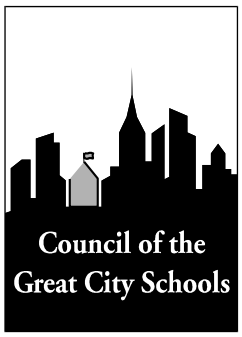
Improving Middle School Achievement in the Norfolk Public Schools

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

Submitted to the
Norfolk Public Schools

By the Council of the Great City Schools



Summer 2012

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Council of the Great City Schools thanks the many individuals who contributed to this project to improve student achievement in the Norfolk Public Schools. Their efforts were critical to our ability to present the district with the best possible proposals. First, we thank former Interim Superintendent Spencer. It is not easy to ask for this kind of review. It takes courage, openness, and uncompromising commitment to the city's children.

Second, we thank the Norfolk school board for its support of this project and its patience as the report was being written.

Third, we thank the staff members of the Norfolk Public Schools, who provided all the time, documents, and data that the Council needed in order to do its work. Their openness and enthusiasm were critical to our understanding of the challenges faced by the Norfolk public school system.

Fourth, we thank the many individuals, groups, organizations, and associations with which we met. Our only regret is that we were unable to meet with everyone whom we know had something valuable to contribute.

Fifth, the Council thanks the Houston Independent School District and the Richmond Public Schools for contributing staff members to this effort. The enthusiasm and generosity of these school districts serve as further examples of how the nation's urban public school systems are working together to help each other improve student performance.

Finally, I thank Council staff members Ricki Price-Baugh, Sharon Lewis, Robin Hall, and Denise Walston, whose skills were critical to the success of this effort. Thank you.

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

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INTRODUCTION

The Norfolk Public School district is working hard to boost student performance, close achievement gaps, and retain the confidence of its community. Like most other large urban districts, it must balance shrinking budgets while improving the opportunities for its students to graduate fully prepared for college and careers.

The school system has been the recipient of numerous awards over the years for its efforts. The Norfolk school board won the National School Board's CUBE award in 2006 for its vision and focus. Norfolk was awarded the Broad Prize in 2005 for demonstrating improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among low-income and minority students. Two of the district's leaders—Superintendent John Simpson and School Board member Anna Dodson—won the Council of the Great City Schools' Richard R. Green Award for Excellence in Urban Education. And in 2012, six Norfolk schools also won excellence awards from the Virginia Board of Education for meeting all state and federal accountability benchmarks for at least two consecutive years.

But the district has struggled since mid-decade with frequent changes in leadership and stagnating student achievement. In the seven-year period since 2005, the district has had four superintendents and five leadership changes. Dr. Denise Schnitzer served as interim superintendent from 2004-2005; Dr. Stephen Jones was superintendent from 2005 to June 2010. Mr. Michael Spencer served as interim superintendent from June 2010 to August 2010. Dr. Richard Bentley served as superintendent from August 2010 to November 2011. Spencer resumed the role of interim superintendent in November 2011 and served in that position until the arrival of new superintendent, Samuel King, in July 2012.

In preparing for the transition to the new superintendent, the interim Norfolk superintendent, Michael Spencer, invited the Council of the Great City Schools to determine why student achievement scores at the middle school level were essentially flat in mathematics, reading, and social studies. He asked the organization to examine district practice to determine if the school system was on the right path academically, with a particular focus on the middle grades. Finally, he asked the team to propose ideas for making the instructional program more efficient and effective.

The answers to these questions are complicated, but these are the questions the interim superintendent asked the Council's team to address. The Council of the Great City Schools assembled a team of math, language arts, and social studies specialists from other big city school

districts across the nation to provide the school district the best possible answers and advice. This report presents their work.

Goals and Purposes of the PROJECT

Overview of the Project

The Council of the Great City Schools, the nation's primary coalition of large urban school systems, has prepared this report to summarize its observations and recommendations to the Norfolk School District about improving student mathematics, reading, and social studies achievement in grades six through eight.

This project was requested by former Interim Superintendent Michael Spencer and coordinated by Associate Superintendent of Academics Christine Harris.

To conduct its work, the Council assembled a Strategic Support Team (SST) composed of curriculum and instructional leaders who have worked to address some of the same academic issues as those faced by the Norfolk Public Schools and have substantially improved academic performance over the last several years in their own districts. Four Council staff members accompanied and supported the team and prepared this report summarizing the team's findings and proposals.

In collaboration with school system staff, the Council's team reviewed the school district's efforts to improve student achievement in mathematics, reading, and social studies. In addition, the team benchmarked the district with faster-improving urban districts throughout the country and examined Norfolk's practices in comparison to those of urban school districts that have seen substantial improvement. The team also interviewed an extensive number of individuals, reviewed written materials and reports, and analyzed data on student achievement.

The team made its site visit to Norfolk on January 29 through February 1, 2012. The SST began its work with a discussion with Interim Superintendent Spencer along with other members of his leadership team: Dr. Sharon Byrdsong, executive director for secondary schools; Mr. John Maniscalco, associate superintendent, business and finance; Dr. Christine Harris, associate superintendent; and Dr. Lisa Harris, senior director of curriculum and professional development. Mr. Spencer and staff discussed district strengths and challenges, as well as efforts the district was making to improve middle school achievement.

That discussion was followed by two days of intensive fact-finding, including school visits, and a day devoted to synthesizing the team's findings and mapping out preliminary strategies for improving middle-school achievement. The team debriefed the interim superintendent and his leadership team at the end of the site visit.

We commend the school district staff and the school board for their courage and openness in requesting a peer review such as this. It is not easy to subject oneself and the institution one leads to the scrutiny that such an analysis entails. These leaders deserve the public's thanks.

Project Goals

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

- Review the middle school program in mathematics, reading, and social studies in the Norfolk Public Schools and assess the district's potential for accelerating student achievement in the midst of a severe financial crisis.

- Propose ways for the Norfolk Public Schools to strengthen its instructional program in mathematics, reading, and social studies and accelerate middle school achievement gains without overwhelming schools with new initiatives.

- Identify expertise, resources, strategies, and materials from other city school systems across the country that the Norfolk Public Schools could access and use to accelerate student performance at the middle school level.

These goals sprang from four questions posed by school district leaders—

1. Which practices place the Norfolk Public Schools on the right path academically and should be maintained in order to improve the quality of instruction?

2. Why is the Norfolk Public Schools not seeing steady growth in academic achievement at the middle school level?

3. How can the district's benchmark assessments provide information needed to improve instruction without overpowering the instructional program and usurping too much instructional time?

4. How can district programs be streamlined for greater effectiveness to concentrate on the most effective programs?

The Work of the Strategic Support Team

The Strategic Support Team visited the Norfolk Public Schools on January 29-February 1, 2012. It comprised Council staff members and curriculum and instructional leaders from other urban school systems that have been improving student achievement.

The team began its work by receiving an overview of the academic status of the Norfolk Public Schools from Interim Superintendent Spencer and his leadership team. In that discussion, the interim superintendent laid out the challenges facing the district and the steps the district was taking to address them. Additionally, he indicated that he wanted to provide the next superintendent with some guidance and tools for improving the district's academic performance. The team used this discussion to sharpen its focus for the subsequent two days as it examined the school system's broad instructional strategies. This work included extensive interviews with central office staff members, school board members, principals, teachers, representatives of outside organizations, parents, and others. The team also reviewed numerous documents and reports and analyzed data on middle school and fifth grade student performance in mathematics, reading, and social studies.

The team examined the school district's broad instructional strategies, materials, core instructional programs for middle school, department structure and organization, assessment programs, and professional development efforts. It also reviewed district priorities and analyzed how well Norfolk's strategies and programs reflected those priorities. Two members of the team visited four middle schools to see if and how curricular goals and strategies were translated into classroom practice.

At the end of the site visit, the team debriefed the interim superintendent and his leadership team on preliminary findings and proposals. After the visit, team members gathered additional information, analyzed an extensive amount of data, refined their initial recommendations, and wrote and edited the draft report.

This approach to providing technical assistance to urban school districts working to improve student achievement is unique to the Council of the Great City Schools and its members, and it is proving to be effective for a number of reasons.

First, the approach allows district leadership to work directly with talented, successful practitioners from other urban school systems that have established track records of performance and improvement.

Second, the recommendations developed by these peer teams have validity because the individuals who develop them have faced many of the same problems now encountered by the school system requesting a Council review. Team members are aware of challenges faced by urban schools, and their strategies have been tested under the most rigorous conditions.

Third, using senior urban school managers from other communities is faster and less expensive than retaining a large management-consulting firm. It does not take team members long to determine what is going on in a district. This rapid learning curve permits reviews that are less expensive than could be secured with experts who are not as well versed on how urban education systems work.

Finally, the teams comprise a pool of expertise that a school system such as Norfolk can use to implement recommendations from the reports or develop other strategies. Members of the Strategic Support Team included the following individuals—

Strategic Support Team

Maria Crenshaw Director of Instruction Richmond School District Richmond, Virginia	Michael Casserly Executive Director Council of the Great City Schools Washington, D.C.
Katy Dula Director of PreK-12 Literacy (retired) Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District Charlotte, North Carolina	Robin Hall Director of Language Arts and Literacy Council of the Great City Schools Washington, D.C.

Angela Miller Manager of Social Studies Houston Independent School District Houston, Texas	Sharon Lewis Director of Research Council of the Great City Schools Washington, D.C.
Denise Walston Director of Mathematics Council of the Great City Schools Washington, D.C.	Ricki Price-Baugh Director of Academic Achievement Council of the Great City Schools Washington, D.C.

Contents of this Report

This report begins with an introduction providing background information on the issues facing the Norfolk Public Schools as the district works to boost student achievement in the middle grades. Chapter 1 presents an overview of the Norfolk Public Schools and student performance on both the annual Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments and on SOL performance by cohort. Chapter 2 summarizes the findings of the Strategic Support Team, and chapter 3 presents the team's recommendations to improve student achievement. Chapter 4 presents a synopsis of the findings and recommendations.

The report includes four appendices. Appendix A lists the people with whom the team talked during its site visit. Appendix B lists the documents that the team reviewed. Appendix C provides brief biographical sketches of team members. Appendix D features a brief description of the Council of the Great City Schools and a list of the Strategic Support Teams that the organization has fielded over the last decade to improve urban education nationally.

The Council has now fielded more than 220 Strategic Support Teams in over 50 major city school districts in a variety of instructional and management areas. These reviews have included examinations of instructional systems, finances and budget, transportation, food services, security, procurement, technology systems, and many other facets of urban school operations.

The Council tailors its reports specifically to each district and to the particular challenges it faces. The Council recognizes that each city is different, and no city has exactly the same mixture of student demographics, staffing patterns, and resources that Norfolk has. Our recommendations, therefore, may not be precisely applicable elsewhere.

Moreover, the Council does not use a template in its reviews; rather, it is guided by the organization's cutting-edge research on why some urban school systems improve and others do not.[1] This research focuses on key organizational and instructional strategies behind the academic gains of some of the fastest-improving urban school systems in the nation and how those reforms differ from those of districts that are not seeing much progress.

[1] Snipes, J., Doolittle. F., and Herlihy, C. (2002). *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement*. MDRC for the Council of the Great City Schools; and Casserly, M., et al. (2011). *Pieces of the Puzzle: Factors in the Improvement of Urban School Districts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Washington, DC: The Council of the Great City Schools.

It is also important to note that this project did not examine the entire school system. This analysis cannot be considered an audit. For example, we did not spend time looking at food services, special education, federal programs, transportation, personnel, facilities management, security, or other operational functions. The SST did not conduct a detailed review of staffing allocations and did not examine staff qualifications, although the team was generally impressed with the quality of many individuals in the district. We did not look at school board policies or other governance issues in any depth. Our focus in this report is exclusively on student achievement in mathematics, reading, and social studies at the middle school level and how to improve it.

CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND

Leadership

The Norfolk Public Schools (NPS) is governed by a seven-member board known as the School Board of the City of Norfolk. The Norfolk City Council appoints board members to serve two-year terms.

The School Board is charged with setting policy and approving the budget to assure the proper administration of the educational programs of Norfolk Public Schools. Additionally, the Board approves the hiring of staff to administer and carry out its policies. School Board meetings are generally held at 7:00 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month and are open to the public.

Samuel King was appointed superintendent by the school board in July 2012 to succeed Michael Spencer, who served as interim superintendent of schools. Spencer had previously been the district's chief of operations (2003-2011) and was principal of Maury High School (1995-2003).

Norfolk, Virginia, home of the world's largest naval station, has a population of 238,832 people and spans an area of slightly over 66 square miles. Norfolk serves as the cultural and financial hub of Southeastern Virginia.

In 2011, the school district had 33 elementary schools, eight middle schools, five high schools, and other alternative and specialty programs. In addition, the district has a high school International Baccalaureate program, as well as a middle school program focusing on international studies. The district also has an extensive pre-kindergarten program that includes several early childhood centers.

Student Characteristics

The Norfolk School district enrolled 34,011 students in the 2009-10 school year, the most recent year on which enrollment data are available nationally from the National Center for Educational Statistics—or about 27.3 percent of the state's enrollment. Some 63.3 percent of the student population was African American, while White students accounted for 23.0 percent of the district's enrollment. Only 4.2 percent of the student population in 2009-10 was Hispanic, 2.6 percent was Asian, 0.2 percent was American Indian or Alaska Native, and 6.7 percent of students were not in those classifications. (See exhibit 1.)

Compared with the State of Virginia, Norfolk students were more likely to be poor than their statewide peers. Some 61.3 percent of Norfolk's students were eligible for the National School Lunch Program—a rate approaching twice the statewide average of 35.7 percent. Norfolk's percentage of students with an individualized education plan (IEP)—13.7 percent-- is similar to that of the statewide average of 13.2 percent. However, Norfolk has a very low percentage of English language learners (1.8 percent), compared with the state average of 7.0 percent.

In addition, the Council team looked at the district's enrollment compared to the state averages and to urban school averages nationwide. (See exhibit 1.) It found that Norfolk enrolled more than 2.5 times the percentage of Black students than the State of Virginia (25.4 percent). Moreover, Black student enrollment in the Norfolk Public Schools was almost twice the percentage of the average Council-member district (33.7 percent) and almost four times the national percentage of 16.4 percent.

In 2009-2010, the percentages of Hispanics students enrolled in the state (9.4 percent) and in NPS (4.2 percent) were much lower than the national rate of 22.6 percent and the Council average of 37.5 percent. In addition, the percentage of Asian students in Norfolk (2.6 percent) was only about a third that of Asian students in other Great City School districts (6.6 percent).

Moreover, the Norfolk Public Schools had the same percentage of students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) as other Council-member districts (13.7 percent). And only about 1.8 percent of the district's students were English language learners (ELLs), a level significantly lower than the nation (9.5 percent) or other urban districts (16.7 percent).

Exhibit 1. Comparison of Norfolk, the State of Virginia, the Council of the Great City Schools Member Districts, and All Schools in the Nation, 2009-2010

	Norfolk	Virginia	CGCS	Nation
Enrollment	34,011	1,245,340	7,020,653	49,811,154
% American Indian/ Alaska Native	0.2	0.3	0.5	1.3
% Asian	2.6	5.9	6.6	4.9
% Hispanic	4.2	9.4	37.5	22.6
% Black	63.3	25.4	33.7	16.4
% White	23.0	56.0	19.9	52.8
% Other	6.7	2.9	1.4	1.8
% NSLP	61.3	35.7	56.6	46.0
% with IEPs	13.7	13.2	13.7	13.2
% ELLs	1.8	7.0	16.7	9.5
Pupils/Teacher	15.7	17.6	15.9	15.5
Schools	54	2,193	11,864	103,695
Students/School	630	568	592	480
Spending/Pupil (2008-09 data)	$11,441	$12,455	$14,656	$12,529

Data source: National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2009-10 School FTE, 2009-10 District FTE, and 2008-09 District FIN

In addition, the Norfolk school district had a lower student-per-teacher ratio (15.7) than the average ratio in the state (17.6)[2] and a slightly lower ratio than other urban districts (15.9).

[2] According to the 2009-2010 NCES database, the most recent available.

Moreover, Norfolk spent about $1,000 less per student than the state ($11,441 to $12,455, respectively), according to the 2008-09 NCES database, the most recent data available. And, Norfolk's per-pupil expenditure of $11,441 was approximately $3,000 lower than the average CGCS district. (See exhibit 1.)

The Council team also looked at trends in enrollment between school years 2007-08 and 2011-12. (See exhibit 2.) Trend data show that Norfolk's enrollment decreased by 1,541 students between 2007 and 2012 using NCES and NPS data. However, the percentages of Black and White students remained relatively stable over the same period. There was only a 1.6 percentage point decrease in the percentage of Black students and a 1.4 percentage point decrease in the percentage of White students. However, the percentage of Hispanic students rose from 3.9 percent to 6.2 percent of the NPS enrollment during the same period. Moreover, the enrollment of "Other" students (which includes mixed races/ethnicities and those who do not identify any ethnicity) grew from 8.6 percent of the enrollment in 2007-08 to 9.2 percent in 2011-12.

Furthermore, the percentage of students eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) showed a large increase—a gain of 9.4 percentage points between 2007 and 2012. There was also a small decrease over the period (0.8 percentage points) in the percentage of students in the district with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) over the period.

Exhibit 2. Trends in Norfolk Public Schools Student Demographics and Teacher Ratios, 2007-08 to 2011-12.

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Enrollment	35,063	34,431	34,011	33,829	33,522
% Black	63.9	63.5	63.3	62.6	62.3
% Hispanic	3.9	4.0	4.2	6.1	6.2
% White	23.7	23.4	23.0	22.5	22.3
% Other	8.6	9.1	9.5	8.8	9.2
% NSLP	57.5	58.3	61.3	69.8	66.9
% ELLs	1.5	1.5	1.8	1.9	1.9
% with IEPs	14.0	13.9	13.7	12.9	13.2
Pupils/Teacher	16.2	16.0	15.7	12.6	13.5
FTE Teachers	2,163.9	2,148.2	2,171.4	2,695	2,479

Data Sources: National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2009-10 School FTE, 2009-10 District FTE. 2011-12 data provided by Norfolk Public Schools

Maybe more importantly, the district managed, in spite of significant budget cuts in the last four years, to lower its pupil/teacher ratio from 16.2 in 2007 to 13.5 in 2012. (See exhibit 2.)

Student Achievement

The Council's Strategic Support Team also examined student math and reading achievement in grades 3 through 8 in the Norfolk Public Schools. The examination entailed looking at spring 2011 results, 2011 results compared to 2008 results, cohort groups enrolled in the district between 2008 and 2010, Norfolk results compared with state results, and Norfolk's status on *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB*)* and state accountability systems. Finally, we examined student math performance by school. While the report is focused on middle school achievement, we examined elementary achievement as well, since it is the foundation on which middle school performance rests.

State Assessment in Mathematics

Virginia's student assessment system in mathematics is composed of Standards of Learning Assessments (SOL), which are designed to measure student achievement against state grade-level standards in grades 3 through 8, along with end-of-course results. The SOL assessment is administered online in late May/early June to students at the middle school level.

In Virginia, student performance on the Standards of Learning Assessments (SOL) is used for school and district accountability purposes under *No Child Left Behind* and for the state's accountability systems. The SOL classifies student achievement according to four categories: advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic. The cut scores for proficiency in mathematics have remained stable over time. The minimum score for the proficient level is 400 out of 600 at every grade level. When the state refers to percentages of students proficient in mathematics, it means the percentage of students who perform at either the proficient or advanced levels. (See exhibit 3.)

Exhibit 3. Proficiency Level Scaled Score Ranges in Mathematics for the Standards of Learning Assessments (SOL)

Proficiency Level	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Advanced	500 or above	500 or above	500 or above	500 or above	500 or above	500 or above
Proficient	400-499	400-499	400-499	400-499	400-499	400-499
Basic	312-399	305-399	311-399	317-399	314-399	297-399
Below Basic	311 or below	304 or below	310 or below	316 or below	313 or below	296 or below

Data Source: Norfolk Public School Data furnished to the team.

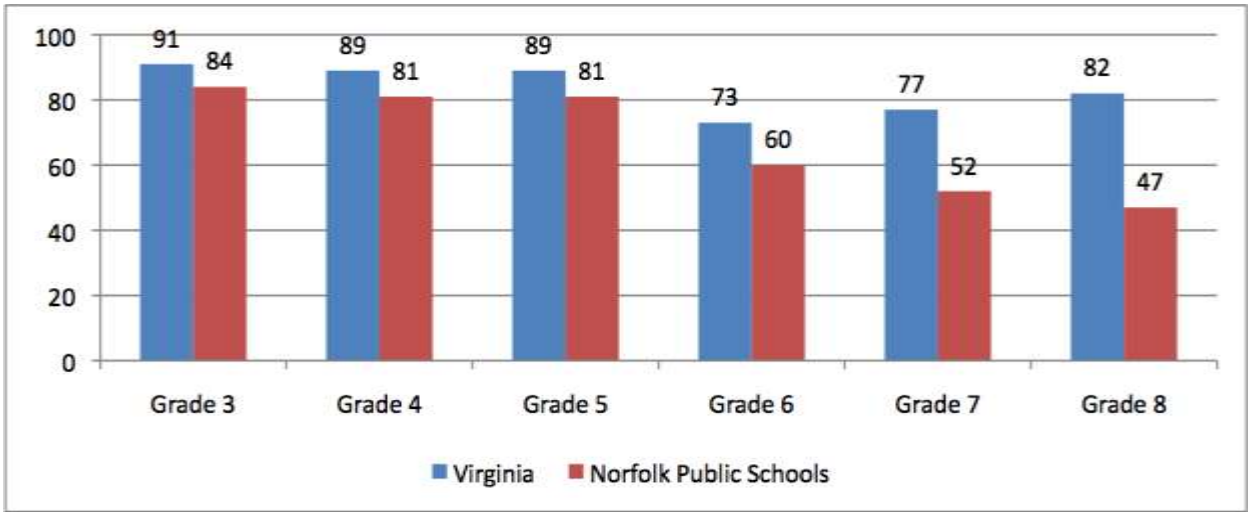
In 2011, over 80 percent of elementary school students in NPS achieved at proficient levels or above on the SOL mathematics test (84 percent of third graders, 81 percent of fourth graders, and 89 percent of fifth graders). NPS achievement in those grade levels is somewhat

lower than statewide averages grade-by-grade, but never by more than by 8 percentage points. However, middle school students in NPS did not approach these statewide achievement levels: Only 60 percent of seventh graders, 52 percent of seventh graders, and 47 percent of eighth graders attained a proficient level or above on the SOL mathematics test in 2011.

It is important to note that state reporting can be somewhat deceptive in that the data do not paint a full picture of middle school mathematics achievement for Norfolk.[3] On deeper investigation, the team discovered that state data only show results for 39 NPS students who took the seventh grade math SOL and 1700 eighth graders. Students taking Algebra I or geometry in middle school are not shown in the state data. (An explanation for how this happens is found in footnote 3 below and in chapter 2.) So while we comment on these state data in mathematics, the reader should keep in mind that they omit most of Norfolk's middle school students.

According to these incomplete state data, Norfolk middle school students lagged far behind their statewide peers. On the SOL mathematics test in 2011, NPS sixth graders scored 18 percentage points lower than statewide averages, seventh graders scored 25 percentage points lower, and eighth graders scores 35 percentage points lower. While Norfolk student performance declined sharply between sixth and eighth grades, statewide performance improved between sixth and eighth grade in 2011. (See exhibit 4.)

Exhibit 4. Performance on the Mathematics Standards of Learning Assessment (SOL) for the State of Virginia and Norfolk Public Schools, 2011



Data Source: Virginia Department of Education

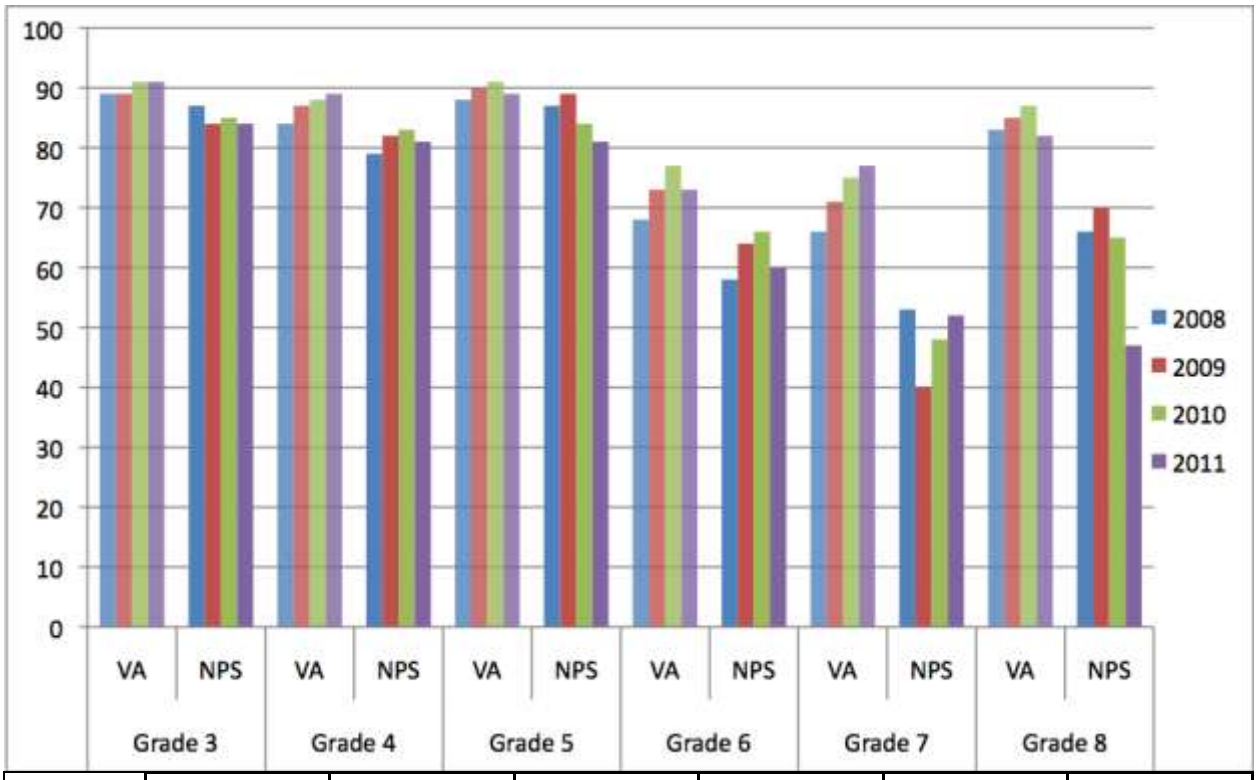
The team also reviewed student achievement data in grades 3 through 8 for both the state of Virginia and the Norfolk Public Schools during a four-year period spanning 2008 to 2011. In

[3] The team was informed that Norfolk Public Schools works to place more students in Algebra I in eighth grade rather than wait until high school. This means that the district compresses middle school math into two years rather than three for most students. Most seventh grade students take the eighth grade test, and the data results for those seventh graders appear as eighth grade scores. Those who pass the eighth grade test in seventh grade are placed into Algebra I in the eighth grade. Those who did not pass that test in seventh grade enroll in eighth grade mathematics and re-take the eighth grade test at that grade level. It would require deft data handling at the district level to extract meaningful results from the state data reports.

using Virginia Department of Education data, the reader should keep two things in mind. At the middle school level, there have been nominal increases in student achievement on the Virginia Standards of Learning Assessment in both mathematics and reading.

