

Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools

Five Year Strategic Plan

Interim Report



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Executive Summary

The Williamsburg-James City County School Division (WJCC) contracted with PCG Education to facilitate its development of a five-year strategic plan that reflects the school board's emphasis on establishing and supporting a premier school system. The process of developing the Strategic Plan involves two phases. During the first phase, the opinions, understandings, perceptions, and interests of the community, the professionals, and the students were collected. Specifically, a profile of the community's perception of current conditions and expectations for the future were developed.

This document comprises the *Interim Report*, a milestone in the development of the Five Year Strategic Plan. In this document, PCG Education has collated and analyzed the findings of an intensive three-month data collection period across the division, gathering information from focus groups, community forums, and online surveys. This document contains not only a summary of the collected data, but also draws and expands upon ten key themes that have emerged repeatedly throughout this process. In summary the two phases are:

Phase One PCG Education conducted data collection and analysis through multiple channels across the Division to identify major themes and related areas of potential focus in the resulting five year strategic plan.

Phase Two Through a facilitated process, WJCC Strategic Plan Steering Committee members will review the analysis of data from Phase 1 to establish a set of district priorities and goals. These priorities and goals will be made available for public review. WJCC professionals will develop goals into action plans.

The outcome of this two-part process will yield a five-year strategic plan that will shape the future of the WJCC public schools consistent with the vision and expectations of the community. Ultimately, the final plan should reflect the bold goals established and supported by the community.

PHASE ONE Data collection and analysis was carried out over several months in the fall of 2011. In addition to focus groups, community forums, and individual interviews, over 2000 surveys were submitted. Students, teachers, parents, community members, school administrators, district administrators participated in the process.

Data Collection	Number
Online Surveys	2000+
Teacher Surveys	90
Focus Groups and Community Forums	24
Interviews	8
School and District Capacity Profiles	15

Please note that Teachers who participated in the completion of School Capacity Profiles were offered an opportunity to submit an exit survey, which shared some but not all of the questions used in the publicly posted Online Survey.



KEY FINDINGS Ten major themes emerged from the data.

1. **WJCC community members, inclusive of professionals and students, desire to have a voice in the direction of the schools.**
2. **WJCC community members would like to see a tighter relationship between the school division and the community, making use of the many and varied community resources to expand the opportunities for students.**
3. **Clear, understandable evidence should shape and inform practices.**
4. **Effective instructional practices are the key to achieving desired student outcomes.**
5. **The many professionals who come together to shape the learning experience are integral to the success of students.**
6. **Students' discovery and development through worthwhile learning experiences are shaped at the convergence of programs and professionals.**
7. **WJCC must live within available resources while maximizing the resources available, including consideration for personnel, capital improvements, and financial.**
8. **A safe and orderly school is one in which there is a welcoming culture and all members, students, staff and school communities are committed to maintaining safe, caring and orderly buildings for ALL who enter.**
9. **In an effort to address culture, WJCC will need to address cultural issues and enhance communications, establishing a shared set of expectations and behaviors.**
10. **The ultimate goal is to provide students with opportunities to explore and experience their world in meaningful ways**

Each of the themes suggests areas for further study and consideration in Phase Two of this project. These themes are not the strategic plan itself, but provide direction for consideration in building out the plan in Phase Two.

PHASE TWO The second half of this project will take place from February to June, 2012. In this phase, the data from Phase One will be reviewed and considered by the Strategic Plan Steering Committee so that goals and priorities can be established and distributed for broader feedback. Working in close concert with members of the steering committee, members of the professional staff will help to identify the specific strategies and actions necessary to accomplish the goals over the next five years. The goals, strategies, and specific steps to accomplish these will be woven together to create a seamless five-year strategic plan.



I. INTRODUCTION

The Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools (WJCC) seeks to develop a five-year strategic plan that addresses the economic and demographic landscape within and beyond the borders of WJCC. Specifically, the school division's professional and elected leadership seek to address the realities of economic globalization in preparing students for life within and beyond their academic development. Moreover, the leadership has invited input from the many constituents of Williamsburg and James City County, including, but not limited to students, educators, parents, civic and business leaders, military personnel, and community organizations. This participatory approach is an example of applying transformational leadership in which there is a willingness and desire to include all people in a collaborative process for problem solving and visioning the future. The expressed desire to create an inclusive, collaborative process can be found in the text of the Request for Proposal 11-0036, issued by WJCC in June, 2011.

In the context of the goals established by the board of WJCC, this effort can be seen as a way for schools to address the individual needs of its students and the collective needs of its community and for the system to become a premier school division. Currently, the school division is driven by four key priorities:

- **Student Achievement:** Instruction, student learning and the opportunity for all students to meet and exceed standards will be driven by a focus on defining and supporting unique individual student learning needs.
- **Environment For Learning:** Educationally sound, safe and healthy environments will promote excellence in teaching and the potential for learning throughout the school division.
- **Communication and Relationships:** The Board will foster and promote an atmosphere of collaboration with all constituents, and establish positive working relationships amongst themselves as well as district administration, staff, community, and families.
- **Strategic Planning:** The Board, in tandem with staff, families and community, will create a multi-year, measurable, and actionable strategic plan that ensures the continuous improvement of the school division.

The guiding principles of the project are to generate broad consensus, secure support across stakeholder groups, and mine the capacities of staff and community members to re-imagine a WJCC educational system that will provide a motivating, achievement-oriented experience for all students, staff, parents, and community members. At the conclusion of the strategic planning period (2011-2012 academic year), WJCC will have a five-year strategic plan that provides the means to address the goals and aspirations of the community within the realities of existing and projected resources. The five-year strategic plan will speak to both the broad goals and actions required to attain them.



Project Overview

The project is divided into two phases:

Phase 1: Data collection and analysis.

Staff, students, and the community-at-large participated in a data collection process designed to be inclusive, in which they discussed the current state of education in Williamsburg and James City County and shared their ideas for their vision of the future of teaching and learning as well as their expectations of attributes of WJCC students. PCG Education consultants analyzed and synthesized the resulting data.

Phase 2: Prioritization, action-plans development, and 5-Year Strategic Plan completion.

PCG Education will facilitate in the examination of:

- The current state of teaching and learning in WJCC
- What attributes do students develop as a result of their WJCC educational experience
- How staff, parents, and the community-at-large can participate in the facilitation of the development of these skills and competencies

During the first phase, significant efforts were made to engage a diverse cross-section of representatives of the community to ensure that multiple perspectives were reflected. WJCC offered a range of opportunities for individuals to share their ideas about education and its intersection with the community. PCG Education examined these data for common and divergent ideas amongst stakeholders.

Going forward, PCG consultants will work with Division employees, leadership, and the Strategic Plan Steering Committee to identify specific changes that must occur to achieve the vision and to address the priorities that emerged from the initial data collected. Throughout this phase, WJCC leadership will explore those achievable elements that are within the realm of control of the school division to make modifications, improvements, and adjustments, and that will collectively bring about the desired outcomes.

The Five-Year Strategic Plan will be designed to provide guidance to WJCC in enacting their vision and outlook for the future of education that will best serve the needs of all students. Data from the current state, as detailed in this report, will be referred to frequently as the goals, and action plans are developed. For instance, in the development of action plans will consider current conditions (i.e., “what is”) in an effort to establish bold goals for moving forward (e.g., “what can be”). From these data will arise an opportunity to establish goals and the steps necessary to achieve them.

The following elements will be included in the Five-Year Strategic Plan:

- An overall statement of purpose and vision



- A list of change elements and/or goals that are consistent with achieving the overall vision (i.e., collectively these goals are the model for change that achieve the broader vision)
- Strategies necessary for the realization of the goals
- Action steps necessary for the realization of the strategies
- Expected timelines for achieving the goals, strategies and action steps
- Individual(s) responsible for ensuring that a given component is executed
- Resources required for the execution of a given component
- Recommended best-practice or high yield processes for action steps
- Measures of success
- A schedule with dates at which progress towards realizing the goal will be reviewed
- Process for evaluating and revising action steps and goals

Contextualizing the Interim Report

This report represents the work of Phase 1. It documents the current conditions as perceived and represented by students, staff, community members, et al. It is a snapshot of current conditions, both perceived and real, and represents a starting point on the pathway to developing a vision for the future and a way of achieving that vision. The data here are a collection of individual and groups reflecting on current and possible conditions for the schools. PCG Education consultants catalogued these into categories of which they appeared to represent. From these categories and themes, a vision and a set of strategic goals can arise.

The themes and priorities detailed in this report document areas that stakeholders identified as important for the division to consider as it works to reflect the needs and desires of the WJCC students and extended community. They are representative of the conditions for change, namely the practices and processes that need to be clarified, expanded, modified, eliminated, or created, in order for WJCC to enact its vision of future that is responsive to an ever-changing world.

The Williamsburg-James City County Community

The data represented below are drawn from members of the WJCC community, which is rich in history and tradition. Founded by the earliest English settlers, WJCC is the birthplace of this nation and the republic. The Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools serve the combined communities of the city of Williamsburg and the county of James City. Steeped in history, WJCC was among the first areas settled in the New World, including Jamestown and Williamsburg.

Located on the Virginia Peninsula, the independent city of Williamsburg and James City County (WJCC) are home to a community of 81,077 residents. It is neighbored by three other independent cities: Newport News (180,719), Hampton (137,436), Poquoson (12,150), and York County (65,464). Home to numerous historic sites and modern theme parks, WJCC is one of the



most popular tourist destinations in the state and attracts over 4 million visitors annually. Due to its temperate climate, abundance of cultural offerings, and wide-ranging recreational facilities, WJCC also attracts retirement communities and is home to a sizable population of retirees (19% vs 12% for all of Virginia). In terms of racial demographics, the WJCC region is generally less diverse than the state average. According to the 2010 census, the WJCC population is 78% White (State avg. 69%), 14% African-American (State avg. 19%), 3% Asian-American (State avg. 6%), and 3% multi-racial. Additionally, about 5% of the population identifies as Latino or Hispanic.

