



**James G. Merrill, Ed.D.**  
*Superintendent, Virginia Beach City Public Schools*

Over the course of a 37-year career in public education, Dr. James G. Merrill has established himself as an innovative, effective, and forward-thinking leader. His overriding mission is to ensure that all students graduate with the skills they need to succeed as 21st century learners, workers, and citizens. To this end, he has spearheaded the creation and implementation of an innovative strategic plan, *Compass to 2015: A Strategic Plan for Student Success*.

This remarkable document focuses on four outcomes for student success: all VBCPS students will be academically proficient, effective communicators and collaborators, globally aware, independent and responsible learners and citizens as well as critical and creative thinkers, innovators, and problem solvers. *Compass to 2015* reflects stakeholder expectations for Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) students with its emphasis on 21st century skills. At the same time, the plan provides the basis for this school division's philosophical and strategic shift from concentrating on testing skills to ensuring students learn thinking skills, such as problem solving, creative inquiry, collaboration, adaptability, data and information access and analysis, to name a few.

Dr. Merrill was named superintendent of Virginia Beach City Public Schools, the third largest school division in Virginia, in 2006. He has strategically developed and sustained an operating budget far exceeding a half billion dollars in the face of difficult economic times as well as facilitated a long-range plan for improving school facilities. Through his understanding of complex school system issues and emphasis on positive relationship building he has improved levels of parental involvement, especially with underserved populations and instituted innovative technology across the division, including whiteboards; an electronic grade book; AlertNow, an information and emergency notification system; and VBCPS Parent Portal, a powerful online tool that allows parents/guardians to monitor their children's progress in school.

Dr. Merrill began his career in education in 1973 in North Carolina as an English teacher; and moved through the administrative ranks in several North Carolina school divisions, spending 15 years in Wake County before becoming superintendent of the Alamance-Burlington School System in 2000. As a result of Dr. Merrill's outstanding record as an educator, he was named the 2005 North Carolina Superintendent of the Year by the North Carolina School Boards Association and the North Carolina Association of School Administrators. In that same year, he also was awarded the University of North Carolina at Greensboro School of Education's Outstanding Achievement Award as well as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Education's Distinguished Leadership Award.

Dr. Merrill was a Morehead scholar at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he earned his bachelor's degree in education in secondary English. He then earned a master's degree in educational administration from Appalachian State University and his doctoral degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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**HIGHLIGHTS**  
**School Year 2010-2011**

- *GreatSchools*, a national non-profit group that studies public and private school education, ranked VBCPS the fifth best large city school division in the nation.
- Ten VBCPS high schools were ranked in the top six percent nationwide by *The Washington Post* newspaper.
- Virginia Beach led the region with its strong performance on the SAT. Of particular note was the performance of our African American students. They exceeded the mean scores of their counterparts at both the state and national levels in all three sections of the SAT for the third consecutive year.
- VBCPS met or outperformed the state on two key academic measures, the 2010 On-Time Graduation Rate (Virginia Beach, 85 percent; Virginia, 85 percent) and the cohort-based dropout rate (Virginia Beach, 6.9 percent; Virginia, 8.2 percent).
- Green Run and W.T. Cooke elementary schools earned 2011 "Title I Distinguished Schools" honors from the Virginia Department of Education.
- The Adult Learning Center (ALC) leads the state in the number of students who were successful on the GED. The ALC tested more students than any other division (1,603). Of that number, 66.8 percent passed. The state average is 61.4 percent.
- Seven schools earned the prestigious 2011 *Governor's Award for Educational Excellence*; fourteen schools earned 2011 *Board of Education Awards of Excellence*; and twenty-two of the division's eligible schools earned 2011 *Board of Education Competence to Excellence* awards, all from the Virginia Department of Education.
- Virginia Beach City Public Schools took top honors for *Best Green Organization* and *Best Green Institutional Project* from the *Virginia Sustainable Building Network*.
- The Renaissance Academy is the first center of its kind in the nation – housing six alternative education programs and a museum commemorating the former African American school that once stood on the site.