In mathematics, Norfolk Public Schools students at every grade level scored below their statewide peers. In addition, during every year between 2008 and 2011, students at elementary grades both statewide and in NPS had higher proficiency rates on the SOL math test than did middle school students

Exhibit 5. Performance on the Mathematics Standards of Learning Assessment (SOL) for the State of Virginia and Norfolk Public Schools, 2008 through 2011



% PASSED	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
Year	**VA**	**NPS**	**VA**	**NPS**	**VA**	**NPS**	**VA**	**NPS**	**VA**	**NPS**	**VA**	**NPS**
2008	89	87	84	79	88	87	68	58	66	53	83	66
2009	89	84	87	82	90	89	73	64	71	40	85	70
2010	91	85	88	83	91	84	77	66	75	48	87	65
2011	91	84	89	81	89	81	73	60	77	52	82	47
Change	**2**	**(3)**	**5**	**2**	**1**	**(6)**	**5**	**2**	**11**	**(1)**	**(1)**	**(19)**

Data Source: Virginia Department of Education

The Virginia Department of Education also reported gains in student performance statewide, with the exception of grade 8, where the state declined a single percentage point between 2008 and 2011. During the same period, however, Norfolk Public Schools showed

decreases in math achievement, declining three percentage points in third grade, six percentage points in fifth grade, one percentage point in seventh grade, and 19 percentage points in eighth grade. Moreover, even the gains NPS made in fourth and sixth grades were not as great as statewide increases. This means that the achievement gap between NPS students and their statewide peers is growing. (See exhibit 5.)

State Assessment in Reading

The proficiency levels for scores on the SOL reading assessment use the same cutoffs for proficiency as do the SOL math tests. Student performance scores of 500 or above are classified as advanced; scores of 400-499 are classified as proficient. The basic and below-basic levels have slightly higher cutoffs than those in mathematics and vary by grade level. (See exhibit 6.) While individual students are ranked on four levels, the state website reports only three: advanced, proficient, and "failed" (grouping basic and below basic together under the label of "failed.")

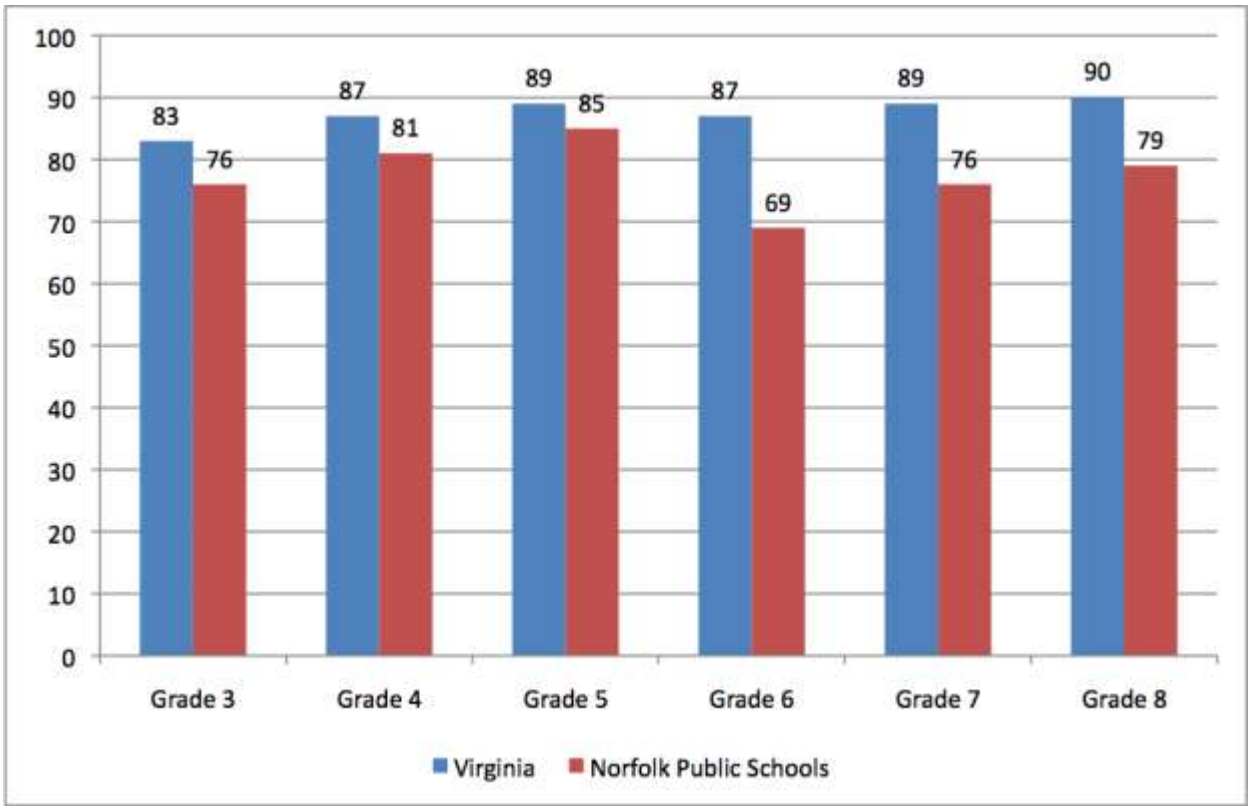
Exhibit 6. Proficiency-Level Scaled Score Ranges in Reading for the Standards of Learning Assessments (SOL)

Proficiency Level	**Gr 3**	**Gr 4**	**Gr 5**	**Gr 6**	**Gr 7**	**Gr 8**
Advanced	500 or above	500 or above	500 or above	500 or above	500 or above	500 or above
Proficient	400-499	400-499	400-499	400-499	400-499	400-499
Basic	311-399	322-399	339-399	324-399	323-399	322-399
Below Basic	310 or below	321 or below	338 or below	323 or below	322 or below	321 or below

Data Source: Norfolk Public School data furnished to the team.

In 2011, state reading performance at every grade between 3 and 8 was always 82 percent proficient or above. At the elementary grade levels, NPS students scored near the state averages in 2011 in percentages of students proficient or above. However, the gap widened significantly in middle school. In 2011, the gap in reading performance between NPS and the state ranged from a low of four percentage points in fifth grade to 18 percentage points in the sixth grade. In 2011, NPS reading performance dropped from 85 percent proficient and above in grade 5 to 69 percent proficient and above in grade 6. However, in 2011, the percentage of NPS students who scored proficient or above in reading was higher in grades seven and eight (76 and 79 percent, respectively) than in grade 6. And reading performance in the middle school grades in Norfolk was higher than in mathematics. Still, a double-digit gap separates NPS reading performance from the performance of peers statewide in grades six through eight. (See exhibit 7.)

Exhibit 7. Performance on the Reading Standards of Learning Assessment (SOL) for the State of Virginia and Norfolk Public Schools, 2011

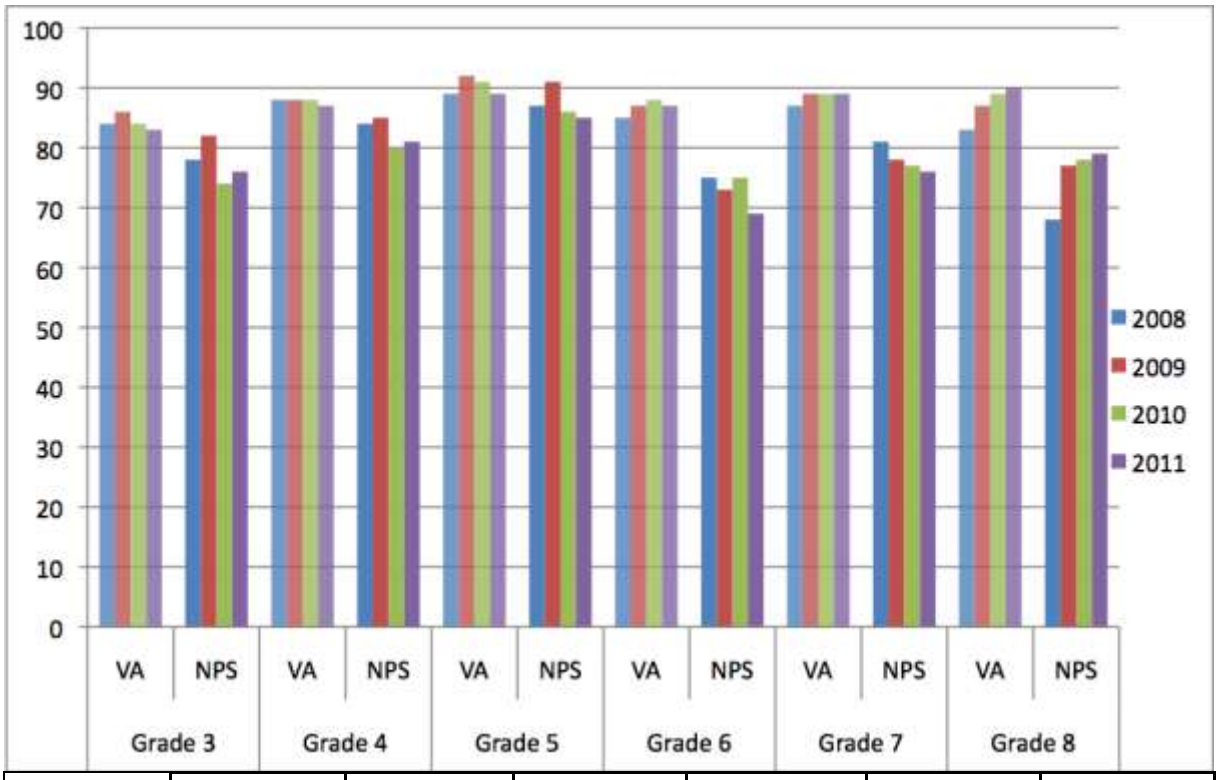


Data Source: Virginia Department of Education

As in mathematics, lower percentages of Norfolk Public Schools students scored at proficient levels or above than their statewide peers in reading at every grade level each year between 2008 and 2011. The reading performances of both the state and the city were fairly flat at the elementary grades. The state did post a single percentage point decline in grades 3 and 4, while Norfolk students showed a slightly larger loss of two to three percentage points over the same period. (See exhibit 8.)

At the middle-school levels, however, the state posted gains of two to seven percentage points in reading between 2008 and 2011. The gap between the state and NPS in the sixth and seventh grades grew over the same period, with a decline of six percentage points among NPS sixth graders and a decline of five percentage points among seventh graders. However, in grade 8, Norfolk students gained 11 percentage points in reading proficiency between 2008 and 2011, compared with a gain of 7 percentage points for the state, thereby narrowing the gap from 15 percentage points in 2008 to 11 percentage points in 2011. (See exhibit 8.)

Exhibit 8. Performance on the Reading Standards of Learning Assessment (SOL) for the State of Virginia and Norfolk Public Schools, 2008 through 2011



% PASSED	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
Year	**VA**	**NPS**	**VA**	**NPS**	**VA**	**NPS**	**VA**	**NPS**	**VA**	**NPS**	**VA**	**NPS**
2008	84	78	88	84	89	87	85	75	87	81	83	68
2009	86	82	88	85	92	91	87	73	89	78	87	77
2010	84	74	88	80	91	86	88	75	89	77	89	78
2011	83	76	87	81	89	85	87	69	89	76	90	79
Change	(1)	(2)	(1)	(3)	0	(2)	2	(6)	2	(5)	7	11

Data Source: Virginia Department of Education

Trends in Performance in Mathematics, Reading, and History/Social Studies

In addition to examining achievement at the proficient level, the SST examined the percentage of students scoring at the highest levels, where proficiancy is clearly evident. Similarly, the team examined data on students who failed to attain proficiency. Unfortunately, the State of Virginia disaggregates data on the percentages of students passing, but it does not publicly provide data disaggregating results at basic and below basic levels.

Nonetheless, the team examined trends in NPS student performance levels between 2008 and 2011 at each of three state-reported performance levels (advanced, proficient, failed) in mathematics, reading, and social studies.

Mathematics Trends

The data in exhibit 9 show that the percentage of NPS students scoring at the advanced level on the SOL mathematics test is greater at the elementary school level than at the middle school. Fifth grade students had the largest percentages performing at advanced levels in math between spring 2008 and spring 2011—scoring over 45 percent each year at the advanced level. However, the 45 percent advanced in 2011 was a decline from a high of 53 percent in 2009.

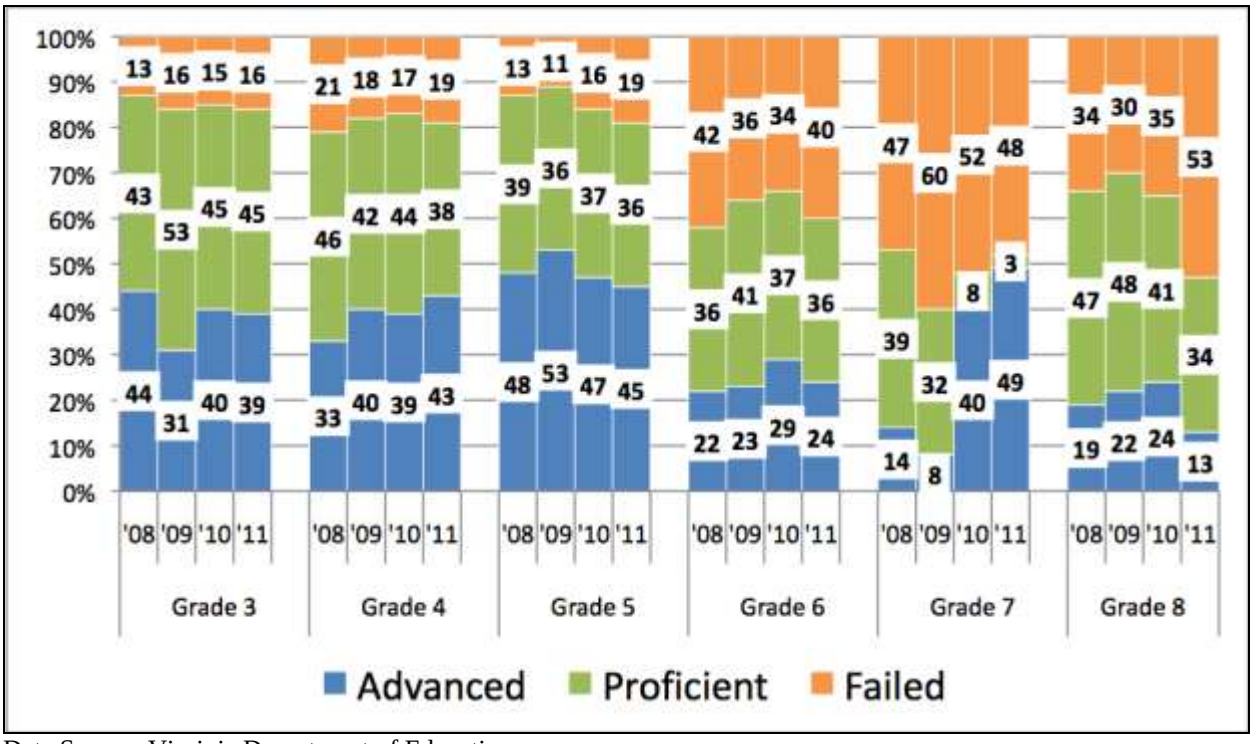
On the other hand, eighth grade tended to have the lowest percentage of students performing at advanced levels on the SOL math test (13 percent in 2011, down from 24 percent in 2010). In contrast, in 2010 and 2011, the percentage of NPS sixth graders scoring at the advanced level was about half the percentage of fifth and seven graders scoring at that level. However, one should keep in mind that the district's practice of compressing seventh and eighth grade mathematics courses was in place during 2010 and 2011. (This practice is described more fully in chapter 2.)

The combined percentages of NPS students performing at proficient and advanced levels in mathematics were generally lower in 2011 than in 2010, except in grade 7 (which reports data on only 39 students). Performance at the advanced level varied sharply at the middle school level. Sixth graders at the advanced level ranged from 22 percent in 2008 to 24 percent in 2011, after having reached 29 percent in 2010. Eighth grade math performance on the SOL at the advanced level rose for three years, before declining to 13 percent in 2011, which might have been an artifact of state reporting methods. Of the reported seventh graders—that is, those taking the seventh grade math SOL, state data indicated that students tended either to pass at the advanced level or to fail. About 49 percent of district seventh graders attained the advanced level while 48 percent failed. (See exhibits 9 and 10.)

Because the team learned that the State of Virginia's Department of Education does not separately post seventh and eighth grade performance on the high school end-of-course exams that these middle schoolers take, the team used Norfolk Public Schools data to examine spring 2011 results. The district data were analyzed using pseudo-identification numbers to protect student identity. Looking at these data provides a somewhat less grim view of student performance than looking at state reports.

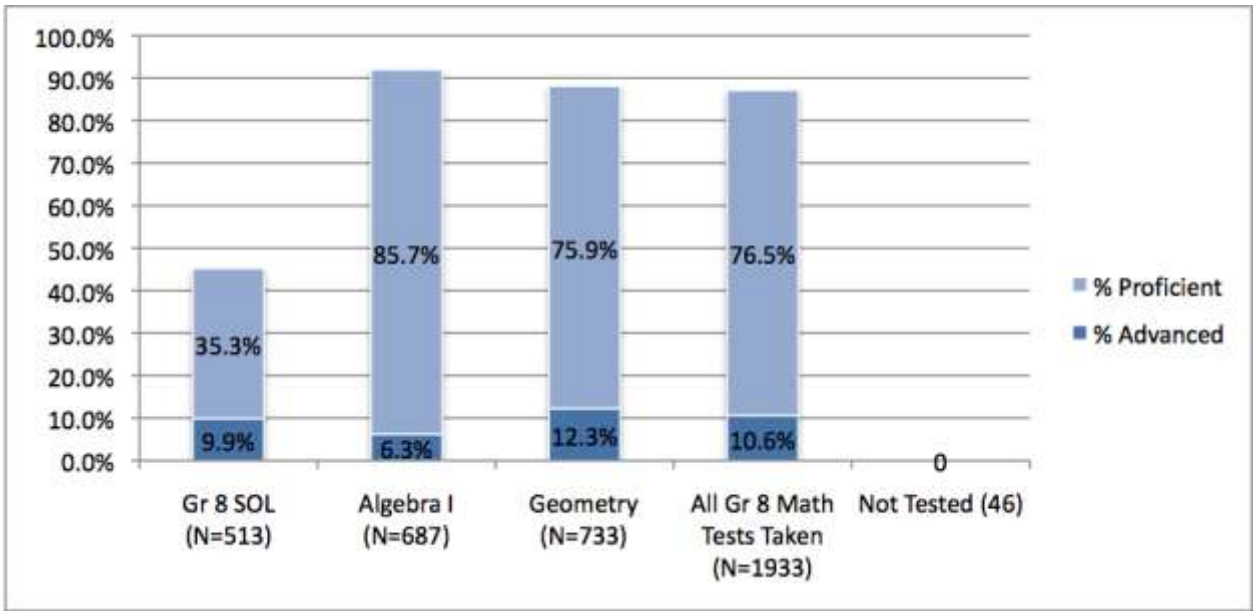
Exhibit 10 reports the results of the data analysis on the math performance of 1,979 eighth-graders in spring 2011. Of that number, 46 (2.3 percent) were not tested. About 37 percent (733) of the eighth graders took the geometry test, and 88.2 percent of them passed. About 34.7 percent (687) of the eighth graders took the state's Algebra I end-of-course test, and 92.0 percent of them passed that high school test. Of the remaining 513 students (25.9 percent), only 45.2 percent passed the eighth grade SOL test in spring 2011. This is a lower figure than the state uses (47 percent). However, the discrepancy might be due to our calculation's being unadjusted for students who entered the district after the October cutoff date and our inability to awards points for successfully remediating students. Despite the flaws in the data, the failure rates are still high. It should be noted that very low percentages of students performed at advanced levels in Algebra I or geometry, but the nature of the data do not permit one to know whether the low performance levels are due to students being unprepared, are an artifact of having middle school students taking a high school exit exam, or both.

Exhibit 9. Norfolk Public Schools Performance-Level Percentages on Standards of Learning (SOL) Mathematics, 2008-2011



Data Source: Virginia Department of Education

Exhibit 10. Eighth Grade Passing Performance at Proficient and Advanced Levels on SOL Eighth Grade Mathematics, Algebra I, Geometry, and All Tests Taken, 2011



Data source: Norfolk Public Schools

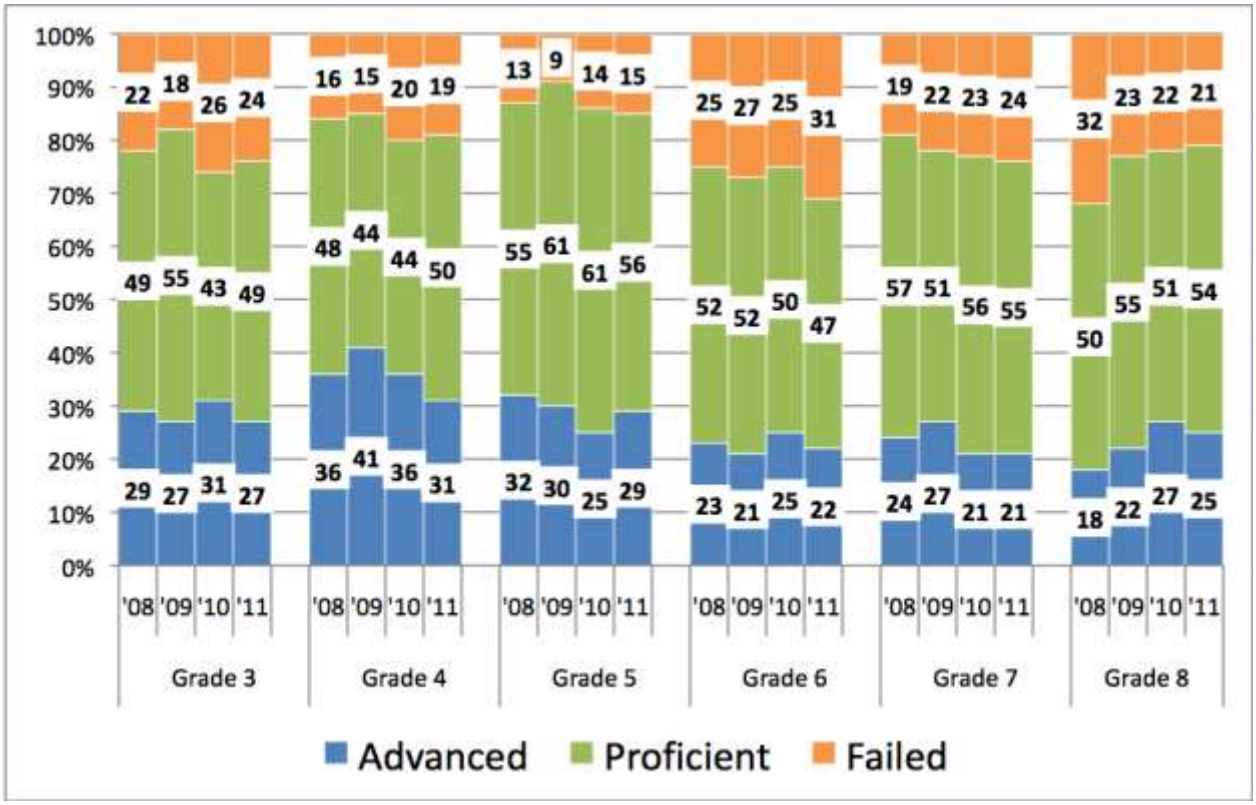
Reading Trends

SOL reading data do not have the same confounding issues seen in mathematics because all students are tested in the same ways and there are no compressed classes. The reading results show the percentage of students achieving at the advanced level on the SOL reading test is greater at the elementary level than at the middle school level, but the differences are not as stark as in mathematics.

In general, in 2011, performance at the proficient and advanced levels was higher in reading than in mathematics. However, at the elementary school level, the percentage of NPS students achieving at the advanced level in reading was lower than the percentage scoring at the advanced level in mathematics. Sixth graders in NPS performed comparably at the advanced levels in mathematics and reading. The percentage of seventh graders scoring at the advanced level was higher in math than in reading; however, the percentage of eight graders scoring at the advanced level on the SOL was higher in reading than in math. (See exhibit 11).

Fourth grade had the highest portion of students achieving at the advanced level in reading (31 percent in 2011), while seventh grade had the lowest (21 percent). At grade five in 2010, 86 percent of students scored at the proficient level or better, while in 2011, only 69 percent of NPS sixth graders scored at the proficient level or better. (See exhibit 11.)

Exhibit 11. Norfolk Public Schools Performance Level Percentages on Standards of Learning (SOL) Reading, 2008-2011

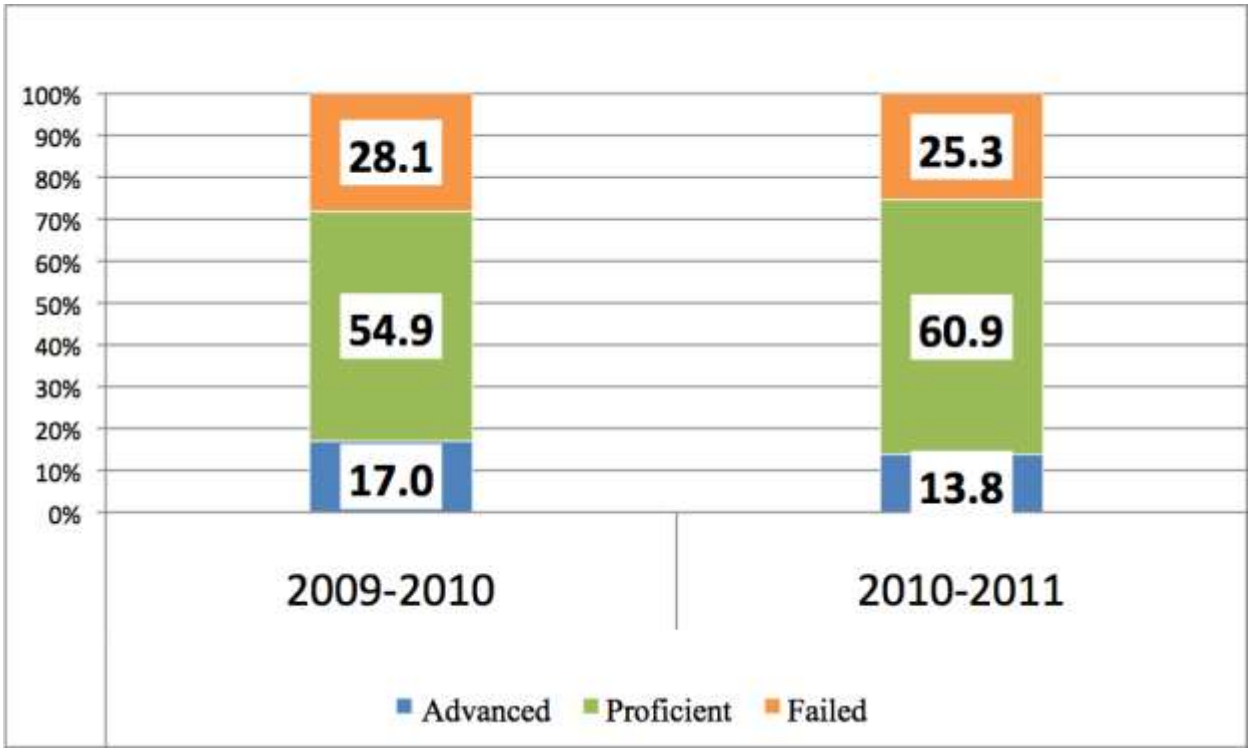


Data Source: Virginia Department of Education

History/Social Studies Trends

In addition to mathematics and reading, the data on grade 8 show that, between 2010 and 2011, the percentage of students failing the SOL assessment in history/social studies decreased by more than three percentage points. However, the improvement at the lowest levels did not transfer to the higher performance levels. The percentage of students scoring at the advanced level actually decreased by 4.8 percentage points between spring 2010 and 2011; the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level increased by six percentage points. (See exhibit 12.)

