FourPoint Education Partners

Alexandria City Public Schools

Preparing for Strategic Planning:
Engaging Community and Assessing Needs

October 23, 2019

Our Charge

FourPoint was asked to engage community and assess needs in a way that complements other Division reviews and data collection efforts. We focused on six domains.

- Finance

- Governance

- School Improvement

- Instructional Delivery

- College, Career, and Life Readiness

- Community Voice

Our Charge

We engaged community and assessed needs in a variety of ways.

- Reviewed extant data, including system audits
- Facilitated discussions during two meetings of strategic planning committee
- Conducted 175 classroom walkthroughs, across all ACPS schools
- Conducted 15 focus groups w/105 ACPS participants at community sites representing all segments of the community, including non-English speakers, special programs, partners, faith-based organizations, and parents
- Conducted 6 focus groups with 38 middle and high school students
- Interviewed City officials and school and division administrators

Our Charge

What follows is a summary of a report currently in draft and that is being reviewed by Division leadership.

Along with the strategic planning workbook, this will serve as the basis for strategic planning, which begins now.
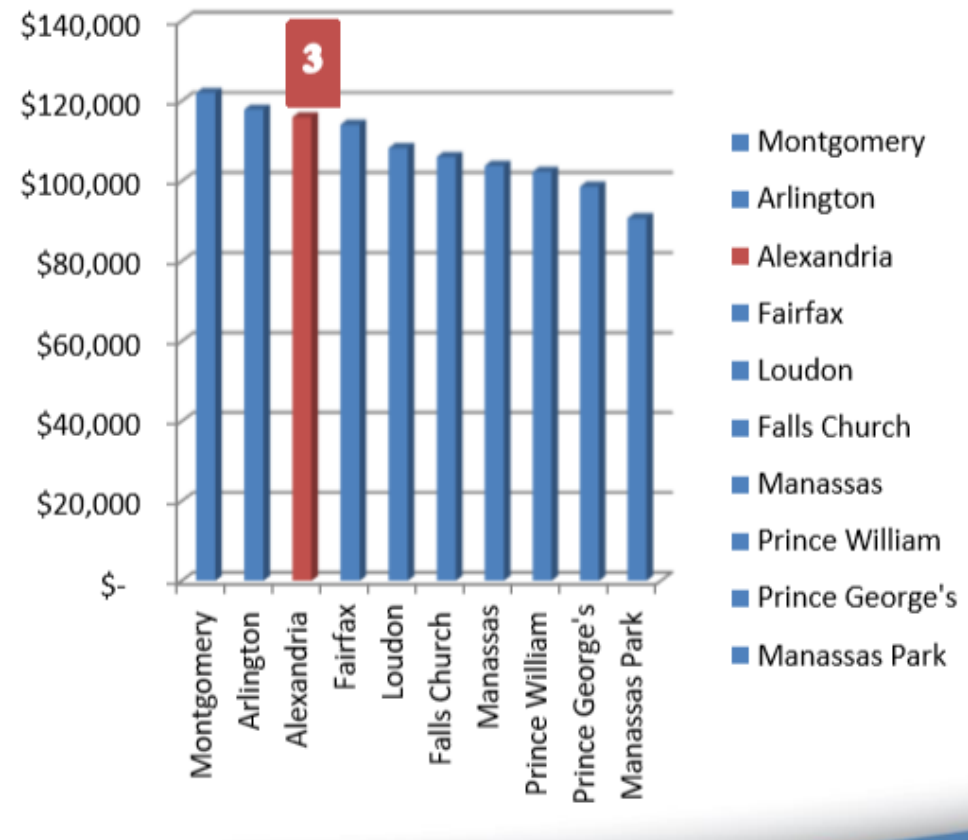
- Review findings across six domains

- Review recommendations

- Begin to set goals and objectives for the strategic plan

FINANCE FINDINGS

1. ACPS is a well-resourced Division.

   - Local funding far exceeds state requirements
   - City increases to education mirror overall increases to City budget
   - Low student-per-teacher ratios
   - ACPS salaries rose by 2.6% in FY 2019

