

**Strategic
Planning
Assessment
Phase:**

**Results and
Key Findings
Report**

April 2018



**WILLIAMSBURG
JAMES CITY COUNTY**
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Overview



Purpose

From February through April 2018, The Valbrun Consulting Group (TVCG) conducted a comprehensive, current-state assessment of Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools (WJCCPS) as a first step toward developing the division's next strategic plan. This report highlights the key findings from the assessment and provides guidance on the most important areas of focus over the next five years to help move the division forward in its efforts to champion the needs of all students.

Methodology

The assessment began with an objective review of the division's current strategic plan and progress reports, performance data, instructional practices, strategic and operating documents, policies, external audits and reports, professional development data, information related to academic programs, climate and engagement survey results, and other publicly available information. The next phase of the assessment used surveys, facilitated work sessions and more than 30 focus groups to listen to a wide range of stakeholders – *from division employees, students and parents/families to School Board members, community members and local business, higher education and organizational leaders*. They shared their perspectives on:

- what's working well at WJCCPS,
- what can be improved upon,
- external trends that the division could or could further take advantage of to improve academic outcomes for all students, and
- outside factors that could hinder the division's ability to improve outcomes for all of its diverse learners.

Many stakeholders also shared their hopes for the future of WJCCPS.

It's important to note that no one piece of information gathered during the assessment phase tells the entire story or is more important than another. The Valbrun Consulting Group thoughtfully reviewed and equally considered all of the feedback to identify the overarching themes noted below. Findings from this report will be used to inform the development of goals and strategies for the next strategic plan.

STRENGTHS AND OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

Overall, Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools is a very good school division. All of its schools continue to meet the State Standards of Learning benchmarks and earn full accreditation with the Virginia department of Education. The percentage of students performing at proficient or advanced levels is 80% or higher across all tested areas, exceeding the state average. And, at 92.3%, the on-time graduation rate is among the highest in the state and exceeds the national average. In addition to these accomplishments, stakeholders within the division and throughout the community consistently touted high-quality teachers and instruction, community support and “the people” as other sources of deep pride. Employees working within and outside of schools were commonly described as “caring, passionate and highly dedicated.” These are foundational areas for any high-performing school division. Maintaining strength in these areas must be a core component in the design and development of the next strategic plan.

RECOMMENDED AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY AND FOCUS

To build on this momentum, TVCG used all of the assessment phase information to identify high-impact areas of opportunity that – if advanced with intention, quality and fidelity -- will help move WJCCPS and all of its students to even greater success over the next five years. These areas are highlighted below.

➤ **College and Career Readiness**

While college readiness for most students was noted as an overall strength, there is a clear expectation that WJCCPS will continue to raise the educational bar. They want all students to graduate with the knowledge, skills and competencies they will need to be successful in the rapidly changing world and workplace of tomorrow. Expectations include:

- nurturing critical thinking and reasoning skills, entrepreneurship, technological savvy, creativity and the ability to innovate in every student in every classroom
- offering vocational opportunities and experiences that meet the varied career interests of WJCCPS students and allow career-bound students to graduate certified (where appropriate) and ready to work
- expanding World Languages, International Baccalaureate and other magnet opportunities
- providing more tools and resources to help students better identify their interests and passions

➤ **Educational Equity: Helping All Students Succeed at High Levels**

As WJCCPS students and their learning needs become more diverse, the division must be even more intentional about how it allocates its resources to ensure all students have access to high-quality learning opportunities and environments. These resources include facilities, materials,

technology, operating dollars, capital funding and instructional and support staff. Feedback suggests an effective plan should strive to equitably:

- supply resources to support content and skill mastery for all students
- provide adequate learning spaces for all students
- address disparities in achievement among subgroups
- reduce overcrowding
- address aging facilities and ensure facilities support curriculum needs
- improve outreach and outcomes for economically disadvantaged students
- increase supports and programs for special needs and ESL/ELL students

➤ **Personalized, Culturally Responsive Learning Environments**

Preparing all WJCCPS students for future success starts by equipping every classroom with teachers who are highly proficient in differentiated instruction and can effectively engage students of all backgrounds. It also requires that every school is led by a high-quality principal who consistently promotes a culture of instructional excellence, collaboration and inclusion.

