



# Charting the Course

*For Every Student, Every Day*

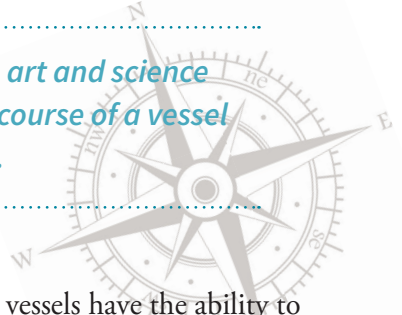
## **Superintendent's Post-Entry Plan Executive Summary**

Virginia Beach City Public Schools  
Aaron C. Spence, Ed.D.



# Charting the Course, Setting Direction

**Navigation** (*nav-i-gey-shun'*)- noun. The art and science of plotting, ascertaining, and directing the course of a vessel toward a chosen destination (*Dictionary.com*).



In nautical terms, the officers and crew of seagoing vessels have the ability to choose a destination for a voyage that is different from where the ship might naturally drift. They then use all means available — sails, rudder, the stars, maps, GPS satellites — to move toward that chosen destination. Likewise, a fundamental attribute of effective leadership is the ability to intentionally choose a desired future state from a number of alternatives and move purposefully to cause that choice to become reality. Plainly put, for Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS), skillful direction setting is the first and best tool to ensure success for every student, every day.

To determine that direction and the course that follows, Dr. Aaron Spence spent his first six months as superintendent meeting with a wide range of both internal and external stakeholders, conducting an extensive analysis of student data and reviewing critical division documents, processes and practices. At the same time, VBCPS was in the midst of an input process to develop its recently-adopted strategic plan, *Compass to 2020: Charting the Course*. This strategic framework is the directional beacon for teaching and learning across the school division, with its focus on ensuring that every student is challenged and supported to reach his or her full potential. It describes a worthy destination and provides thorough, well-articulated goals and strategies — a true heading to guide the work of educators and the deployment of resources.



**COMPASS to 2020**  
*Charting the Course*

Aligned to the *Compass to 2020* strategic framework are this post-entry plan's five leverage points that emerged from the considerable stakeholder input, leadership insight and data Dr. Spence collected throughout his transition. The leverage points — **High Quality Teaching and Learning; Talent Management; Student-Centered Culture; Culture of Respect and Community Engagement** — all represent areas where VBCPS has considerable available capacity and/or potential.

However, similar to navigating a ship, no matter how skillful and thoughtful the direction setting may be, it does not guarantee arrival at a chosen destination. It is the captain's and crews' moment-by-moment actions that make the difference as they adjust the sails and rudder to keep the ship heading in the right direction. The superintendent, along with leaders at all levels of the organization will continue to engage staff, students and the community in the design/innovation process around these five promising pathways.

## High Quality Teaching and Learning

Of all the variables that affect student achievement, none has a higher impact than quality instruction—a great teacher in every classroom makes an incredible difference for students. As VBCPS increases its capacity to select and develop high quality instructional practices, it creates a culture of professionalism and performance that assists in the recruitment and retention of high quality staff. This cyclical process ensures every student has access to a world-class learning experience.

### WORK PRIORITIES

- Focus on early intervention with a laser-like concentration on struggling readers and students with limited numeracy skills.
- Use diagnostic, formative, interim, and summative assessment data to inform instruction.
- Create a common lexicon of research-based instructional practices and expectations across the division to eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps.
- Increase access to rigorous coursework for all students.
- Evaluate and refine curriculum to ensure each student is engaged in rigorous, relevant and concept-based learning that creates multiple pathways to success.
- Conduct a curriculum audit to ensure the intended, taught, and tested curriculum is aligned and meeting our expectations for students.
- Form a task force to explore grading practices throughout the division with the goal of placing an emphasis on student learning.
- Adopt a system-wide framework for what constitutes effective teaching and learning that is aligned with “Future Ready Learning Skills” and focuses on graduating students who are college and career ready.

## Talent Management

VBCPS is uniquely positioned to attract and retain top teaching and leadership talent. The community provides high levels of public support for education, and the surrounding economic and social demographics are well suited for recruiting top talent. In addition to a nationally-recognized school division in which to work, Virginia Beach offers an excellent lifestyle—as our Mayor has been known to say, this is the greatest city in the world! If having the best professional talent in every school and classroom makes a difference for children, VBCPS is well positioned to take advantage of this leverage point.

