leadership to the Exceptional Children Program related to the identification and placement of students, provision of services, and assurance of procedural safeguards. Dr. Rhyne has designed and implemented special education initiatives in the district that have been expanded to general education. These include a model for teacher support as well as an electronic system for the completion of paperwork. She has played an active role in the implementation of the district's comprehensive reading program, its Algebra I program, and its initiation of a Positive Behavior Instruction and Support (PBIS) system. Dr. Rhyne has also served as a principal, assistant principal and area coordinator for special education in the district. Prior to this, Dr. Rhyne worked in the Fairfax County, Virginia Public Schools where she was a special education program specialist and teacher. She has been an adjunct professor at Appalachian State University and Queens College and has also published professionally. Dr. Rhyne holds Ph.D. and M.Ed. degrees in special education from the University of Virginia and a B.A degree from Purdue University.

### **Jeff Simering**

Jeff Simering has been the Director of Legislative Services for the Council of the Great City Schools since 1994. Having been actively involved in the development of federal education legislation for over twenty years, Simering advises the 60 member coalition of Great City Schools on the implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education, and other federal laws. Prior to joining the Council, he was the principal of a consulting firm advising school districts and others on program development and implementation, as well as conducting government relations. Simering received a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Baltimore.

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### **Ron Stewart**

Ron Stewart serves as the Supervisor of State and Federal Programs for Columbus Public Schools. In 35 years as an educator, his career has included experiences as a teacher, high school principal, senior operations manager, state consultant, and district administrator. Immediately prior to joining Columbus Public Schools three years ago, Mr. Stewart was the associate director of Division of Federal Student Programs with the Ohio Department of Education. In that capacity, he was responsible for the daily operation of 9 statewide grants including the \$350 million Title I grant. He also served with the department in the as a senior consultant in the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education. In his work at Columbus Public Schools and in particular the implementation of *No Child Left Behind*, Mr. Stewart provided the leadership for the district to fully implement the Act during its first year. His knowledge and expertise permitted the district to build its own foundation rather than creating new infrastructure. He was recently elected a president of the Ohio Association of Administrators of State and Federal Education Programs that has a state membership of over 900 practitioners. Mr. Stewart completed his undergraduate studies at The Ohio State University and his graduate degree at Xavier University.

### **Denise Walston**

Denise Walston is the Senior Coordinator for Mathematics in the Norfolk Public Schools. She has held this post since 1994. She has overseen the district's dramatic improvement in math achievement scores since assuming this post. Ms. Walston is an active member of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics, and has served as president of the Tidewater Council of teachers of Mathematics. She also serves on a number of statewide assessment committees responsible for the development and oversight of Virginia's math standards and testing system. She has her undergraduate degree in mathematics from the University of North Carolina and master's degree in mathematics education from Old Dominion University. Ms. Walston has also taken extensive graduate training from Princeton and George Washington universities. She began her career as a high school math teacher in the Norfolk Public Schools.

**APPENDIX E: ABOUT THE COUNCIL**

**Council of the Great City Schools**

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 61 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. Its Board of Directors is composed of the Superintendent of Schools and one School Board member from each member city. An Executive Committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between Superintendents and School Board members, provides regular oversight of the 501(c)(3) organization. The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public education and assist its members in the improvement of leadership and instruction. The Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group convenes two major conferences each year; conducts studies on urban school conditions and trends; and operates ongoing networks of senior school district managers with responsibilities in such areas as federal programs, operations, finance, personnel, communications, research, technology, and others. The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, and has its headquarters in Washington, D.C.