II. DATA OVERVIEW

Strategic Planning in the Context of Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools

WJCC's development of a strategic plan is being conducted over the 2011-2012 academic year. The WJCC leadership decided early to develop a five-year strategic plan that would reflect the professional and communities' vision for the future of the public schools. Thus, broad and significant stakeholder involvement was sought early and remains a priority throughout the project. Although the strategic plan is designed to focus on the next five years, 2012-2017, it must also reflect a longer vision for the future of WJCC students, its professionals, schools, and the overall WJCC community. Therefore, the strategic plan will be a living document, referenced and monitored frequently in addition to being adjusted to reflect the most current conditions without compromising the larger vision.

Similar to other school divisions, WJCC school division has developed strategic plans in the past. Many such documents exist in this community, the Commonwealth and across the nation. The goal is to develop a plan that is distinct from prior plans in the following subtle, yet significant, ways:

- First, the newly developed plan is conceived of and brought to life by a community. By emphasizing a collaborative and inclusive process, the Division and School Board hopes to enlist the support of the entire WJCC community. Moreover, the plan should reflect those particulars that make Williamsburg and James City County unique—it should have a local flavor.
- Second, the strategic plan should provide clear direction to individuals and groups around expectations, actions, and accountability. This level of concrete detail enhances the opportunity for transparency and should foster the pursuit of the goals and actions within the plan.
- Third, the plan is fluid and will be delivered in an electronic format for easy distribution. By making the plan widely available, the Division and the School Board seeks to include



the community in enacting the plan and holding the division and community accountable.

Ultimately, the goal is to move this strategic plan off the shelf as an historical artifact and into the hands of the practitioners and community members who will collectively enact its contents.

III. DATA COLLECTION/METHODOLOGY

Input from a broad and representative stakeholder group was the goal of the data collection effort and as such was designed to provide any WJCC student, parent, staff or community member ample opportunity to have their individual voice heard in this process. Input was captured from stakeholder groups in numerous distinct ways.

As part of the formal data collection process, PCG consultants conducted a series of stakeholder focus groups. In order to address the needs of many others who could not be included in the Focus Group presentations, there was a need to provide a less formal but more robust mechanism for accepting input. Consequently, online and paper based surveys, an open email link from the division web site and open, public community forums were also arranged. Data were collected and recorded as outlined below.

Focus Groups

Each group was chosen by the division and attended, at pre-scheduled meetings times that were held, for the most part, at division offices. Attendees were presented with a series of questions that focused on what the future view of the division would be when students were being fully and truly served in a meaningful way. Frequently, attendees were prompted for additional information, and comments were probed for deeper analysis and causative beliefs when and where appropriate.¹ In most sessions, focus group audio comments were recorded with the prior knowledge and approval of the groups and with the understanding that this was done to capture conversations and content, rather than to identify a particular speaker. In addition, comments were captured through a process of systematic note taking by PCG staff. Subsequently, these notes have been summarized and categorized by similarities of content and on repeated themes as they emerged. While in all cases WJCC administrative staff welcomed focus group guests to the building and process, the meetings were attended by PCG staff and focus group attendees only and no WJCC administration staff attended the information gathering sessions unless they were formally a part of the focus group.

- **Community Focus Groups** – The report is based on the input of approximately eighteen (18) distinct community based focus groups, including 4-groups dedicated solely to WJCC professional educators and support personnel, over the period of Phase 1. These included

¹ See Appendix B for Sample Question sets and Focus Group Protocol



six (6) groups added in response to expressed concerns that the initial selection of groups was not comprehensive enough to address the voices of the entire community.

- **Student Focus Groups** – The report is based on the input of three (3) student-based focus groups, one from each of three division high schools.
- **Interviews** – PCG consultants met with each of the Division board members as well as several City Council members and a County Supervisor to discuss their thoughts on the future of education in WJCC. These 30-45 minute interviews were not audio recorded, but notes were analyzed for incorporation in this report.

Community-wide / Open Access Input

Online / Paper Surveys – An online survey or questionnaire was developed in consultation with the WJCC Strategic Planning Steering Committee and made available via a link on the Strategic Planning page of the Division web site². In addition, paper copies of the survey were made available and distributed for those members of the community who did not have access to provide information electronically or who simply preferred a pen and paper method. The survey was also translated to Spanish and posted to the Division web site along with the availability of paper copies as well.

Information and data collected from the survey will be handled as a separate entity and compared to the data collected from all other collection methods.

Response to link on web site – A link was posted to the WJCC Strategic Planning page on the Division web site to provide an opportunity for any individuals who wished not to participate in the survey but wanted to specifically comment on only one thing but in greater detail. Entries from this method were emailed directly to PCG staff and all submissions were provided with a response from PCG staff. When appropriate, this information was also included and used in determining the themes and areas of concern in this report.

Community forums – Public forums were held on three different (3) occasions. While the purpose of the community forums was to build awareness of the project, its openness, and the associated procedures, they also served as a way in which to gather additional data. In response to the reaction of the first community forum (Monday, November 7), PCG consultants made several modifications to the work. As previously noted, six focus groups and two community forums were added to address the concerns of the community members. Moreover, the subsequent community forums were redesigned to provide community members time to express their specific concerns and ideas for the future of the WJCC schools and students. While the community forums were not audio recorded, PCG staff made notes of the comments and inputs for consideration in concert with the other information collected in the process.

² Link to the WJCC Strategic Plan site:
<http://www.wjcc.k12.va.us/content/admin/superintendent/premier/index.html>



School-Specific Input

School Capacity/Climate Survey

PCG Education facilitated three meetings and met with school leadership teams (principals and their staff) from each school to complete a reflective survey of current and desired practices. School leadership teams were asked to comment on the degree to which their school cultures support desired teaching and learning practices, as measured by teacher beliefs and the degree to which its classrooms have been able to foster student acquisition of desired competencies. Further, teams were asked to comment on the degree to which school policies; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and resources collectively support personalized learning and the development of desired attributes. Finally, teams were asked to rate the type of, and level of need for, professional development experiences.

District Capacity Profile

A similar task was started with the Division Leadership Team. The profile was facilitated by a PCG Education consultant and asked central administrators to comment on the leadership's capacity to initiate and implement their ideas for the future. They were also asked to clarify the extent to which the division has delineated its expectations for student-centered learning and the school-based practices that are capable of facilitating the implementation of the initiative, as well as the degree to which its policies and resource allocations reflect the division's expectations. In summary, they were asked to identify division strengths and challenges.



IV. EMERGING THEMES

Over the course of three months, PCG collected and documented information from focus groups, surveys, school capacity profiles, individual contributions, and interviews. PCG reviewed the data to develop a set of common themes. When possible PCG quantified data, but many of the questions were open-ended, focused on developing a vision of the future of the WJCC schools. Thus, some data are represented quantitatively, while others are represented with excerpted statements from the collected data. While PCG ultimately identified sufficient evidence to describe ten unique categories, the categories are related to one another and in some cases may even overlap to a degree. This means that a statement categorized by one theme might also appropriately fit within another.

It must be understood that while the themes suggest priorities or areas of focus for the strategic plan, they do not provide direction for next steps or what must change. In the planning process that follows the release of this report (Phase 2), steering committee members, the leadership team, and the professional staff will have an opportunity to shape the goals that are established and the actions required to pursue these as they relate to the overall vision for the school division³. In other words, the identified themes provide areas for consideration in developing the strategic plan; they are not the strategic plan itself. Similarly, some areas of interest and themes might not be reflected in the strategic plan, while the process allows for the exploration and inclusion of others.

The following themes—represented in alphabetic order—were prevalent and consistently addressed across the data:

- Communication
- Community Engagement
- Data
- Instructional Practices
- Professionalism
- Program
- Resources
- Safe Orderly Environment
- School / Division Culture / Trust
- Student Engagement

On the following pages, each of these themes is explored in greater detail and illustrated through examples of data collected during the fall of 2011. The examples are not meant to be

³ At various times throughout Phase 2, information will be distributed to the community at large. At times, the process will call for feedback from all stakeholders to ensure that the process is on track and meeting the needs of the students of the WJCC.



exhaustive, but to exemplify the attitudes, expectations, and current practices as expressed by stakeholders through multiple data sources.



Communication

THEME 1: *WJCC community members, inclusive of professionals and students, desire to have a voice in the direction of the schools. Moreover, they wish to shape a more transparent and mutually respectful environment in which ideas and information are shared openly.*

Advancements in technology over the last 30 years have transformed the way in which information is shaped and shared. Communication is the sharing of accurate and timely information. In prior generations, there were not always clear pathways in which the delivery of information from one group to another (e.g., teacher to student; school to home; school to community) could respond or demonstrate understanding. Today, we are in a position to do more to ensure the clarity of message(s), evaluate for understanding and invite dialogue amongst the many stakeholders in the community.

Repeatedly, members of the professional staff, the parents, and the community members expressed variations of “improve communication.” This is best captured in a survey response,

“I find that the communications are not forthcoming and are very guarded leaving parents to fill in the blanks with hear-say.”

While WJCC employs several widely used and recognized methods to communicate with stakeholders, there appears to be an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of communications.