Areas of focus highlighted throughout the assessment phase included:

- a comprehensive plan to effectively recruit, retain and continuously strengthen high-quality teachers
- a long-term professional development plan for teachers and instructional support staff, including cultural proficiency PD and more teacher-developed PD and best-practice sharing
- high-quality leadership development for principals
- more and better curriculum development resources
- improved teacher evaluations and accountability methods

➤ **Culture, Morale and Internal Communications**

WJCCPS is a school division in transition. With years of steady student enrollment growth, it has evolved from a small school division to a more complex, mid-sized one. The division has also realized a significant amount of leadership and organizational change over the past few years. As such, many participants expressed numerous culture, process and internal communications challenges. While there are areas where morale appears strong, there are also areas where morale is low.

There is wide-ranging support for Superintendent Herron and her early efforts to begin addressing these challenges. She was referenced by many as a “breath of fresh air.” Going forward, to help support a high-functioning division, employees expect a greater degree of focus in the following areas:

- establishing a more vision, mission, core values and customer service-minded culture
- fostering a more proactive versus reactive culture
- clarity of roles and responsibilities
- more inclusive decision making
- better upfront planning – with the right people at the table -- to ensure initiatives are planned and implemented with fidelity

- more frequent and timely communication to ensure employees hear information from the division first (versus the news)
- better overall quality of communication, including the “why” behind decisions
- greater division-wide consistency/standardization of key processes *i.e. on-boarding of new employees*
- more professional development and career-progression opportunities for support staff
- more intentional succession planning

➤ **Community and Family Engagement**

Meeting the needs of all WJCCPS students will require the continued engagement and support of the entire Williamsburg-James City County community – *from parents, families, retirees and volunteers to local businesses, faith-based organizations and higher education partners*. Ideas shared to effectively and continuously engage these audiences included:

- increasing multi-lingual translation and interpretation supports for schools
- making the website more user-friendly and engaging
- expanding partnerships to create more vocational opportunities and experiences for students
- establishing opportunities for authentic, two-way dialogue with community members who reflect the full range of families served by the division

➤ **Physical, Social and Emotional Safety**

Ensuring every WJCCPS environment is a place where students and staff feel physically, socially and emotionally safe was a top priority for all stakeholders. Recent reports of gun violence in schools across the country and an increasing national climate of discord have contributed to a heightened sense of anxiety for students, families and staff members. While safety was considered an overall strength, it was clear from respondents that the status quo will not be sufficient moving forward. Areas of opportunity include:

- more social-emotional supports, character development and bullying prevention efforts
- greater consistency in implementing protocols for gaining access to schools
- adding more school psychologists and social workers
- better supports and alternatives for students with significant disciplinary challenges
- more consistent allocation of security personnel across schools
- continued focus on positive behavioral interventions such as PBIS and MTSS

HOPES FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Below are comments representing the range of hopes for WJCCPS.

Over the next five years, I hope WJCCPS:

- “is a place where all students are academically successful”
- “has seen real movement in the opportunity gap”

- “will be brave enough to look at our data for all of our children and move the needle for all of our kids”
- “has moved to an individual-based education that brings out the individual uniqueness of each student”
- “provides more opportunities for students to better prepare them for college, a job or any position they want to pursue”
- “will have a more updated approach to Special ED and inclusion practices”
- “will adopt the latest in innovative teaching strategies and abandon what makes us comfortable (old-school strategies)”
- “is a place where all students have access to appropriate technology to support their learning and teachers who are comfortable using it”
- offers “more virtual classes and trade schools”
- pursues “more centralization of policies, procedures...”
- promotes “shared leadership that is focused on fewer things and based on authentic relationships”
- better “scales and replicates successful programs”
- emphasizes “more consistent discipline procedures across the division and more planning time”
- advances a “growth mindset that embraces ongoing collaboration/innovation”
- “increases communication and collaboration between schools and Central Office”