E**xhibit 12.** Norfolk Public Schools Performance-Level Percentages on Standards of Learning Grade 8 History/Social Studies, Spring 2010 to Spring 2011



Data Source: Virginia Department of Education

Middle School Results by Selected Student Groups in 2011

The Council's team also examined the Virginia Department of Education data on 2011 student achievement results to assess achievement gaps by ethnicity in mathematics and reading. While the exhibits show state data on multiple ethnic groups, this report focuses on the largest groups in the Norfolk Public Schools.

Student Groups in Mathematics

Exhibit 13 shows that the range of math performance in grades 3 through 8 varies for each student group. However, the range is wider at the middle grades than at elementary level for all subgroups. The percentage of students passing the grade five SOL in 2011 exceeds the percentage of students of all ethnic groups passing in grade six. Black students generally have lower passing rates at the advanced level in grades 3 through 8.

The team also compared student achievement by subgroups to their statewide counterparts. Exhibit 14 shows the state and city achievement of each student subgroup according to the state's three SOL performance levels for grades 6, 7, and 8. The results showed that state grade-level peers outperformed every Norfolk student group at every grade level.

The team was particularly cautious about using math data in grades 7 and 8 for two reasons. First, the state website only reports on a small, select group of 39 NPS seventh graders because most NPS students in Grade 7 took the eighth grade SOL math test in both 2010 and 2011. Those seventh graders who passed the eighth grade math test in seventh grade were then placed in high school math courses. However, most NPS students who took the grade 8 test in eighth grade had failed it previously and were subsequently placed in the regular math program. For those reasons, this section emphasizes sixth-grade student data.

In general White students in Norfolk and in Virginia outscored Black and Hispanic students on the SOL math test in 2011, except for grade 7 where only 39 students (33 of them Black) took the test. Exhibit 14 shows passing rates among White sixth graders were similar in NPS (76 percent) and statewide (79 percent). Moreover, 44 percent of sixth grade White students in NPS scored at the advanced level, compared with 37 percent of their statewide peers. About 83 percent of White students statewide passed the seventh grade math test, but the number of White seventh graders in NPS (out of the total 39 tested) was too small to analyze.

At eighth grade, 87 percent of White students statewide passed the SOL math test in 2011, with 54 percent scoring at the advanced level. By contrast, only 57 percent of White students in Norfolk passed the eighth grade SOL math exam, with only 23 percent at the advanced level. However, one should note that average eighth grade performance in NPS reflects only a subset of students who were not already enrolled in the high school math courses. The percentage of White eighth graders statewide and in NPS achieving at the proficient level are similar, but there is a 30-point difference between them in overall passing rates because there is a lower percentage of NPS students achieving at the advanced level.

Exhibit 14 also shows that Black students statewide and in NPS achieved at very similar levels on the SOL math exam in 2011: Fifty-six percent of Black sixth graders statewide passed the SOL, compared with 51 percent of Black sixth graders in NPS—a difference of only five percentage points. The percentage of Black sixth graders achieving at advanced and proficient levels in NPS and statewide was also similar. On the other hand, within NPS, 51 percent of Black sixth graders achieved passing levels, compared to 76 percent of White sixth graders—a gap of 25 points.

Finally, Hispanic sixth graders statewide and in NPS had similar achievement levels. About 67 percent of sixth grade Hispanic students statewide passed the SOL math exam, compared with 65 percent in Norfolk. However, only 18 percent of Hispanic sixth graders in NPS scored at the advanced level while 24 percent of their statewide peers did. Within NPS, Hispanic sixth graders had passing rates that were 11 percentage points lower than White sixth graders but 16 percentage points higher than Black sixth graders. (See exhibit 14.)

Exhibit 13. Norfolk Mathematics Standards of Learning Level Assessment (SOL) Level and Percentage for Grades 3-8 by Ethnicity, 2011

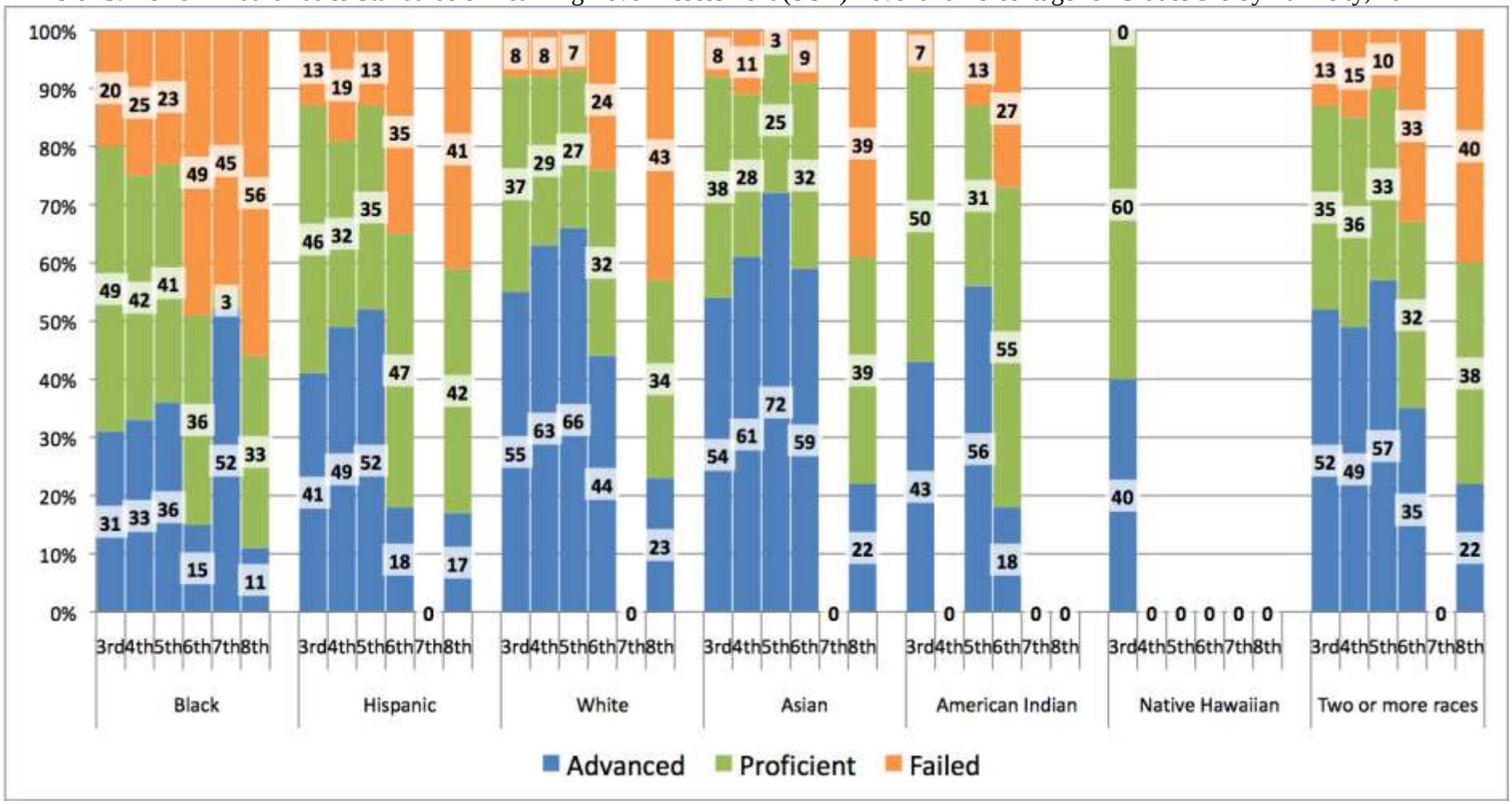
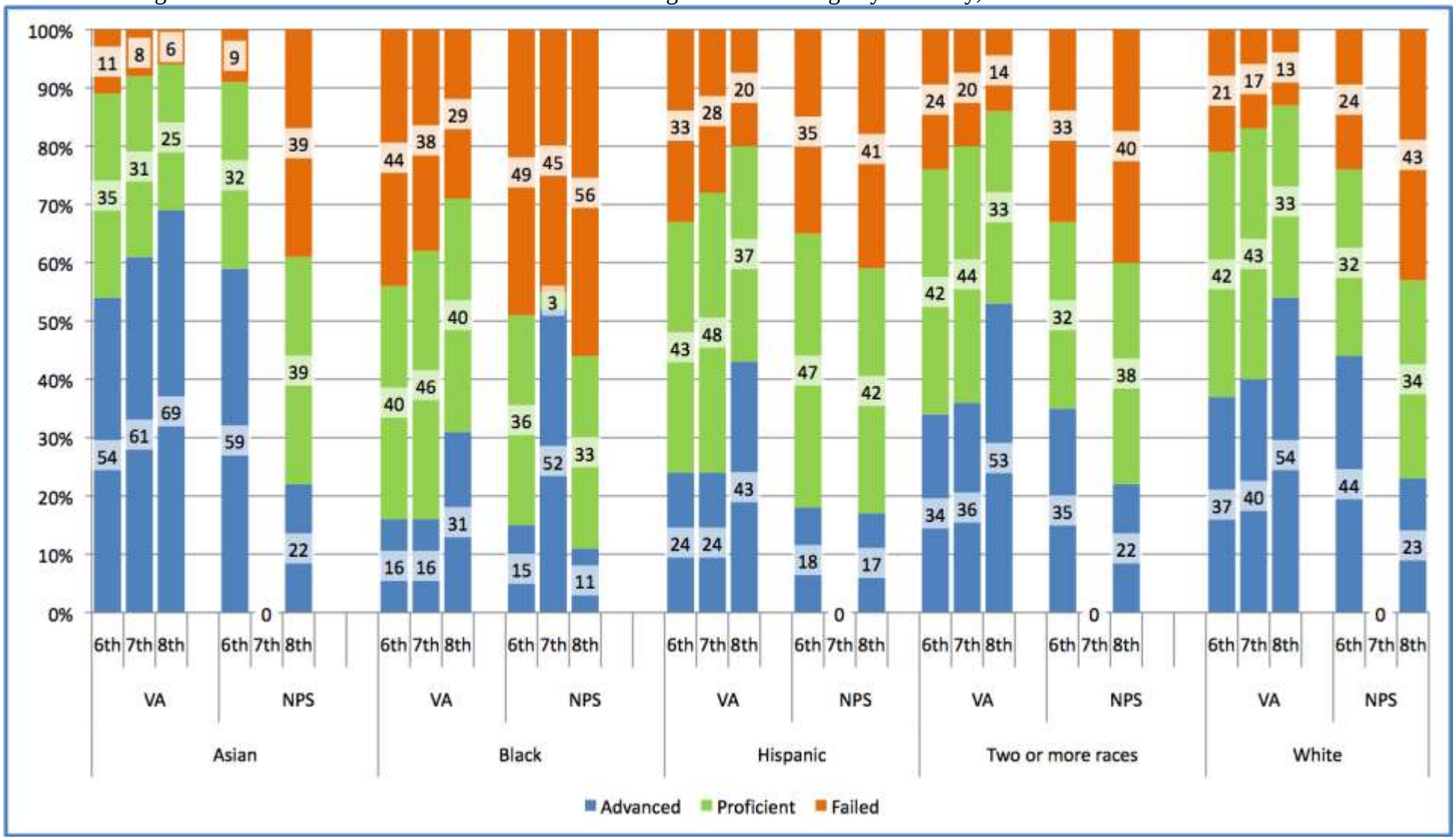


Exhibit 14. Virginia and Norfolk Mathematics Standards of Learning Level Percentage by Ethnicity, 2011



Reading Performance by Ethnicity

Exhibit 15 shows middle school SOL reading achievement levels for selected student groups in Virginia and Norfolk in 2011. For the student groups shown, eighth grade performance was the highest among grades 6-8. Statewide passing rates for each grade and each ethnic group were almost always higher than for the corresponding NPS peer group. Likewise, statewide performance at the advanced level in every student group in the middle grades was higher than for their corresponding Norfolk group.

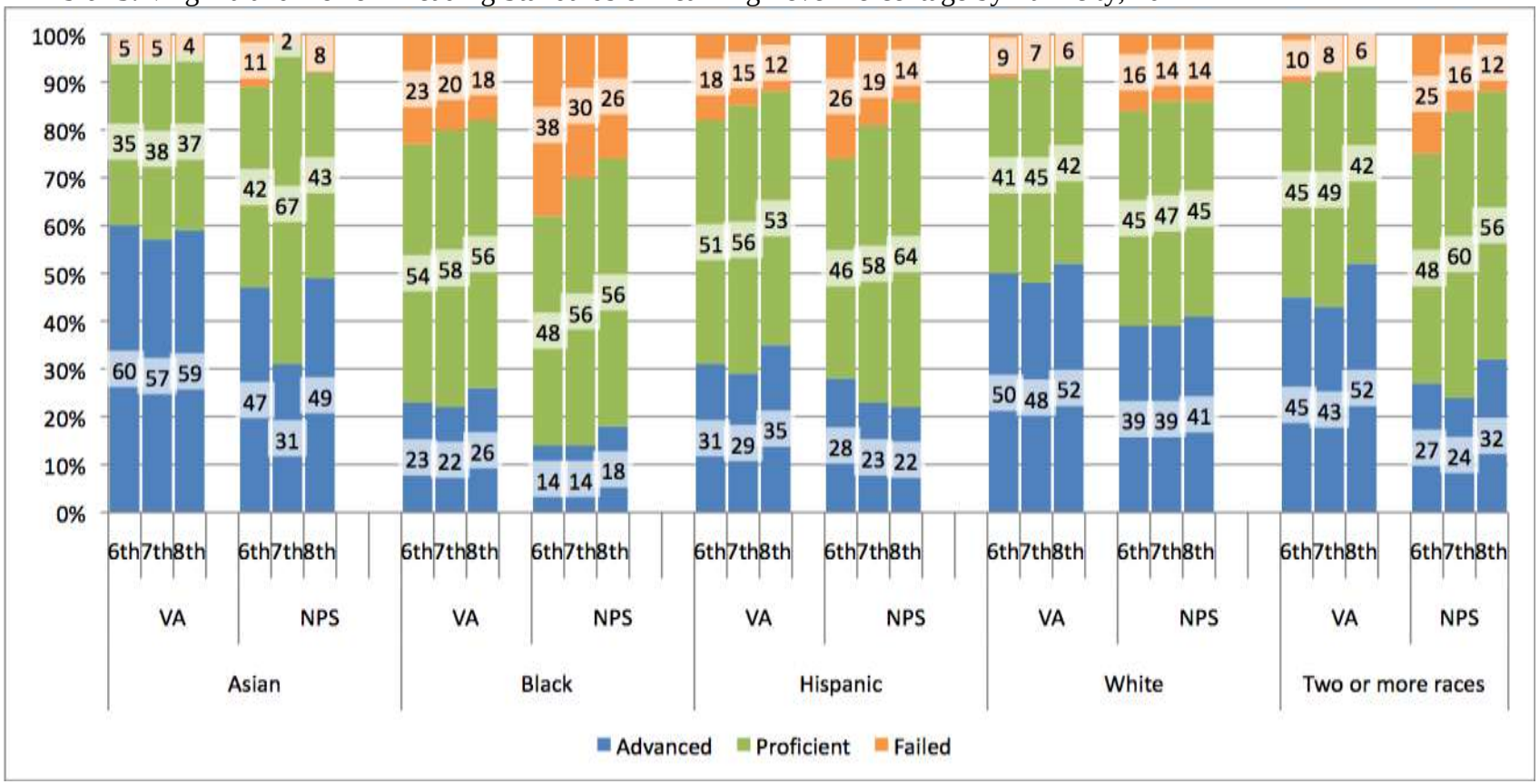
In 2011, Asian students statewide also outperformed all ethnic groups in reading, with 60 percent scoring at advanced level in grade 6, 57 percent in grade 7, and 59 percent in grade 8. Their overall statewide passing rates hover around the 95-96 percent range. Asian students also lead other ethnic groups in Norfolk. Their passing rates (proficient or above) on the SOL reading exam are uniformly high: 89 percent in grade 6, 98 percent in grade 7, and 92 percent in grade 8.

Moreover, White students statewide performed nearly as well as Asian middle school students, with passing rates of 91 percent in grade 6, 93 percent in grade 7, and 94 percent in grade 8. However, White students in NPS read at somewhat lower achievement levels than their statewide peers (84 percent passing in sixth grade and 86 percent in both seventh and eighth grades). White students in middle schools statewide performed about 10 percentage points higher at the advanced reading level than White middle schoolers in NPS.

Hispanic student scores were somewhat below those of White students. Between 82 and 88 percent of Hispanic middle school students statewide passed the SOL reading in 2011. In NPS, the range in passing rates among Hispanic students was from 74 percent in sixth grade (eight percentage points lower than their statewide peers) to 86 percent in eighth grade (only two percentage points below their statewide peers). However, the percentage of students achieving at the advanced level in reading among Hispanic students both statewide and in NPS never reached more than one-third.

Finally, among all groups and at each grade level, NPS, Black students had the lowest percentage with scores of proficient or above in reading (62 percent in grade 6, 70 percent in grade 7, and 74 percent in grade 8). These levels were between 8 and 15 percentage points lower than their statewide peers (77 percent in grade 6, 80 percent in grade 7, and 82 in grade 8). The percentage of White students in NPS scoring at the advanced level on the SOL reading exam in 2011 was more than twice the percentage of Black students. (See exhibit 15.)

Exhibit 15. Virginia and Norfolk Reading Standards of Learning Level Percentage by Ethnicity, 2011



Reading Performance on Three-Year Longitudinal Cohorts

Of course, status scores alone do not provide a complete picture of student performance at the middle school level because annual performance levels represent a changing cohort of students every year. For example, average seventh-grade performance does not measure the same students who were in sixth grade the previous year. In addition, the test itself can vary from year-to-year and may not be vertically aligned across grade levels. Nor do annual snapshots of proficient levels take into account differences in where students started. Consequently, while average performance levels and annual changes to them can give the reader some information, the picture remains incomplete.

As a result, the Council team screened district data to determine which students had remained in the district for *three consecutive* years (2008-09 through 2010-11), and we examined the SOL data on each student over each of the three years.[4] This methodology included only those students who were in grades 4, 5, or 6 in 2008-2009. We then examined the SOL reading and mathematics data on these students in four ways.

First, we examined the number and percentage of cohorts of students achieving at each performance level in spring 2009 and spring 2011 in reading and mathematics, and we calculated the change in the numbers and percentages of students scoring at each level over time.

For example, 2,044 Norfolk students took the sixth grade SOL reading assessment in spring 2009. By spring 2011, there were 1,515 of these same students who were still enrolled in NPS in eighth grade and who were tested in 2009, 2010, and 2011. The reading achievement of these 1,515 students was tracked as a cohort.

Data on the cohort indicate about 20.5 percent (311 students) of the 1,515 NPS sixth graders in spring of 2009 scored at the advanced level on the SOL reading test; 54.7 percent scored at the proficient level; 19.6 percent, at the basic level; and 5.2 percent, at the below-basic level. The percentage of students in the cohort reading at the advanced level increased by 6.6 percentage points (from 20.5 percent to 27.1 percent) by the end of their eighth grade year. The district also saw a 1.4 percentage point improvement in the percentage of the cohort scoring at the proficient level by the eighth grade. Similarly, the cohort showed a decrease in the percentage of students scoring at the lower two levels in reading. The percentage of students scoring at the basic level dropped by 4.8 percentage points (from 19.6 to 14.8 percent) and the percentage below the basic level dropped from 5.2 percent to 2.0 percent (a reduction of 3.2 percentage points).

Consequently, of the cohort of 1,515 sixth graders taking the SOL reading assessment in 2008-09, 100 more students scored at the advanced level and 21 more students scored at the proficient level by the time they were eighth graders in 2011. Conversely, 73 fewer students in the cohort scored at the basic level in reading, and 48 fewer scored below basic in reading by eighth grade. (See exhibit 16.)

[4] The district furnished student data from its warehouse but removed student names and identifying information and then created a set of false identification numbers for use in the analysis.

Exhibit 16. Reading Performance on the SOL for Three-Year Longitudinal Cohort of Norfolk Public School Students, Grade 6 in 2008-09 and in Grade 8 in 2010-11*

	2008-'09		2010-'11		Delta	
	Student		Student		Student	
Performance Level	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percentage Points
Advanced	311	20.5	411	27.1	100	6.6
Proficient	828	54.7	849	56.0	21	1.4
Basic	297	19.6	224	14.8	-73	-4.8
Below Basic	79	5.2	31	2.0	-48	-3.2
Total Students	1515	100	1515	100		

*Data source: Norfolk Public School data furnished to the team.

Second, the Council created a rudimentary "value added" measure by examining how many individual students in the cohort changed their performance levels between spring 2009 and spring 2011.

In exhibit 17 below, the first (far left) column shows how many sixth grade students in the cohort scored at each performance level in the spring of the 2008-09 school year. Additionally, the percentages under the heading for 2010-11 show the performance levels of those same students after three years in NPS schools. For example, there were 311 sixth graders who attained the advanced level in reading in spring 2009. Three years later, 411 members of the same cohort attained the advanced level, an increase of 100 students at the highest performance level. However, these 411 students did not include all of the 311 students who were advanced readers in 2009. Of the 311 sixth graders who attained the advanced reading level in spring 2009, only 69.8 percent were still reading at the advanced level three years later. About 29.9 percent had dropped to the proficient level, and about 0.3 percent had dropped below the proficient level.

In addition, 849 students in the cohort were reading at the proficient level on the SOL test in 2011—or 21 more students than in 2009. Of the 828 sixth graders in NPS who were scoring at the proficient level in 2008-09, 22.1 percent of them had moved to the advanced level by 2010-11, and about 71.1 percent continued to perform at the proficient level. However, 6.5 percent of the cohort dropped to the basic level, and 0.2 percent fell to the below-basic level over the three-year period.

Moreover, of the 297 students who scored at the basic level in reading in 2008-09, 40.4 percent were still at that level three years later, and 3.7 percent had dropped to the below basic level on the SOL. On the other hand, 52.5 percent had improved to the proficient level and 3.4 percent had climbed all the way to the advanced reading level.

Data on the three-year cohort also showed that reading performance improved for over three-fourths of those who were reading at the below-basic level in 2008-09. Moreover, only 31 students in the cohort were classified at the lowest level by the time they were in the eighth grade. About 62.0 percent had improved one level (to basic), 13.9

percent had improved to proficient, and 1.3 percent had improved to the advanced reading level. However, 22.8 percent of the most struggling readers in 2008-09 were still at that level after three years of instruction. (See exhibit 17.)

Exhibit 17. SOL Reading Achievement Three-Year Cohort Value-Add Percentage of Norfolk Students Grade 6 in 2008-09 through Grade 8 in 2010-2011*

	Reading Achievement Three-Year Cohort Value-Add Percentage			
	2008 - 2009 to 2010 - 2011			
Column: Percentage of 6th grade students achieving at these levels in 2009. *Row: Level of same students in 8th grade in 2011.*	% Advanced (N=411)	% Proficient (N=849)	% Basic (N=224)	% Below Basic (N=31)
Advanced (N=311)	**69.8**	**29.9**	**0.3**	**0.0**
Proficient (N=828)	**22.1**	**71.1**	**6.5**	**0.2**
Basic (N=297)	**3.4**	**52.5**	**40.4**	**3.7**
Below Basic (N=79)	**1.3**	**13.9**	**62.0**	**22.8**

*Data source: Norfolk Public School data furnished to the team.

Third, we calculated the total number and percentage of students who had progressed, regressed, and remained at the same proficiency level over the three-year period.

For the 1,515 sixth graders in 2009 who remained in NPS for the subsequent three years, the school system improved the reading achievement levels of 27.1 percent of them by 2011. Most of this improvement was by one performance level (25.6 percent), but 1.4 percent improved two levels, and 0.1 percent improved three levels. About 62.3 percent remained at the same level (which is desirable for those at the advanced level, but less so for those at other achievement levels). There was a decline in reading achievement in 10.6 percent of the cohort, with 10.4 percent moving down one level and 0.2 percent falling two levels in performance. (See exhibit 18).

Exhibit 18. Percentage of Norfolk Students in the Longitudinal Cohort Who Remained at the Same Performance Level on the Reading SOL or Improved or Declined by One to Three Levels, 2008 through 2011.*

Summary	Value Add	%No Change	%One Level	%Two Levels	%Three Levels
%Regressed	**10.6**		10.4	0.2	0.0
%No Change	**62.3**	62.3			
%Progressed	**27.1**		25.6	1.4	0.1

*Data source: Norfolk Public School data furnished to the team.

Fourth, the team created a "net weighted impact metric" to compare district net gains and losses among cohort students over the three-year period.

To calculate the net change metric, the team applied a positive or negative multiplier to the percentage of students who gained or regressed performance levels over the three years. The weight for regressing one level was (-1); regressing two levels, (-2); and so on. Gains in performance levels earned positive weights. The weighted scores were then totaled to derive a "net weighted impact metric." The resulting total was a relative measure of how the district's instructional program has impacted the students who had been enrolled in NPS for three years.

This methodology—the net weighted impact metric—assumes that the state tests are aligned in terms of both content and level of difficulty from year to year, so the reader should treat the data cautiously and avoid over-interpretation. The Council gives this caution because—

(1) The standard error of measurement is different for each grade and subject.

(2) Scale scores for each subtest may not be vertically equated from one grade to the next.