Average Teacher Compensation Package

Legend:
- Montgomery
- Arlington
- Alexandria
- Fairfax
- Loudon
- Falls Church
- Manassas
- Prince William
- Prince George's
- Manassas Park

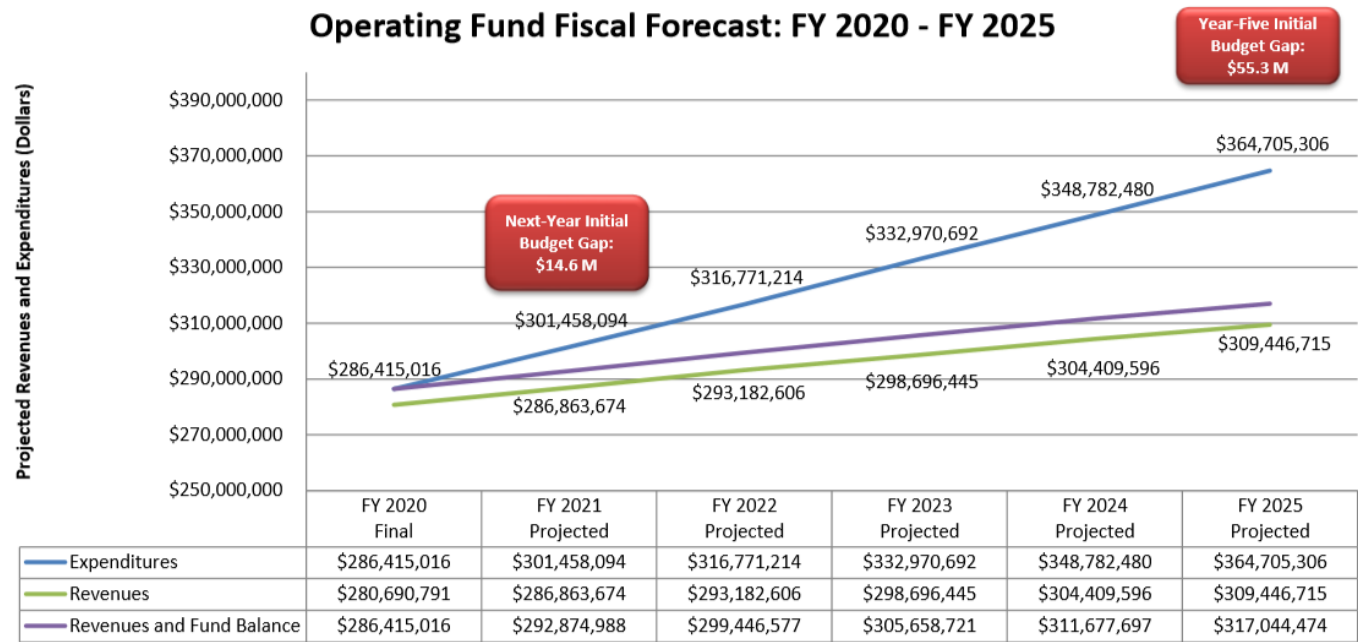**FY 2019**

FINANCE FINDINGS

2. The ACPS budget includes a high percentage of local funds.

   - 82.8% of budget from local revenues and 16.7% from state funds

   - On average across Virginia, school divisions receive 55% from local revenues and 45% from state funds