### WORK PRIORITIES

- Refine procedures, practices and processes to ensure top talent is recruited, selected, oriented, deployed, coached/developed and retained.
- Ensure internal and external stakeholder engagement in the talent selection process.
- Examine the current application/selection process, identify areas for improvement, and deploy an improvement plan for minority recruitment and selection.
- Examine organizational effectiveness and efficiency of the central office to include a realignment of positions and roles.
- Develop a teacher leadership and career lattice.
- Engage and rally the community around respecting, supporting and honoring teachers and other staff.
- Revisit the need for a single point of service for organizational development.
- Provide principals and other administrators with opportunities to enhance their instructional pedagogy while refining their ability to quickly observe and provide coaching feedback to teachers about their instructional practices.
- Refine the existing “Grow Your Own Leaders” program to prepare committed educators for administrative positions.



## Student-Centered Culture

Placing students squarely at the center of the VBCPS strategic framework provides a client-centered approach that celebrates student success, studies student attributes, innovates around student outcomes and places student learning in first place with respect to school and division priorities.

### WORK PRIORITIES

- Establish a division-wide culture in which the primary focus of decisions at all levels is the best interest of every student every day.
- Ensure teachers and administrators have access to crucial data (diagnostic, formative, interim, summative) in a timely and efficient manner and format in order to better serve all students.
- Identify achievement targets and yearly benchmark measures for all subgroups.
- Review current learning management systems for adequacy and effectiveness.
- Foster student-staff relationships where students feel valued as partners in their own education.
- Provide opportunities for student feedback regarding learning experiences and teacher relationships.
- Remove barriers to achievement by engaging all students in rigorous meaningful instruction that supports their aspirations and future readiness.
- Conduct specific reviews on each of the following areas: grading practices, school schedules, achievement data, discipline data, attendance data, and class-size data to determine the degree to which we are supporting or impeding student growth and development and then use results to adjust/strengthen/replace current practices.
- Implement a task force of stakeholder groups to review issues of poverty, race, and diversity in order to prepare recommendations for improved discipline and academic achievement.
- Strengthen supports for special education and general education students to ensure social, emotional, and academic needs are being met.
- Increase access to honors, CTE pathways, dual enrollment, advanced placement, IB programs, and academy/advanced academic programs.
- Create a work group to study, make recommendations, and create a multi-year phase-in plan that focuses on the technology infrastructure, device and access needs of VBCPS and the community, and professional development support needed to ensure equal access to technology for every student every day.



## Culture of Respect

School and division culture are the invisible but powerful forces that determine individual behavior throughout the organization. Strong organizations manifest excellence through strong cultural forces, not expansive policy manuals or written edicts. Culture is a powerful lever for organizational improvement. Focusing on the division's interpersonal relationships by cultivating a culture of respect promises to create the conditions where professional talent is expected and nurtured and high performance is expected from every child, every day.

### WORK PRIORITIES

- Reexamine and communicate core values, beliefs, and willingness to be a servant leader.
- Define, communicate, and implement common expectations for mutual respect between and among students, parents, teachers, staff, administration, and the community which results in an environment where each person has a voice and feels valued.
- Communicate expectations to both internal and external groups to develop an understanding of the division's beliefs and common practices through the lens of equity, diversity, and poverty to ensure that everyone is treated in a culture of respect.
- Ensure that Central Office views its roles as one of central support and servant leadership to reflect a close and rich connection with the schools.

## Community Engagement

Schools are an integral part of the community, and they succeed or fail along with the broader community. Fortunately, community support is already very strong in Virginia Beach. We now have the opportunity to leverage that support and to think about how to truly engage our community in the process of making our schools the places we aspire for them to be.

Each of these leverage points is well aligned to the division's strategic framework and each passes muster with respect to leverage and capacity. The superintendent, along with leaders at all levels of the organization will continue to engage staff, students, and community in the design/innovation process around these five promising pathways.

### WORK PRIORITIES

- Harness the power of the community to advocate for the resources needed to provide rigorous, innovative, and real world learning opportunities for students.
- Evaluate and conduct a needs-assessment among schools to determine the community support needed to enhance student learning opportunities.
- Evaluate current volunteer efforts and partnerships to determine opportunities for future growth and alignment to our strategic work.
- Collaborate with the community to expand student learning beyond the traditional classroom setting to include internships, mentorships, work experiences, and development within the chosen profession.
- Collaborate with the community in the development of clear career pathways in regionally important employment fields to ensure our students have career opportunities within our local communities.



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*“To become **the** premier school division in the nation, we must embrace the hard work of developing our capacity to have and to meet high expectations for every student, every day. I am genuinely excited about what tomorrow holds for the thousands of children in our community. Moving forward, this post-entry plan report and our strategic framework, Compass to 2020: Charting the Course, will provide direction for our school division over the next several years. I believe by working together, we can accomplish our hopes and dreams for our children.”*

Aaron C. Spence, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

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Read the full **Charting the Course For Every Student, Every Day** post-entry plan report on **vbschools.com**. Continue to follow the journey with Dr. Spence on Twitter @BeachSupe.

**vbschools.com**

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