(3) Test score comparisons from one year to the next are less valid at the individual student level, a pattern particularly true for the highest and lowest performing students. The scale scores at the extremes can vary substantially with changes in performance on a single item. This problem may be compounded with varying break points from year to year for both upper and lower performance categories.

In spite of these limitations, the team conducted the analysis because it provided a helpful big-picture story about how the district's schools are doing, and it signals to the state that its assessment system and how it is calibrated continues to have challenges that prevent the kind of analysis done in this report from being free of caveats.

The result of the computations was a net weighted impact metric on SOL reading achievement of a positive 17.8. Therefore, in general, students who were enrolled in the Norfolk middle schools for three years of instruction tended to improve their SOL performance levels. (See exhibit 19.)

Exhibit 19. Net Weighted Impact Metric for SOL Reading Achievement Three-Year Cohort of Norfolk Students Grade 6 in 2008-09 through Grade 8 in 2010-2011*

net weighted impact metric	
Positive	**17.8**

*Data source: Norfolk Public School data furnished to the team.

Mathematics Performance on Three-Year Longitudinal Cohorts

The Council's team conducted this same cohort study on mathematics for grades 6-8 between spring 2009 and spring 2011. For the cohort study in mathematics as for the one in reading, the team used individual student data with pseudo-identification numbers. For the purposes of the examination, students who were tested in mathematics in grades 6, 7, and 8—regardless of the math course they were enrolled in—were part of the cohort,

and the team did not differentiate performance based on which test students took in eighth grade. In other words, the team looked to see whether students who ranked at the advanced level in sixth grade were still performing at the advanced level in the eighth grade regardless of whether they took the Algebra I, geometry, or the regular eighth grade test in 2011.

Mathematics Cohort Analysis

In the NPS database furnished to the team, there were 2,054 students taking the sixth-grade math test in spring 2009. Only 1,486 students, however, took some math test (SOL, Algebra I, or geometry) in spring 2010 and in spring 2011. These 1,486 students were tracked as the three-year cohort the team used for analysis. Of this cohort, 23.8 percent scored at the advanced level, 42.4 percent were proficient, and 33.8 percent failed the sixth grade SOL math test in spring 2009. By spring 2011, the number of students failing a math test (of any kind) declined by 203 students to 20.2 percent (a decrease of 13.7 percentage points). However, the number of students at the advanced level also declined by 3.5 percentage points, or 52 students. (See exhibit 20.)

Exhibit 20. Mathematics Performance on the SOL for Three-Year Longitudinal Cohort of Norfolk Students Grade 6 in 2008-09 through Grade 8 in 2010-11*

	2008-'09		2010-11		Delta	
Performance	**Student**		**Student**		**Student**	
Level	**Count**	**Percent**	**Count**	**Percent**	**Count**	**Percentage Points**
Advanced	353	23.8	301	20.3	-52	-3.5
Proficient	630	42.4	885	59.6	255	17.2
Failed	503	33.8	300	20.2	-203	-13.7
Total Students	1486	100	1486	100		

*Data source: Norfolk Public School data furnished to the team.

Exhibit 21 shows that of the 353 students who were scoring at the advanced level in sixth grade in spring 2009, only 34.3 percent maintained that level on the mathematics test in spring 2011. About 65.7 percent dropped to the proficient level, but none failed.

Of the 630 sixth grade students who were at the proficient math level in 2009, 22.5 percent scored at the advanced level in 2011 and 70.5 percent remained at the proficient level. However, 7 percent had declined to the basic or below-basic levels (failed).

Of the 503 sixth grade students who did not pass the sixth grade SOL mathematics test in spring 2009, some 50.9 percent were still at that level in 2011. However, 41.6 percent had improved to the proficient level by 2011, and an additional 7.6 percent had moved to advanced levels on the test they took in eighth grade after three years of mathematics instruction in NPS. (See exhibit 21.)

Exhibit 21. SOL Mathematics Value-Add for the Three-Year Longitudinal Cohort of Norfolk Students, 2008-09 to 2010-11 (Grade 8 Math SOL, Algebra I, or Geometry Test, Spring 2011)

Mathematics Achievement Three-Year Cohort Value-Add Percentage 2008 - 2009 to 2010 – 2011			
from \ *to*	**Advanced**	**Proficient**	**Failed**
Advanced (N=353)	**34.3**	**65.7**	**0.0**
Proficient (N=630)	**22.5**	**70.5**	**7.0**
Failed (N=503)	**7.6**	**41.6**	**50.9**

*Data source: Norfolk Public School data furnished to the team.

Exhibit 22 shows that 26.2 percent of the 1,486 students staying in NPS middle schools for three years improved by one or two performance levels in math between 2008 and 2011. About 55.2 percent remained at the same level, and 18.6 percent declined by one level. No one declined two levels, but 2.6 percent of the cohort was able to improve two performance levels.

Exhibit 22. Percentage of Norfolk Students in the Longitudinal Cohort Who Remained at the Same Performance Level on the Mathematics SOL or Improved or Declined by One or Two Levels, 2008 through 2011*

Summary	Value Add	%No Change	%One Level	%Two Levels
%Regressed	**18.6**		18.6	0.0
%No Change	**55.2**	55.2		
%Progressed	**26.2**		23.6	2.6

*Data source: Norfolk Public School data furnished to the team.

The result of the complete calculations was a net weighted impact metric in mathematics of a positive 10.2, which is smaller than the reading net weighted impact metric of 17.8, but the index still indicates a "positive" impact on student math learning in the Norfolk Public Schools over the three-year period. (See exhibit 23.)

Exhibit 23. Net Weighted Impact Metric for SOL Mathematics Achievement Three-Year Cohort of Norfolk Students Grade 6 in 2008-09 through Grade 8 in 2010-2011

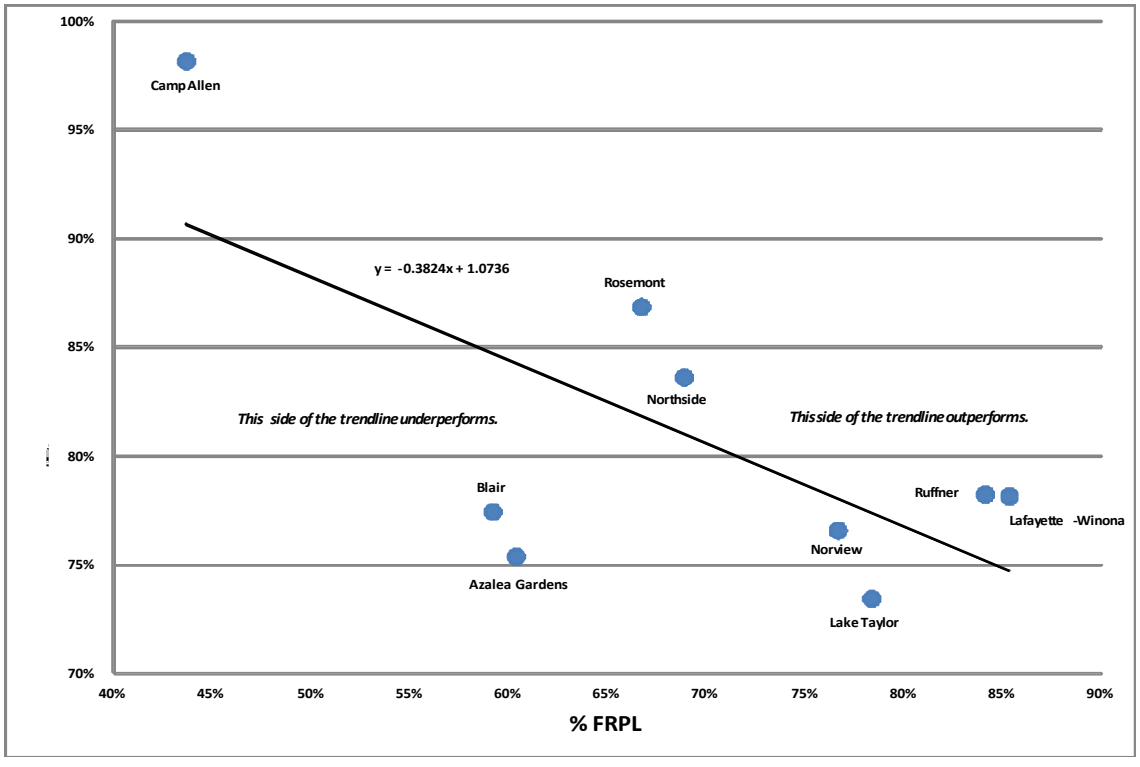
net weighted impact metric	
Positive	**10.2**

Student Achievement by School

In addition to the cohort analysis, the Council team looked at eighth-grade performance in mathematics on the SOL and end-of-course tests according to National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation rates—by school.[5] Exhibit 24 shows the results: a significant negative correlation between math achievement and poverty rates, i.e., the higher the poverty rate, the lower the percentage of students passing one of the state math tests in 2011.

Schools that were below the trend line had math achievement that was lower than predicted statistically based on poverty levels. Schools above the trend line performed better than predicted statistically. The vertical distance a dot lies away from the trend line indicates how much better or worse a school performed than predicted. Thus, eighth grade students at Rosemont, Northside, Ruffner, and Lafayette-Winona students outperformed their predictions based on their numbers of students in the National School Lunch Program. Conversely, students at Blair, Azalea Gardens, Norview, and Lake Taylor underperformed their predictions predicted.

Exhibit 24. Grade 8 Performance as Percentage Proficient and Above on SOL and End-of-Course Mathematics Tests versus Percent of School Enrollment Participating in National School Lunch Program, 2010-11



[5] The Council's team did not have sufficient data to conduct the same analysis on English language arts.

District Accountability

According to data on the State of Virginia's website, the state's accountability system includes annual assessments of student achievement in four core content areas: mathematics, history/social science, English, and science. Schools receive two annual accountability ratings based on the performance of their students on the SOL tests and other statewide assessments. School performance is classified as either fully accredited, accredited with warning, or accreditation denied.

A school's state accreditation reflects overall achievement in English, history/social science, mathematics, and science. Schools in which students meet or exceed achievement objectives established by the Virginia Board of Education in the four major content areas are rated "fully accredited." To determine these ratings, the state uses grade bands rather than individual grade-level scores. The state also adjusts passing rates based on the date that students enroll in the school and awards bonus points for bringing failing students up to proficient or above. There is no reward for maintaining students at advanced levels of performance.

Fully Accredited

Elementary schools are "fully accredited" if students in the designated grade bands achieve all of the following passing rates:

- English – 75 percent or higher, grades 3-5
- Mathematics – 70 percent or higher, grades 3-5
- Science – 50 percent or higher in grade 3 and 70 percent or higher in grade 5
- History – 50 percent or higher in grade 3 and 70 percent or higher in Virginia Studies (grade 4 or 5)

Middle schools are fully accredited if students achieve passing rates of 70 percent or higher in all four content areas.

Accredited with Warning

A school receives an "accredited with warning" rating if its adjusted passing rates for the four core subjects are below the achievement levels required for full accreditation. Schools that receive this rating undergo academic reviews and are required to adopt and implement school improvement plans. Schools that are warned in English and/or mathematics are also required to adopt instructional programs proven by research to be effective in raising achievement in these subjects. A school may hold this rating for no more than three consecutive years. In addition, high schools earning an index of less than the specified benchmark for the year are rated as accredited with warning.

Accreditation Denied

A school is rated "accreditation denied" if it fails to meet the requirements for full accreditation for four consecutive years.

State performance measures are also used for accountability purposes under *No Child Left Behind* (2001):

In Virginia, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the federal law is determined for the district, individual schools, and student groups with enrollments of greater than 10 at each school. Student groups include:

- Schoolwide—all students
- African American/Black
- Alaska Native/American Indian
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Two or more races (multi-ethnic)
- Economically Disadvantaged (EDS)
- Students with Disabilities (SWD)
- Limited English Proficient (LEP)

A school's federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) rating indicates the progress being made toward the goals determined by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The federal law requires states to set annual achievement benchmarks in reading and mathematics leading to 100 percent proficiency by 2014. The law also requires testing in science at least once in elementary, middle and high school. Schools and school districts that meet or exceed all annual benchmarks are rated as having made AYP. States also receive AYP ratings.

While state accreditation ratings are based on overall student achievement in all major content areas, AYP ratings are based on overall achievement and achievement by student subgroups, primarily in reading and mathematics. For the 2010-2011 school year, the AYP benchmarks were set at 86 percent proficient in reading and 85 percent proficient in mathematics.

Norfolk Accountability Ratings

Of 33 elementary schools in NPS, 10 made AYP in 2011 and 23 did not. Of Norfolk's seven middle schools, none made AYP in 2011, according to data to the team by the district. Middle schools ranged from being in Year 3 to Year 7 of School Improvement, and all required additional corrective action in both reading and mathematics. (See exhibits 25 and 26.)

Exhibit 25. Norfolk Middle School AYP Performance 2011

Building Name	Read-ing SI Level	Math SI Level	Reading AYP Level	Math AYP Level
Azalea Gardens Middle	Year 4	Year 3	Additional Corrective Actions	Additional Corrective Actions
Northside Middle	Year 4	Year 5	Additional Corrective Actions	Additional Corrective Actions
Lake Taylor Middle	Year 5	Year 4	Additional Corrective Actions	Additional Corrective Actions
William H. Ruffner Middle	Year 5	Year 5	Additional Corrective Actions	Additional Corrective Actions
Norview Middle	Year 6	Year 4	Additional Corrective Actions	Additional Corrective Actions
Blair Middle	Year 6	Year 5	Additional Corrective Actions	Additional Corrective Actions
Lafayette-Winona Middle	Year 7	Year 7	Additional Corrective Actions	Additional Corrective Actions

Data source: Virginia Department of Education, Adequate Yearly Progress Report 2010-2011.

Exhibit 26. Norfolk Public Schools AYP Performance for 2011

	Number of Schools	**Made AYP**	**Did Not Make AYP**	**Reading Was a Factor in School Improvement Status**	**Math Was a Factor in School Improvement Status**
Elementary	33	10	23	11	5
Middle Schools	7	0	7	7	7

Chapter 2: Findings

This chapter summarizes the findings and observations of the Council's Strategic Support Team (SST) on the middle-school instructional program in mathematics, reading, and social studies of the Norfolk Public Schools. Research by the Council of the Great City Schools indicates that urban school districts that have significantly improved academic performance share a number of common characteristics that set them apart from urban systems that have not shown much progress.[6]

This report organizes the Strategic Support Team's findings and suggested next steps according to nine categories or common themes among urban districts with substantial achievement gains: (1) political preconditions, (2) goals and accountability, (3) curriculum and instruction, (4) professional development and teacher quality, (5) reform press (or the ability to ensure that classrooms reflect the reforms), (6) assessment and use of data, and (7) lowest-performing students and schools.

Since the purpose of the team was to examine the district's middle school instructional program specifically, we focus most of our findings on those grades. However, when other factors are likely to impact middle-school achievement, we include those issues as well.

Findings

The SST assembled by the Council of the Great City Schools interviewed dozens of people and reviewed scores of documents for this project. All findings and observations are current as of February 2012, when the team made its site visit. We included updated information since the site visit as the team requested it, but there may be issues of importance on which the team has not received updated information.

Highlights

- ★ The district appointed a new superintendent of schools, Samuel King, on July 1, 2012.
- ★ The former interim superintendent was asked to serve twice in that role, had a good working relationship with the school board, and wanted to provide the incoming superintendent with recommendations that could be acted on.
- ★ The district is facing sharp budget cuts and, like many big-city school districts, has limited control of its revenues.

[6] Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., and Herlihy, C. (2002) *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement*. MDRC for the Council of the Great City Schools. Casserly, M. et al. (2011) *Pieces of the Puzzle: Factors in the Improvement of Urban School Systems on the National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Washington, DC: Council of the Great City Schools.

★ The leadership team recognizes that insufficient instructional processes and structures account for the lack of student progress at the middle school, and they are actively searching for actions to remedy the situation.

★ School accountability plans have measurable priorities, and they are linked to the district's three main goals.

★ SOL results districtwide are stagnant at the middle school level and lag behind the state. However, the district can demonstrate that middle school students who have remained in the system for three years do see improvements in their reading and math scores on the SOL.

★ Testing results posted on the state's website for middle school mathematics in Norfolk do not include data on students taking high school courses. District plans should take this omission into consideration.

★ The district has a written curriculum, but it does not provide sufficient guidance to teachers on district expectations for student work at each grade level. This void contributes to a weak instructional foundation at the elementary school level that leaves students unprepared for the jump in rigor that occurs in middle school.

★ The district has instituted professional learning communities, a structure that could be made more useful in meeting district priorities for student learning.

★ The district has the capacity to produce data-supported and data-informed instruction but has reduced staffing for that function. This has also led to program evaluations becoming more process-oriented rather than results-based.

★ The district has no uniform strategy to ensure that classroom instruction is aligned with district goals and curriculum and that expectations for student work are shared districtwide at every level of the organization rather than being determined by individual schools and teachers.

A. Political Preconditions

Urban school districts that have improved significantly over the last several years have a number of common characteristics. These commonalities also set them apart from urban school systems that have not seen significant improvements. One key indicator of an urban school district showing gains is the political unity of the school board, its focus on student achievement, and its ability to work with the district administration to improve academic performance over a sustained period of time.

Positive Findings

- The district's leadership recognizes that the lack of improvement in middle school achievement requires action on their part in order to ameliorate the situation.

- District leaders are open to making improvements to better serve students.

- The Norfolk Public Schools appear to enjoy some support from the business community and other community stakeholders. For example, the Greater Norfolk Corporation is actively working with the district to create a high school with a STEM or career and technology focus.

Areas of Concern

- The school district lacks an overarching and coherent vision about instructional reform and middle school improvement, and it has few mechanisms in place to evaluate or track plans for improvement or progress on those plans.

- The school district has had a large number of superintendents or interim superintendents over the last several years—four since 2004 (Schnitzer, Jones, Spencer, Bentley and Spencer)—making it more difficult to institute a vision for improvement or to gain any momentum behind a consistent set of reforms. Any momentum it created prior to 2004 appears to have been lost.

- The school board appears to devote more time at its meetings to management, budget, and operational decisions than to the district's instructional program.

- The district does not adequately communicate its instructional priorities or articulate who is accountable for determining its academic priorities, nor does it articulate strategies for achieving priorities or have systems for monitoring progress or achievement of those priorities.

- Overall, the district expresses low expectations for student achievement. This is evidenced when interviewees attribute the failure to make middle school gains in achievement to factors outside of staff influence (e.g., hormones, parents, perception that requirements are too high, acceptance of poor discipline, etc.).

- Most individuals the team interviewed—from the leadership level through schools and community—did not voice any clear sense of urgency for improving the academic achievement of students.

- The team heard numerous comments that suggested a lack of confidence in district's capacity to make difficult decisions. For example, some interviewees stated that there was be no support for rating a staff member's performance as unsatisfactory.

- The district places considerable emphasis on the processes of teaching and gathering data, but student learning, as evidenced by student work and performance, is a weaker part of the process.

- Team members and interviewees expressed considerable concern about the number of initiatives the district has and how disconnected they were with each other. No one could name programs that should be ended, and no one could articulate how the many programs and initiatives fit together.

- The district has witnessed considerable program-creep over the years without much evidence of what works and what doesn't. Most initiatives do not appear to be systemic, nor do they appear to have been implemented with fidelity or consistency (e.g., PD360, Teachscape, and leveled readers). The result is a very fractured and incoherent instructional program.

- No one in the district is managing outside partnerships, again fracturing initiatives by sending mixed messages about what the district considers most important.

B. Goals and Accountability

Urban school systems that have seen significant gains in student achievement often have a clear sense of where they are going and some way of holding people responsible for the results they get. This clarity is exhibited in other districts through their consensus at the leadership level about the system's direction and in the way leaders have translated that broad vision into explicit academic goals for the district and individual schools. Typically, these goals are realistic, measurable, and accompanied by specific timelines, but they also stretch the district beyond its comfort zone.

In addition, in districts with substantial gains, accountability can take a number of forms. In some cases, accountability structures are very specific, unyielding, and mechanical. In others, the accountability structures are more professional in nature and rely on a joint sense of ownership for results. Some improving districts have also instituted rewards or incentives for achieving goals although the research continues to be mixed on their effectiveness. The right kind of accountability often depends on the capacity of staff, the clarity of the district's direction, its history of getting better results, and the achievement level of its students.

Positive Findings

- The district has three main goals that staff can easily recite although the goals stated on the school board's webpage are different from the goals that most people know.

- School improvement and accountability plans have measurable priorities, and they are linked to the district's three main goals.

- The district has a staff evaluation system.

- Superintendent and senior staff members are on annual contracts. Twenty percent of senior staff evaluations are based on student outcomes, using AYP data, accreditation rates, disciplinary incidents, and achievement gaps.

Areas of Concern

- The district lacks a uniform and commonly understood instructional focus on the middle schools. The school system also lacks clear priorities that govern the work of central office and building-level staff members. Interviewees indicated that

each school determines its own focus. In addition, the team saw that individual departments in the central office did not coordinate their priorities with each other, adding to the fractured nature of the district's instructional program.

- There was no clear cooperation or coordination of programs across school levels, i.e., elementary grades through high school. While the written curriculum attempts to bridge the less demanding fifth grade work with the more challenging middle school expectations, those connections are not apparent in the classrooms visited, and school staff do not feel compelled to use the curriculum as presented. As a result, a consistent foundation of instruction is not provided in a sufficient number of classrooms districtwide to avoid high failure rates in the sixth grade and beyond (see chapter 1.)

- NPS central office staff members indicated that there were "non-negotiables" in the district curriculum, but interviews indicated that these are not known throughout the district. In addition, no one is held accountable for complying with them. Some of the non-negotiables described by interviewees varied from daily activities to instructional strategies in each content area, but they do not appear to include any requirement to teach the district's curriculum or make use of a particular professional development offering.

- The district lacks real staff accountability for student achievement results at any level except for some central office staff and principals—although no principals have been terminated over the last several years for not raising student achievement.

- If principals do not receive a satisfactory performance rating on domain 5 (student achievement—20 percent) in their personnel evaluations, nothing necessarily happens.

- There is no executive director at the central office level solely focused on middle schools.

- Teachers are evaluated on a three-year rotating basis, but the seven evaluation domains do not include improvements in student achievement.

C. Curriculum and Instruction

Norfolk requested that the Council's team focus specifically on the district's instruction program in mathematics, reading, and social studies at the middle school level. Urban school districts with substantial improvements in student achievement often have a curriculum that is focused, coherent, and clearly articulated. Also, these districts analyze the content of their textbooks and other materials to ensure they align with state standards and adopt or create supplemental materials to fill any gaps.

Positive Findings

General

- The district provides its teachers with the state's Curriculum Framework 2010.
- NPS has also developed pacing guides in English language arts, mathematics, and social studies to indicate what is to be taught by quarter and by units within the quarter. Each unit examined by the team showed the duration, focus, and essential knowledge that students are to gain. The pacing chart provides teachers with a time period in which to teach the listed objectives.
- The district makes its curriculum available to teachers and staff on flash-drives and on its intranet and provides links to related files, materials, and resources.
- "Powerful literacy characteristics" are incorporated into all content area pacing guides to encourage literacy across content areas.
- Three-year cohort data indicate that the Norfolk Public Schools tends to positively impact student achievement for students remaining in the district for three years. The improvement is greater in reading than in mathematics.
- The cohort data also indicate high mobility rates among students in the district. Of the 2,054 NPS students taking a sixth grade state math test in spring 2009, only 1,486 remained in Norfolk and were tested on some state mathematics test in 2010 and 2011. Of the 2,044 NPS students taking a sixth grade SOL reading test in 2009, only 1,515 remained in Norfolk and were tested each year through spring 2011. This pattern suggests that the stagnant student performance is driven, at least in part, by students who enter or exit the district during the three-year span studied.
- The district has a four-day transition program for rising sixth graders to orient them to their new schools.

Mathematics

- State reports that the team saw on math performance only show achievement on the SOL mathematics test. The reports do not include middle school results on math tests on high school courses that many NPS seventh and eighth graders take. In eighth grade, in 2011, the NPS passing rate among 687 students taking the state's Algebra I end-of-course exam was 92.0 percent, and the passing rate among 733 students taking geometry was 88.2 percent. While this does not excuse low performance on the SOL math test among the remaining 513 eighth graders, or the failure of any students taking Algebra I or geometry, it should revise the image of completely stagnant math performance among middle school students. In all, the overall passing rate among eighth graders on all math tests taken (i.e.,

SOL, Algebra I and Geometry) was 76.5 percent. (This does not include the 46 eighth grade students who were not tested in mathematics.)

- The central office staff warned schools that the eighth grade SOL math test, which had been easier than the seventh grade test because of its alignment to a less demanding set of standards, was due to change in 2012 to a more challenging set of standards. None of the school-based interviewees mentioned this change or the warning that came with it. There does not appear to be a mechanism for translating content-area expertise or expectations to all levels of the organization.

- The district provides an overview of each math unit at each grade level that points out the big ideas behind each standard and articulates common misconceptions that students may hold. For example, in the first quarter of the Algebra I course, under the area of expressions and operations, the guide states that typical student misconceptions often include incorrect interpretations of the order of operations and the inability of students to distinguish between expressions such as -7^3 and (-7).[3] Teachers utilizing this feature in the guides can address potential problems before they interfere with student learning.

- The regular elementary school math curriculum and the high school Algebra I, geometry, and Algebra II courses all include unit overviews and classroom activities. These unit overviews identify typical student misconceptions, as we indicated above, provide details about student learning that should occur during the unit, and make explicit connections with previous units.

- The regular elementary math guides and the high school Algebra I, geometry, and Algebra II courses also offer links to unit overviews, lessons, vocabulary, teaching strategies and sample activities.

- The district has expanded or added objectives beyond the state's curriculum framework requiring students to solve multistep and non-routine problems in order to focus attention on an area of the SOL where NPS students often have difficulty. Such additional skills and/or knowledge are denoted with the letter N at each grade level in the district's math curriculum. This "N" differentiates the objective from those specified in the state's framework.

Reading/Language Arts

- Interviewees indicated that NPS focuses on writing as part of the literacy curriculum and provides professional development on how to infuse writing across the curriculum. This focus on writing calls for both general education and special education teachers to plan together on how to apply the writing objectives. The "Achievable Results Update" also focuses on reading and writing across the curriculum.

- "Powerful literacy characteristics" are included in the pacing guides in all content areas. This emphasis is also seen in the instructional units. For example, in the

third quarter of grade 3, under the nonfiction unit, the intent of the unit states, "students will read and demonstrate comprehension of nonfiction print materials and trade books across the curriculum, including age-appropriate materials that reflect the Virginia Standards of Learning in English, history and social studies, science, and mathematics, in order to build vocabulary and content knowledge."

- Central office interviewees indicated that they are reviewing the elementary curriculum to see if there is a need to close gaps between fifth and sixth grade instructional expectations.