3. Staff salaries and benefits (88%) are a higher proportion of the budget than average (80% nationally).

Contributions

0.5%

16.7%

82.8%

■ Local   ■ State   ■ Federal
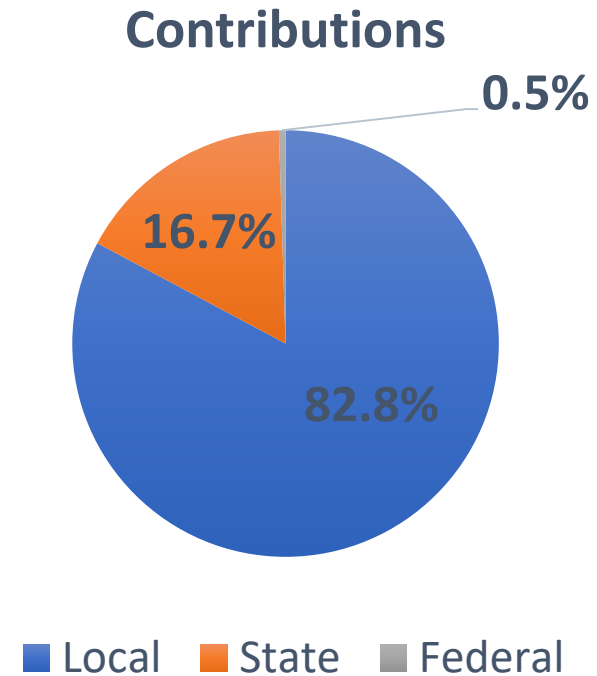
FINANCE FINDINGS (continued)

4. Structural deficit based on student population growth & facilities needs

Fiscal Forecast FY 2020-2025

Operating Fund Fiscal Forecast: FY 2020 - FY 2025

	FY 2020 Final	FY 2021 Projected	FY 2022 Projected	FY 2023 Projected	FY 2024 Projected	FY 2025 Projected
Expenditures	$286,415,016	$301,458,094	$316,771,214	$332,970,692	$348,782,480	$364,705,306
Revenues	$280,690,791	$286,863,674	$293,182,606	$298,696,445	$304,409,596	$309,446,715
Revenues and Fund Balance	$286,415,016	$292,874,988	$299,446,577	$305,658,721	$311,677,697	$317,044,474

Next-Year Initial Budget Gap: $14.6 M

Year-Five Initial Budget Gap: $55.3 M

FINANCE FINDINGS (continued)

5. School staffing based on student counts, with additional staff to support English learners, students with disabilities, & talented and gifted (TAG) students.

| Special Student Populations	
Position allocation formulas for SWD, EL, and TAG students are based on a number of factors.	
Position	**Allocation Formula**
Special Education Staffing	School-based allocations^ are determined by disability category and level of service.
EL Staffing, schools with <119 students	• 1-30 students: 1.00 FTE • 31-60 students: 2.00 FTE • 61-119 students: 3.00 FTE
EL Staffing, schools with 120+ EL students	Uses service minutes formula based on student grade and level of English proficiency
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Staffing	Based on class size and enrollment + additional time and program considerations

FINANCE FINDINGS (continued)

6. Beyond targeted central office staff support for special programs and populations, ACPS' current resource allocation process does not ensure that the highest need schools receive additional funding support.

    - This means that some schools with higher proportions of students receiving free or reduced price lunch (FRPL) are receiving less funding support.

    - An alternative would be for ACPS funding formulas to take into account the proportion of students in poverty, to offset the need for additional support with the additional resources to meet their needs.

GOVERNANCE FINDINGS

1. ACPS strategic planning is happening at an opportune time.

   - Department of Community and Health Services and Department of Health (with Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria) both working on plans due in Spring

   - City leaders welcome continued collaboration

   - Regional growth as a high-tech hub creates partnership opportunities
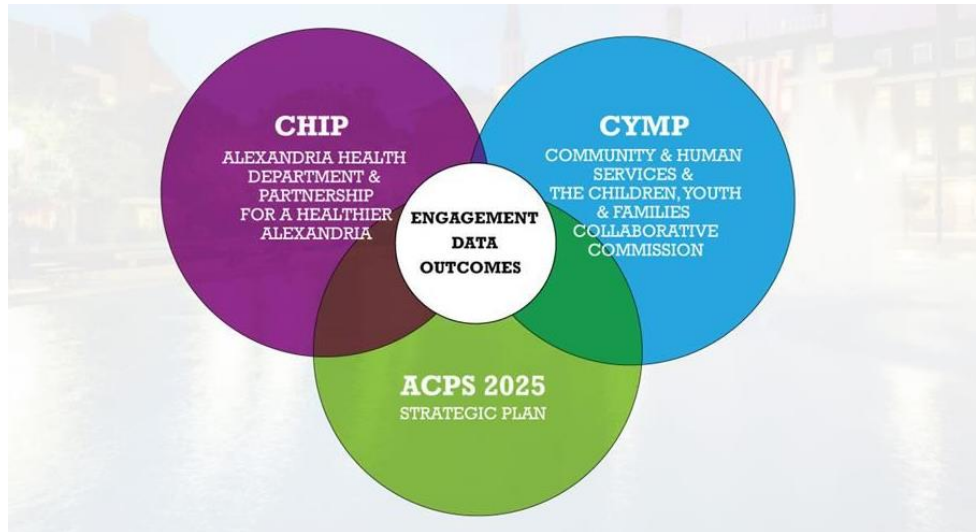
GOVERNANCE FINDINGS (continued)