Similarly, school personnel are seeking greater clarity and opportunity to engage in a collaborative process with their administrators and one another. While this might also fit into the professional theme, the emphasis by some participants was clearly on how decisions are made and communicated. For example, school personnel and students raised questions about how decisions were made. Specifically, teachers discussed the adoption of pedagogical approaches and purchasing of materials without seeking their input. Within the educator focus group, teachers voiced a frustration of their lack of being included in the decision making process:

“Consulting with the teachers is a requirement...much time and money was spent but (the decisions were) done at the central office”

As a result, the teachers express concern that they were left to consume messaging from central office and interpret to the best of their ability. This can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. While formal communication mechanisms may exist (e.g., email, memos, Division website), some constituents expressed concern about the timeliness and accuracy of such communication. For example, teachers want clear and direct communication so that important dates and times are not missed or miscommunicated. For example, the teachers want



and believe the community would benefit from increased communication about where and how to obtain

“a calendar saying when testing is, when report cards are going out, parent teacher meetings are”

When examining the survey data on communication, however, a slightly different picture emerges. That is, about two thirds of the parents who completed the survey expressed satisfaction with the level of communication about their child, their school, and the school division. Nevertheless, communication remains a concern for the remaining one third. The communication theme is not limited to its role in operating schools, but extends to all of the interactions one might expect in a social environment. For example, communication is premised on the idea of expressing ideas in an atmosphere of mutual respect. This means students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members engage in an environment in which multiple voices and ideas are invited to participate and can be heard. Among the issues raised by students was a sense that they are frustrated by the inability to engage the adults in a conversation.

“Better communication between the admin and the students; admin and students are not treating one another with mutual respect.”

Communication skills are a priority attribute that the community and professionals expect students to develop and apply in the school environment and within the community. Specifically, students need to learn how to consume, craft, create, and respond to information in a respectful way and atmosphere. Perhaps, the best summary of communication as a theme came from a community group suggesting that they can do more for the schools if asked,

“If WJCC communicated and asked, we could offer a network of supports.”



Community Engagement

THEME 2: *WJCC community members would like to see a tighter relationship between the school division and the community, making use of the many and varied community resources to expand the opportunities for students. Communities that are inclusive of all its members provide the means to make people feel part of something important and relevant.*

An extension of the communication theme is the notion of community engagement. When considering the importance of communication and community engagement, the WJCC Division can inform, collaborate with, and involve the extensive stakeholder network within the community. In addition to benefiting the students, a close relationship with the community serves to improve trust amongst constituents. This sentiment was captured in a community-based focus group,

“trust, transparency, building relationships with community and parents” should be a conversation and supported by “reach(ing) out to parents who feel disenfranchised.”

By drawing the community and school division closer together, there could be a greater attention to developing meaningful community connections. As one responder summarized,

“more community involvement—students (become) more connected to their schools.”

The principle of a coordinated community effort also recognizes that meaningful learning occurs outside of the classroom.

“Kids learn at home and learn at school and we are too focused on what happens at school. Parental involvement in the learning process is a critical as what happens in the classroom. Students come to school ready to learn....a big thing. If our goal is this...we need to look at this as a community. Once you know the goal then you can start to measure. Society focuses too much on the teachers but not enough on what happens outside of the school.”

Another reason to consider involving the community is the resources that are currently provided and could be provided in the future. Among those resources are financial considerations. The community funds public education. If the strategic plan is to be successful, it must be shared with and supported by the community. In addition, a number of participants pointed to the vast resources that the community could provide in the way of experienced individuals with whom students, parents, and the school division might benefit. One such suggestion included doing more to leverage the local resources,

“make better use of the college students” and retirees.



For example, it was suggested that the business acumen of local business leaders and retirees could be used to benefit the division by

“applying business expertise in the schools”

and could be helpful to students in learning by being engaged in authentic, “real world” projects and settings.

Additionally, it was suggested that since schools (buildings) serve as the central meeting points in many WJCC communities, that more can be done to welcome in those individuals who seek a place to develop academically, socially, etc. For example, it was suggested that the community could help tackle adult literacy, which in turn could benefit their child’s development. While this is already being done in some WJCC school settings, it was felt that a more comprehensive, division wide approach would be beneficial.

According to Henderson (2002)⁴, “when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and like school more.” Moreover, when community, home, and school establish a set of shared values, including high aspirations and expectations, these are more likely to be pursued with the involvement of all concerned. This is not to minimize the complexity of the issue of community involvement. The data suggest that while there is a desire to draw tighter relationships between the community and the school,

“we often don’t know where to begin” in reaching out to or into the schools. The school division “needs more organization to access the many resources in the community.”

Any community-related goal needs to take into account both the practical elements of how best to engage the community and then to maintain a steady meaningful relationship based upon current staffing, building and space requirements.

⁴ **A New Wave of Evidence**, a report from Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (2002)
<http://www.nea.org/tools/17360.htm>



Data

THEME 3: Today's schools are functioning in a time of unprecedented levels of accountability. Be it from Federal or State scrutiny or just the day-to-day justification of instructional decisions or expenditures, community members, educators, parents and students are demanding the clear, understandable evidence that will instill confidence in the education of the community's youth.

It comes as no surprise to anyone that education, like most human endeavors, is a data driven industry. Whether it is a matter of achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (per federal requirements) in order to secure additional or extended funding or simply a measure of our ultimate success in graduating a greater percentage of students this year than last, eventually, most, if not all, educational roads lead back to the data. While frequently maligned as not necessary or with the ever popular "statisticians can make the data say anything you want it to" educators can hardly escape the stark glare of the empirical evidence. Popular catch phrases like "data driven," "results oriented," "evidence-based," and "intelligent accountability" give rise to the understanding that we cannot live without the use of some kind of data to link performance to program or instructional efficacy.

Within the focus groups, surveys, and emails received, there appeared to be support for using data, while de-emphasizing the VA Standards of Learning (VSOL) assessment as the driving element of education. For example in one parent's email,

"(I) encourage use of research-based practice in all aspects of education, including selection of curricula, engagement in professional development, and management of school discipline...A philosophy of evidence-based decision making should be modeled throughout the system."

The dual nature of data was clearly borne out in the course of data gathering. For example, participants willingly shared statistics on various topics to selectively enhance, support or reject a tenet or belief. Not surprisingly, data can be seen from many perspectives. While data was not the most popular of themes, it remains integral to understanding our students, our schools, and our plan. Data are the way in which popular and unpopular arguments in which emotional responses are elicited can be considered. Such is the nature of using data in education and this fact only serves to further highlight the "double edged" nature of the element.



There was a general acceptance of the need for attention to data with statements from focus group members such as:

“Have your numbers say what you say you are doing”

“Milestones and accountability - measurable with accountability - delta will determine programs that work”

In the end, WJCC will need to review the mechanisms in place for the timely collection, monitoring and consistent communication of meaningful data that will drive not only decision making when the results are good but also course corrections when the data does not tell the story that is desired. Of course, a key to the successful use of data is its selection. That is, it will be imperative for any data-related goal to consider the appropriateness of the data. Moreover, participants expressed the need to use data as the way in which to hold the Division accountable for accomplishing the goals in the five-year strategic plan. The focus on data, however, contrasted with a general sentiment of overly focusing on a single metric, the Standards of Learning statewide exam. So while a number of participants were encouraging the examination of data for purposes of making informed decisions, they also advocated reducing the attention paid to the SOL exam.

“(We need) milestones and accountability—what do we want to achieve by when.”



Instructional Practices

THEME 4: Effective instructional practices are the key to achieving desired student outcomes. These practices should apply sound principles of learning, should be culturally responsive, and should be considerate of the holistic development of the child.

Every great educational idea eventually boils down to what happens in the classroom and at the intersection of interaction between teacher and learner, which should not be interpreted strictly as the interaction between adult and child. The moment of learning is guided or controlled by the teacher's designated or selected instructional practices that will make for meaningful learning experiences for an individual or group of students. Instructional practices are the tools of the trade and the precision and skill with which they are used are the measure of the craftsman who wields them.

Instructional practices refer to the selected activities and strategies chosen, for the most part, by the teacher, and designed to not only engage each student but also ensure that all students for whom the lesson was designed and delivered meet the desired outcome. A well-chosen instructional strategy will allow each student to demonstrate learning in a manner appropriate to their preferred learning style or needs, recognize that every student learns at a different pace, ensure that there is deep and rich understanding of the content, and above all, allow the teacher to know when a student is NOT mastering the content in a timely fashion in order to make adjustments to the delivery and course correct mid-stream.

Across the data collected, students, parents, professionals within the schools expressed an expectation that teaching is expected to be able to deal effectively with every different learning style and need of every student in classrooms, which stands in contrast to some of the realities of the classroom. For example, many complained that such a goal would be easier met in smaller classes, with fewer behavioral issues, and with better-aligned content to areas of interest and ability. Some of the comments that demonstrate the need to revisit the instructional practices (and resources) as expressed by teachers, parents, and students include:

"Level the learning so kids could be working at different levels and still working on the same projects"

"A biology sheet used recently was from the 60s!"

"A more divergent thinking approach would be welcomed"

"Look at other ways to educate - online, non-traditional methods, lengthen the year - it's a partnership but it is a transformation, social, academic, awareness of self"



“Educate the whole child for every child. Sooner they learn their strengths and the strengths are nurtured, it builds confidence and this leads to success”

“Combine math and science to give purpose”

“Replace textbooks with a personal technological device”

“Access to technology for students who may not have one at home” (check out one for the year)

“PE—Why not allow the afterschool sports count so that students can find more academic time? Band counts as an art.”

“Don’t push kids through the system; allow them to meet the standards”

Embedded in these statements is a request for more personalized learning that can be more flexible, acknowledging an increasing demand for anywhere, anytime learning.

Added to this is the expectation that all of those students will achieve at higher levels of performance than the previous year with the perception at least that there is an ever decreasing control of the content of the curriculum and the time to deliver it. The teachers expressed their concern that each teacher is expected to have an overflowing toolbox of instructional strategies that reflects the latest and most up to date research on brain-based learning, emerging technologies, special education developments and State and Federal legislations. For teachers, centralized directives on material and pedagogical adoptions further complicate the issue of developing best practices when they feel they lack the authority to do so.

What emerges from the data is a sense that...

- 1) Teachers are working extremely hard with the resources available
- 2) Instructional practices should be modified to better engage and enlighten the students

The perceived gap between effort (1) and expectation (2) needs to be examined as part of the goal development. Going forward in Phase 2 of the Strategic Planning process, it will be integral to bridge the gap between the expectations for students and what is being delivered in the classrooms of WJCC. Efforts in this regard will not only produce positive results for students it will also improve working conditions for staff and serve to support parents and the community as well.