- An honor's pacing guide for each grade level has been developed in English/Language Arts, but there is little difference between the expectations in the regular ELA courses and the expectations in the honors courses. Moreover, the team noted that the "reading strand" provides little guidance on the kinds of reading materials that would typify the level of reading that students should be doing in their courses or the types of questions that teachers should ask to assess students' understanding of the material and the correct use of academic language.

- A "Curriculum Guide Addendum" document provides SOL objectives for the major reading skills that are matched with suggested strategies. The district's materials also contain district-developed ancillary materials for teacher use with the ELA curriculum.

Social Studies

The district's social studies curriculum document includes a copy of the state's standards, an enhanced scope and sequence, and the state's social studies documents. The only difference is that the district adds a pacing guide for NPS teachers to use.

- There appears to have been teacher input in the development of the additional curricular documents and assessment items in the social studies curriculum.

- Department chairs have monthly opportunities for meetings and professional development on the curriculum, planning, instructional strategies, and discussions of data from the district benchmark assessments and needed interventions.

- History and social science curriculum benchmarks are routinely included in the districtwide assessment program and have a high degree of reliability in predicting scores on the SOLs, according to research staff the team interviewed.

- Data from the district benchmark assessments appear to be discussed and used by department chairpersons to inform instruction. The inclusion of three questions per objective tested provides data that can be acted upon to inform instruction.

Areas of Concern

General

- The district has scattered its focus across too many instructional initiatives, some of which may be in conflict with each other.

- The district has developed a number of good instructional tools and documents, but it lacks the instructional systems and strategies to leverage those tools. The curriculum documents themselves do not clarify best practices or strategies for teaching particular objectives.

- The district has not been clear about what is negotiable and non-negotiable in its curriculum. Without such guidance, everything in the curriculum appears to be of equal priority. While the central office has unwritten priorities that were stated for the team, no staff outside of the central office mentioned them, nor was the team assured that the curriculum was extensively used by teachers throughout the district.

- Interviewees indicated that individual school sites determine what is non-negotiable for that site. All schools—including low-achieving schools—have considerable autonomy over programming and student services.

- Low-level instruction at the elementary school level is creating a weak foundation for achievement at the middle school level.

    - The low level of student skills in the elementary grades appears to be masked by passing rates on the fifth grade SOL tests.

    - Rather than having a logical development of concepts across grade levels, there is a large jump in the rigor of the state's standards between fifth and sixth grades across content areas. Central office staff members indicate that they have worked to close that specific gap through guidance in district curriculum documents, but there is a need for greater vertical articulation between eighth and ninth grades as well.

    - The district has not provided elementary teachers or principals with clear written expectations or exemplars of what rigorous grade-level work demonstrating deep understanding of concepts and mastery of skills should look like at every grade. Thus, every elementary teacher must individually determine whether a student has attained mastery. Accurate information about the mastery of grade-level concepts and skills is delayed for years until students must work with more complex tasks.

    - Minimum test-taking strategies are sufficient to pass the elementary school-level SOL, but the middle-grades SOL requires "strategic competence" and application of concepts and skills in reading and math. When the grade 8

mathematics SOL for 2012 is revised to reflect higher standards, scores are likely to plummet because of the weak rigor in the elementary grades.

- The middle school curriculum documents in the three core subjects lack examples of student work by which to clearly define high-level and rigorous instruction and achievement. Furthermore, there are few curricular materials, professional development offerings, or examples of student work by which to unambiguously define district expectations for high-level and rigorous instruction and achievement at each grade level and subject.

  For example, the middle school mathematics curriculum is organized around big ideas (for instance, in quarter #1, numerical operations and relationships). Except for the first quarter documents, the middle school materials lack exemplars to clearly illustrate high-level and rigorous instruction to communicate district expectations to teachers throughout the school year. Team members wondered if this might also account for the virtual absence of student work posted in classrooms and hallways at middle schools they visited.

  The district does have some exemplars to guide teachers in elementary and high school math. These exemplars required high-level and rigorous instruction. However, no interviewees ever mentioned these exemplars, causing the team to wonder whether they were used or whether principals knew why it was important to observe them in classroom practice.

- The district has a significant number of new teachers, who often have a greater need for written guidance to understand the meaning and expectation of the standards in order to ensure greater consistency between the written and implemented curricula.

- Instructional materials don't adequately define what it looks like when students meet objectives. The materials leave it up to individual teacher and principal decisions that may vary within and across district schools.

- Teachers must look at multiple curriculum documents and tools in reading, math, and social studies in order to do their work. For example, teachers using the pacing chart in mathematics have to consult the curriculum guide or the Virginia Department of Education objectives to know what the objectives are because the district's pacing guides only provide the standard number and some key words (for example, 6.0NA Problem Solving; 6.1A Ratios; 6.1B Model Ratios).

- Lesson plans and activities are linked on the intranet and can only be accessed from an NPS site.

- The district's central office instructional department has cut staffing of the curriculum department until it is too skeletal to perform all of the usual leadership roles with quality and depth, e.g., developing materials, targeting professional development needs, analyzing student achievement data, and developing

appropriate responses to weak student performance within and across grade levels. This lack of capacity makes it difficult to build the systems necessary to translate the written curriculum materials into daily practice. Rich curriculum guidance and materials in language arts, for example, could easily be ignored in favor of less effective strategies if principals and teachers lack the support to know why the materials will produce greater learning and how they should be implemented in classrooms.

- Although there was a timetable for revising the curriculum, there appears to be no districtwide system in place for revising the curriculum based on student data from the state test, benchmarks or observations from classroom visits. The team saw little evidence that the district's data system was routinely used to modify or inform improvements in the curriculum. And no one could cite examples where this had occurred.

- There appears to be no standard system for monitoring curriculum implementation. The district really has no idea how well its curriculum is being implemented and where. It also has no way to determine if implementing the curriculum as written leads to student success.

- There is no consistency in what the district recommends for resources or curricular supports for honors classes in reading, English, and social studies to differentiate them from general education courses.

Mathematics

- The team learned that, beginning in school year 2009-10, a decision was made to have all seventh graders take the eighth-grade SOL test rather than the seventh-grade state assessments if they were not enrolled in a credit-bearing Algebra I course. This decision appeared to have been designed for both laudable and not-so-laudable reasons. First, the move would enable more students to take Algebra I by eighth grade. Second, it would enable students to skip the seventh-grade SOL, which at the time was more difficult than the eighth grade SOL test; thus, achievement would appear higher.

  The impact of this decision was two-fold:

  1) Students in grade seven would be required to experience a compressed curriculum for both grades seven and eight within a single year.

  2) Seventh grade students who had previously failed the grade six SOL assessment would be required to take the eighth-grade state assessment even though they lacked the foundations needed for success.

  This unusual practice was the result of changes in the state assessments. The state originally tested in grades 3, 5, and 8, with assessments aligned to its 2001 standards. When it introduced new tests using more demanding standards at

grades 4, 6, and 7, it left its original tests in grades 3, 5, and 8 in place, tied to the 2001 standards. Consequently, the new seventh-grade test was more difficult to pass than the eighth-grade test, and results statewide demonstrated as much. Prior to 2010, there had been small but steady increases on the seventh-grade SOL test, but the district fell into a practice used elsewhere in the state of testing seventh graders on the easier eighth-grade SOL in order to boost overall middle school scores. Avoiding the seventh-grade test was seen as one way that all middle schools might be able to meet the state benchmark in mathematics and prevent several schools from having their state accreditation revoked based on student math performance. The district did this by compressing grades 6-8 in math instruction into two years, testing almost all seventh graders using the easier grade 8 SOL math test. Simultaneously, the district set a high goal to enroll all students in Algebra I by the eighth grade so they would be able to take more advanced mathematics courses in high school.

These twin decisions were fraught with problems. First, it is laudable to want all students to have early access to Algebra I, provided that they had the foundation they needed for the course. However, in compressing seventh and eighth grade mathematics, there were insufficient safeguards in place to ensure that students indeed had that footing. The district did not have mechanisms in place to see how taking Algebra I in eighth grade affected course-taking in high school. And, while the written elementary curriculum called for practice with multistep problems, these types of problems were absent from elementary state mathematics testing, so they were probably given short shrift in elementary classrooms. Consequently, when the state in 2012 was scheduled to shift the eighth-grade SOL in mathematics to more demanding standards, students were ill-equipped to make the transition, making it likely that math scores would plummet in 2012.

At the end of spring 2010, all middle schools met the state benchmark in mathematics, with substantial increases in grade seven. So, while the decisions resulted in middle schools initially meeting the state benchmark in math, they did not result in better student understanding of critical math concepts because classroom practice was more focused on getting good passing scores on the state test. Students were able to pass the eighth-grade assessment based on weaker standards, but their understanding of mathematics was extremely fragile. This was evidenced by their performance on district benchmark assessments and, predictably, on the 2012 assessment, when the eighth-grade test changed to align to more rigorous standards and scores dropped.

- In grade 7, students are taught seventh and eighth grade math in one year. The SST team did not see how the curriculum helped teachers deal with students who lacked the basic foundation or who had been struggling with math or particular concepts in previous years. Additionally, the team was concerned that students may not be receiving all of the necessary instruction to master grade 8 objectives.

- The district is not systematic in responding to problem areas it sees in math achievement. Since grade-level success is highly dependent on the knowledge and

skills students learn at earlier grade levels, it is important to detect early problem areas and address them in a timely fashion. However, there is no sense of urgency throughout the district to address issues that may have been detected. While a few staff may sound alarms, those alarms did not translate into districtwide focus or action.

- A careful review of the district's middle school math curriculum, coupled with data on student performance, indicates that middle school students lack a strong conceptual foundation in mathematics. This problem at the middle school level has its roots in kindergarten through grade 5, where there is little to guide teachers on what highly rigorous student work would look like.

- While the district's curriculum includes specific standards that might help students transition from one grade level to another, teachers and administrators indicated that most of these objectives are taught *after* the SOL is administered. For example, middle-school students are expected to be able to solve multistep problems in context. Prior to the 2011-2012 school year, the foundation for this expectation was indicated in the NPS elementary curriculum beginning in grades 4-5. Theoretically, students would have the opportunity to develop those foundational skills needed to successfully solve multi-step problems. However, these objectives are denoted with an "N" in the curriculum guide, which implies that this standard would not be tested on the SOL. As a result, its teaching becomes optional until after the SOL test—if it is taught at all. This is one example of how preparation prior to middle school can be described as fragile.

- New results from the spring 2011-2012 accreditation report for elementary schools show that only 21 percent (7 out of 33) of schools met state benchmarks outright. However, using a three-year average, 78.7 percent (26 out of 33) schools were deemed fully accredited. This is a net decrease of four schools since SY 2010-2011, which was shown in exhibit 26. There are seven remaining elementary schools—high poverty and majority African American—that will receive a rating from the state as accredited with warning. These results were starker at the middle school level, where none of the middle schools met the state benchmark outright. However, two schools will become fully accredited using the three-year average in mathematics. (The three- year average is a sum of the overall performances in mathematics—grades 6, 7, and 8, Algebra I, and geometry—over a three-year period.)

- Student performance data show that the lackluster student performance in NPS is a K-12 problem, although it is more pronounced at the middle school level. The team obtained results on the most recent 2012 SOL test, which indicated that unadjusted middle school performance was 62.2 percent proficient in grade 6, 16.5 percent proficient in grade 7, and 22.6 percent proficient in grade 8. While the state continues to eliminate scores among middle-school students taking high school courses from their standard reports, the team was concerned that the compression of middle-school math coursework into two rather than three years may be exacerbating weaknesses that some students bring with them from

elementary school. Combined with the increased difficulty of the revised eighth grade test, this compression of coursework may be contributing to high failure rates on the SOL.

- If a math objective is to be taught in multiple quarters, the curriculum does not always state to what extent or depth it is to be taught. For example, Objective 6.4 ("The student will demonstrate multiple representations of multiplication and division of fractions") appears in multiple quarters without any indication in the curriculum as to how far teachers are to take instruction in each quarter.

- In some math documents, the district has labeled objectives with both the SOL objective label (i.e., 6.2) and a letter (i.e. 6.2a) that contains a smaller portion of the SOL objective. The team was concerned that this inconsistency has the potential for confusing teachers.

- Interviews and site visits to schools revealed a lack of consistency across schools in the use of instructional supports, the use of Common Formative Assessments (CFAs), the rigor of instruction, and the use of available resources. Some schools use the daily math reviews, equivalency tapes, CFA, etc. and some did not. Implementation and consistency of use clearly depend on each individual principal.

Reading and Language Arts

- The team did not see a district strategy to move students from one reading level to another. The reading curriculum does not systematically address what tools, resources or practices (instructional or assessment) should be used to monitor student movement from one reading level to the next.

- Interviewees reported a heavy use of leveled texts, which have a place in the instructional program as long as they do not replace extensive use of grade-level readings that allow students to gain the vocabulary and strategies to read complex, grade-level material.

- In the elementary grades, curriculum materials lack any articulation of desired instructional rigor and place little emphasis on building comprehension and understanding. The materials also place little emphasis on having students mastering grade-level texts in the elementary grades in order to create a strong foundation in reading for middle school work.

- The curricular documents give teachers information on objectives, topics, and needed vocabulary, but they do not indicate how to assess student mastery of the objectives. For example, in reading and English classes, the district developed pacing charts to assist teachers in systematically moving students through the curriculum. However, minimal guidance is provided for teachers to determine whether performance tasks, prompts, or student work was completed at the

expected level of rigor. There were no exemplars or other materials to ensure consistent interpretation of districtwide expectations.

- The reading and English curriculum for middle school does not show where teachers can build synergies in their instruction across the two areas and where each teacher has particular instructional responsibilities. It is unclear how instructional coaches are helping to address this issue.

- The Council's team found that, while the district calls for reading and writing across the curriculum, there are no requirements or guidelines concerning the level of the text used to make this happen or the kind of student work that would be sought. For instance, there is no guidance on the use of rich texts in the elementary and middle grades, and students may not be required to discuss or write about complex texts in meaningful ways that would have them support positions in their writing based on evidence from the text.

  Many questions and prompts within the curriculum are designed for students to personally relate the text and to give their personal reactions to it (text to self). Even expository writing prompts fall into this category. (Unit/Quarter 2, English 7 SOL). In addition, many of the writing prompts that connect to stories that student read are not text-dependent. This means that students might be able to answer the prompts without actually reading the material. They might never have to show where the author sets up a particular argument or point out where the text would lead to a particular inference.

  The currently-adopted reading series is focused mainly on fiction and narratives. It does not provide enough nonfiction texts where students read for information.

- During school visits, the team found that the majority of questions students were being asked fell into knowledge and recall levels on Bloom's Taxonomy rather than requiring analysis or synthesis of ideas.

- Moreover, the team found a lack of rigor in the informational texts that students were being asked to read in elementary grades. This practice inadequately prepares students for a successful transition to middle school. Even at the middle school, the level of rigor in the informational texts was unclear since the teacher largely has responsibility for choosing the texts from extensive reading lists. This practice may lead to inconsistencies in grade-level instruction.

- It is helpful that the curriculum documents contain a list of books and websites that teachers might use; however, the list is not annotated in any way. Teachers would have to do their own research to know which resources would be most useful to them at a particular point in the school year. In addition, the approved reading lists do not indicate how reading levels were determined.

- The generic writing materials furnished to the team were focused mostly on grade levels where writing is tested. There is no mention of writing in early elementary

grades. There were also detailed scoring guides that deal with particular grade-level bands by type of writing taught, but there was no mention of how the district intends to ensure that the rubrics are understood by all instructional staff. The team did not see exemplars of student writing to illustrate the differences in how a piece of writing should be scored.

- Grading procedures found on the NPS website showed that determination of a student's overall reading grades at elementary school level was based upwards of 60 percent on diagnostic reading test scores (from the DRA)—a misuse of diagnostic testing. Student work counts for only 5 percent of the grade. The result may be that teachers will drill towards the diagnostic test results and not toward the standards. This grading procedure may explain why so little student work is displayed or emphasized.

- School site visits generally found few displays of student work. Team members observed little classroom differentiation of instruction, extensive silent reading time followed by mostly recall-like questions by teachers, irregular implementation of the curriculum, low-level student work, minimal student engagement, and extensive teacher lecturing.

- Middle-grades teachers interviewed indicated that they do not have sufficient guidance from the district curriculum to teach reading, and they expressed concerns that school libraries were outdated and not interesting to students. Many teachers felt that if they had a reading textbook, they would have sufficient guidance. Unfortunately, textbooks cannot take the place of teacher understanding about how students learn to read for comprehension, understanding, and analysis and how students develop their ability to acquire and use academic vocabulary and comprehend the layering of language in complex text. The district should not entrust grade-level expectations to a textbook. It requires deep understanding of content, the strategies to teach and assess it while helping students overcome gaps in their learning, and strong resource material.

Social Studies

- The team heard that there was very little instruction in social studies in the elementary grades.

- In social studies, there is no reference to the adopted textbooks as a resource in any curriculum document.

- Social studies curriculum documents and resources available at each grade level/course are not uniform or vertically articulated.

- Although teachers are expected to differentiate social studies instruction for all students (exceptional education, ELL students, struggling readers, and so on), there are no suggestions or recommendations within curriculum documents to accommodate diverse learners.

- Although social studies curriculum documents are kept on an intranet server and provided through flash drives to teachers, awareness of the documents and how to access them seems to depend on building-level department chairs and the instructional coaches at the three middle schools.

- The social studies curriculum documents make reference to specific skills and Pre-AP strategies, but there is not an articulated system in place to ensure that these strategies are taught to the teachers, provided to students, or routinely included in materials. Explicit statements of Pre-AP strategies are present only in grade 6 documents; other references appear to be limited to referring teachers to a website with strategies.

- The pacing guide for grade 6 suggests that 2.5 weeks should be spent on a unit entitled geography, which includes standards US1.2a, b, c, d. However, the district's detailed lesson plans for US1.2 contain suggested activities that conflict with the allotted amount of time in the pacing guide.

- There was only one example of a lesson illustrating substandards within the broader grade 6 standards in the intranet social studies folders. There were no similar documents seen for grades 7 or 8.

- Although sample items were provided for one or two substandards/objectives, such as US1.2a, there was no evidence that similar sample items were available for all standards and objectives.

- There were multiple reports on the need for increased professional development for teachers on creating high-quality, aligned items for CFAs and other assessments, but there was little follow-up on doing it.

- Although the SOL is administered online, all district benchmark assessments are completed using a paper and pencil/Scantron format, which may not allow students the opportunity to practice under the higher stakes testing conditions. In addition, on paper copies of the social studies tests, graphics—particularly those with pictures or maps—are often difficult to read and interpret due to the print quality. It would be difficult to know whether a student did not know the information or simply could not see the image well enough to interpret the item and answer the question.

Interventions

- The district lacks a clearly defined Response to Intervention (RtI) strategy, nor does it have a defined system of instruction tiers associated with RtI. (District staff members do not use the term "tiers" in the same way that is meant in an RtI context.) Furthermore, the team did not see any regular, definable differentiation of instruction when it made its site visit to schools.

- The district lacks a defined system of interventions or RtI in the middle grades for students who are falling behind academically.

- The pacing guides do not specify time for remediation or indicate a methodology for building in remediation as teachers move onto the next unit of instruction.

- NPS lacks a clear strategy for identifying the instructional needs of children and developing a plan to increase reading levels (other than the incorrect usage of the DRAs). Interviewees indicated that the SOL and CFAs are used for this purpose; however, they are not diagnostic enough to indicate the skills students need to develop or prescriptive enough to systematically raise student achievement.

- The district lacks reading interventions in middle grades, although the district has some interventions in the elementary grades. Indeed, training in reading has been intensified somewhat in grades K-3.

    - The DRA is used to monitor student progress in reading and match students to texts on their reading level. (The DRA is also used for grading purposes.) Middle school reading curriculum documents, however, do not provide suggestions for intervention or differentiation based on DRA results.

    - The curriculum notes to teachers do not explain how to address the needs of struggling readers.

- In reading/language arts, some of the intervention strategies specified in the curriculum only provide activities that practice a concept or skill rather than demonstrating how to teach someone the concept or skill differently or more effectively. For example, the activities requiring students to identify a stated or implied main idea provide questions to discuss main ideas in texts. However, it does not illustrate how a teacher might help a child who does not already know how to address these questions correctly.

- Student behavior and classroom management appear to be issues at the school level, but the district does not have a districtwide positive behavior intervention system (PBIS program), but rather offers only an alternative school for disruptive students.

- The district is losing instructional days to student absenteeism and out-of-school suspensions. Additionally, teacher absenteeism and the use of substitute teachers may play a role in the stagnation of middle school achievement scores.

D. Professional Development and Teacher Quality

A common characteristic of many faster-improving urban school districts across the country is a high-quality and cohesive professional development program that is closely aligned with the instructional standards and offerings that the districts are using. These programs are often defined centrally, in part, but are built around the district's articulated curriculum, delivered uniformly across the district, and differentiated in ways that address the specific needs of teachers and students. These faster-improving districts

also find ways to ensure that some of their better teachers are working in schools with the greatest needs.

Positive Findings

- There are three district-defined professional development days and three school-defined professional development days.
- The district features a three-year teacher induction program (BEST, COMP, and TESA).
- Interviewees report that they are working on joint professional development for both reading and ELA teachers.
- Executive directors annually evaluate principals assigned to their supervision.
- Teachers have one common planning period per day.
- Teachers on the summative evaluation track have three formal observations per year every three years; in between, teachers receive no formal evaluative observations.

Areas of Concern

- Staff members are working very hard, but they are not operating under a common vision toward a common end.
- Interviewees told the Council team that the lack of a teacher pay raise for the last four years had resulted in teachers leaving the district to secure higher pay in neighboring districts.
- Interviewees indicated that grades 6 and 7 were used as dumping grounds for weak teachers because these were untested grades until about five years ago. The Council team estimated that half of those teachers might remain in middle school classrooms today.
- Principals reported having a difficult time removing ineffective teachers from the classroom using the current dismissal process.
- There is no strategic capacity-building function or professional development for central office staff with responsibilities for instruction.
- Central office instructional staff is skeletal, and staff members report having a hard time meeting school-support needs and administrative responsibilities.
- Extensive—maybe excessive—professional development occurs in the district, and it appears highly fractured in its purposes and quality. In general, there is no commonality or focus in the professional development offered by the district.

Professional development was frequently mentioned during interviews, but the team saw no up-to-date professional development plan beyond the one for 2010 that was shared with the team. The district has gone through a number of superintendents since then.

- Information concerning the use of instructional coaches indicates that they are trained and placed in district middle schools. However, the team saw no clear plan for what training, skills, knowledge or experience a coach must have in order to be effective. It appears that the Johns Hopkins University partnership, which is training SIG coaches under the federal SIG program, is not using the same method that the district itself uses to train its coaches.

- Imbedded professional development is not evaluated for whether it is implemented in classrooms or how effective the sessions were in practice. Moreover, the only evaluation of centralized professional development involves participant surveys, but evaluations do not assess the professional development's effects on student achievement.

- Follow-up for professional development and its application appears to be lacking.

- School-defined time for professional development, using a departmental chairperson train-the-trainer approach, is reported to work on most campuses, but many interviewees noted that additional training for department chairs would be helpful. For example, interviewees involved in social studies professional development indicated that, at times, their professional development was redundant for veteran teachers and lacked depth for new teachers.

- Teachers of gifted students do not receive consistent, ongoing training to ensure rigor and challenging coursework in the gifted program.

- There is little independent evaluation conducted on the effectiveness of outside professional development providers (e.g., Johns Hopkins, William & Mary).

- The district often lists tools and strategies in curriculum documents (i.e., "Addendum by Objective"), but there is no consistent guidance for teachers on how to use those tools and strategies. If teachers miss the initial professional development on a document, they appear to have no place to go to for that information. A list or brief description of a strategy does not provide the depth of understanding needed on how to apply strategies appropriately, how to implement them, or when it is inappropriate to use one strategy rather than another.

- The district has a significant number of new teachers, including those who have switched careers. These teachers need to have a deep understanding of district expectations for student learning, including the background knowledge required for each objective, what to look for in student work, and how to differentiate instruction—including for those students who are struggling.

- Norfolk does not have a principals' academy *per se* to build instructional leadership or capacity to meet district goals and expectations.

E. Reform Press

Urban school systems that are improving student achievement are not waiting for their reforms to trickle down from the central office into the schools and classrooms. Instead, these faster-improving school districts have developed specific strategies to drive instructional reforms into schools and classrooms, and they create strategies to monitor the implementation of these reforms to ensure their integrity and comprehensiveness.

Positive Findings

- Principals are required to conduct classroom observations and utilize data-driven decision making.

- Walk-through results are supposed to be discussed in common planning time.

- Central office interviewees report working more closely than previously with elementary reading specialists to provide strategic support to schools.

Areas of Concern

- The district lacks a uniform, centrally defined reform strategy that it is able to articulate for everyone or to press down to schools. Schools largely define their own strategies, but they are not evaluated for effectiveness or impact on students transferring across schools.

- The practice of having school leadership teams select their own areas of instructional focus or investigation may unwittingly result in greater incoherence across schools in the implementation of the curriculum.

- Walk-throughs place greater emphasis on compliance than on quality instruction. For instance, the walk-throughs emphasize meeting time allotments for whole-group instruction, word study, daily math review, and other instructional routines rather than the quality of instruction aligned to curriculum objectives and the level of student learning.

- There is no systemic mechanism for monitoring the implementation of programs. The team noted substantial inconsistency across schools in curriculum delivery, assessment practices, resources, and instructional support.

- The district uses multiple walk-through forms. These included math and ELA forms developed by the district, multiple forms developed by individual schools, and the "Beers" form developed by a consultant. Secondary schools develop and use their own walk-through protocols. Some schools use Teachscape, but most use their own unique forms, making it impossible to determine how well curriculum or other initiatives are reaching students.

- The Beers walk-through procedure is used in three low-performing SIG middle schools, with results reviewed by the executive directors with responsibility for those schools. According to interviews, the use of data resulted in more clearly written student objectives, but there was no clear impact on achievement. Principals and coaches report being trained on use of the walk-throughs. The form, however, does not provide specific criteria that align to student achievement on the SOL. Furthermore, the Beers form provides no overt connection to the curriculum, pacing guides, assessments, or student achievement. These omissions can inadvertently signal to school staff that there is no need to use or attend to these areas.

- The district lacks sufficient numbers of instructional coaches in middle schools. Moreover, the team heard that some coaches are used for non-instructional purposes, like hall duty.

- NPS provided weak and insufficient incentives—$2,000—to work in low-performing schools in the district. Teachers taking the incentives sometimes worked in the low-performing school only for a year and then would return to their original schools.

- The funding for all coaches in SIG schools expires in the 2012-13 school year.

- All in all, NPS does not have the mechanisms in place to monitor whether any of its instructional programs are being implemented as intended. This is the opposite of what the Council teams often see. In many urban school systems, there is excessive monitoring and unwelcome and intrusive coaching, but those districts are monitoring the wrong thing or keeping an eye out for a set of instructional strategies that don't really exist. In Norfolk, it is hard to tell whether the programs are being implemented properly because the typical tools for assessing implementation aren't in place since the culture of the district so highly values individual school discretion.

