

**Virginia Beach City Public Schools
Secondary Guidance Pilot
September 2003—June 2005**

An Implementation Report

VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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June 2005

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VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS SECONDARY GUIDANCE PILOT

An Implementation Report of the Secondary Guidance Pilot

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report provides the School Board and superintendent with an assessment of the Secondary Guidance Pilot as implemented at Kellam High School and First Colonial High School during the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years. Its purpose is to provide information for the continuous improvement process of the secondary guidance program in Virginia Beach through feedback gathered from the guidance staff participating in the pilot. The report examines the aspects of the pilot that were to be implemented within each pilot school including workshops, schedules, grade-level specialists, a student database, as well as the work of the Guidance Statistics Team.

FINDINGS

- From the beginning of the pilot, differences existed between and within the two school sites with respect to counselors' understanding of the pilot goals and objectives. However, most counselors viewed the goals of the pilot as good goals. Differences in understanding the pilot goals and objectives may have been the result of communication issues between members of Cortez Management Corporation and individual counselors.
- During the first year of the pilot, both pilot sites sent letters to rising seniors concerning the junior packet. Very few students returned the requested information, and the schools did not hold students accountable for the requested information. The junior packet was not pursued by either school during the second year of the pilot.
- The pilot sites developed a total of four new guidance workshops that were presented to students during the pilot. Cortez Management Corporation developed 12 workshops, five of which were presented during the pilot. In general, the workshops were not offered as widely as intended under the pilot plan. Many of the workshops that were delivered were well received based on feedback provided by students.
- A majority of the guidance staff at both pilot schools indicated that workshops on applying to college, high school orientation, study skills, test-taking strategies, and time management would be very useful for students, although several counselors

indicated that some of the topics were better suited for middle school students (i.e., study skills and time management).

- There was little evidence that the grade-level curriculum objectives were consistently implemented at the pilot sites during the first year of the pilot. During year two of the pilot, reverting back to the alpha system for student assignment further diminished the focus on grade-level objectives.
- Obstacles to implementing the guidance curriculum included the lack of coordination between the time line associated with the grade-level objectives and other guidance responsibilities, confusion over the process of developing workshops, the timing of the availability of the Cortez-developed workshops, and a reluctance of some counselors to use the Cortez-developed workshops.
- The grade-level specialist method of student assignment proposed and partially implemented under the pilot plan was the most contentious portion of the pilot. Counselors indicated that the plan created an uneven workload among counselors, made no provisions for training counselors to become specialists, and reduced the opportunity for counselors to develop personal relationships with students and parents.
- The guidance staff at both pilot sites reported spending a higher percentage of face-time with students during the second year of the pilot compared to the first year of the pilot.
- The objective of creating a daily counselor schedule was only implemented at one of the pilot sites during the first year of the pilot. Counselors cited unexpected events, challenges associated with operating a triage model of services, and concerns for good customer service as preventing full implementation of this objective.
- During the first year of the pilot, several surveys and career interest inventories were administered to students and captured in the web-based Student-At-A-Glance database. The perceptions of the usefulness of the database varied greatly between the two pilot sites with one site indicating that the information was not useful, while the other site indicated that the information would have been useful but was not accessible.
- During the second year of the pilot, the pilot schools did not have access to the web-based version of the Student-At-A-Glance database since services were terminated with Cortez Management Corporation. One of the pilot sites did not administer any of the surveys that were part of the database during the second year of the pilot, and the other pilot site administered the career inventories to some but not all of the students as proposed in the pilot.
- The Guidance Statistics Team was not fully staffed during the pilot and counselors had little knowledge about the role that the Guidance Statistics Team would serve in providing shared guidance services. Approximately one-third of the counselors

thought that having a centralized statistics team would be helpful for statistical reports and data requests.

- The counselors and directors from the pilot sites made a variety of suggestions for improving the secondary guidance program in Virginia Beach including developing a division-wide calendar for guidance services, creating a division-wide guidance curriculum with counselor input, hiring a new coordinator of guidance/student records with an extensive background in school counseling, increasing clerical support, staffing a career/college center within each high school, and having a well trained data tech at each school.
- Overall, the pilot was not successful. The primary obstacles to successful implementation included initial lack of support and resistance, communication issues, and lack of integration with existing guidance responsibilities and tasks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a divisionwide secondary guidance plan with input from multiple sources and include measurable objectives of the knowledge and skills students are expected to receive, research-based options for the delivery of the guidance services, a divisionwide calendar of guidance activities, and a means of reporting the results associated with the guidance program.
- Provide professional development to secondary guidance directors and counselors specific to the elements included in a new divisionwide secondary guidance plan including topics related to developing, implementing, and sustaining a comprehensive guidance program.
- Communicate the new guidance plan to all stakeholders for the purpose of informing individuals of what to expect from the secondary guidance program in Virginia Beach.