Designing the Future Together

An Update on the
Strategic Planning Process

April 1, 2014 School Board Presentation

Good evening Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair Brunke, members of the School Board, and Dr. Magula. I am here with my colleague, Dr. Lisa Banicky, director of innovation and strategic planning to provide you with an update on the strategic planning process. As you may recall, on December 3, 2013 the School Board was provided the proposed planning process that would be used to develop the next strategic plan. The process involved the activation of a Core Management Team to lay the foundation for the work of the Community Ad Hoc Strategic Plan Committee. This update provides an overview of the work completed and input received to date as well as the next steps in the planning process for the division's strategic plan.
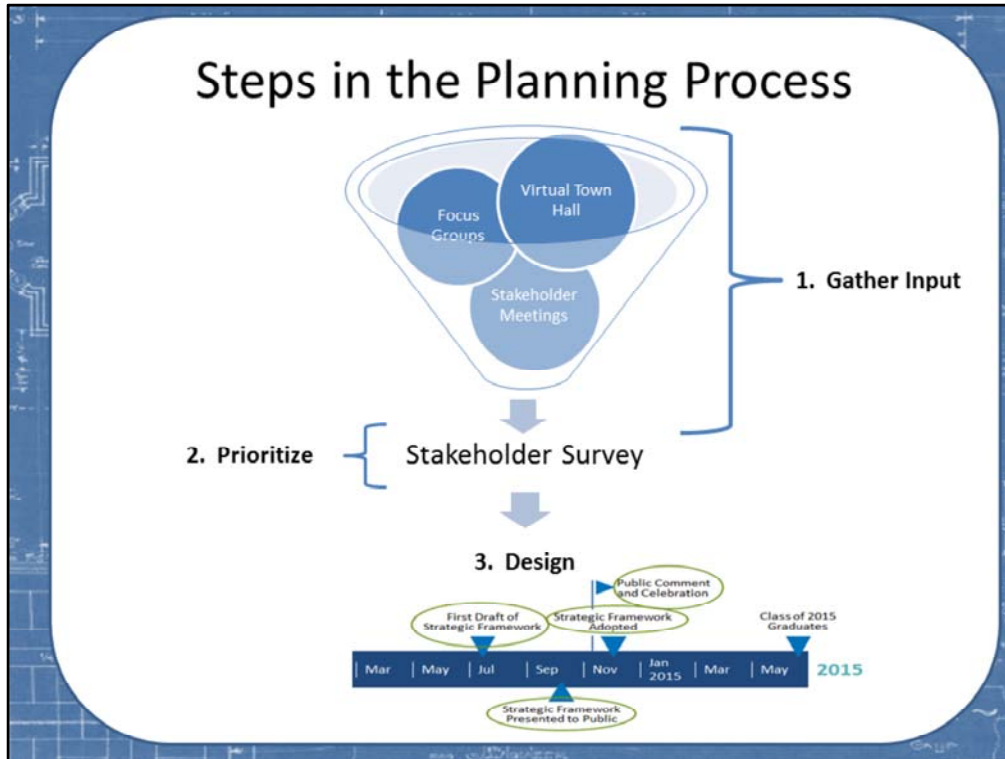
Thank you Dr. Robertson. The planning process that was presented in December outlined three key steps:

The first step was to gather input through focus groups, a virtual town hall, and meetings with internal and external stakeholder groups. This step has been completed, and I will provide more information about it in subsequent slides. The second step is to use the information gathered during the input phase to develop a communitywide survey to help identify key priority areas for strategic planning purposes, and the third step of the process is to design a draft strategic framework. (**Click**)

During the December 3 presentation to the School Board, I provided a tentative timeline that included having a draft of the framework available for first review by the School Board at their July retreat. The intention is to present the framework to the School Board as Information at an October meeting and hold a special event in November to gather public comment on the framework and celebrate the work accomplished under the current strategic plan. The goal is to formally adopt the next strategic framework in December.