F. Assessment and Data Use

Two of the most noticeable features of urban school systems that are seeing significant improvements in student achievement are their regular assessments of student progress and their use of data to decide (1) on the nature and placement of intervention strategies before the end of each school year and (2) on needed professional development. Moreover, these districts use data to monitor school and district progress, hold people accountable for results, and inform instructional practice.

Positive Findings

- The school district uses the SOL, benchmark tests administered three times a year, and school-developed Common Formative Assessments (CFAs).

- The benchmark tests are given in various time windows, but the windows are not taken into account in the pacing guides.

- According to interviews, district benchmark tests appear to predict performance on the SOLs—with about 82 percent accuracy.

- District benchmark assessments in math have been shortened to maximize time for instruction. For example, the first quarter benchmark test for grade 6 had 59 questions in 2010-2011 but 27 questions in 2011-2012.

- Every school has a data team that receives professional development from the district.

- The research department produces multiple reports, but it is unclear how the board and/or staff use them to inform instruction.

Areas of Concern

- Staffing cuts have limited the research department's ability to carry out the quantity and type of research the district requires for decision making.

- CFAs are used differently in each school to define instructional groupings. Some schools use the results as part of their students' grades even though they were not designed for that purpose.

- Teachers from grade-level teams create the items on the CFAs. However, the items have not been vetted to ensure alignment with curriculum expectations. Consequently, the accuracy and validity of the items vary by schools.

- Benchmark tests are given in paper/pencil form in Norfolk, but the SOLs are administered online. The district does not have sufficient computers or administrative staff to administer the benchmark tests on line.

- The team found that the quality of printing of the paper tests sometimes distorts images, so students are forced to try to interpret the images, rather than use the images to test content knowledge. This was particularly noted in social studies tests.

- Benchmark tests are not cumulative across the school year, so it is hard to tell whether objectives that were not mastered in one quarter were being maintained at a later time.

G. Lowest-Performing Students and Schools

Urban school systems that are seeing substantial improvement in student performance have targeted strategies for intervening in and increasing achievement in

their lowest-performing schools and among students who are farthest behind. Such strategies may vary from city to city, but they share a number of common elements.

Positive Findings

- NPS has hired strong new ELL and special education staff directors.
- All 10 full-time ESL teachers are ESL endorsed.
- NPS is part of the WIDA consortium.
- The district is opening an ESL reception center to test immigrant students—funded through Title III.
- The district has recently begun Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training to transition from the traditional pull-out strategies that have historically been used.
- The district conducts universal screening for gifted programs for elementary school students, but only at first grade. The district uses the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills or ITBS (70 percent cutoff score) for gifted student identification after grade 1, based on parental requests or teacher recommendations. The district uses a pull-out model to serve qualifying students. The district has about 4,000 gifted students, disproportionately White. All schools have resource teachers for the gifted students—about 37 teachers.
- Ruffner and Lake Taylor schools use the transformation SIG model to turn around their historically low performance.
- Short-term suspended students can volunteer to return to school after hours for tutoring and homework with teachers from that school.
- The district only has about 825 ELL students, most of whom are Hispanic, but a considerable minority of ELLs speak Tagalog.

Areas of Concern

- Interviewees at all levels repeatedly cited discipline as a recurring issue in the NPS schools.
- Only SIG schools offer an option for in-school suspensions.
- Many level 3, 4, and 5 ELLs are not receiving regular services. ELLs in middle school are pulled out for about 90 minutes a week, including from their English classes. ESL teachers generally serve multiple schools.
- According to interviews, the gifted program serves only a handful of ELL students.

- There are no ESL-endorsed coaches in NPS schools.
- Seven part-time teachers of ELL students lack their ESL endorsement.
- Occupational and speech therapists are on a teacher salary scale, but can earn more by going to an outside contractor hired by the district.
- Special education teachers were sometimes pulled out of class for extraneous duties, putting the onus for instruction of these students back on the general education teacher. Many special education teachers appear not to be strong in the content areas.
- NPS lacks a districtwide strategy for special education although new staff members were working on filling this void. Inclusion is viewed as a place rather than as a strategy for addressing the academic and social needs of students.
- Special education staff members were reportedly not always included in procurement decisions that impact special education, e.g., instructional hardware and software purchases.
- Middle schools do not receive Title I funds. All Title I funds are devoted to eligible elementary schools.

CHAPTER 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings in chapter 2, the Council's Strategic Support Team developed a series of recommendations and proposals for the Norfolk Public Schools designed to help accelerate student performance in middle school literacy, mathematics, and social studies. These suggested next steps, like the findings in the previous chapter, are organized around key features of significantly improving urban school districts: (1) political preconditions; (2) goals and accountability; (3) curriculum and instruction; (4) professional development; (5) reform press (or the ability to get reforms into the classrooms); (6) data, assessment, and evaluation; and (7) lowest-performing students and schools.

A. Political Preconditions

Urban districts that have made significant improvements in student performance have school boards that have made student achievement their first priority and have sustained the priority over a long period. They define the initial vision for the district and work closely with the superintendent to transform that vision into a coherent theory of action and clear goals. These boards also work to sell the districts' goals and reforms to the community and to hold the superintendent accountable for results. As the Norfolk Public Schools takes the next steps in its own reforms and improvement, it should consider doing the following:

1. *Charge the superintendent and staff with developing a clearly focused K-8 school reform plan and theory of action, and charge the school board with receiving and discussing regular status reports on that plan.*

   In a time of leadership changes, budget cuts, staff layoffs, and ever-dwindling resources, it is common to focus solely on these critical financial and organizational issues and pay less attention to academic areas. Consider establishing a cross-functional team to develop a clearly focused K-8 school reform plan designed to improve academic achievement, making use of the findings and recommendations of this report. Emphasize to the team that the charge is not to assign blame for the current situation but to work together to radically improve it. No single member of the team is successful unless the whole team is successful in creating conditions that will result in student achievement gains.

   Reserve time on board agendas to receive and discuss detailed, data-supported reports on the progress of the plan's implementation and the impact actions are having on student performance. Such action will send a clear message that academic achievement is the central focus of the Norfolk Public Schools.

2. *Include in the plan how the district will marshal outside community organizations to work with the district on the plan.*

The district is fortunate to have outside organizations that take a deep interest in public schools and would want to be involved in the planning process. Use this opportunity to create a united stance to support the work of the schools. Have representatives meet with district staff to ensure that all work fits into a seamless approach or strategy for improvement.

3. *Ensure that the new superintendent is familiar with this report.*

   The district needs an extended period of strong leadership that will emphasize explicit, stable goals and clear expectations in order to increase the academic rigor in NPS classrooms. The superintendent sets the tone of urgency and requires departments and school staff to collaborate to attain reform goals and improved student achievement. (The Council will be happy to provide a personal briefing by phone or in person.

4. *Charge the associate superintendent for academic affairs and the executive directors with creating a sense of teamwork and shared accountability among academic staff as well as backing the difficult decisions that the instructional team at the central office and school levels need to make and the difficult requirements they need to set during the reform process.*

   Districtwide reforms require a unified team approach, with a willingness to be evidence-based about what is working and to be honest about barriers to student achievement that the district has failed to address. This includes ending programs that are not productive in order to devote resources to more promising practices. It also means supporting efforts to remove ineffective personnel.

   Team decisions about districtwide curricular or instructional requirements should be guided by what is best for students in order to achieve rigorous academic standards. The district team should work with the central office instructional team and school-level personnel to ensure that goals for student work are clear and that efforts to achieve goals are well supported with differentiated professional development and instructional resources.

   Moreover, reforms should be phased in order of priority so that they are not overwhelming to central office or schools and can be well supported with current funding. However, all staff should understand the rationale for each reform, how all the components fit together, and how the reforms will include student work.

   The district has a history of implementing multiple and conflicting initiatives that receive diminished support over time and only serve to confuse the district's direction and focus. The proposed reform plan should guard against this possibility.

   The district's team should also avoid creating a set of reform strategies that entail a compliance mentality, complete with checklists on surface implementation of initiatives. An example would involve checking to see that an instructional objective has been written on a classroom board without looking to see that the level of work or the strategies being used to support students would actually result in mastering the

objective. Instead, aim for deeper understanding of the importance of and rationale behind the reforms, what shifts they require in instruction, tools or strategies to help struggling students catch up, and differentiated instruction that helps all students access grade-level material —including struggling students.

5. *Charge the associate superintendent with streamlining and evaluating the district's instructional programs and initiatives to ensure that they are working in tandem with one another on behalf of higher academic performance and go beyond the compliance orientation that has marked previous district efforts.*

   As the district builds its reform efforts, build in a plan to evaluate the various programs and initiatives in place to determine their actual impact on student achievement. This may need to be done as a multiyear process in conjunction with research staff. Any new initiatives should have their evaluation built into the design process.

B. Goals and Accountability

Urban school systems that have seen significant gains in student achievement often have a clear sense of where they are going. This clarity is exhibited not only in the leadership consensus about the system's direction, but also in how leaders translate that broad vision into explicit academic goals that are set both for the whole school district and for individual schools. These goals are realistic, measurable, and accompanied by specific timelines, but they also stretch the district beyond its comfort zone.

Urban school districts that are seeing significant gains in student performance also attribute some of their progress to improved systems of accountability. Accountability is a mainstay of all district activities. The importance of these accountability systems is that they focus staff attention and energy on defined systemwide goals. They also make it clearer to staff how and on which criteria they will be evaluated. Finally, they have the added benefit of signaling to the public that school staff members are responsible for getting results.

6. *Clarify and make consistent the actual goals of the school district in all communications vehicles.*

   Ensure that the NPS website, print materials, and other communications reflect the same goals for the district. Check older web pages and publications that may still be in distribution to ensure that they are up to date.

7. *Ensure that the contract for the new superintendent has explicit performance goals for the district and that school board evaluations of the superintendent are tied to progress on those goals.*

8. *Strengthen the evaluations of principals and senior central office staff personnel to emphasize districtwide movement on student achievement, graduation rates, accreditation, school climate, and discipline. Incorporate stretch goals in personnel*

evaluations (e.g., number of students scoring at advanced levels). Define consequences to staff for lack of movement on goals.

It is important that the public and the school staff know that district leaders have a personal stake in student achievement, graduation rates, accreditation, and school climate.

Having multiple goals ensures that higher achievement does not come at the expense of pushing some students out of the system or other unintended consequences. Thus, student achievement increases must not come at the expense of dropouts.

Similarly, focusing on moving students to advanced levels of performance rather than aiming for mere proficiency requires giving more attention to challenging classroom work and incorporating strategies to continue teaching at grade level while paying attention to gaps in grade-level work. It is important for district leaders not to lose sight of those goals and of the fact that their own evaluations reflect the importance of the work they do in those areas. Consider ways to acknowledge outstanding performance, and define consequences for lack of improvement.

Senior central office staff members play an important role in addressing the challenges of the district. Part of their evaluation should include their role in proposing and implementing systemic solutions to challenges addressed in the reform plan, as well as attainment of student achievement goals among all student groups. To be clear, developing materials or holding professional development sessions must be paired with achieving desired results on student goals. Simply creating plans, materials, and tools is not sufficient. The proof is in student outcomes.

As part of their evaluations, principals should also demonstrate evidence of how they are supporting and monitoring instructional program reforms. For principals to be able to do this, the district must provide them with training on what to look for in various grade levels at various points in the year and how to support reforms and initiatives. Ideally, principals should be able to request central office support in conducting walk-throughs to build confidence in their observations and feedback to teachers.

9. *Clarify domain number seven on the teacher appraisal instruments to emphasize actual growth in student achievement on multiple measures. Involve the teachers' association in the modification.*

   Successful classroom work and student performance should be part of teacher appraisal. To be sure, not all learning can be measured on a single state test, but the district should have some means to know when students are achieving district goals. Work with teachers to set reasonable measures to indicate student academic growth.

C. Curriculum and Instruction

Preliminary research suggests that urban school districts that are improving student performance have standardized their curriculum and have adopted a clearer

instructional approach to improving reading and math achievement. This approach brings greater focus to a district's instructional programs, mitigates the effects of high student mobility, and leverages the ability of districts to design and carry out the support and monitoring of program implementation.

10. *Charge the CAO and curriculum staff—as part of a cross-functional reform plan team—with ensuring the plan provides for curriculum revisions outlined below. Additionally, ensure that the plan builds in a system that implements the curriculum evenly, monitors its usefulness, and makes corrections and revisions based on data and feedback measures. Respond to teacher and principal feedback as the plan is implemented.*

    Even the best curriculum will not have an impact on student achievement unless it is understood and used. The purpose of a curriculum is to focus and connect the work in classrooms within and across grade levels. A cohesive and comprehensive curriculum lets every teacher in every school know where to expend the most energy in each content area so children gain a common understanding of key concepts and skills that build across grade levels. However, in Norfolk, many schools create their own priorities, and individual teachers must often determine the required level of rigor on their own. A clearly articulated curriculum that staff members use effectively can avoid the fragmentation that the district has experienced over the last several years.

    The NPS curriculum is not universally viewed as something that requires implementation in the classrooms. So, even if the district improved the curriculum to clearly indicate the level of rigor needed in student work and the intention of each objective, it is possible that the current district culture would leave these materials unused. The instructional department's work should reinforce why a district curriculum is important for student achievement. This understanding should be conveyed to all staff—in part by involving them—to change the culture of the district to one that values the curriculum, makes time to study it, monitors its use, and builds a system complete with feedback from users to consistently improve district performance.

11. *Consider combining curriculum and pacing guides into a single curriculum guide so teachers will have a single source of information to guide instructional planning. This could be accomplished with links between the materials.*

    Teachers should be at the forefront of this work to determine how to make materials more useful.

12. *Create a needs assessment or use focus groups of teachers to clarify what guidance teachers need from the curriculum, thereby developing a shared understanding of expectations for student learning.*

    For a curriculum to be used, it has to be seen as valuable by those who use it. The Council team suggests that the district create mechanisms or focus groups to hear directly from teachers what they like about the guidance they are receiving about

district expectations, where they need additional information, and how they would like to see it presented. Central office staff should also build in mechanisms to ensure that all teachers understand why teaching the curriculum to the depth expected is essential to build student knowledge of concepts and skills methodically across grade levels.

Recognize that many students do not now have the needed foundation for the grade level they are in. Demonstrate within the guides or through professional development how teachers can address these gaps while continuing to work on grade-level objectives so students do not fall farther behind.

13. *Review and modify curriculum guides to ensure that exemplars by grade level and subject articulate the expected depth and rigor of student assignments and illustrate the meaning of the standards. These should include sample tasks, scaffolding strategies, rubrics, examples of use of complex text, text-dependent questions, models of classroom discussion of the texts, and assessments that include and go beyond multiple-choice items.*

    At the time of the team visit, most Norfolk curriculum guides did not sufficiently articulate a clear vision and expectation for student work products at the middle school level.

    In the absence of such guidance, every teacher is forced to come to individual conclusions about the meaning of each curriculum objective. This has resulted in wide variation in interpretations and expectations for students. Many teachers are likely to use the textbook as if it were the arbiter of district expectations. That may work for some topics, but for others, the textbook may be insufficient. But, if there is no written guidance from the district, there is no clear way for teachers to know.

    Other teachers may turn to state assessments as the arbiter of what needs to be taught. This practice is also fraught with problems. It can lead to drills and worksheets that fail to teach core concepts. At that point, many students may be unable to apply skills in novel situations. This practice can also lead to omission of key foundations that are not formally tested in that grade level but will be assessed at greater complexity in subsequent grade levels. Lacking that foundation, students must make larger conceptual leaps to access more complex materials. Some will be able to do so, but others will struggle. A teacher who is informed about why an untested concept is essential for that grade level is much more likely to ensure that students learn it. Thus, this recommendation is not merely about mandating the use of the curriculum; rather, it also requires attention to building a system that ensures that everyone deeply understands the content and rationale of the written curriculum.

    The elementary and high school unit overviews in mathematics may serve as models for beginning the process of providing greater specificity at the middle school level. Consider establishing an instructional cross-functional team that includes classroom teachers to design the type of exemplars and guidance that teachers need in order to focus their efforts productively across the district. The team should also include

building administrators who can point out and resolve other issues that could impede the use of the curriculum—including creating time for teachers to work together.

The exemplars can clarify units of study, demonstrating what is meant by high-level and rigorous instruction or showing a sample of student work that demonstrates district expectations for student achievement at each grade and course. Additionally, examples of student work inform classroom instructional practice. Consider developing specific questions for teachers to delve into student thinking or examples and strategies for connecting conceptual and procedural understanding in mathematics. When calling for a particular story or informational text, consider developing questions and articulating the kinds of answers that are expected.

Look for opportunities within the pacing guide to indicate the level of work intended. For example, in the grade 6 reading pacing guide, under *Tales, Legends and Drama* on page 1, there is a list of ways students are expected to demonstrate knowledge of unfamiliar words and phrases. However, the examples are all low-level words (i.e., synonyms – small: little; antonyms – up: down). While the Council team guessed that the list came from an official source, the list could also feature additional academic words appropriate to sixth grade or aligned to the suggested stories to indicate the level of academic vocabulary intended for sixth graders. Additionally, the long list of language arts-specific vocabulary words listed as "essential vocabulary" does not indicate which words students may already know from prior grade levels and which words are new to the current grade level. In the seven days of lessons specified, it would be impossible to adequately teach all 39 terms listed.

In adding exemplars to the curriculum, keep in mind that a good exemplar can be short, with annotations pointing out the key points the district wants teachers to notice. They could also include a note stating the circumstances under which the exemplar was produced, for example, a piece of writing that was a first draft under timed conditions, or pieces that were written based on a particular guiding question, or a finished piece that had been revised. It is also possible to provide examples of writing that do not meet the goal and to explain why they do not and articulate what next steps would be needed improve performance.

Also, it would be helpful to note that exemplars early in the year might provide steps toward final exemplars late in the school year. We do not expect that students will enter class with all the skills we expect of them by the end of the year

In providing rubrics or sample questions, be sure to include completed examples. Remember that the goal is to clarify the level of rigor and sophistication expected at each grade level. This is particularly important in language arts, where so often objectives are repeated across grade levels with only the complexity of the reading and sophistication of student reasoning and writing changing from year to year.

14. *Build in time within the pacing guides for intervention, remediation, and extension in addressing student needs. Identify specific strategies around a concept that may be*

used before a lesson and during a unit to address student needs so that all students have the opportunity to learn at grade-level standards.

When the pacing guide has every day filled, there is an unintended message that the class must move on, whether or not students have mastered the material. Examine the guide carefully to see that the objectives can be taught within the school year. It is helpful to indicate how specific, common misconceptions might be addressed as teachers move forward in the pacing guide. Similarly, it is wise to build in some time after benchmark testing, when teachers can address issues that students may not have grasped, and provide interventions or enrichment for students who want greater challenge and depth of learning.

Certain types of learning are best supported with specific strategies. Whenever that is the case, guides should explicitly indicate those strategies. Consider a link that provides greater information or videos about differing strategies and why they are a good match for each type of learning, so that teachers become ever more reflective in their teaching.

Moreover, central office staff should make use of data results from state and local testing to regularly refine curriculum guidance and timelines. When changes are made to the curriculum or pacing systems based on data results, ensure that the system builds in a way to notify school administrators and teachers about what the changes are, why they were made, and the implications they have for classroom implementation.

Finally, principals and other building administrators will need a differentiated understanding of the curriculum. They are not content experts, but they need to know what to look for as they observe classrooms and student work. They need to know who can be contacted or what materials are available to support their teachers and students.

15. *When objectives are taught in multiple quarters over the school year, be sure to identify the extent and depth to which the objective is to be taught in each quarter (at what level/extent and how it is to be expanded over time).*

    Currently, there is no indication of how student expectations change over the course of the year. If there is an expectation for greater sophistication, cue teachers into what that would look like in classroom work. This is particularly true in language arts, where the objectives often are the same across quarters, but the actual expectation changes for how a student demonstrates growth in mastering the objective.

16. *Develop and clearly articulate the district's instructional non-negotiables for each content area and ensure that teachers and principals know the rationale for why it must be part of district practice, and how it translates into classroom practice. Limit the number of non-negotiables to those items of greatest importance, and mandate their use. Provide reasonable consequences if they are not implemented.*

The team was told by some staff that the district has curriculum non-negotiables, but most staff members do not consider them mandatory. Rather, each school determines its own non-negotiables. This lack of districtwide focus was clearly visible to team members during their site visits. In their classroom observation, the team found instructional inconsistencies within and across schools.

In determining what truly is non-negotiable, focus on the strong, high-leverage items that are important for quality instruction in the content area rather than "nice to have" items. Non-negotiables should be easily seen as indispensable for a quality instructional program. Don't waste energy pushing for small components as non-negotiable. If there is no district support and teachers do not see the value of a particular component, it will not make an impact on student achievement, but it will contribute to a sense that it is acceptable to ignore central office stances about calling something non-negotiable.

On the other hand, there are issues that worth specifying as non-negotiable, and the district should create a consensus across departments about them and their implementation. For example, using the NPS curriculum should be non-negotiable because it is integral to creating a school system that shares expectations for student learning in each content area and grade level. It is worth expending energy to explain its importance and monitor its implementation. There can be little hope of long-term improvement in achievement without doing so. Hand in hand with that stance, the curriculum must be clearly written and explicitly aligned with district goals and expectations for students so that it is worth teaching. There should also be a feedback mechanism within the system to hear from end users when something is not working, so that curriculum documents can be modified and additional supports created.

17. *Explicitly clarify—and engage practitioners with—strategies that increase student achievement and engagement. These strategies should be included systematically in professional development opportunities for teachers and building administrators.*

    Each curriculum guide already includes a briefly annotated list of strategies, and pacing guides name particular strategies within units. However, only the name of the strategy is provided. The team suggests that a mere listing of strategies does not provide the information a teacher needs in order to use them effectively. Clarify the annotated list or link an expanded notation about the strategy, indicating when it is best used and when it is not. A laundry list of strategies does not substitute for teachers deeply understanding how and when to use the best strategies.

18. *Track course-taking patterns in high school to determine whether or not students' taking compressed math courses in middle school results in higher math achievement later on.*

    The district should use these data to refine instructional decisions at the district level about whether to continue this practice of compressing coursework in grades 7 and 8. The Council's team was skeptical about the practice because of fears that students would miss out on foundational skills by trying to cover too many concepts in too

short a period. Still, the Council would let the data guide the decision about whether to return to a regular course sequence.

19. *Eliminate the requirement that all seventh graders take the eighth grade SOL assessments.*

    Students are being expected to learn the content of two grade levels (grades 7 and 8) within one year. Even though class schedules allow for more time, a significant number of rising seventh graders did not meet the minimum proficiency score in sixth grade. Sixth graders who cannot meet proficiency on the SOL should progress through middle school taking the seventh- and eighth-grade tests in turn, so they have a strong foundation for Algebra I in ninth grade.

    This recommendation should not be construed to hold back students who are indeed ready for high school coursework in middle school. However, the district should ensure that these students have a solid foundation for that work. Additionally, the purpose of introducing high school coursework in middle school is to enable students to take more advanced courses in high school. The district should monitor whether this is indeed seen in course-taking patterns. The Council team's hunch is that it is not.

20. *Establish a cross-functional team composed of building administrators and teachers (from elementary, middle, and high schools), and central office administrators (especially from the offices of ELA, special education, and gifted) to serve as an advisory group to the mathematics office.*

    This group would have input on the philosophy of teaching mathematics, translating philosophy into practice, and taking a look at student achievement data to identify patterns of achievement and strategies for improvement. This advisory group would be charged with making recommendations about the fidelity of mathematics instruction. Since the district conducts frequent audits at specific sites, this group could conduct instructional audits at selected sites throughout the school year. Moreover, the organizational structure of the cross-functional team could create stronger lines of communication between building administrators and the mathematics office, emphasizing shared responsibility for solutions that lead to greater student success.

21. *Use district data to identify strategic instructional goals districtwide, and establish how these goals can be translated into practice rather than establishing a compliance-oriented set of reforms.*

    As indicated earlier, problems that appear in one grade level usually have their roots in earlier grade levels. For example, suppose the district finds that students have difficulty demonstrating relationships between fractions and decimals. The district might look at the earliest introduction of these concepts and the practices behind them. The district would then build a case for teachers in earlier grade levels to present fractions and decimals as numbers on a number line so students develop a deeper understanding of how numbers are related.

22. *Ensure that reading instruction is not limited to leveled texts but includes grade level material, and ensure that teachers know strategies for helping struggling students read grade-level material on a regular basis.*

    The Council provides workshops on techniques that provide all students with access to grade-level texts in addition to using leveled texts when needed. We urge the district to make use of these opportunities and share information with school staff.

23. *Inventory current materials and reading lists to ensure that they reflect and contain the type of rigor and content necessary to meet standards and boost achievement.*

    The pacing guides include some reading from informational texts. Take time to ensure that these texts contain the appropriate level of complexity for the grade level and that teachers are comfortable showing students how an author layers information into the language of a text to make a point or substantiate an argument. Reach out to teachers in science and social studies to share these techniques with them, so that students can read the content materials for those courses.

    Develop sample questions that will require students to use evidence from a text to support their answers. Show teachers examples of questions that are text dependent versus those that could be answered without even reading the text.

24. *Establish a set of common learning experiences and readings to be used by all students no matter what school they attend.*

    Teachers should be allowed to select reading materials that they are passionate about teaching, but there should also be a set of common learning experiences at each grade and school to ensure that students are exposed to complex, rich text with academic vocabulary expected for that grade level. Selecting these materials can be done collaboratively with joint planning across schools and grade levels.

25. *Inventory current materials and reading lists to ensure that they reflect and contain the type of rigor and content necessary to meet standards and boost achievement.*

    Look for rich informational texts that can be used during the literacy block, and include sample questions that will require students to use evidence from the text to support their answers during writing exercises. Try to select some challenging texts on interesting topics. Use them to teach students how to handle more complex sentences that layer information using clauses and other writing techniques.

26. *Change the grading procedures for the elementary grades to place substantially greater emphasis on authentic student work that will demonstrate grade-level student learning and comprehension rather than using diagnostic and summative test results.*

    The problems that the district faces in middle school student achievement begin at the elementary school level. Weak foundations in elementary math, for instance, become much more visible as middle school courses begin to require more abstract thinking and concept development and use. Consider ways to make clear to teachers what level

of rigor the district expects at each grade level, and provide samples of student work that exemplify that level of understanding.

Consider how the district might incorporate student work in walk-throughs or by gathering and analyzing samples. What instructional leaders and teachers need to look for should go well beyond worksheets and drills—although there is a time and a place for that practice.

In English language arts, students' work should demonstrate that they comprehend increasingly complex text and have the ability to take and defend positions with clear reasoning and citing relevant evidence. In every classroom, the amount of student discussion matters as well—whether in pairs or in groups. Students should be explaining their conclusions and using academic vocabulary as they discuss material they have learned.