Professionalism

THEME 5: The many professionals who come together to shape the learning experience are integral to the success of students. Successful organizations are those where every member of the staff, no matter the position, go about their day-to-day roles in a professional manner and who focus on the emotional, social, and academic development of each and every child.

Notwithstanding the preceding discussion about Instructional Practices, the notion of professionalism transcends the actual activities of a classroom or what happens in the office of an administrator. Professionalism is the sum of character, attitude, competency, and commitment. It is common to refer to teachers, for example, as a group of professionals in the sense that they all possess professional credentials, which enable them to be licensed to teach in the state. Although the two are related, however, based on the input from focus groups, professionalism used in this context was about the former as opposed to the latter.

A basic perception of Professionalism for the WJCC seemed to have at its core an understanding that there was a balance between concepts of job competence, in the case of a teacher subject matter expertise, an appreciation for standards of performance and conduct for oneself and for students and others, and holding high expectations again for self, students and others.

Throughout the data there are examples of professional tension. These tensions arose primarily as a result of communication and trust issues. For example, one teacher's aide suggested that she had become fearful of sharing ideas with her teacher since she was viewed as "lesser" despite having years of professional experiences before "retiring" to a teacher's aide position. Similarly, teachers expressed frustration of the lack of openness between the teaching staff and the administrators.

"How do [central administrators] plan if [they] don't know what is going on? Then [they] need to find out. Get into schools, classrooms and have focus groups"

Another teacher noted that despite difficult financial times, central office is able to find funds for perceived pet projects—including the development of the strategic plan.

"Money to be found, but God knows where it came from."

Professionals along the continuum expressed concerns that any attempt to do something outside the norm might result in punitive retribution from others. Some professionals expressed concern that the fear extends beyond just professional practices, but includes issue related to race and sexual preference. It was noted for example, *"Teachers fearful of being fired as a result of their sexual preferences."*



Students, parents, and teachers also expressed a concern that a myriad of factors, including an emphasis on content “coverage” and attending to large class size led to a less fulfilling professional and therefore learning experience. For example, a student offered,

“High School Chemistry class – I had to act like I got it but didn't – I felt belittled” if I asked for clarification.

While a parent offered,

“My daughter in junior year in a good school - taking geometry - average grade in the class was a D and told it was the parent's problem,”

which was confirmed by one teacher who stated it this way,

“We all start with the best of intentions but fall back to old ways”

It is not hard to imagine how a series of events of this type would lead to a reduction in the confidence in the service provided by an individual or system as a whole. As a next step, goals related to professionalism, need to recognize the significant contributions of the professionals, while rebuilding a level of confidence in the activities of the WJCC as a division and to find avenues to ensure that that is the norm for all staff members. As stated by several teachers, the professionalism goals will need to address:

“Keeping teachers and encouraging them to develop professionally” because “the ones who love their jobs and subjects have made a tremendous impact on students”



Program

THEME 6: From an educational perspective, if students are the focus of the endeavor, then program is the mechanism by which the energies of the organization are delivered to the students. Students' discovery and development through worthwhile learning experiences are shaped at the convergence of programs and professionals. In a time of steadily dwindling resources, the selection and implementation of effective and accessible programs is now and will remain integral to the successful education of WJCC students. As a result, the strategic planning process must address the need for programs that best meet the needs of students and the communities of the WJCC.

The data suggests an expectation that the programs of study be shaped to the interests and needs of students. Contrasting the way in which school is organized in which all students are exposed to roughly the same instructional content over similar periods of time, community members, students, and division staff all appealed for programs that 1) reflected the interest of individuals, 2) attended to the development of students, offering both basic and enriched activities, and 3) related to the world in which students live. Moreover, programming needs to be inclusive of all students and treat each with respect for his/her needs.

One teacher suggested the schools focus on developing

“individual learning plans—building the plan for the student.”

Community members shared this sentiment when suggesting that the course selections at the high school be designed with the students in mind, rather than just the adults. Specifically, the suggestion was that course selection be based on interests to

“provide students with the opportunity to recognize and develop their potential.”

This idea was reinforced by high school students who questioned the uniformity of the course expectations without regard for areas of interest or aptitude. A student suggested that requiring that all students take the same core subjects doesn't make sense, but it might be better to offer alternatives within an area of study.

Repeatedly, participants pointed to the futility of preparing everyone for a college education, when it is clearly not the direction everyone will go. It was suggested in several settings that the WJCC system might consider offering more technical and career-oriented opportunities. In this same context, it was suggested that a relationship with the local community college, in which students can earn their high school diploma while working toward their associate degree, might also benefit many of the disenfranchised students.



Community members, parents, students, and educators noted that there are limited opportunities for students pursuing something in the career or technical fields. It was noted repeatedly that students wishing to pursue vocational education needed to enroll in a program that is a considerable distance from the WJCC community. The perception is that vocational, career, and technical educational options might be receiving less attention and fewer resources than college preparatory programs. These concerns might be compounded by miscommunication and misunderstandings about programs available. One parent expressed this,

“Vocational Tech programs are not available - they are being cut despite knowing that this is what we should be doing.”

Offering a variety of opportunities also means examining the scheduling, transportation, and course distribution to understand how these external forces shape the programs. Examples included scheduling conflicts with class types, limited availability of AP, art, music, and inadequate transportation to get to alternate campuses.

Community members and parents emphasized the need to develop citizenship skills and interpersonal communication skills. On the matter of the civics, it was suggested that students have a greater sense of their civic responsibility and democratic process.

“Civics leads to enthusiasm...We need to provide students with the opportunity to recognize and develop to their potential.”

One such participant suggested that the schools do more to teach students the soft skills of success:

“Be here, be on time, be accountable, productive, be in the workplace.”

When examining the many ideas and suggestion that converge around program, it becomes clear that school serves many functions. None is more important than being to provide each student with the opportunity to explore and develop. The needs of all students, from the gifted to the special needs, need to be met. The idea about different programs offering multiple opportunities not yet explored, is the central component of this theme. As one participant stated,

“Competing with the world might be misguided and not sensitive to the needs of our children.”

“The curriculum needs to engage the students, and when it doesn’t, intervene accordingly”

Considerations of how best to address Program and resources (next theme) tie directly to the advancement of technology and society. This suggests the need to examine the concept of personalized learning that is delivered anywhere and at any time.



Resources

THEME 7: Every organization is faced with ensuring that resources are targeted to meet system goals and distributed to achieve the desired outcomes of that organization. Like every organization, WJCC must maximize the resources available, including consideration for personnel, capital improvements, and financial needs. The future planning of WJCC will depend upon the distribution of diminishing financial resources to accomplish all the goals established to meet student needs. In order to achieve these goals, WJCC will have to examine ways to meet the needs of the community without compromising on the expected outcomes.

The influence a school system has on the development of an individual is profound. Providing sufficient resources to ensure that student' needs are met in clean, safe, modern facilities, staffed by the best people available takes considerable resources. At national, state and local levels, there has been a reduction of resources. This is not to suggest that school systems are spending less, but the increasing costs compounded by a struggling economy has left many school systems in a position of creatively tackle their shrinking resources. Public schools and the people who work in them are all too familiar with the call to do more with less. In examining the data from the many constituents, the availability of resources across the school division is of concern.

Within the feedback of the many constituents, few advocate the “do more with less” attitude. Instead, teachers, parents, and students make their expectations clear without regard for resource constraints. Perhaps, there is an assumption that schools will operate as efficiently as possible. Still, the one consistent demand on resources cannot be achieved through any efficiency. Almost uniformly, participants demanded smaller class size, with more one-on-one time for students with teachers. Across data sources there were clear expectations that class size should be reduced. Teachers expressed exasperation over the growing enrollment in individual classes. Parents expressed an expectation that class size be as small as possible.

Addressing class size as a one-size fits all is neither possible nor sustainable for any school system.

Still, when considering how schools are resourced, there are several issues that must be considered to ensure that each child is well served. Among the issues that must be settled is that equal and equity are not the same things. When considering the following issue, it is important to recognize that there are strategies that can be applied with some students and not others. There are some students that require small learning environments all of the time, while



others can thrive outside that setting. Therefore the counter point made to one participant by another

“Kids come with differing strengths and backgrounds but more kids make it harder”

“Stop class size arguments - thinking only about the size of the class instead of thinking about how we could manage larger class sizes”

As the steering committee tackles this issue, there will need to be considerations for how best to address the needs of many in more creative ways. For example, the consistent conversation around class size is founded on the premise that smaller and same sized classes are necessary at all times. There are times, however, when flexible class size might better meet the demands for personalized learning and the availability of resources. The key was best expressed by a participant in the focus group, we need to “balance resources and programs” to meet the needs of students.



Safe Orderly Environment

THEME 8: The need for safe, violence free schools has never been more prevalent than it is today. That said however, a Safe and Orderly Environment is far more than just a building where laws are not broken and crimes are not committed. A Safe and Orderly school is one in which there is a welcoming culture and all members, students, staff and school communities are committed to maintaining safe, caring and orderly buildings for ALL who enter.

In his book of the same name, Hullely insists that in order to be effective, schools must be “Harbors of Hope” for all students.⁵ Schools where this occurs develop optimal environments for learning. Clearly, an optimal learning environment is not one that is only crime free. It must be more than just that so while a Safe and Orderly Environment is an extremely desirable one, it obviously must address several other issues as well.

The acceptance of others, regardless of race, gender, income, sexual orientation or gender identity, is a key to creating a safe environment for all students. Intolerance in any of its forms has no place in an optimal learning environment or Harbor of Hope.