2. There is widespread agreement among City & Division leaders about priorities.

   - Equity and mental health are shared top priorities, w/strong collaboration potential
   - Other priorities (from Comm. Health Assessment) incl. poverty & affordable housing
   - ACPS School Board priorities for next school year are…

Goal 1: Academic Excellence and Educational Equity	Goal 2: Family and Community Engagement	Goal 3: An Exemplary Staff	Goal 4: Facilities and the Learning Environment	Goal 5: Health and Wellness	Goal 6: Effective and Efficient Operations
• K-2 Literacy Programming • Implementation of SPED Audit	• Outreach to Hispanic Families to Improve Graduation and Chronic Absenteeism • Outreach to Underserved Communities to Increase Engagement	• Increased Staff Retention • Implementation of Human Resources Audit	• ALICE Training • Cultural Competency for all Staff	• Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Including Restorative Practices and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) • Chronic Absenteeism Among Hispanic Students at the Secondary Level	• Improving Customer Relationship Services and Management • Implementation of Facilities Audit

GOVERNANCE FINDINGS (continued)

3. The school board can improve its focus on ensuring that all students succeed by:

- Working with the Department of Accountability to review formative data, to better anticipate and inform changes in student achievement
- Helping the Division stay focused on a clear theory of action for school improvement
- Asking questions about implementation of a few strategic initiatives
- Not getting distracted by non-essential issues

What, if anything, did you find surprising?

What, if anything, did you disagree with?

What, if anything, would you add, particularly on behalf of the community group(s) with which you identify?

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FINDINGS

School divisions organize themselves along a continuum of school management approaches.

- At one end of the continuum—a *centrally managed* approach—the central office controls many inputs required for an excellent education, including hiring of staff, resource allocation, curriculum and assessment, and professional development.

- At the other end of the continuum—a *school-based management* approach—the central office empowers schools to make most decisions related to how an excellent education is delivered to students.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FINDINGS

1. All ACPS schools are fully accredited for the first time in 20 years, and some student achievement gaps have narrowed.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FINDINGS (continued)

2. Significant gaps in achievement by school, race/ethnicity, and program persist.

- Gaps between White and Hispanic and English Learner students' SOL pass rates and on-time graduation rates have widened.

3. Student outcomes other than achievement also differ by race/ethnicity and program.

- Hispanic students disproportionately chronically absent

- Multiple instances of disproportionate suspensions, especially among Black students

- Worrisome numbers of students of color and culturally/linguistically diverse referred to specialized instruction, esp. high rates of Black students being labeled w/an emotionally disability

- Disproportionately high rates of White students identified for TAG and participating in Honors

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FINDINGS (continued)

% of Students at each School: Eligible for FRPL, Proficient or Advanced Reading, TAG Identified

School	% of Students Eligible for FRPL	% of Students Proficient or Advanced in Reading	% TAG Identified
Elementary and K-8 Schools			
Lyles-Crouch	18%	85%	23%
Charles Barrett	30%	80%	15%
Matthew Maury	30%	74%	27%
George Mason	31%	71%	24%
Douglas MacArthur	35%	72%	24%
Mount Vernon	52%	57%	13%
Samuel Tucker	62%	74%	9%
Jefferson-Houston (K-8)	63%	61%	11%
John Adams	67%	64%	7%
James K. Polk	72%	67%	11%
Patrick Henry (K-8)	75%	74%	11%
Cora Kelly	85%	56%	5%
William Ramsay	87%	43%	5%
Middle Schools			
George Washington	45%	73%	33%
Francis C. Hammond	77%	61%	11%
High School			
T.C. Williams	58%	77%	12%

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FINDINGS (continued)

4. The Division would benefit from a clear theory of action for school and instructional improvement, with aligned systems and structures.