It is imperative that social studies and science instruction take place at elementary grade levels to ensure that students have the background knowledge on these topics as well as the foundations in vocabulary, concepts, and reading skills they need to perform well in middle school grades.

27. *Define and implement a districtwide Response to Intervention (RtI) system or pyramid of academic and behavioral interventions for struggling students at both elementary and middle school levels. Strengthen the Tier 1 (general education) program to reflect the earlier recommendations and incorporate Tier 2 and 3 interventions (tutorials) during the school day and in afterschool activities.*

    Response to Intervention is a general education responsibility. It begins with a strong general education program that is differentiated to enable students to have full access to grade-level work. Tier II provides small-group attention to students needing additional support. And Tier III is designed for those few students who are in need of individualized and differing kinds of support.

    This recommendation is more complex than it might appear. The district will need to articulate exactly what access to Tier I looks like when it is being implemented well. The district will also need to create a mechanism to work with teachers and principals in a just-in-time mode to clarify key features of quality instruction that will be needed in upcoming lessons and address questions about differentiation for students who need support to access the content.

    The first step in this process requires the district to determine whether the problem that schools are seeing at the middle school level is due to the lack of concept mastery at an earlier grade. The team believes that students lack foundation skills to handle more complex analysis and work at the middle school level. So the suggestion behind this recommendation is two-pronged. Teachers need strategies for helping to shore up students with weak conceptual foundations without having to stop the instructional progress for extended periods of time. Simultaneously, the district will need to examine elementary school preparation to determine if student work is appropriately rigorous to lead to higher-level middle school work.

An example of a strategy in math that can assist students of varying backgrounds is based on a Japanese practice that was reviewed at the Council's 2012 meeting of bilingual directors. Rather than having a teacher lecture on all of the content students were about to study, a teacher has students create problems generated from a set of facts. For example, the statement, "A dragonfly can fly 50 meters in two seconds." Students then create problems individually to demonstrate what they already know. Hearing their peers explain their problems allows students at all levels to learn from each other in a way that brings their knowledge up to grade level.

The next step is to analyze whether weaknesses in middle school performance the result of instructional gaps or of language deficits related to weak instruction involving academic language. There might be a particular problem with students who have not been given access to grade-level material that builds vocabulary in context. Remedying this problem will take a long-term, concerted effort to expand the kind of reading students undertake.

Finally, determine whether problems with middle school performance relate to pacing or to the alignment of supplemental materials. This means paying close attention to teacher feedback about the curriculum itself. It means examining pacing, clarity of expectations, and whether use of the recommended instructional materials actually leads to the performance required at middle school.

In general, the Council team is concerned that when test scores do not improve at a sufficient rate, there is a tendency to assign blame rather than to develop a shared sense of responsibility. This can be exacerbated in times of leadership changes, but student achievement in Norfolk is a symptom of broader complex and systemic issues that can only be resolved when everyone works together to address them.

28. *Clearly define instructional roles of English and reading teachers.*

    Currently, the two courses at the middle school level are not coordinated in any way. English teachers and reading teachers do not have guidelines for their areas of emphasis and do not work together in a systemic way.

29. *Delineate instructional distinctions between regular and honors reading and English.*

    Teachers need to have written guidance about regular and honors courses so that, no matter which school a child attends or which teacher a child has, the level of work meets or exceeds district expectations for the course.

    Consider higher-level readings and student research in honors classes that require greater sophistication and vocabulary, and define higher performance expectations in the content areas and the rigor they exhibit.

30. *Develop a systematic approach to teaching writing.*

    It is important for students to write well, applying grammar, syntax, punctuation, and academic vocabulary appropriate to their grade level. Exemplars should help clarify

district expectations. The district should provide guidance on how to help students build logical thinking, create strong transitions to link ideas within their writing, and bolster an argument based on evidence.

31. *Ensure that at-risk readers are provided with additional supports based on data about their needs.*

    Teachers know when students are struggling with their reading, and they often know that there are many possible reasons for that struggle, including decoding, academic vocabulary, fluency, dyslexia, lack of practice with complex text, or any number of issues. Thus, a single remedy may not address all of the issues facing an individual student. The district needs to be more deliberate in its use of data to determine what types of intervention are most likely to be successful in addressing the underlying reason why a student is struggling.

    It is also important to note that struggling readers are often pulled out of the very classroom experiences they need to read on grade level. For example, it may be appropriate to work on fluency issues using leveled-readers for independent practice. But, the district should consider what happens when this is done too frequently with struggling readers while the rest of the class is working on grade-level material. At that point, the struggling reader falls farther and farther behind, missing out on the experience of reading on grade level and developing the vocabulary needed to understand the context and meaning of what is being read.

    Up to this point, the district has demonstrated that it can generate data but not that it can use it to inform instruction.

32. *Remove the "N' designation in the district's curriculum materials, especially in the seventh grade pre-algebra courses to ensure that **all** students learn the grade-level standards needed to be successful on the eighth grade SOL assessments.*

    NPS wants to indicate where teachers should focus their efforts and where more classroom time and attention are important, but it should avoid signaling that only tested standards need to be taught. The current practice is undermining the district's ability to build skills that students will need in later grades.

    The district's math curriculum includes specific standards at all grades that were designed to address gaps as students transition from one grade level to another. In an attempt to distinguish those objectives from those tested on the SOL, however, they were denoted with an "N" in the curriculum guide. The Council team encourages the district to provide teachers with guidance on where to place their instructional emphasis. This "N" designation implies that these objectives are optional. Interviews with teachers and administrators indicated that they taught these objectives *after* the SOL test. If the objectives are designed to "address gaps" in student learning, these objectives should not be optional. For example, the "Ns" in the seventh grade pre-algebra curriculum indicate that these are essential skills necessary for teaching and learning for the eighth grade, yet teachers may be delaying their being taught or not teaching them at all. This undercuts student attainment in the eighth grade.

33. *Revise social studies curriculum documents to include references to adopted texts, websites, primary source documents, and other aligned resources.*

    Social studies documents should provide teachers with the same clarity that the Council team is recommending for all other content areas. The district might consider convening social studies teachers and elementary teachers to determine how best to inform teachers about the best use of the textbook, websites that would add interest and color to the content being studied, primary source documents, and other resources that would help students master required content and skills.

34. *Ensure that professional development includes components on which instructional strategies are appropriate in what situations.*

    Some district guides list strategies that could be useful in presenting content, but the guides often assume that teachers understand when each strategy is best for presenting or reinforcing particular types of learning and when they are not. In addition, the guides do not devote much space to how these strategies are actually implemented. Therefore, professional development also needs to include this type of information, as well as practice with the strategies. Rather than a laundry list, select a few strategies to focus on each year to build stronger instructional capacity.

35. *Consider including models of higher-order thinking strategies, questioning strategies for students [students posing their own questions], and student discussion opportunities in the curriculum—and expect their inclusion in classroom instructional practice.*

36. *Incorporate academic vocabulary and close reading of grade-level texts in mathematics, social studies, and science curriculum.*

    Even native English speakers who can read with fluency often experience difficulty in reading for information. Knowing what is being asked in a word problem and what is not being asked is a vital reading skill. Being able to access science texts and social studies documents goes beyond learning vocabulary specific to the content area. It means that academic language or vocabulary such as "rationale," "consequently," and "controversy" should be emphasized as students encounter them in their texts. At least once a week, each teacher should spend class time working with all students on a particularly complex paragraph or sentence from their reading. Teachers could select text they feel strongly about, but the goal is not to tell students what the text means. Rather, the goal is get student to determine the meaning of the text themselves by having them read the text multiple times and asking them questions that will allow them to see how the author has layered information into his or her sentences.

    In choosing a text, teachers should examine its language requirements in terms of vocabulary and language structure and complexity. Look not only for content-area terms but also for frequently occurring academic language that students may encounter in other content areas. In addition, examine sentence structures and select particular texts that students could break apart into meaningful components in order to understand how academic English works.

For example, help students understand words that carry one meaning in one context and another meaning in a second context. (For example: John marked a point in the middle of the line. Mary was making the point that studying hard is important. The team won the game by one point. Her pencil had a sharp point. It's impolite to point.) Furthermore, students need commonly used cross-content vocabulary in addition to content-specific vocabulary.

37. *Conduct research to determine the extent to which teachers use curriculum documents. Use the results to plan responses that will make the documents more a part of instructional planning. If demand is present, consider how to make off-site use of the curriculum intranet available to teachers.*

Well-written curriculum documents in and of themselves cannot produce changes in classroom practice unless teachers and principals understand why the curriculum exists and how it can address student needs unforeseen by the adopted textbook. Until the use of district curriculum becomes deeply ingrained in the district's culture, the textbook and drill sheets are likely to remain the instructional drivers. Unfortunately, these standbys will not lead to higher student achievement. That goal requires a rigorous academic foundation and growing command of ever more complex learning at each grade level that is seen as connecting vertically to other grades.

D. Professional Development and Teacher and Staff Effectiveness

Many of the faster-improving urban school districts across the country are standardizing and focusing their professional development to ensure better implementation of their curriculum and to clarify to principals and teachers what is expected. This standardized approach does not mean that each school is limited to one kind of professional development. Schools can and should supplement the districtwide training with other activities, but overall district goals and priorities are clear. This professional development need not be held districtwide on a given day in traditional formats. Personnel can be prepared on campus with appropriate staff groupings.

38. *Align and focus all district professional development around the new reform plan and the recommendations in this report on curricular guides, instructional rigor, pacing guides, interventions, etc.*

After talking with a broad spectrum of district personnel, the Council team is convinced that Norfolk has the potential for much higher levels of student achievement. The goal of the reform plan proposed in the earlier section is to help the district align its instructional systems to improve student performance. This means that all components of the instructional system need to be in place. It will not be sufficient to have a well-written curriculum if no one opens it or knows why and how to use it. It would be a waste of effort to provide exemplars of model student work if teachers and principals did not understand their implications for classroom practice. Moreover, teachers need more opportunities to discuss student work and the steps they need to take to move students toward district expectations and beyond. And principals need to know what to look for in student work to ensure that instruction is focused on achieving rigorous expectations.

In addition, when the district develops its strategies for interventions, it will need to provide professional development on implementing them. In short, the district's professional development should be aligned to its focus, vision, priorities, and program.

39. *Evaluate all professional development for how well it is implemented and its impact on student achievement. Amend or drop training if it is not effective.*

    Staff time is a valuable commodity, and it important to know whether the time staff members spend in professional development is worthwhile. Evaluations of professional development should go beyond asking about the venue and the quality of the presentation or activities. The district should determine whether the professional development actually changed practices and whether those changes affected student outcomes.

40. *Charge the chief academic officer with creating better collaboration across the content areas for district-defined and school-defined professional development days around districtwide goals and priorities.*

    It is not unusual to find that departments operate in silos, communicating about major needs haphazardly and sporadically. However, many school districts making faster gains in student achievement have established cross-functional or collaborative teams to ensure systematic, regular communication and problem solving in order to make the best use of professional development time. Moreover, such collaboration helps everyone on staff understand district goals and their roles in attaining them.

41. *Differentiate professional development according to teacher experience and skills, district instructional priorities, and student deficits.*

    We expect teachers to differentiate classroom instruction for students, but districts often do not differentiate their professional development to reflect varying levels of teacher experience, grade levels, subject areas, skills, previous training, or student attainment. NPS should ensure that its professional development reflects the practices the district expects and is tailored to meet the instructional capacities and needs of district teachers and staff. Be clear about what the professional development is designed to accomplish, and define the training around those goals.

42. *Streamline the timeline for remediating and/or exiting low-performing teachers.*

    The team heard that the timeline for remediating or exiting low-performing teachers could be excessive. While teachers need to feel that they are receiving fair treatment, students also have the right to a skillful teacher. The team urges stakeholders to review the current guidelines and reduce the amount of time needed to exit teachers who do not improve their teaching skills.

43. *Charge line administrators in instruction with expanding their expertise on best practices and on the current research on effective strategies for raising student achievement in other major urban school systems.*

The Council has completed several detailed studies that compare the traits of faster-improving urban districts with districts that are not seeing improvements in student achievement: *Foundations for Success* and *Pieces of the Puzzle* (see www.cgcs.org). These publications and others outline practices found in these districts, all of which are eager to share what works and lessons learned.

44. *Set clear expectations about what needs to happen during common planning time and monitor results. Ensure that teachers use collaborative planning time to review student work and discuss strategies for improving achievement both within and across grade levels.*

    Norfolk has a potentially powerful means to increase instructional staff capacity and skills: common planning time. Many districts would love to have common planning time in every school the way that Norfolk does.

    However, the team visited several middle schools and saw some common planning time where teachers were not engaged with each other in any apparent way. While there may be times when teachers break away from group discussions to prepare individual work, the team heard that the time was not always well used, and no one monitors it to see what is accomplished.

    The team urges the district to have clear expectations around planning time so it can be the kind of professional learning community that teachers want and need. Principals may need to be involved, at least initially, to set tone and direction.

45. *Establish a regular principals' training program built around district goals and priorities. Ensure that school leaders have the skills they need to provide a strong instructional program in the content areas.*

    Principals can only be strong instructional leaders when they are aware of district goals and priorities and have the knowledge and skills needed to ensure proper support for instruction. Principals need to know the rationale for instructional initiatives, what is like and what is different from what they might have seen before, and what to look for in student work at key points in the school year.

    In particular, principals need defined and targeted professional development around the mathematics program. They need to understand the goals of the math program and be able to articulate it to faculty and parents. In math, the training for principals should include:

    - Program components and their rationale
    - Progress monitoring
    - Key learning that must be mastered by students—such as math facts and problem solving, and multistep problem situations
    - Look-fors in classroom instruction and student work products
    - Instructional implications for benchmark and other assessment results.

    In addition, systematic on-site training for principals should include a clear vision of what good math instruction looks like. It should help teachers implement that model

of instruction and inform administrators how to monitor it. Professional development should be incorporated into grade-level and department meetings about two weeks prior to beginning new units to ensure that district staff members are working together toward the same ends.

Finally, social studies is often neglected until it is tested. However, this leaves the responsibility for eighth-grade social studies performance in the hands of one or two grade levels. Instead, these skills should be built from the earliest grades, and principals should know what to look for in social studies instruction and student work at every grade.

46. *Ensure that monthly principal meetings are designed to build capacity to lead reforms and improve student behavior.*

    Meetings with principals should include time to build capacity to lead instructional reform and improve student behavior. Consider having principals conduct walk-throughs at more effective middle schools, discussing specific things to look for. Build curriculum staff into the meetings. Include issues that may be interfering with student learning, such as student behavior.

47. *Realign staff deployment and duties to reflect district goals and priorities.*

    Ensure that staffing reflects district goals and priorities.

48. *Provide professional development to middle school teachers that will build their knowledge of how to provide appropriate literacy instruction for students.*

    Many students come to middle school reading below grade level. Others are ready for higher-level work. There is evidence in the three-year cohort data presented in chapter 1 that teachers are often doing well at moving students from below basic to higher achievement levels. Still, some 22.8 percent of students are still below basic after three years of instruction. In addition, the cohort data show that, while 100 more students attain the advanced level on the reading SOL after three years of instruction, the district is not focused on reaching advanced levels. Too many students who were at the advanced level declined to the proficient level over the three years. The district should also discuss how to address the academic needs of students who move in and out of the district.

49. *Consider designating some classrooms as demonstration classrooms where reading and/or mathematics teaching is well done and/or is led by "teacher-leaders." Permit other teachers to visit these classrooms. Consider taping portions of particularly important or traditionally difficult-to-teach concepts and making the videos available to teachers and schools.*

    The best way to master a strategy is to see it in action with a teacher who uses it superbly. It helps to have a partner to reflect with as one is trying out a new strategy. The professional learning community structure and coaching could be used for such purposes.

50. *Establish campus-based lead teachers in mathematics (in the middle grades and grade 5 if possible) to improve mathematics instruction.*

    Math scores in the middle grades indicate that teachers need additional training in math instruction. One way to accomplish this, beyond traditional professional development, would be to establish lead math teachers in at least some schools to provide technical assistance and direction to their colleagues. At the middle school level, this is most likely to be the department chair.

    This model for providing assistance should emphasize how the curriculum is designed to meet the district's instructional goals in math and might include discussions of frequently asked questions. In addition, the district should consider regular meetings of these lead teachers to discuss best practices (e.g., how to support fluency with basic facts, how to develop and use model lessons, how to address the language demands that arise, how to productively build partnerships with parents, how to use student work, how to determine when students are sufficiently proficient given the spiraling nature of the materials, how to address common student misperceptions, etc.).

    Teacher leaders could also be used to prepare other teachers for upcoming lessons, to help them learn where students are likely to need help, and show them how to provide that help within the parameters of the modified pacing guides. This strategy should be evaluated for its effectiveness. Finally, lead teachers should be used to help guide discussions during common planning time and in professional learning communities, and they should be provided an extra stipend for their work.

E. Reform Press

Urban school districts that are seeing steady progress in student achievement do not develop new policies at the central office and hope that they find their way into district classrooms. Instead, these school districts design specific strategies for ensuring that the reforms are being supported and implemented in all classrooms.

51. *Consider establishing an office dedicated to middle school oversight and improvement.*

    The needs of the middle school program require full-time attention. All interviewees indicated their concern for middle school students, but the district lacks an organizational structure to focus its concerns. This recommendation is not intended to be a command-and-control office, but rather one that cultivates middle school leadership teams to effectively address student achievement and to build links to elementary and high school programs in ways that ensure students are prepared for ever more challenging work as they move through the grade levels.

52. *Establish tools and systems to ensure congruence between the written and implemented curriculum throughout the district.*

    In their classroom observation, the team saw significant inconsistencies in the level of

instructional rigor within and among schools. In some classrooms, teachers merely had students completing "low-level" worksheets while in another classroom, at the same grade level, students were asked to describe and generalize patterns. There was a significant range in the required level of student thinking.

In addition, the pacing guides allude to Powerful Literacy (PL) characteristics, which are supposed to be detailed "habits of mind" for students working to be college and career ready. While these PL characteristics are identified, there is little to guide teachers on how to determine their presence. And there is nothing in pacing guides that suggests how to build them. For example, one of the pacing guides has a hyperlinked characteristic that "demonstrates personal responsibility for learning," but the link does not define what this looks like or how to create it.

53. *Consolidate or modify district walk-through forms and procedures to reflect district priorities. Differentiate look-fors by content area and time of year. Executive staff, executive directors, and principals should jointly develop the forms with their teachers and use them uniformly with the same sets of expectations*.

    The district's use of multiple look-for forms and procedures is sending inconsistent—almost arbitrary—messages about its instructional priorities. When everyone is clear about high-leverage instructional practices and priorities, these should be incorporated into a single set of look-fors. In addition, the district should ensure that these procedures do not become rote compliance checklists that are not evaluative in nature. Instead, they should drive and inform discussions that lead to stronger implementation of practices that improve student learning.

    For instance, a look-for procedure that devolves into a compliance document can be seen in the routine call on such forms for teachers to have "word walls." By themselves, however, word walls do little for students. In a compliance-driven system, it is easy for teachers to post a word wall that never changes and does not reflect grade-level work. What is important is how teachers use that word wall, the level of words displayed, hearing students using those words, and seeing those words appear in written student work.

    Finally, look-fors should be limited to those high-leverage factors that make a strong difference. Consequently, look-fors should concern levels of student engagement in the academic work, teacher questions that require students to support their responses with evidence from the text the class is reading, emphasis on grade-level work, and the use of strong vocabulary. Seeing less should result in a conversation with the teacher or with the common planning group about how to make the necessary instructional changes.

54. *Eliminate use of the Beers walk-through form and procedure.*

    As the district moves to a single walk-through form and procedure aligned to its goals, it would be an appropriate time to end the use of forms that do not precisely reflect the district's priorities.

55. *Begin monthly diagnostic walk-throughs in schools where math achievement has been an issue. Link the observation process in each quarter to key concepts found in the pacing guides. Use "look for" guidelines to improve program implementation and student achievement.*

56. *Develop a transition plan for the continuation of the instructional coaching system in the middle schools when federal SIG funding expires. Consider use of federal Title I and/or II funds.*

    While the coaching system can be improved, it remains a powerful mechanism for building district capacity to improve instruction and support teachers. The district should consider ways to maintain this component, rather than letting funds expire with no replacement strategy.

57. *Limit the use of coaches for non-instructional duties and responsibilities. Consider using volunteers to patrol hallways so coaches are freed to work in classrooms.*

    It is essential that instructional coaches work in classrooms and in common planning periods if they are to have any impact. If they are being assigned other responsibilities, the district and the principals are not being clear about their priorities. The practice suggests that there may be doubts about the knowledge and skill level of the coaches; there may be competing priorities that suggest other personnel are needed; there may be a lack of clarity about the role of the coaches, so they get used as supplemental employees; there may be resistance by teachers to using coaches; or there not be clarity among principals about how to best use coaches.

58. *Consider having the executive director for schools report to the associate superintendent for academic affairs to reduce siloed efforts and improve the coordination of efforts in meeting district priorities.*

    The district should consider ways to unify its efforts. The team believes that the organizational structure should promote the kind of coordination of efforts the district needs to address its academic needs.

59. *Develop a district PBIS-like plan (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) that is incorporated into all schools. Evaluate its implementation and results.*

    Classroom teachers need classroom environments that are conducive to learning. Concerns expressed about student discipline and classroom management indicate a need for a broader-based behavioral program. The program should:

    - Develop school rules with input from students.
    - Develop and implement progressive discipline practices.
    - Select activities to reward students for positive behavior.
    - Develop an intervention plan for students who are frequently absent.
    - Expect that all teachers and staff will implement the behavior plan.
    - Provide targeted in-depth and ongoing professional development for all the above.

F. Assessment and Data Use

A common feature in urban districts making rapid gains in student achievement is their use of statistical data. These districts use data to monitor progress, identify schools or students that are starting to slip behind, and decide on intervention strategies to bring students back up to speed and professional development to help teachers strengthen skills. Data are also used to inform and shape instruction and to identify areas where the curriculum may need to be modified.

60. *Charge the SEAS (strategic evaluation and assessment support unit) with working with teachers and other content area staff to create a bank of test items consistent with the standards and priorities that teachers can use in their development of CFAs. Provide professional development on the use of the item bank.*

    The two main purposes of the CFAs are to let teachers know how well students are progressing and to let the district know whether the system is on track for end-of-year testing. In some ways, it is an inefficient use of time and expertise to have individual teachers creating and checking items. Instead, consider an item bank that teachers could use directly or use as a guide for the level and types of items that would reflect grade-level expectations.

    The district should be cautious, however, about ready-made commercial item banks because they may lack items that are aligned with the newer state testing expectations. Be sure to examine any purchased bank item by item to eliminate those that do not meet the level of rigor expected by the district.

61. *Develop a protocol for the interpretation and use of CFA data to improve instruction.*

    Assessments can become a compliance and grading exercise (just like look-fors) unless the district uses them as tools to improve teaching and learning. Consider engaging teachers, principals, and curriculum staff in developing protocols that could be used during common planning time to review CFA results and determine next steps to address student learning gaps and to improve the way concepts and skills are taught.

62. *Develop a multiyear calendar or schedule for evaluating major programs and initiatives. Consider funding an additional staff position to perform this function by combining the evaluation funds from various district grants programs.*

    The school district evaluates few of its major programs on a regular basis to determine their level of implementation or impact on student achievement. Without such evaluation, however, the district lacks the information it needs to refine reforms or judge whether its initiatives are producing achievement gains.

    The team also proposes that the district examine current and future grants, and consider consolidating the funds reserved for program evaluation into a staff position in-house that could meet that purpose. This might free current staff to be more

focused on data and data use and to think more strategically about whether to continue, refine, or end initiatives.

63. *Develop a schedule to report and discuss with school board and staff the evaluation findings, recommendations, and next steps from major reports.*

    Conducting studies and writing reports must be part of the process to ensure that the school board and staff are aware of what works, what doesn't, and what may need to be modified in the instructional program. A schedule ensures that reports are expected and that time is allocated to discuss them and their implications.

64. *Develop a plan for rolling out computer-based testing with the benchmark assessments.*

    To ensure that students are comfortable with computer-based tests like the SOL, consider modifying the district benchmark test into a computer-based assessment. In the plan, include time and funding for training school principals, assistant principals, counselors, and teachers on how to use the system, retrieve results, and manipulate data.

65. *Redesign benchmark tests to include items on objectives where students are performing poorly to gain additional information on what they can do.*

66. *Track longitudinal cohort data to determine if district programs are having a positive impact on their achievement, as was done in chapter 1 of this report.*

G. Lowest-Performing Students and Schools

Urban school districts that are seeing substantial improvement in student performance have a targeted strategy to intervene in and increase achievement in their lowest-performing schools and with their lowest-performing students. These school districts also have clear strategies for teaching special populations such as English language learners and students with disabilities. Such strategies may vary from city to city, but they share a number of common elements. To build towards a successful system, NPS might consider the following steps:

67. *Establish a series of rapid response teams to work with schools showing particularly low achievement on the first, second, and third benchmark tests.*

    The district should consider how it could support schools when benchmark tests indicate that there is a serious problem. We must assume that everyone is working as hard and effectively as they can, so this proposal is meant to create a mechanism by which the challenges are addressed jointly, as other urban school systems have done. These teams would consist of district experts in the areas showing greatest weaknesses, and would entail having a team on-site in a school for one to two weeks to work with staff on instructional problem areas, strategies for improvement, and implementation.

The team recognizes that central office staffing has been seriously curtailed, but the teams might also consist of staff from other schools showing stronger performance. It is a strategy that has proven effective in other districts.

68. *Increase the salary scale of occupational and speech therapists to reduce the gap with private providers hired by the district. Take these staff off the teacher pay scale.*

    The team heard that occupational and speech therapists can make higher salaries working for private providers. In turn, these providers charge the district more for those same services than the district would pay if the therapists were on staff. Consider an annual bonus or stipend for these therapists that would make it advantageous for them to continue as district staff.

69. *Develop a clear definition of what full inclusion for students with disabilities and ELLs looks like and what it is designed to accomplish. Seek technical assistance from the Training and Technical Assistance Center (T/TAC) and look at inclusion models in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.*

    At present, there is no clear district vision about serving students with disabilities and ELLs in mainstream classrooms. The vision should be accompanied by staff development for all staff and teachers to ensure that the education of these students is seen as a shared responsibility rather than the sole province of the special education and bilingual departments.

70. *Articulate a clear English-language development strategy as part of the district's ESL program.*

71. *Articulate a clear model for ELL instruction as the enrollment of English language learners increases.*

    Research conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools on urban school districts whose ELL students are making the fastest gains indicates that any number of methodologies can be successful—but only when the program is strongly advocated by district leadership, implemented well in classrooms, and carefully monitored and evaluated with an eye to improvement. The Council team does not advocate a particular approach, but it does recommend programming that has a strong emphasis on mastery of academic language at grade-level.