The Ministry of Education for the Province of British Columbia states that “safe, caring and orderly schools are striving to”:

- develop positive school cultures and focus on prevention;
- use school-wide efforts to build “community,” fostering respect, inclusion, fairness and equity;
- set, communicate and consistently reinforce clear expectations of conduct;
- teach, model and encourage socially responsible behaviours that contribute to the school community, solve problems in peaceful ways, value diversity and defend human rights;
- assume responsibility, in partnership with the wider community, for resolving critical safety concerns;
- work together to better understand issues such as bullying, intimidation and harassment, racism, sexism and homophobia, and to learn new skills to respond to them;
- respond consistently to incidents in a fair and reasoned manner, using interventions that repair harm, strengthen relationships and restore a sense of belonging;

⁵ Hullely, W., Dier, L., (2005). Harbors of Hope: The Planning for School and Student Success Process. Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Service



- participate in the development of policies, procedures and practices that promote school safety;
- monitor and evaluate their school environments for evidence of continuous improvement; and
- recognize and celebrate achievements, while acknowledging areas that need improvement.⁶

While not individually or specifically stated as such by focus group members, it was not difficult to ascertain that there was definitely a desire expressed for many of the same beliefs stated above.

“An atmosphere of respect and openness. An environment of good teaching where students are reached and teachers support one another. Monitoring student data. A board that embraces and listens to constituents' concerns”

“Showing respect for every student's needs”

“Teachers unafraid of going to colleagues and administrators”

“Evidence of a cohesive climate, and learning. You would see flow in a building. Kids knowing what to do.”

“building a positive morale in the school and with all students”

Data indicated that there was a real willingness, across many groups, to embrace the conditions to create this kind of a school and school division. Perhaps most elegantly stated was the PTA member who said,

“Excellence - schools that hold high expectations and standards for all aspects of the school”

An effective strategic plan will be one in which the creation of a Safe and Orderly Environment, division-wide, is clearly, collaboratively and effectively addressed. This might include expanding the SHIP program, as well as examining other learning environment alternatives.

⁶ http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/safe_caring_orderly_schools.htm



School / Division Culture / Trust

THEME 9: Rituals, relationships, expectations, and behaviors shape school culture. In an effort to address culture, WJCC will need to address their cultural issues and enhance communications, establishing a shared set of expectations, and behaviors.

All schools begin with the same general mission in mind: to educate each student to his or her potential. Variations exist, but when the expectations and behaviors that follow from that mission are different from educator to educator or between administration and teachers, the result may impact the core culture of the organization. Instead of behaving like a well-integrated school system pursuing the same outcomes for all students, the division often behaves like a collection of schools and individuals. This is not meant to be an indictment on those who work hard every day to do their job; it is an observation of an element that arose in the course of data collection.

This isolation of each school might be a symptom or a cause in a wide tension that was expressed throughout the data collection. Within the WJCC community some expressed a sense of frustration over being marginalized and disenfranchised. Others dismissed this tension, suggesting that such tensions could be minimized by just focusing on students. These latter views emphasize a shared identity where differences are ignored—where there exists a basic universal humanity of shared values and equity for all. The diversity of WJCC is real and was represented across the data. From students suggesting that school rules were not applied fairly to all students, to parents noticing the composition of the athletic programs to teachers' sense of isolation. PCG Education encountered the many complexities of the diversity of the community when requests were made to conduct focus groups that more closely represented the individual groups. While these focus groups provided additional insight into these underlying issues, the consultants had already noted the overriding issue of inclusiveness as a way to build for a more stable culture.

A school division's culture should not be defined just by the individuals and their differences, but is also informed by a set of shared beliefs, customs, behaviors, and expectations. Scheduling, professional expectations, and establishing policies that support the pursuit of a mission often shape a culture. A culture of collaboration is shaped by the many interactions between all individuals. Notions that there are winners and losers shape a culture of competitiveness. The culture of WJCC division was described as being in conflict,

“the Hatfields and the McCoys.”

In a focus group it was suggested,



“to change the form in which stuff is delivered - the control nature of the culture must change: control vs. collaboration. We are a telling place not an asking place. Need to change the culture - ubiquitous computing, teacher directed vs. teacher partnership.”

WJCC is hardly unique in this internal friction between achieving what everybody wants—ensuring the success of students—and the practical realities of what occurs at school every day. Still as expressed by another participant,

“culture is what needs to change. Whatever we do, our focus has to be on student learning and not the show of education. Community and staff need to let some things go and focus on student learning. If we do that, our decisions become easy. We say it but it is true.”

The importance of shaping the culture is that it helps to define the direction of the organization. It allows constituents to build an affinity for the people and the institution. Moreover, it helps to create stability, so that a staff change at any level doesn’t influence the culture. Stated by one teacher, the culture can set the tone for everything else that follows,

“we were there to transform students’ lives.”

Another artifact of the culture is the way in which the organization functions. Like so many organizations, the division is still largely organized around silos. While not the purpose of this report, one teacher offered a notion of “primitive circles” to replace the notion of silos. That is, circles, which intersect at multiple angles to reflect the many ways in which individuals, intersect within an organization. The emphasis is on developing a culture in which relationships interact and evolve to improve the entire community. A reality such as this could result in

“teachers that want to stay.” Convert from a “this too shall pass” attitude to one in which individuals are invested in success. Ultimately, the cultural issues can “energize or murder the organization” according to a division administrator.



Student Engagement

THEME 10: When considering the many elements and themes that arose in the data, student engagement was a subtext to them all. When considering programs, resources, communication, etc. the ultimate goal is to provide students with opportunities to explore and experience their world in meaningful ways while not creating a ceiling or a set of expectations to which they are bound.

When students demand that they be

“prepared for the real world and their interests”

over the course requirements, they are demonstrating the way in which they understand the learning experience. If the learning experience leaves them feeling personally unfulfilled and without a tangible connection their interests, they will “check out.” Not surprisingly, students were very vocal about their need to be engaged. They, however, were not alone in expressing frustration in the lack of connection between what they do and where it fits into the world. For example, one participant noted that

“kids who see repeated worksheets over and over again”

derive no clear benefit.

Moreover, student engagement aims directly at meeting students at where they are. Specifically, a child who falls behind and lacks support feels frustration and one who excels and lacks enrichment becomes bored. The result is teaching that is aimed at something other than the student. As one teacher noted,

“we are constantly trying to meet someone else's needs not the child's. No point in trying to teach a child to read who can't (yet) talk.”

Student engagement can manifest itself in many ways and grows in complexity with the maturing of the child. Still, as one teacher explained,

“we have a vision for our children, we have a future for our children, we know what our children need.....we need to be allowed to have time to teach. Hands on inquiry and dialogue.”

This notion was reinforced by support personnel, who stated,

“we need to give kids more elbow room and allow them to push out beyond the family and give them the feeling that they can do anything, mechanic, engineer.”



The benefits of an engaged student body are many and were expressed by both teachers and students. When students are engaged, they

“take pride in their work,” and “take on ownership of the learning.”

Increasing opportunities to engage in meaningful learning experiences means tapping into their intrinsic sense of curiosity rather than a set of extrinsic motivational elements (e.g., grades, test scores, etc.). When considering this theme, it is important to consider the need to develop a sense of self, a sense that effort in school matters for outcomes other than grades, and that there are many opportunities for personal growth. That is, simply telling students to be attentive, engaged, and apply themselves becomes less meaningful with each passing year. As many students pointed out, much of what is in their textbooks is also at their fingertips in the form of mobile devices. Teacher and learner engagement occurs when the work is worthwhile and the interaction is meaningful.

NEXT STEPS

Change is the continuous adoption of strategies, structures, and procedures to address long-term goals of an organization within, and consideration of, ever-changing environments. The change process is complex, time consuming, and involves understanding and working through many interrelated parts. In the context of WJCC developing a 5-year strategic plan working groups will be established to identify goals and consider pathways for positive change. Each work group will be designed to consider contributing components to changes in teaching and learning (e.g., considerations for instructional design, personnel development). Over a two-month period, these work groups will help collaboratively develop a model that articulates what needs to be changed and built upon to get the outcomes that the community has identified. These work groups are reflective of the themes and related priorities identified across the various data sources. During the February 2012 meeting, the themes will be discussed and it will be determined around which work groups will need to focus.



APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF SURVEY DATA

Initial on-line Survey Findings

Survey Responders⁷

An initial downloading of the survey results was completed on the afternoon of January 9th, 2012. At that time, there were 1,723 entries to the survey with the majority of respondents being either parents or WJCC staff. Some responders identified themselves as others but were generally represented by the groups identified on the survey. For example, “*I am a staff member and have children in WJCC schools*” or “*member of community/former WJCC staff*” and “*parent of a soon to be WJCC student*” were the kinds of “other” listed entries.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
A current WJCC student	8.6%	149
A former WJCC student	1.0%	18
A parent or caregiver of a current WJCC student(s)	35.2%	606
A parent or caregiver of a former WJCC student(s)	5.7%	98
A current WJCC staff member	34.3%	591
A member of the WJCC community (never had children in the WJCC)	10.2%	175
Other (Please specify)	4.9%	84
Other (please specify)		98
<i>answered question</i>		1723

For every seven (7) females who responded to the survey, there were two (2) males and one (1) person who preferred to not disclose their gender. Almost as many persons skipped this question (829) as there was who chose to answer it (894).⁸

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Female	68.0%	677
Male	21.8%	217
Prefer not to answer	10.2%	102
<i>answered question</i>		894
<i>skipped question</i>		727

⁷ Data provided in this report is based on the survey data received up until the afternoon of January 9th, 2012. Any survey responses received after this time are not reflected in this document but will be considered for future documents and decision making.

⁸ “Chose not to answer” in this section includes those respondents who skipped the question, as well as those who selected “Prefer not to answer” and “Other”, when available.



From the standpoint of race, where the responder reported, most (80%) of the surveys were completed by someone who was white. Like the question on gender, a significant number of respondents (890) chose not to answer this question at all.