- Efforts are underway to provide more direction to schools.

- Meanwhile, new initiatives incl. common curriculum, Balanced Literacy, MTSS, PBIS, cooperative learning, English learning strategies, restorative practices, PLCs, & social emotional academic learning.

  - Administrators unclear on which are required & implementation varies greatly across schools.

- Also newly introduced: instructional framework & common definition of instructional leadership.

- Key central office systems and structures to support schools also in early implementation, incl. PD, evaluation, principal coaching & supervision, school consultations, integrated teams.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FINDINGS (continued)

5. The Division's recent decision to maintain a single comprehensive high school will enable ACPS to continue providing many opportunities to students, without contributing to segregation.

- Community values the 400 different courses available to students at T.C. Williams HS

- Opportunities for students expected to expand through economic developments increasing the area's profile as a high-tech hub.

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY FINDINGS

1. ACPS classrooms are well managed and safe learning environments but more could be done to promote student engagement and high-level thinking.

    *   Teachers communicate high expectations for behavior and participation in most classrooms, resulting in well managed classrooms, despite lack of observable behavior management system

    *   Teacher action to ensure students' emotional engagement in learning is needed

2. Limited evidence that planning and delivery of instruction is guided by ACPS Teaching and Learning Instructional Framework (*Plan-Teach-Assess-Adjust*) designed to support all students in learning curriculum standards through engaging, high-level thinking tasks

    *   Teachers delivered lessons aligned to Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) and communicated learning objectives/targets aligned to standards.

    *   Some provided immediate, specific feedback on learning objectives/targets.
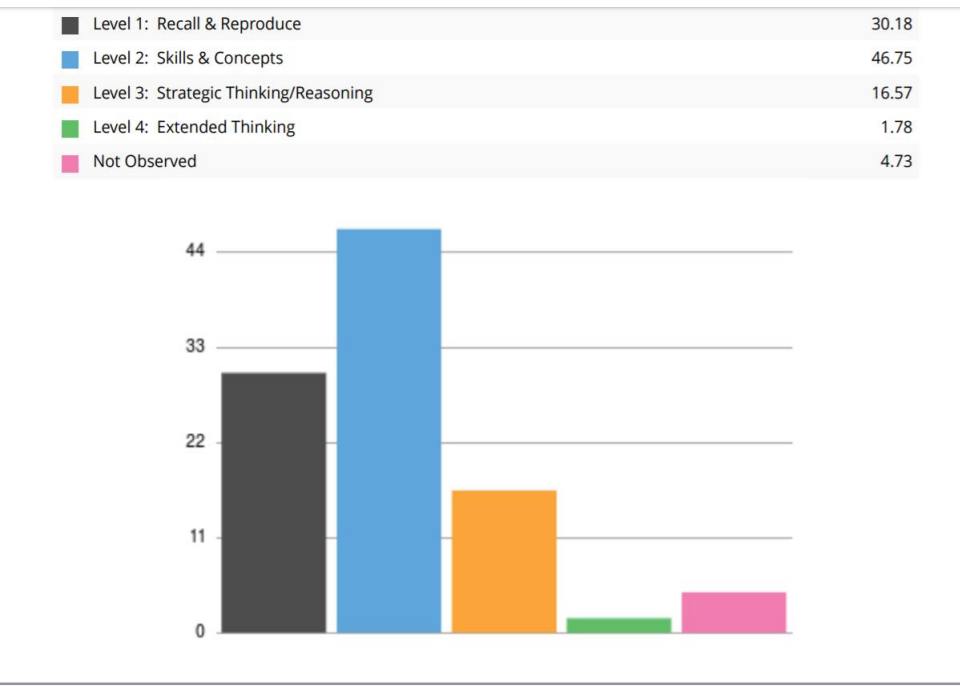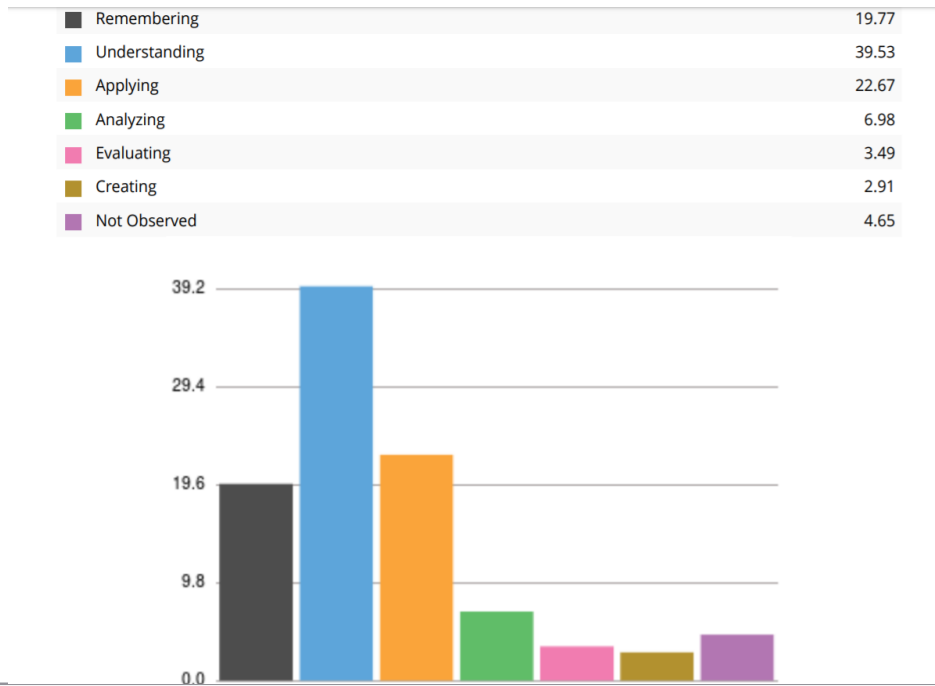
INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY FINDINGS