72. *Use SOL, benchmark assessments, and no-verbal alternative tools to trigger or signal the need for gifted and talented screening in addition to teacher and parent referral. Drop the use of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS).*

    The ITBS is a standardized test that assumes students have had formal exposure to complex reading. A child may be gifted, but a child of poverty may simply not yet have the vocabulary and skills to do well on that particular test. However, students performing at advanced levels on the SOL and benchmark tests should not have to depend on whether a parent or teacher writes a referral for consideration for the gifted and talented program.

73. Consider the use of in-school suspensions for most short-term disciplinary actions.

Examine suspension data on a regular basis to determine how many instructional days are being missed due to out-of-school suspensions. When possible, consider in-school suspension options that keep students focused on their academic work in a structured environment. The district should also be examining suspension rates school by school and determining where major problems exist and whether disproportionate suspensions are being levied on students by race or income.

74. Hold some portion of Title I funds at the central office to support middle school reform in Title I-eligible middle schools.

Consider using Title I funds to support coaches or expert staff that could be part of rapid support teams and other instructional strategies recommended in this report. Funds might also be held for professional development.

CHAPTER 4. SYNOPSIS AND DISCUSSION

The former interim superintendent of the Norfolk Public Schools invited the Council of the Great City Schools to examine student achievement at the middle school level, determine why it was stagnant in mathematics, reading, and social studies; and make recommendations for improving it. Moreover, he asked the Council team to determine whether the district was on the right path academically, examine the district's interim assessment system, and make any proposals that might help streamline the district's many programs.

The Norfolk Public Schools has seen some gains in the elementary grades on the state's Standards of Learning (SOL) tests but does need to pause to consider some practices that are working against faster improvements at both the elementary and the middle school levels. It was clear to the Council's team that two critical practices were impeding the district's progress: First, the district is teaching at lower levels in the elementary grades than it should be, and the result is that students are not gaining the skills they need in order to be successful in the middle grades and beyond. Second, the course configuration in the middle grades, particularly in math, may be undermining the district's attempts to boost achievement faster, although the system lacks the data to know for sure.

It was also clear to the Council team that the school district lacks the kind of coherent instructional program that it once had in the early 2000s and that program-creep has undercut the district's sense of priorities and direction. This situation has been exacerbated by the degree of school-based decision making that exists absent clear guidance on what improvement would look like. In addition, the district may also be living under the legacy of a former practice where some of its weakest teachers were placed in the middle grades without proper support, technical assistance, or professional development. Moreover, the district lacks a clearly understood strategy for handling students who are falling behind academically. Finally, it appears that the Norfolk Public Schools makes very weak use of its data on student achievement to inform curricular changes, define professional development, or assign interventions. The combination of findings suggests a school district that could be getting much stronger student results than it is currently attaining.

The Council team attempted to design a series of recommendations that would strengthen the middle school program on a number of fronts, including proposals in the area of elementary school instruction leading to the middle schools, curricular reform and modifications, changes in pacing guides to take into account the need for re-teaching and remediation, strengthened staff accountability for results, more cohesive professional development, better use of data, more clearly articulated professional development, and other recommendations. Over time, we think these and other steps will begin to improve student performance.

We have also attempted to be mindful that our recommendations come in a context where the school system is under enormous financial strain. With that situation in mind, we took extra care to make the vast majority of proposals budget neutral.

In short, the district is not seeing steady growth in academic achievement at the middle school level because it lacks the systems that create the growth the school system is looking for. The written curriculum at both the elementary and the middle school levels lacks clear guidance for what grade-level student work looks like. It is not even clear that the district expects the curriculum to be used or to what extent it is used by teachers to shape classroom instruction. Pacing guides lack time for review and remediation, as we have indicated. Data from the benchmark tests do not appear to drive action on the part of the school system, and the tests themselves are not in the same format that the SOLs are, despite the high correlation between the two assessments. There is no systemic monitoring of classroom instruction, and there are few consequences for anyone in the district for poor student performance, although principal and some central office staff are evaluated in part on the basis of student outcomes.

The brief answer to the former interim superintendent's question about whether the district was on the right track academically is "no." The school system's instructional program is too ill-defined and fractured to yield any other answer. It has also suffered under a revolving door of leaders that has made it hard to gain any momentum behind a consistent set of reforms. Still, the school system has many strong staff members and teachers, and it does have a curriculum that needs tweaking and implementing rather than scrapping and rewriting.

The brief answer to the question about the benchmark assessments is that they need revisiting from top to bottom, particularly now that the state has new standards in place. Recent research by the Council of the Great City Schools and the American Institutes for Research found that benchmark assessment results, if used by principals and teachers, could lead to higher student achievement in reading and math. But the NPS assessments, while predicting results on the SOLs, do not appear to be used by either district or school-based staff to inform instruction. Moreover, the CFAs are not providing teachers or district staff with the information they need to improve instruction, and it is not clear that the assessments are necessary on a districtwide basis.

And the brief answer to the third question related to streamlining programs rests in the need for clarity on the part of the district about its direct and regular evaluations of what works and doesn't work.

The Norfolk Public Schools are now under new leadership and it will be important for the district to create a clear path moving forward and then sustain it over a number of years. The research on why major urban school systems make significant gains consistently points to this conclusion. And it was one of the main reasons why Norfolk once saw substantial improvements. There is no reason why similar gains cannot be recreated for the benefit of all city students in the years to come.

APPENDIX A. INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

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School District School Board and Staff

- Michael Spencer, Interim Superintendent
- Christine Harris, Associate Superintendent
- Lisa Corbin, Senior Director of Curriculum and Professional Development
- Steve Tonelson, School Board
- Warren Stewart, School Board
- Sandra Witcher, Senior Director of Special Education
- Christonya Brown, Senior Coordinator of History/Social Science
- Alfreda Jernigan, Interim Senior Coordinator of Mathematics
- Gale A. Lee, Senior Director, Compensatory Education
- Thomas Calhoun, President, Norfolk Federation of Teachers
- LaDawn Durant, Instructional Coach, Lake Taylor Middle School
- Charlotte Glaeser, Instructional Coach, Lake Taylor Middle School
- Phillip Hess, Instructional Coach, Lake Taylor Middle School
- Angelina M. Taylor-Jamison, Instructional Coach, Lake Taylor Middle School
- Heidi Lewis, Instructional Coach, Ruffner Middle School
- Irene M. Narlis, Social Studies Coach, Lafayette-Winona Middle School
- Amanda Schilling, Reading Instructional Coach, Ruffner Middle School
- Marye Werling, Mathematics Coach, Ruffner Academy
- Karren P. Bailey, Executive Director, Strategic Evaluation, Assessment and Support
- Monica Robinson, Senior Coordinator, English/Reading,
- Dorie Banks, Senior Coordinator, Gifted Education Services
- Sharon I. Byrdsong, Executive Director of Secondary Schools
- Margot Hall, Senior Coordinator, Foreign Language and English as a Second Language
- Carlos Clanton, Executive Director, Norfolk Education Foundation
- Brandan Adams, Teacher, Rosemont Academy
- Karla Batista, Teacher, Ruffner Middle School
- Linda Beverly-Ebert, Teacher, Blair Middle School
- Odetta Bryant, Teacher, Norview Middle School
- Cindi Campbell, Teacher, Azalea Gardens Middle School
- Marie Carter, Teacher, Lake Taylor Middle School
- Letitia Edwards, Teacher, Lake Taylor Middle School
- Joli Kane, Teacher, Northside Middle School
- Lawrence Parker, Teacher, Blair Middle School
- Andrea Schwartz, Teacher, Norview Middle School
- Curtis Young, Teacher, Lafayette-Winona Middle School
- April Bernarde, Assistant Principal, Blair Middle School
- Reuthenia Clark, Principal, Azalea Gardens Middle School
- Dennis Fifer, Principal, Norview Middle School

- Tracey Flemings, Principal, Lafayette-Winona Middle School
- Richard Fraley, Principal, Northside Middle School
- Lynnell Gibson, Principal, Lake Taylor Middle School
- Sharon J. Mims, Principal, Ruffner Middle School
- Michelle Williams-Moore, Principal, The Academy of International Studies at Rosemont
- Karen L. Mattox, Parent, Azalea Gardens

APPENDIX B. DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

APPENDIX B. DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

- Virginia Department of Education Report Cards for Blair, Lafayette-Winona, Lake Taylor, Northside, Norview, and Ruffner Middle Schools (www.doe.virginia.gov)
- Teacher Induction Program (Years 1-3)
- PD 360 Overview
- PD 360 Individual Professional Growth Documentation
- English/Reading Audit Checklist
- Middle School Math Instructional Audit Checklist
- Learner Walk (unrevised)
- Learner Walks, Revised 7/7/11
- District Benchmark Assessment History/Social Science November 2011, Grades 6, 7, and 8
- District Benchmark Assessment Mathematics November 2011, Grades 6, 7, and 8
- Virginia November Quarterly Form, William H. Ruffner Middle School
- Virginia November Quarterly Form, Lake Taylor Middle School
- Report of Technical Assistance to Norfolk City Public Schools, Virginia Department of Education, April 27, 2010
- District-furnished pseudo-identification database of selected grade levels and school years to establish a three-year cohort
- United States History to 1865 Curriculum, Revised August 2011
- Written Document Analysis Worksheet
- US History to 1865 (Honors) Curriculum 2008: History and Social Science Standards Curriculum Framework for United States History to 1865 from the Board of Education, Commonwealth of Virginia
- Documents of American History, Virginia Department of Education
- Regions of North America
- Blueprints- USI: Virginia Standards of Learning Assessments Test Blueprint, United States History to 1865, 2008 History and Social Science Standards of Learning, effective with the administration of the 2010-2011 History and Social Science Standards of Learning (SOL) tests
- Enhanced Scope and Sequence: History and Social Science Standards of Learning
- Enhanced Scope and Sequence: United States History to 1865, Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Education, 2010
- US History Timeline, PowerPoint slides
- Geographic Regions of North America PowerPoint
- USI2a: USI.2 Seven Continents and Five Oceans PowerPoint
- DocsTeach Activities Create: Civil War Document Sort DocsTeach Activities
- NPS Reading 6-8, Curriculum Guide Addendum: Suggested Strategies by Objective
- Beers walk-through document
- Middle School tradebook list and links—sixth grade
- Executive Summary: District/Local Benchmark Assessment
- District Benchmark Assessment/Redevelopment &Implementation Plan 2011-2012
- Norfolk Public Schools Office of the Superintendent—Organization Chart 2011-2012

- SOL:USI.2b-Sample Lesson Plan
- Lafayette-Winona Middle School 2011-2012 Master Schedule
- Blair Middle School-Daily Lesson Plan; seventh grade history (1/131/12-2/1/12)
- Unlocking the SOL Writing Prompt
- William H. Ruffner Academy Daily Learning Plan-Grade 6- 1/26/12-1/31/12
- Crash activities
- PD 360 Overview
- Middle School Math – Instructional Audit checklist
- Lake Taylor Middle School-Teacher Matrix
- William H. Ruffner Academy Master Schedule 2011-2012
- Lake Taylor Middle School Daily Lesson Plan 1/26-1/31
- Teacher Induction Program Brochure
- Lake Taylor Middle School 2011-2012 Bell Schedule
- Lake Taylor Middle School Floor Plan
- District's organization structure for academics
- Copy of the district's most recent Strategic Plan
- Copy of a recent evaluation of the district's plan, including professional development for principals and assistant principals
- Copy of the district's professional development plan
- One hard copy plus digital format of the district's curriculum guidance (guides, pacing guides, curriculum maps, etc.) for fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades for math, language arts, and social studies
- Samples of grades 5 through 8 benchmark (short cycle) tests in math, language arts/reading, social studies, and Algebra I
- Description of language arts/reading, social studies, and mathematics instructional approaches and names of textbooks/programs/interventions at third through eighth grades
- Information about the district's magnet plan or other programs designed to attract students to particular areas of interest (School of International Studies, gifted program in middle school)
- Numbers and percentages of students participating in the district's gifted and talented programs, per school with racial/ethnic, English language learners, and gender data for elementary and middle schools
- A description of how the district supports low-performing schools and students
- Numbers and percentages of students participating in the district's special education programs, per school by racial/ethnicity for elementary and middle schools
- A description of the philosophy and time requirements of the district's programs for English language learners
- Numbers and percentages of students participating in the district's schools, with racial/ethnic and gender data
- Issues regarding particular language and ethnic groups within Norfolk
- Evaluation of the district's ELL program, including data on student academic progress and mastery of English
- Description of process used to evaluate principals, with appropriate forms
- Description of process used to evaluate teacher performance, with appropriate forms

- List of middle schools with reform models, if applicable
- List of elementary and middle schools by state and national accountability status for this year and the previous year (for each schools that has not made AYP, the list indicates which factors caused the school to be in the accountability status)
- Middle school feeder patterns (from elementary schools)
- Board agendas from three recent board meetings
- Copies of any program studies that have been required by the state or federal government
- Middle school student data files for mathematics.
- Norfolk Public Schools Learning Communities
- Excel student data
- Norfolk Pacing Guide 2011-2012: Grade 6, Pre-Algebra grade 7, Algebra 1
- NPS Reading 6-8, Curriculum Guide Addendum: Suggested Strategies by Objective
- Copy of evaluation of district's plan, including professional development for site-based and central office staff

APPENDIX C. STRATEGIC SUPPORT TEAM MEMBERS

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Michael Casserly

Michael Casserly is the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of 65 of the nation's largest urban public school districts. Dr. Casserly has been with the organization for 28 years, 13 of them as executive director. Before heading the group, he was the organization's chief lobbyist on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, and served as the Council's director of research. Dr. Casserly has led major reforms in federal education laws, garnered significant aid for urban schools across the country, spurred major gains in urban school achievement and management, and advocated for urban school leadership in the standards movement. He led the organization in holding the nation's first summit of urban school superintendents and big-city mayors. He holds a doctorate from the University of Maryland and a bachelor's degree from Villanova University.

Maria Crenshaw

Maria F. Crenshaw is the director of instruction for Richmond Public Schools. For nearly seven years, she was a Title I mathematics instructional specialist for the district. She has been instrumental in the district's dramatic improvement in elementary and middle school math achievement scores. In that capacity, she provided leadership and management to the elementary and middle school math program to by monitoring and supervising teachers and activities. She collaborated in developing lesson plans and instructional activities aligned to district and state standards with the adopted textbooks and supplemental materials. Her responsibilities also included developing quarterly benchmark tests, analyzing the data from the benchmarks, assisting teachers and administrators with effective strategies for teacher and student improvement, and conducting professional development for teachers and administrators. Mrs. Crenshaw is a national presenter, presenting at National Staff Development Council (NSDC), National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics (NCSM), and National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). She earned her undergraduate degree in early childhood and elementary education from Radford (College) University and master's degree in educational administration and supervision from Virginia State University. Mrs. Crenshaw has also taken extensive graduate training in the area of mathematics from Virginia Commonwealth and Virginia State universities.

Katy Dula

Kay Dula's career in education has been spent both teaching and working across the K-12 spectrum in the area of English/language arts and reading, mainly in the intermediate to middle school level, or in administrative positions in the area of curriculum and instruction at the district level. In June of 2012, she retired from the education system in North Carolina. She began her career teaching language arts at the middle school level and was one of the first National Board Certified teachers in the nation. She worked for three years as part of the North Carolina State Assistance Teams as the state began its

ABC initiative for academic improvement. As a part of this effort, she provided guidance to schools as they implemented efforts to improve academic achievement for all students. She was appointed to the Professional Teaching Standards Commission by then-Governor Jim Hunt. Ms. Dula worked as a district literacy specialist and served briefly as the interim assistant superintendent of elementary curriculum and instruction and as the executive coordinator for the associate superintendent of curriculum and instruction before becoming district director of PreK-12 literacy, a post she held in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School district at the time of her retirement. Currently, working under a federal grant, she works part time for that district on teacher incentive grants (pay for performance). Also, Ms. Dula has been involved in several school site visits with the Council of the Great City Schools.

Angela Miller

Angela Miller has been serving as the Secondary Social Studies Curriculum Manager in the Houston Independent School District (HISD) since 2006. She began her work in the curriculum department in 2000 as a specialist and became manager for pk-12 social studies curriculum in 2001. Ms. Miller has been a social studies educator in HISD since 1982, including teaching social studies in the middle grades. Under her leadership, HISD has received four Teaching American History Grants, and Ms. Miller has served as project for each of these grants. Social studies scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests have consistently risen since 2003. In addition to curriculum development for the 203,000 students in HISD, Ms. Miller also serves as a lecturer at the University of Houston in secondary social studies trends and methods and effective planning for social studies instruction. Ms. Miller has often presented sessions at NCSS, TCSS, AERA, ATE, NCHE, and multiple national Teaching American History Grant meetings. M. Miller has a B.A. degree in history with high honors from Westhampton College of the University of Richmond (VA). She has a master's degree in education Social studies curriculum and instruction) from the University of Houston. She is pursuing an EdD from the same institution.

Robin Hall

Robin Hall is the director of language arts and literacy for the Council of the Great City Schools. She keeps members informed about research on systems and successful strategies for improving student achievement. Dr. Hall also provides support for development and dissemination of information and tools to implement the Common Core State Standards. She has served in various capacities for Atlanta Public Schools, including executive director of K-8 schools, principal, K-12 language arts coordinator, instructional liaison specialist, language arts department chairperson and high school language arts teacher, constituting over 25 years of educational experience. Dr. Hall has also served on the Council of the Great City Schools support teams in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and professional development. In 2006, Dr. Hall was appointed to the National Assessment Governing Board by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. Among the board responsibilities are selecting the content of the NAEP test, selecting the subjects to be tested, identifying learning objectives for each grade tested, identifying appropriate achievement goals and ensuring that all items selected for use in

the assessment are free from racial, cultural, gender and regional biases. She received her B.A. degree in English from Vassar College and her M.A. and D.A.H. degrees from Clark Atlanta University.

Sharon Lewis

Sharon Lewis has been with the Council of Great City Schools for over a decade. She directs the Council's research program, which contributes to the organization's efforts to improve teaching and learning in the nation's urban schools, as well as to help develop education policy. The Council's research team serves as support to all other departments by designing and conducting survey research, collecting and maintaining demographic/characteristics of large urban districts, collecting and analyzing longitudinal data, assisting in developing policy research, gathering and reporting what works in urban schools, etc. Ms. Lewis has served on many national committees including but not limited to the Committee to Evaluate NAEP, National Research Council (NRC); NRC's Committee on Test Design for K-12 Science Achievement; NRC's Committee on High Stakes Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation; Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, APA, AERA, NCME; and the Advisory Council for Educational Statistics, US Department of Education.

Ricki Price-Baugh

Ricki Price-Baugh retired from her position as the assistant superintendent for curriculum in the Houston Independent School District. In this position, she was responsible for strategic planning and the design, implementation, and evaluation of the district's curriculum and instructional initiatives for eight departments: English/language arts, fine arts, early childhood education, foreign language, health/physical education, mathematics, science, and social studies. Since beginning her work with the Houston schools 30 years ago, Dr. Price-Baugh has served as a teacher, department chair, resource coordinator, project manager, and director of curriculum services. Her major accomplishments included a districtwide effort to align curriculum, textbook, and assessment systems, and a substantial increase in student achievement scores in the district. Dr. Price-Baugh is currently the director of academic achievement for the Council of the Great City Schools. She is a certified curriculum auditor for Phi Delta Kappa and is a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Dr. Price-Baugh has a doctoral degree from Baylor University, a master's degree in Spanish literature from the University of Maryland, and a bachelor's degree (magna cum laude) from Tulane University.

Denise Walston

Denise M. Walston is the director of mathematics for the Council of the Great City Schools. She has served on numerous CGCS support teams in the area of curriculum, instruction, and professional development. She works with the Council to provide high-leverage support in implementation of the Common Core State Mathematics Standards in urban school districts. Ms. Walston retired from Norfolk Public Schools as the senior coordinator of K-12 mathematics. Her responsibilities included developing K-12 mathematics curricula; providing job-embedded professional development; and leveraging resources to provide quality professional development for teachers, teacher

leaders, and administrators. During her tenure, Norfolk Public Schools embarked on an Algebra For ALL initiative, which resulted in more than 50 percent of students completing algebra by the end of grade 8 while simultaneously improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps in mathematics. She has also served as an adjunct instructor at both Old Dominion University and the University of Virginia. She is currently the first vice president of the National Council for Mathematics Supervision, past president of the Virginia Council for Mathematics Supervision, and is on the board of the Virginia Mathematics and Science Coalition. Ms. Walston received her B.A. degree in mathematics and history from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and her M.Ed. in mathematics education from Old Dominion University. She has completed additional study at The College of William & Mary and the Woodrow Wilson Institute (Princeton University).

APPENDIX D. ABOUT THE COUNCIL

APPENDIX D. ABOUT THE COUNCIL

Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 65 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. Its board of directors is composed of the superintendent of schools and one school board member from each member city. An executive committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between superintendents and school board members, provides regular oversight of the 501(c)(3) organization. The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public education and assist its members in the improvement of leadership and instruction. The Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group convenes two major conferences each year; conducts studies on urban school conditions and trends; and operates ongoing networks of senior school district managers with responsibilities in areas such as federal programs, operations, finance, personnel, communications, research, and technology. The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, and it has its headquarters in Washington, D.C.

History of Strategic Support Teams Conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools

City	Area	Year
Albuquerque		
	Facilities and Roofing	2003
	Human Resources	2003
	Information Technology	2003
	Special Education	2005
	Legal Services	2005
	Safety and Security	2007
Anchorage		
	Finance	2004
	Communications	2008
	Math Instruction	2010
	Organizational Structure & Staffing	2012
Atlanta		
	Facilities	2009
	Transportation	2010
Austin		
	Special Education	2010
Birmingham		
	Organizational Structure	2007
	Operations	2008
	Facilities	2010
Boston		
	Special Education	2009
Broward County (FL)		
	Information Technology	2000
	Food Services	2009
	Transportation	2009
Buffalo		
	Superintendent Support	2000
	Organizational Structure	2000
	Curriculum and Instruction	2000
	Personnel	2000
	Facilities and Operations	2000
	Communications	2000
	Finance	2000
	Finance II	2003
	Bilingual Education	2009
Caddo Parish (LA)		
	Facilities	2004
Charleston		
	Special Education	2005
Charlotte-Mecklenburg		
	Human Resources	2007

	Organizational Structure	2012
Cincinnati		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Curriculum and Instruction	2009
Chicago		
	Warehouse Operations	2010
	Special Education	2012
Christina (DE)		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007
Cleveland		
	Student Assignments	1999, 2000
	Transportation	2000
	Safety and Security	2000
	Facilities Financing	2000
	Facilities Operations	2000
	Transportation	2004
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Safety and Security	2007
	Safety and Security	2008
	Theme Schools	2009
Columbus		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Human Resources	2001
	Facilities Financing	2002
	Finance and Treasury	2003
	Budget	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Information Technology	2007
	Food Services	2007
	Transportation	2009
Dallas		
	Procurement	2007
	Staffing Levels	2009
Dayton		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Curriculum and Instruction	2001
	Finance	2001
	Communications	2002
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Budget	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008
Denver		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Personnel	2001
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Bilingual Education	2006
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008
Des Moines		

	Budget and Finance	2003
	Staffing Levels	2012
	Human Resource Operations	2012
Detroit		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2002
	Assessment	2002
	Communications	2002
	Curriculum and Assessment	2003
	Communications	2003
	Textbook Procurement	2004
	Food Services	2007
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008
	Facilities	2008
	Finance and Budget	2008
	Information Technology	2008
	Stimulus planning	2009
Greensboro		
	Bilingual Education	2002
	Information Technology	2003
	Special Education	2003
	Facilities	2004
	Human Resources	2007
Hillsborough County (FLA)		
	Transportation	2005
	Procurement	2005
Houston		
	Facilities Operations	2010
	Capitol Program	2010
	Information Technology	2011
	Procurement	2012
Indianapolis		
	Transportation	2007
	Information Technology	2010
Jackson (MS)		
	Bond Referendum	2006
	Communications	2009
Jacksonville		
	Organization and Management	2002
	Operations	2002
	Human Resources	2002
	Finance	2002
	Information Technology	2002
	Finance	2006
Kansas City		
	Human Resources	2005
	Information Technology	2005
	Finance	2005
	Operations	2005

	Purchasing	2006
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
	Program Implementation	2007
	Stimulus Planning	2009
Little Rock		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2010
Los Angeles		
	Budget and Finance	2002
	Organizational Structure	2005
	Finance	2005
	Information Technology	2005
	Human Resources	2005
	Business Services	2005
Louisville		
	Management Information	2005
	Staffing study	2009
Memphis		
	Information Technology	2007
Miami-Dade County		
	Construction Management	2003
	Food Services	2009
	Transportation	2009
	Maintenance & Operations	2009
	Capital Projects	2009
Milwaukee		
	Research and Testing	1999
	Safety and Security	2000
	School Board Support	1999
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
	Alternative Education	2007
	Human Resources	2009
Minneapolis		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Finance	2004
	Federal Programs	2004
Newark		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007
	Food Service	2008
New Orleans		
	Personnel	2001
	Transportation	2002
	Information Technology	2003
	Hurricane Damage Assessment	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
New York City		
	Special Education	2008
Norfolk		
	Testing and Assessment	2003

	Curriculum and Instruction	2012
Orange County		
	Information Technology	2010
Philadelphia		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Federal Programs	2003
	Food Service	2003
	Facilities	2003
	Transportation	2003
	Human Resources	2004
	Budget	2008
	Human Resource	2009
	Special Education	2009
Pittsburgh		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Technology	2006
	Finance	2006
	Special Education	2009
Portland		
	Finance and Budget	2010
	Procurement	2010
	Operations	2010
Providence		
	Business Operations	2001
	MIS and Technology	2001
	Personnel	2001
	Human Resources	2007
	Bilingual Education	2011
	Special Education	2011
Richmond		
	Transportation	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Federal Programs	2003
	Special Education	2003
Rochester		
	Finance and Technology	2003
	Transportation	2004
	Food Services	2004
	Special Education	2008
San Diego		
	Finance	2006
	Food Service	2006
	Transportation	2007
	Procurement	2007
San Francisco		
	Technology	2001
St. Louis		
	Special Education	2003

	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Federal Programs	2004
	Textbook Procurement	2004
	Human Resources	2005
St. Paul		
	Transportation	2011
	Special Education	2012
Seattle		
	Human Resources	2008
	Budget and Finance	2008
	Information Technology	2008
	Bilingual Education	2008
	Transportation	2008
	Capital Projects	2008
	Maintenance and Operations	2008
	Procurement	2008
	Food Services	2008
Toledo		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
Washington, D.C.		
	Finance and Procurement	1998
	Personnel	1998
	Communications	1998
	Transportation	1998
	Facilities Management	1998
	Special Education	1998
	Legal and General Counsel	1998
	MIS and Technology	1998
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Budget and Finance	2005
	Transportation	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007
Wichita		
	Transportation	2009