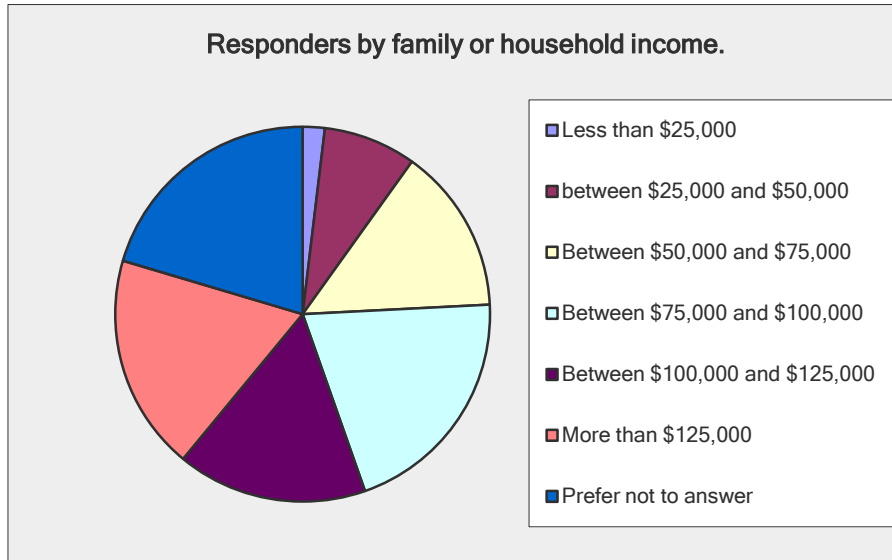
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
African American	6.4%	62
American Indian	0.3%	3
Asian	0.4%	4
East Indian	0.0%	0
Hispanic	1.9%	18
White	79.8%	771
Prefer not to answer	11.2%	108
Other (please specify)		25
<i>answered question</i>		966
<i>skipped question</i>		757

The data quite clearly suggests that the greatest number of responders came from the group of individuals who were college graduates (79%) however, a significant number of survey takers (808) chose not to report in this area of query.

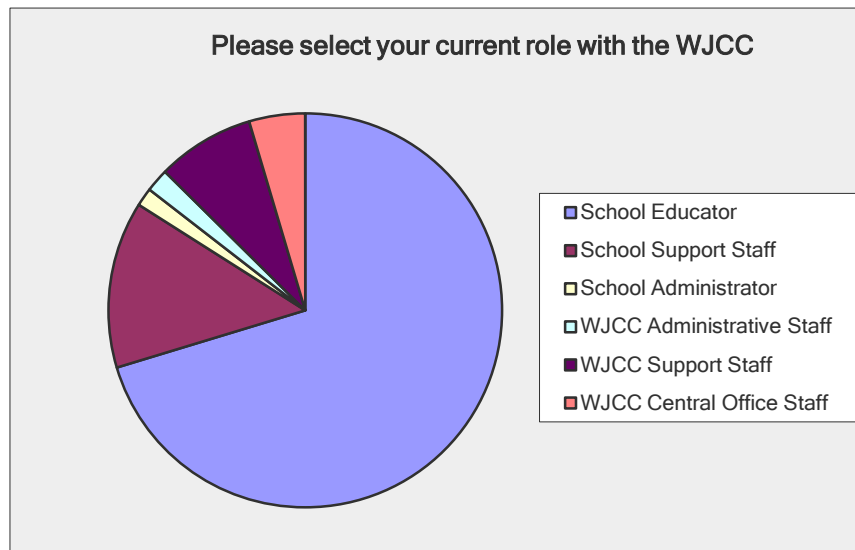
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than high school degree	4.3%	43
High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)	2.4%	24
Some college but no degree	6.1%	61
Associate degree	3.3%	33
Bachelor degree	29.2%	290
Graduate degree	46.8%	464
Prefer not to answer	7.8%	77
<i>answered question</i>		992
<i>skipped question</i>		731



In terms of household incomes, it appears that the survey takers who reported on this question (772) were fairly well balanced. Again, as with some of the other demographic type questions, there was a very significant group, a majority in fact, who chose not to answer this question (951).

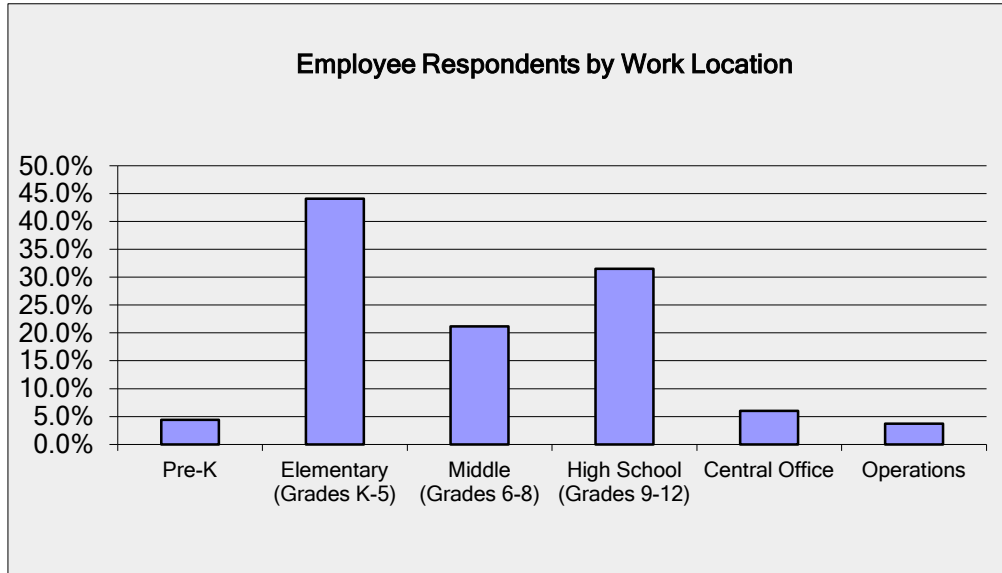


With respect to staff responses, school educators (teachers) clearly out responded all other groups. While this may cause some to draw a preliminary conclusion it is also important to note that the majority of staff persons in the division are in fact teachers and outnumber their other colleagues by a large degree. .

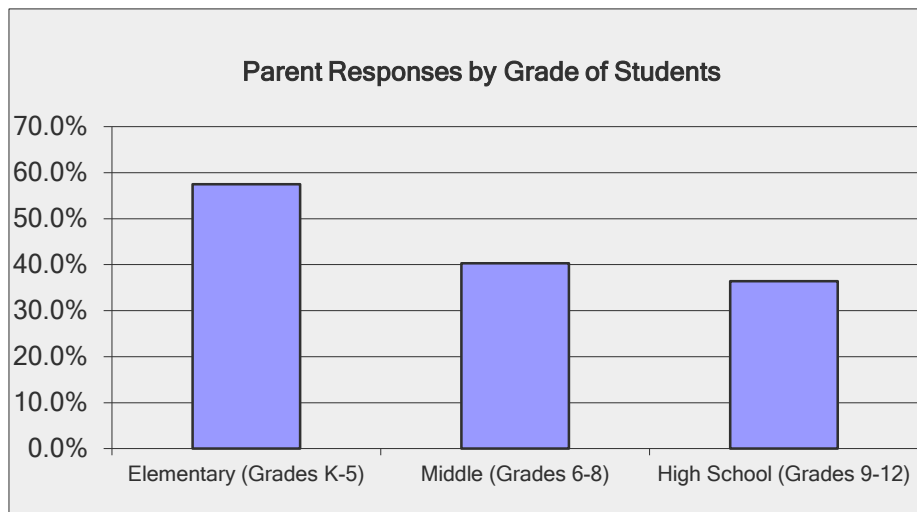




Elementary educators were clearly the largest group of responders, again based on sheer numbers of positions, not a totally unexpected outcome.

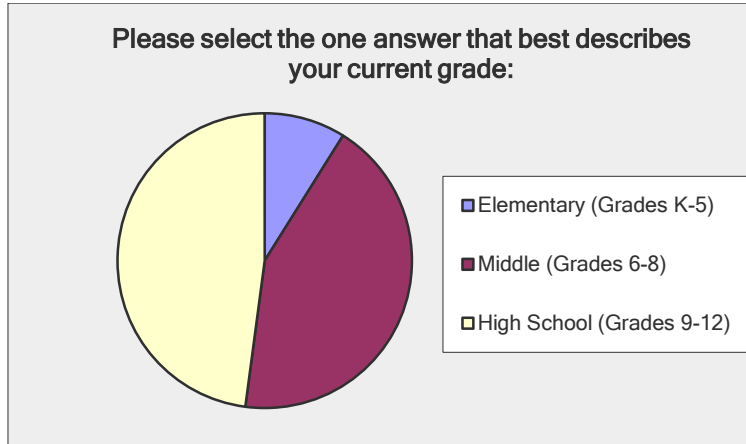


When it came to parents of students, more parents of elementary students (348/605) responded than did parents of students in middle schools (244/605). Both groups exceeded the response rate for parents of secondary students (220/605) in the rates as shown below:





Of the 146 students who responded to the survey, it is interesting to note that the majority (70/146 or 48%) were from the High School group followed closely by the Middle school group (63/146 or 43%) and then by the Elementary school group (13/146 or 9%).