2. *Classroom walkthroughs, cont.*

    - Teachers were observed using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles or best practice strategies aimed to promote engagement and learn at high levels inconsistently.

    - Teachers empowered students to engage with few strategies that have been found to have a high effect size for increasing student achievement but used strategies that accelerate learning infrequently.

GIVE ME FIVE FOR 2025

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY FINDINGS (continued)

3. Classroom instructional tasks require low levels of cognitive rigor for students.

   - The types of student thinking and depth of knowledge were consistently low.

Remembering	19.77
Understanding	39.53
Applying	22.67
Analyzing	6.98
Evaluating	3.49
Creating	2.91
Not Observed	4.65

|	
Level 1: Recall & Reproduce	30.18
Level 2: Skills & Concepts	46.75
Level 3: Strategic Thinking/Reasoning	16.57
Level 4: Extended Thinking	1.78
Not Observed	4.73

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY FINDINGS (continued)

3. *Student engagement in classroom instructional tasks, cont.*

- Students experienced limited opportunities to participate in learning tasks designed to engage students at high levels of thinking.

- Students experienced limited opportunities to demonstrate learning.

Investigate and solve complex problems	8.77
Engage in active reading, note taking and constructed response tasks	30.99
Participate in group work and dialogue about the learning task	26.90
Participate in individual thinking about thinking (metacognition)	22.81
Use technology in the learning process	9.36
Not observed	33.92
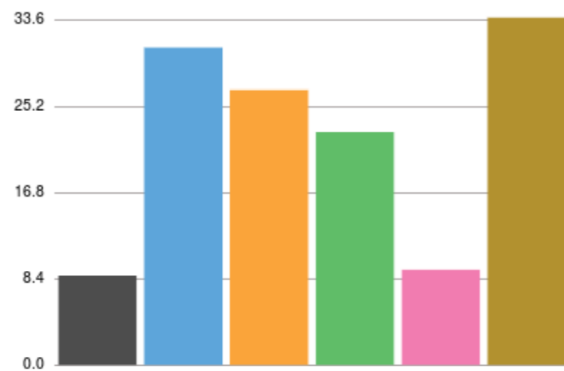
Demonstrates differentiation in activities, materials, products, and assignments	24.57
Conveys new ideas when writing or speaking	13.71
Uses academic and domain-specific vocabulary correctly (writing or speaking)	28.57
Applies learning to real-world contexts to show conceptual understanding	22.86
Prompts peer and self-assessment of learning	33.71
Not Observed	31.43
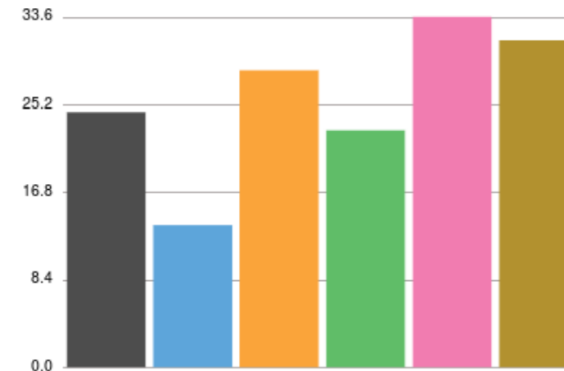
What, if anything, did you find surprising?

What, if anything, did you disagree with?

What, if anything, would you add, particularly on behalf of the community group(s) with which you identify?

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND LIFE READINESS FINDINGS

1. The Division lacks a shared definition and understanding of the profile of an ACPS graduate.

   - Affirmed by interviews with stakeholders from central office to schools and students

   - No reference to *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* nor of any particular skill sets in ACPS *Program of Studies,* nor awareness by stakeholders

   - Contributes to uneven expectations and experiences for student groups

Profile of a Virginia Graduate

In Virginia, the Life Ready Individual Will During His or Her K-12 Experience:

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE

WORKPLACE SKILLS

CAREER PLANNING

COMMUNITY AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

