

## The Virginia Approach to Building State Support for Low-Performing Schools



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### Why was the support needed?

- Concern that divisions with conditionally accredited schools in the process of implementing reconstitution plans approved by the State Board of Education would not be able to “self-correct”
- Recognition that more schools—and more divisions—might face the prospect of developing and implementing reconstitution plans
- VDOE needs to address these concerns within limitations of staff time and other resources



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### A proposed remedy

- Increase capacity of school divisions to better support all schools
- Use research on districts that quickly and substantially improved student achievement as a foundation
- Develop an approach that makes cost-effective use of VDOE resources
- Begin with divisions that have conditionally accredited schools—but keep in mind the potential for scaling up to additional divisions



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### A collaborative effort

- Virginia Department of Education
- Virginia Foundation for Educational Leadership
- Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center
- Center for Innovation & Improvement



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### How did it happen?

- U.S. Department of Education repurposed the Regional Comprehensive Centers to build state capacity.
- ARCC was looking for a way to help VDOE.
- CII published the *Handbook on Restructuring and Substantial School Improvement* and was looking for a place to test its efficacy.



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### How did it happen? (continued)

- VDOE was looking for a way to help 30 schools in, or about to be in, restructuring.
- VDOE needed an efficient, effective, and research-based approach to improving school performance.
- VFEL wanted to expand its role in building leadership capacity.
- SREB had an array of training modules and trainers available.



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### Elements of the initiative

- Emphasis on division support for school improvement
- Use of the research base on "what works"—*CII's Handbook on Restructuring and Substantial School Improvement*
- The WebEx program
- An online tool to support improvement planning
- Integration with VDOE supports, already in place, for schools and divisions



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### How was the research-based model customized to meet Virginia's needs?

- The 160+ indicators were reduced to 20 indicators.
- Materials and scripts were developed around those 20 indicators.
- The online tool was modified to meet the needs of VA school divisions and the VDOE.
- The modifications were based on feedback collected and reported by ARCC evaluators and all the collaborators.



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### The VDOE WebEx program

- Focus is on learning/using a *process* for division and school improvement
- 2007-08: Seven "classes" with instruction provided over the Web and telephone to teams from 20 school divisions
- Divisions assigned to small groups, each taught by two faculty members supported by Kathleen Smith, Director of the Office of School Improvement
- Faculty members are practicing and retired educators with central office/school administrative experience who are also working as faculty in higher education programs across the state



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### The VDOE WebEx program (continued)

- PowerPoint presentations prepared by CII staff provided a common curriculum across the groups.
- Content focused on 20 "indicators" of effective district practices selected by the planning committee.
- "Scripts" were supplemented by faculty members and VDOE staff, with intentional and aggressive efforts made to encourage discussion and input from division personnel.
- VDOE Web site was developed as an additional support.



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### Navigating the system – PPS

- The **Performance Positioning System** works like a GPS.
- The district teams determined
  - where they are in relation to the Success Indicators (reference points) and
  - how to creatively navigate among them to reach their destination of improved student learning



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### Moving ahead to 2008-2009

- WebEx process will be used with additional divisions AND with schools.
- School-level version of the online tool to support improvement efforts has been developed.
- Schools identified by VDOE as "in need of rapid improvement" will be a primary focus.



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### What are the results to date that can be shared?

Our research with the first 30 schools conditionally accredited in 2008 indicates that the alternative governance model was effective in bringing 20 of the schools to full accreditation.



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### Keys to success

- Strong, active leadership within the VDOE was essential.
- VDOE staff had to have time and resources dedicated to the improvement of low-performing schools to make this initiative work.
- VDOE leadership recognized that a system approach was required.
- The ARCC and CII had to be able to adapt the plan to assist the VDOE with building systemic capacity.
- The ARCC was able to bring key partners and collaborators into the capacity-building effort.



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### Keys to success (continued)

- Intensive planning was necessary, and ongoing communication made it possible to adjust and improve the work.
- The use of the WebEx training and Web-based PPS was quickly embraced by all users.
- The language of the CII indicators and lead teacher training, the use of the PPS, the SREB module training, and VFEL Breaking Ranks training had to be woven into this improvement process.
- Divisions knew that the data and information collected through the PPS were reported to the Virginia Board of Education.



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