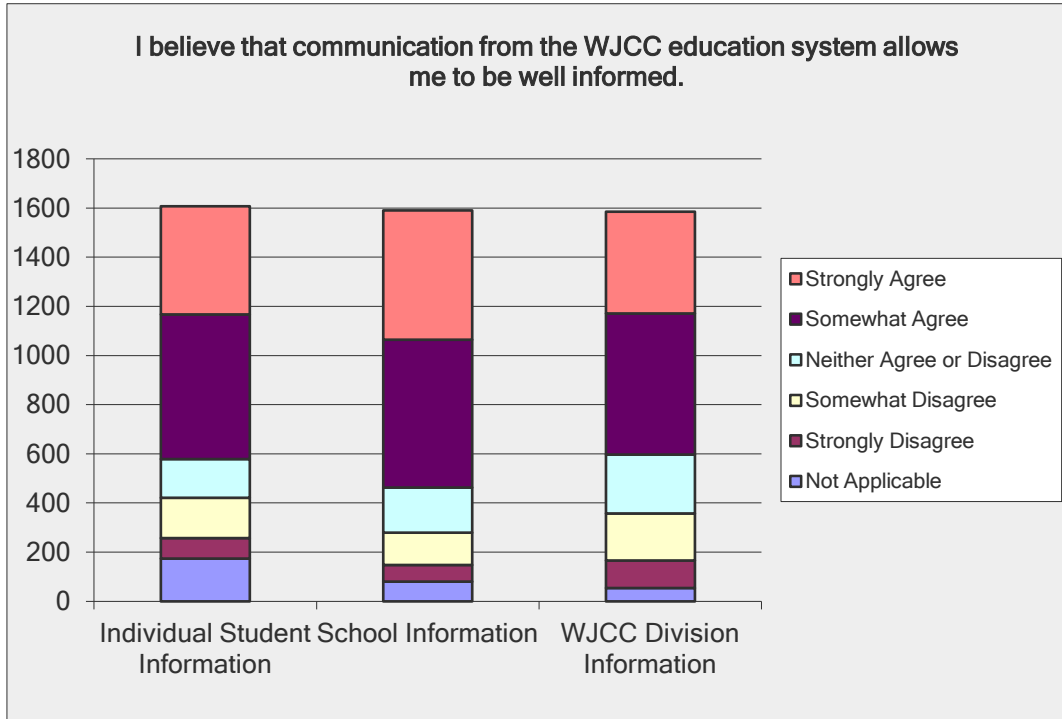
The clear majority of respondents to the survey were from James City but it is very interesting that there were 8 respondents from outside of the state who took the time to complete the survey.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
James City	71.8%	1222
City of Williamsburg	15.3%	260
In Virginia but outside of the WJCC Area	12.4%	211
Outside of Virginia	0.5%	8
<i>answered question</i>		1701



Beliefs About Communication

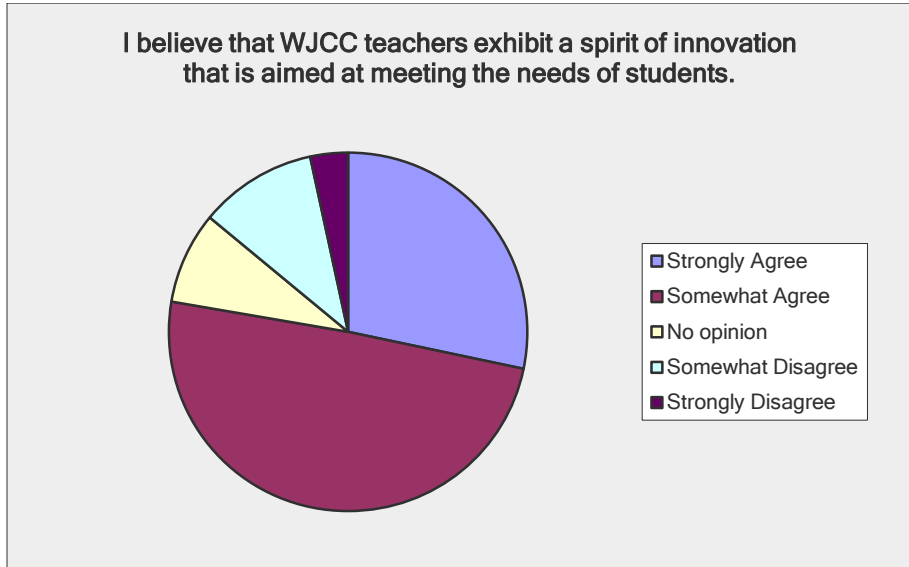
Generally speaking, the majority of respondents all believed that the WJCC allows them to be well informed with respect to communication about Students, School Information and Division Information. The following chart shows that in each case, most of the survey takers agreed strongly or somewhat with the statement. While this is a very strong and positive sign for division and school administration, it should also be noted that there are about 400 respondents, about 1/3, who either had no opinion or disagreed with the statement





Spirit of Innovation & Collaboration

Encouragingly, the majority (79%) of respondents did feel that the teachers in the division do exhibit a spirit of innovation that is aimed at meeting the needs of students.



This figure drops to 57% when considering WJCC Administrators. While this is still clearly a majority, it does represent a lower confidence rate.

Similarly, when respondents were asked to consider if there is a spirit of collaboration existing in the division, the results were almost identical to those of innovation with teachers garnering a 75% confidence and WJCC administrators 54%. As with the previous, the majority of respondents are positive with respect to this belief.

WJCC Graduates – (Skills, Knowledge and Character & Career, Technical and College Readiness)

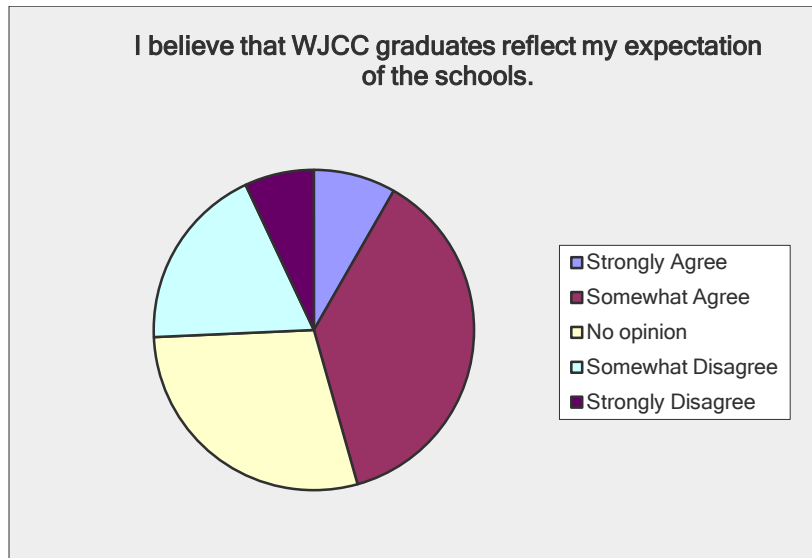
Based on the preliminary results, it appears that only a slight majority (51%) of survey takers thought that students were developing the right balance of skills, knowledge and character to meet the demands of the world when they graduate from WJCC.



In contrast, most responders (64%) either had no opinion or felt that WJCC schools were NOT striking the right balance of career, technical and college readiness for students. The results show there are about a 1/3 of that group who had no opinion on this question.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	8.0%	92
Somewhat Agree	27.6%	319
No opinion	19.1%	221
Somewhat Disagree	26.8%	309
Strongly Disagree	18.5%	214
<i>answered question</i>		1155

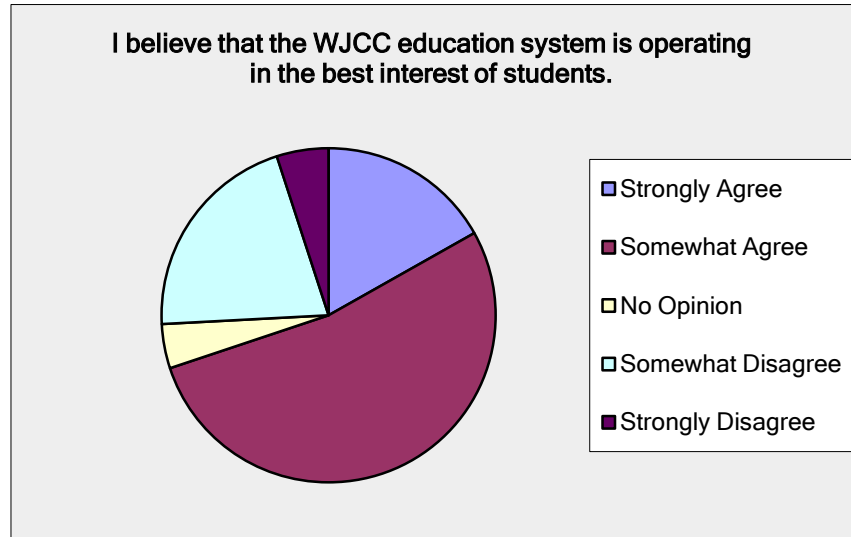
The results are equally as ambivalent when survey takers were asked if WJCC graduates are reflecting the expectations for schools. Since there is such a large component (29%) of those with “no opinion” it is hard to suggest on which side of the line, if any, that this group could be leaning. The majority (46%) of opinion was strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement however with the large no opinion group it gives cause for some pause to support this finding with greater enthusiasm.





WJCC – Operating in the Best Interest of Students

Survey takers state almost overwhelmingly (70%) that they believe that the WJCC education system is operating in the best interest of students. In contrast to the previous questions there are almost no (5%) of respondents who had no opinion on this question.