Strategic Planning Update

- Core Management Team
  - Met December 2013 through March 2014.
  - Identified key stakeholder groups for outreach.
  - Developed plan and logistics for input process.
  - Prepared background information for Ad Hoc Strategic Plan Steering Committee.
  - Began initial planning for November Showcase event.
  - Reviewed input received and developed recommendations for the communitywide stakeholder survey scheduled for April.
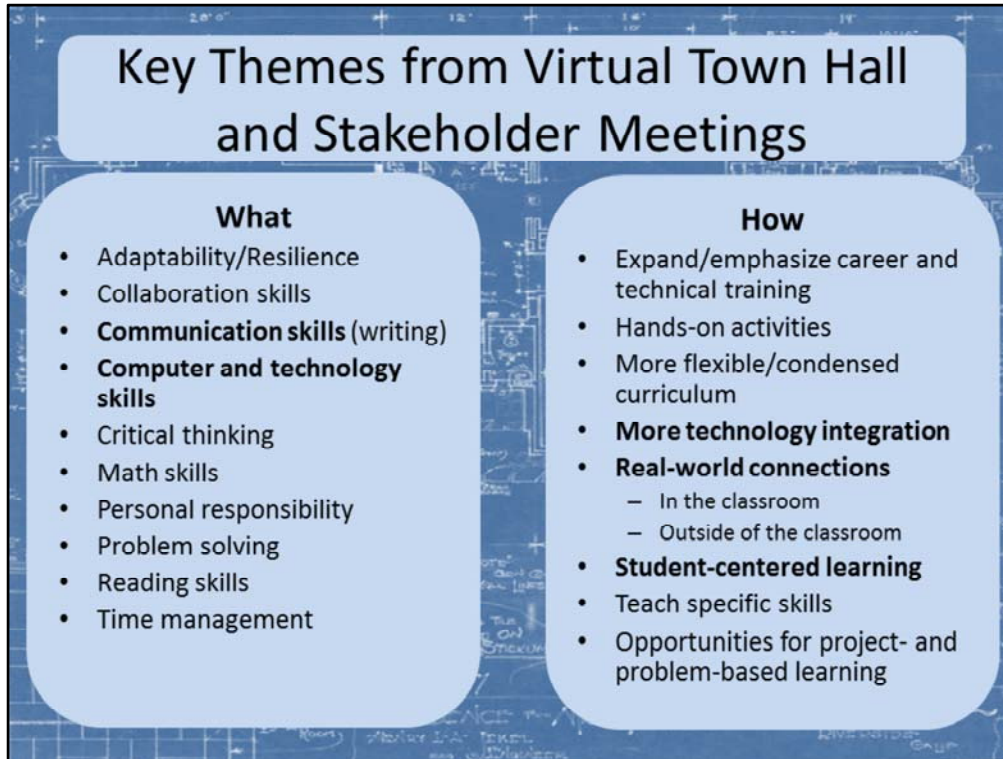
As you may recall, the proposed planning process is guided by the work of two groups of individuals: the Core Management Team and the Ad Hoc Strategic Plan Steering Committee. The Core Management Team was made up of 14 central office administrators representing nine different offices and departments. The committee began working in December and the key tasks completed by the committee are listed on this slide. This committee was instrumental in developing the plan and logistics for the various components of the input process and helped to prepare materials for the consideration of the Ad Hoc Strategic Plan Steering Committee. At this point, I want to provide an overview of the various components of the input process.
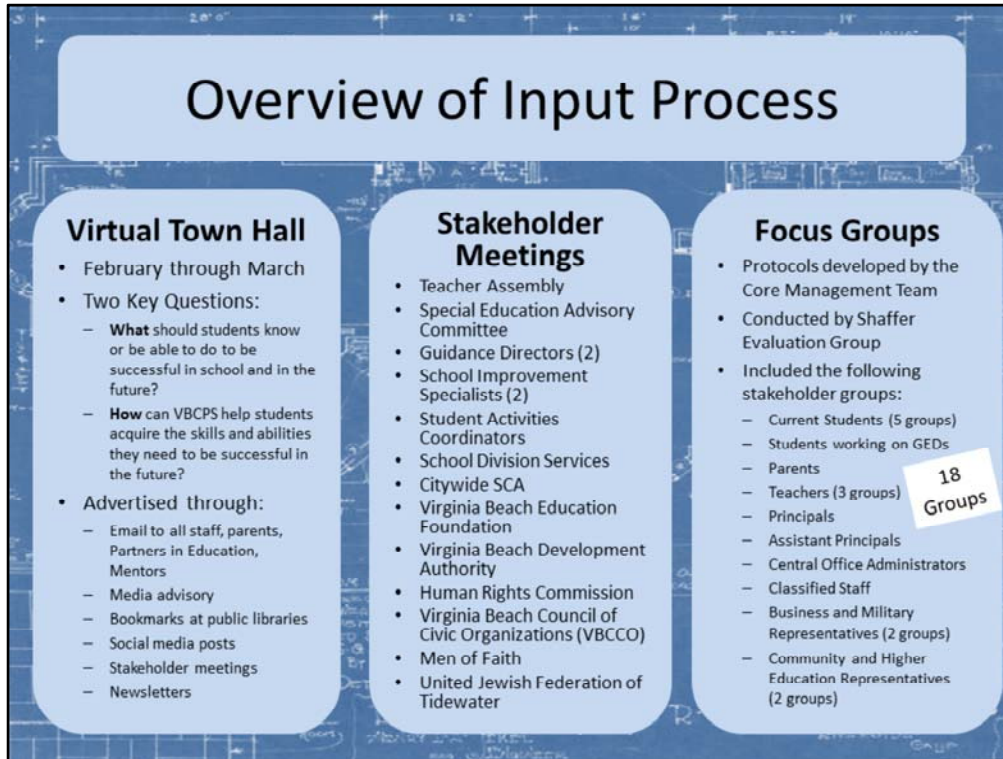
As part of the input process, we created a website dedicated to the next strategic plan and invited visitors to respond to two key questions: "What should students know or be able to do to be successful in school and in the future?" and "How can VBCPS help students acquire the skills and abilities they need to be successful in the future?" The responses to the questions served as a Virtual Town Hall where visitors could see what other people had posted and share their own ideas. As you can see on this slide, we advertised the Virtual Town Hall through a variety of means including email, media advisories, bookmarks at public libraries, social media, various meetings, and newsletters. I would specifically like to thank the Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations and the Virginia Beach Education Association for advertising the information in their respective newsletters. We had 177 comments posted to the Virtual Town Hall over the past two months. (**Click**)

