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MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 30, 2014

Dear Ned, Barbara, Eric, Kate, Jason, Pam and Steve,

First, and on behalf of our entire Albemarle County Public School team, I want to tell you how grateful we are for the leadership, thoughtfulness and commitment to our students and families you demonstrated through the most difficult budget season in my tenure as Superintendent. Our community truly is fortunate for the difference you make in our classrooms. I have said it before and it bears repeating. Unlike so many school divisions in our state, our school division is not defined by crises but by the innovation, teamwork and steady excellence you make possible.

As we prepare to meet on Monday for our annual retreat, I am looking forward to our discussion around big ideas—the concepts that will fulfill our ambitious goal that all students will be prepared for post-graduate success over a lifetime.

A recent study in the *Eastern Economic Journal* by researchers from the University of Miami underscored the importance of this goal. College graduates, by the time they are in their 40s, have cumulative earnings of \$800,000; high school graduates, within the same time frame, have cumulative earnings of \$240,000.

Preparing students for success in a much different world than we faced as high school graduates requires a much different approach to learning. This past week, a team of our division and high school administrators participated in observations and training to learn more about the **team-based learning approach** implemented by the University of Virginia Medical School, one of our partners.

Medical faculty trainers and doctors shared their research on why their model is being adopted across the United States in higher and secondary education classrooms. We are examining the potential this approach has to better educate high school students for post-secondary learning and for employment in a contemporary workforce. This model provides one more set of strategies to engage learners in project- and case-based and in problem-solving learning in the secondary environment.

These strategies include all of our learners. This year, CATEC's staff has worked with a consultation team to develop a forward-thinking vision for career and technical education services serving teens in our city and county schools. **Re-imagining career and technical education leads us to abandon programs designed to educate young people for a 20th century manufacturing and service industry.** This new strategic plan offers our community of learners a flexible curricular model grounded in technical and communication skills that are transportable across today's career paths and into the future of our young people.

A new area of staff focus is an analysis of the impact “**micro**” **learning** can have in our schools. Preliminary qualitative and quantitative data of small cohort communities lead us to believe social structures traditionally associated with active student participation in athletics or performing arts can be transferred into the school environment for all students.

We’ve seen micro learning communities emerge in our academies, charter schools, maker spaces, contemporary libraries and in programs such as AVID, M-cubed and Destination Imagination. They provide invaluable opportunities that increase peer group support, enrich and augment formal learning while diversifying learning options.

Importantly, regardless of whether students are top medical school learners, CATEC participants, or high schoolers, discussions with educators and students associated with these programs reveal some common threads:

- 1) **Empowered and engaged learners** exhibit persistence in the face of challenges, passion for their work and advocacy for their own learning;
- 2) Learners in micro learning communities pursue **active learning** and work with peers whether in medical school (which had 40% attendance in its old lecture-based approach), CATEC, or in our specialty programs;
- 3) Technology learning tools and connectivity change learning environments, accessibility and curricula. Faculty must embrace their learning trajectory to ensure **students receive the active experiences needed to be critical and creative users of tech learning tools.**
- 4) Technologies change. Resources change. Jobs change. Content constantly changes. Educators who teach students to use critical analysis and evaluation skills, to be creative problem-solvers, to communicate well in a variety of media and to work well independently and with diverse teams augment a **mindset of lifelong learning.**

These common threads cut across all demographic populations of children we serve in our division – no matter their capability, their zip code, their color, their gender, or their economic status.

Students in micro learning communities build relationships, establish peer learning groups, seek new skills and knowledge, pursue interests, and apply curiosity and inquiry focus in their learning. Our work in these areas gives us insight into the importance of providing opportunities that facilitate active learning through multiple pathways that lead to the same goal for all – acquisition of lifelong learning competencies essential in the workforce, to future learning, and as responsible members of families and communities.

Your ability as a Board and our ability as a division-wide team to apply **these 21st century concepts to our classrooms will determine how effective we are in eliminating first, opportunity and then learning, gaps.**

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I am looking forward to our annual Board retreat. It will be a highly useful time to begin evaluating our Horizon 2020 goals and priorities and to discuss topics of interest to each of you regarding our operational and strategic work.

Every year our retreat provides time for you to discuss and analyze the work of our school and department staff in serving our young people. We also will consider and evaluate process improvements so that we can better serve learners, their parents, and staff. **The retreat process guides our next steps in moving from initial strategic plan implementation to significant impact.**

Thank you for your commitment, leadership, and your creative and critical analysis in your decision making throughout the year. Your contributions not only support our educators to consistently serve young people better but they also sharply advance our strategic vision, mission, goal, core values and priorities.

Regards,

Pam