Achieve and apply appropriate academic and technical knowledge

Attain and demonstrate productive workplace skills, qualities, and behaviors

Align knowledge, skills, and personal interests with career opportunities

Build connections and value for interactions with diverse communities

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND LIFE READINESS FINDINGS

2. Families' social capital plays an outsized role in students' participation in TAG and other advanced and specialty programming in middle and high school.

- Early, disproportionate identification of students for elementary school TAG programming provides unique advantages to social networks familiar with pathways to MS/HS academic programming

- Parent empowerment programming needed to offset repercussions of current TAG disproportionality: White students 4X more likely than Black students, 6X more likely than Hispanic students and students at economic disadvantage, and 8X more likely than English learners to be identified for TAG programming

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND LIFE READINESS FINDINGS (continued)

3. Counseling and postsecondary advising resources are well designed but unevenly implemented.

   - Parent focus groups confirm that counseling is not widely available and makes navigating transitions and the many choices in high school very difficult.

   - Counseling staff and resources meet standards for best practice, but like middle school honors classes, much of student advising defaults to an 'opt in' approach.

   - Best practices, such as those in the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) elective for promising 'First Gen' students, have not been implemented broadly to ensure common understanding of HS options to prepare for various career and college pathways.

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND LIFE READINESS FINDINGS (continued)

4. Teachers need support in building capacity around cultural awareness and responsiveness to ensure all students feel welcome and supported to explore and pursue pathways of interest.

    - 63% of staff participants agreed with the negative statement, "There is a noticeable relationship between student demographics and rigorous classes."

    - Only 40% of students disagreed that there are tensions in school between students with different backgrounds and identities.

    - Underrepresented students report feeling unwelcome in challenging programs and courses. This was also reiterated by parents in the focus groups, not only for advanced courses, but even more generally in schools.

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND LIFE READINESS FINDINGS (continued)

5. ACPS focuses minimal attention on ensuring a smooth and successful transition from middle to high school.

   - Gr. 9 is one of the most challenging transition periods; social-emotional factors often play a greater role than academic preparedness.
   - Gr. 9 success correlates directly w/on-time graduation; better support in Gr. 9 for student groups w/high dropout rates can help improve graduation rates.