In addition to the Virtual Town Hall, we also attended meetings of internal and external stakeholder groups to inform them of the strategic planning process and gather their input using the same two questions that appeared on the Town Hall site. For most of the groups listed, we had them respond to the questions using a comment card; this process yielded 198 completed cards. **(Click)**

Finally, we commissioned 18 different focus groups, during the month of February, with stakeholders representing the groups you see listed on the slide. One thing to note is that compared to the last time we engaged in the strategic planning process, we increased the number of focus groups for some of the stakeholder groups like current students and teachers. **(Click)**

Key Themes from Virtual Town Hall and Stakeholder Meetings

What
- Adaptability/Resilience
- Collaboration skills
- **Communication skills** (writing)
- **Computer and technology skills**
- Critical thinking
- Math skills
- Personal responsibility
- Problem solving
- Reading skills
- Time management

How
- Expand/emphasize career and technical training
- Hands-on activities
- More flexible/condensed curriculum
- **More technology integration**
- **Real-world connections**
  - In the classroom
  - Outside of the classroom
- **Student-centered learning**
- Teach specific skills
- Opportunities for project- and problem-based learning

For summary purposes, I have highlighted key categories that appeared across the various respondent groups when asked "**What** should students know or be able to do…" and "**how** VBCPS could help students acquire the skills to be successful." The key categories related to the question of "what" are listed alphabetically. It should be noted that communication skills and computer and technology skills were mentioned frequently by the various groups. In most cases, respondents spoke of communication skills generally but when specifics were mentioned, writing surfaced as a key communication skill. The category of computer and technology skills included general references to proficiency in the use of technology and specifics like keyboarding skills, word processing, and using spreadsheets. **(Click)**

Summarizing the responses to the question of how was a bit more challenging because the responses were more diverse. Again, the key categories that emerged across various respondent groups are listed on the slide alphabetically. Increasing technology integration in the classroom, making real-world connections between what students are learning in the classroom to life outside of the classroom, and student-centered learning were among the most frequently suggested by the various groups. The integration of technology category is relatively straight forward. With respect to the category of "real-world connections," these suggestions included explicitly stating the links for students as well as bringing business and community representatives into the classroom to provide their insights while experiences outside of the classroom included work experiences, job shadowing, and internships. The student-centered learning category captured suggestions that focused on individualizing instruction to the learner.

The focus groups that were conducted provided a more in-depth opportunity for stakeholders to discuss the goal and learning outcomes of *Compass to 2015*, progress to date on accomplishing the strategic goal, and how to address the needs of learners in 2021.

The results of the focus group indicated widespread agreement that the current strategic plan goal – that students will graduate having mastered the skills needed to succeed as 21st century learners, workers and citizens – was appropriate now and will continue to be appropriate. There was some discussion around the term "mastered" and community representatives emphasized the importance of every child being challenged and supported to reach their potential. In addition, all stakeholder groups emphasized the continuing importance of the 21st century skills included in the strategic plan. Collaboration, critical thinking, and communication were frequently mentioned as priority skills across stakeholder groups, and school division staff expressed a strong interest in the learner outcome of responsibility.

With respect to progress to date, several areas of successes were highlighted including the variety of opportunities available to students, specific student performance measures, and the division's work to infuse technology into instruction.