Teacher Qualities

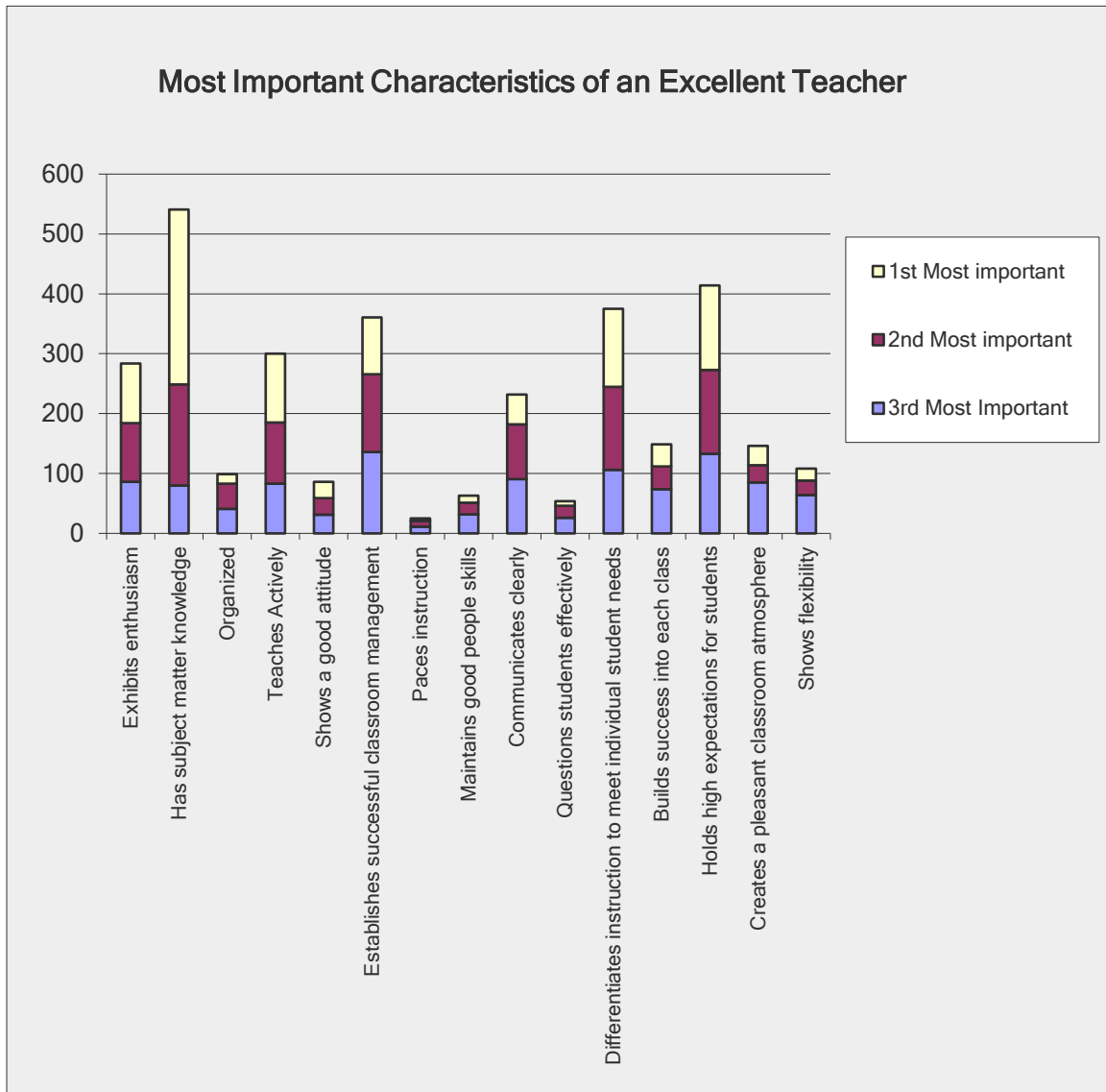
Survey respondents were asked to rank (1 to 3) a list of qualities established as those of which would be exhibited by an excellent teacher⁹. The results reveal that most respondents feel that the three most important qualities are:

- Has subject matter knowledge (50% ranked it 1,2 or 3)
- Holds high expectations for students (38% ranked it 1,2 or 3)
- Differentiates instruction to meet individual student needs (35% ranked it 1,2 or 3)

This was followed closely by:

- Establishes successful classroom management (28% ranked it 1,2 or 3)

⁹ Source: http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr387.shtml

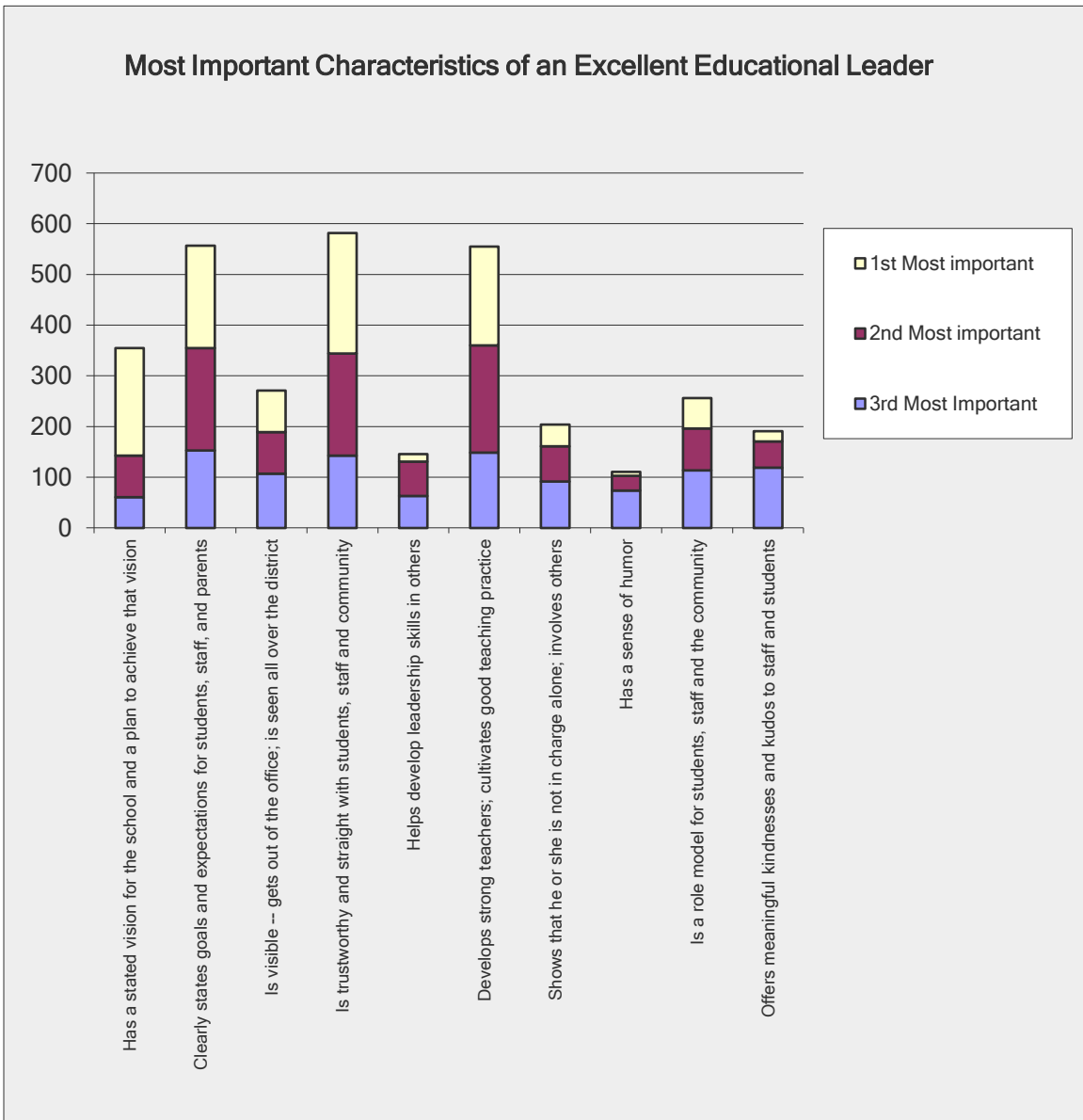


Educational Leader Qualities

Survey respondents were asked to rank (1 to 3) a list of qualities established as those of which would be exhibited by an excellent educational leader¹⁰. The results reveal that most respondents feel that the three most important qualities are:

- Is trustworthy and straight with students staff and community (54% ranked it 1,2 or 3)
- Clearly states goals and expectations for students, staff, and parents (52% ranked it 1,2 or 3)
- Develops strong leaders; cultivates good teaching practice (51% ranked it 1,2 or 3)

¹⁰ Source: http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/TM/WS_leadership_qualities.shtml





APPENDIX B: SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP QUESTION SET

SAMPLE OF FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL WILLIAMSBURG JAMES-CITY COUNTY FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Background

Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools (W-JCC) is positioning itself to “develop a premier public school system that expresses the unique character and potential of the served communities. Creating a climate in which students of all academic abilities are challenged, mutual respect is exercised, and regular collaborations and partnerships occur.” This reflects a national trend towards developing world-class schools focused on college and career readiness in which students are creative problem solvers, collaborators, and communicators. Learning experiences should reflect student needs and aspirations, available technologies, and the skills and competencies that the future demands. Developing a multi-year strategic plan will provide the district with greater clarity around these priorities by identifying shared goals and pathways to accomplishing them. These vision, goals, and goal action maps are the strategic plan. The strategic plan will expand upon WJCC’s current capacities and the communities’ shared vision of the future to serve the academic, social, and emotional development needs of its students; provide for the professional growth of its staff; and involve community members in the education of their children to a greater degree.

Prompts

1. At both the local and national level, there is lots of talk about excellence in education. What does this mean to you? (Describe what is meant by excellence in education? How will we know when we achieved it here?)

Encourage a variety of people to speak. This is, in part, a question to warm up the group and encourage them to talk.

2. Think of the young people you know. What skills would you like to see them develop in advance of graduating from school in preparation for life after school and in the W-JCC community? How might you define success for students? A successful student/graduate is able to...
3. If we want to improve teaching and learning for all students to really prepare them for college, careers and active citizenship, what would need to change in our schools? What can we improve upon?
 - a. What does the district need to do?
 - b. In what ways can you (and the people you represent) support these changes?



I'd like to share a video of some instructional practices that have been catalogued by Edutopia (a not-for-profit attempting to identify exemplary practices for the future of education). Then we attempt to think about those things we like, don't like or challenge us to think differently.

(Videos were shared at some, but not all focus groups depending on the conversation. The video selection was tailored to the audience and was changed based on the direction of the focus group).

4. Thinking about the video, what do you perceive as the benefits, drawbacks? What opportunities/obstacles do you perceive in attempting this or other like practices in W-JCC schools?
5. Final thoughts: What information does the steering committee and district leadership team need to create and implement a premier education for the future of W-JCC schools?



APPENDIX C: SUMMARY DATA OF THEMES BY FOCUS GROUP