6. ACPS should capitalize on emerging developments to ramp up work-based learning and career readiness outcomes.

   - Students find Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs engaging; adding more industry-recognized credential opportunities can capitalize on this.

   - Increasing work-based learning for more students (not just those in CTE) can increase the value of the HS experience.

COMMUNITY VOICE

1. Parents and community members believe schools have many high-quality teachers and staff; they are pleased with the range of programs and supports available for students with unique needs (e.g., AVID, dual language, TAG, Young Scholars, specialized instruction, Chance for Change).

2. Parents and community members believe public perception of ACPS and individual schools has improved greatly over the last several years.

COMMUNITY VOICE

3. Parents and community members cited challenges that need to be addressed.

    - **Communication:** Need to visit communities more often and consistently, to build trust and dependence on reliable information for equitable awareness of programs and opportunities. Non-English speaking parents cited communication as an issue at the school and Division levels; reported not always feeling welcome by the staff at their children's schools.

    - **TAG:** Parents not well informed on qualifications for program and process from year to year; they identified a lack of communication from central office. Focus group attendees indicated favoritism and 'pushiness' by parents seem to be the only ways to be accepted into TAG. Also perceive that the quality of TAG is inconsistent from elementary to middle school.

    - **Transportation:** Safety concerns with bus stop locations, overcrowding, and behaviors; as well as late arrivals and late communication about routes and delays.

    - **Safety and Security:** Focus group members who are recent immigrants expressed a strong concern about the safety of their children and the security of the schools.

COMMUNITY VOICE

4. Parents and community members generally support the idea of equity but recommend ACPS take important nuances into consideration.

- There is a lot of work to do before the ACPS vision of equity is realized.
- Parents who speak Amharic and Arabic believe that they are "third-class citizens," behind White, Black, and Latino families.
- PTAC members noted that "equity costs money" and that "equity can't be achieved by taking away resources from some kids and giving them to others." PTAC members added that choices need to be made. As one member put it: "ACPS can't do everything that needs to be done. How are we going to decide on priorities?"
- According to some parents, the current way that equity is defined does not address students' interests or social and emotional needs.

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND LIFE READINESS & COMMUNITY VOICE FINDINGS

What, if anything, did you find surprising?

What, if anything, did you disagree with?

What, if anything, would you add, particularly on behalf of the community group(s) with which you identify?

RECOMMENDATIONS: FOCUS ON EQUITY

To improve outcomes related to the final KPIs, FourPoint proposes that ACPS promotes equity throughout the system by ensuring that five key elements are in place:

1. *Systemic Coherence* means that the Division's approach to school improvement is aligned with a clear theory of action.

2. *Instructional Excellence* means that all teachers should be ensuring that all students—regardless of background—should feel welcomed and cared for and receive equitable access to rigorous teaching and learning.

3. *Student Accessibility and Support* means that students' ability to participate in a program, and actual enrollment proportionality among students, should be determined by clearly defined criteria and not by their race/ethnicity, country or language of origin, disability, or family's socio-economic status.

4. *Strategic Resource Allocation* means that schools should receive the staffing, instructional materials, and resources they need to ensure that all their students succeed.

5. *Parent and Community Involvement* means that all stakeholders feel welcomed in schools, that caregivers are viewed as teachers' and administrators' partners in the education of their children, and that the community are viewed as resources that can help ensure that all students are successful.

Reflect and Respond

Does an equity focus make sense for organizing the strategic plan?

If so, do the five elements in the framework serve as a good outline for the key buckets of work to be addressed by the strategic plan?

What, if anything, would you change?

Next Steps

- Full needs assessment report forthcoming via e-mail

- Individual feedback on your preferences for work group assignment

- **Wednesday, 12/11 - 4:30-6:30pm**

  - Work groups will begin by reviewing feedback from this evening.

  - Work groups will begin to define high-level objectives and measures.

  - Work groups will begin thinking about potential key performance indicators (KPIs).