Challenges that surfaced during the discussions included preparing **all** students to be 21st century learners, workers, and citizens with issues emerging around the differences in the quality of education for students in academy or advanced courses and students in core courses and the educational outcomes for certain sub-groups, particularly low-income and African American students and students with disabilities. Basic literacy issues in reading, writing, and mathematics also concerned staff and community representatives. Another challenge mentioned by administrators and teachers was the feeling that accreditation issues forced an emphasis on academic proficiency at the expense of the other learner outcomes. Staff also raised concerns about "no-zero" grading practices and its impact on developing responsible learners.

Overview of Focus Group Findings

- Critical skills for the future: communication skills, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability.
- Suggestions for preparing students for their future paths and addressing the needs of students in 2021:
  - Increase awareness and improve counseling related to college and career options.
  - Increase the relevance of coursework by making connections to career pathways more apparent (students).
  - Provide quality experiences inside and outside of the classroom.
  - Continue the focus on proficiency in English-language arts and mathematics.
- Division implementation strategies were also mentioned.

When discussing skills that students would need in the future, the ones most frequently mentioned included communication skills, global awareness and understanding, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability.

Suggestions for preparing students for their future paths and addressing the needs of students in 2021 included increasing awareness and improving counseling related to college and career options, increasing the relevance of coursework, providing quality experiences inside and outside of the classroom, and continuing to focus on proficiency in English-language arts and mathematics.

Stakeholders also discussed division strategies for successfully implementing and supporting the strategic plan, some examples include teacher support and staff professional development and aligning school-level practices with division-level practices.

Next Steps

- Ad Hoc Strategic Plan Steering Committee Meeting – April 10, 2014
- Communitywide stakeholder survey – April 21 through May 9
- Memo and summary of survey findings for School Board (Week of May 16, 2014)

What I have presented is a high-level overview of the input we have received to date. The next step in the process is to use this information to develop a communitywide survey as a way of verifying that that we have identified the key areas and allowing a broader group of people to weigh-in and help shape the priority areas for the next strategic plan. The Ad Hoc Strategic Plan Steering Committee will review the input results in more detail and help finalize the survey as part of their next regularly scheduled meeting on April 10. The goal is to launch the survey after spring break on April 21 and leave it open for three weeks. Our plan is to provide the School Board with a summary of the findings from the survey during the week of May 16.
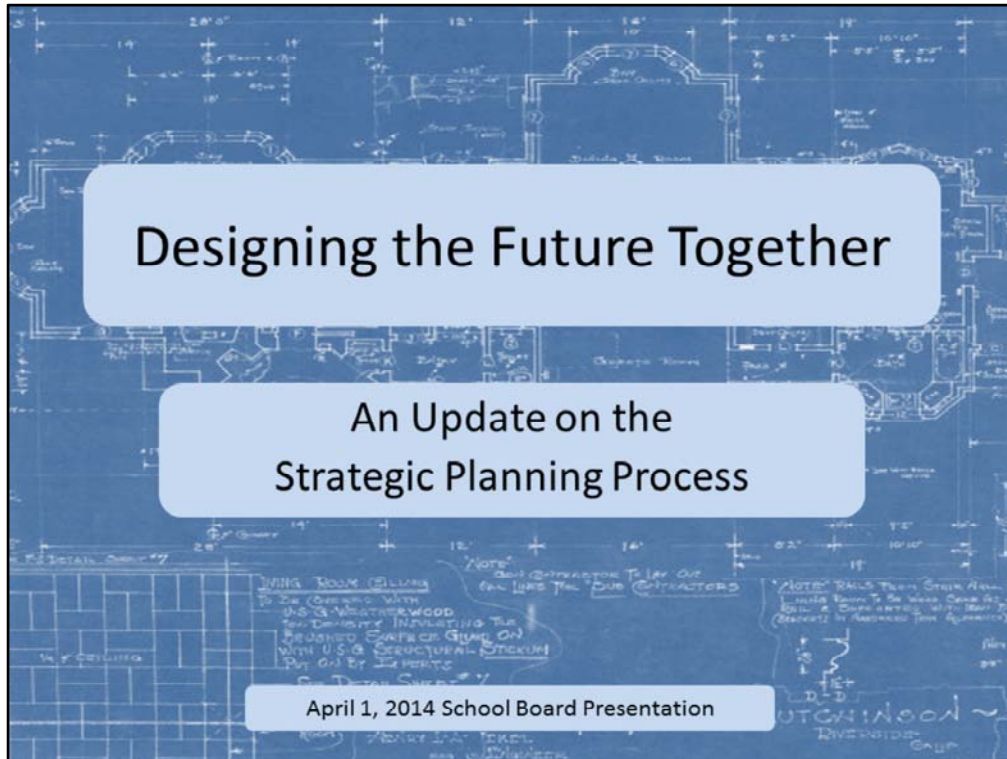
At this point, Dr. Robertson and I are available to answer any questions that you may have.