

May 27, 2010

To: The Honorable Yvonne Folkerts, Chair, and Members of the  
Alexandria City School Board

Re: T. C. Williams Transformation

Dear Board Members:

The attached materials summarize the preliminary planning done by staff in Central Office and at T. C. Williams for the transformation of T. C. Williams High School into a world-class high school. This outline, or roadmap, is in rudimentary stages, but it is a strong foundation that accomplishes two important objectives:

- Addresses specific federal and state requirements for the ACPS application for the school improvement funds that could total \$2,000,000.00 per year for three years for T. C. Williams, and
- Embodies the concepts and goals outlined in the School Board's ACPS Strategic Plan and the Education Plan, directed toward a coordinated K-12 effort to enhance the academic achievement of all students.

We have begun deep conversations with staff about the meaning of "transformation." Who or what should be transformed? What is the difference between "transformation" and "additional programs"? Implicit in the proposals is the belief that all TC staff will be committed to ensure the success of each and every student, and a new system of accountability will monitor that commitment and the effectiveness of new strategies, pedagogy, curriculum, and emphasis on relationships.

What we are seeking is Great Curriculum in the hands of Great Teachers. That is the heart of this transformation. This transformation proposal is predicated on several core beliefs:

1. We improve and move ahead one teacher and one student at a time. The focus is on the individual.
2. We believe that all students can learn.
3. We know that we cannot do this alone...we will rely on partners in the community and among our national colleagues.
4. We know that all students can achieve at even higher levels.

The first stage of TC's transformation will be implemented in the 2010-11 school year. The new principal, Suzanne Maxey, has expressed her confidence that we

will see real change—the beginning of transformation—in the school culture and school spirit almost immediately.

Other aspects of the change will take more time. The TC Vision and Action Committee, led by TC staff, will complement the initial efforts and involve the community in developing a long-range vision and plan for sustainability.

The attached materials include the goals, key components, and some details on the components of the transformation. Let me emphasize once more that every summary report is just that: a summary. Details will be fleshed out in further work with TC staff and with our “external partners.”

I look forward to receiving your views on this proposal. If you are comfortable with the proposed transformation plan, then the four-page summary will serve as “talking points” for us in the coming weeks.

We have a strong base on which to build. The state has given us a challenge. Let us embrace the opportunity we have before us.

Sincerely,

Morton Sherman, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

# **T.C. Williams Transformation**

## **May 2010**

### **Response to Designation as a “Persistently Lowest Achieving” School**

#### **A Challenge and An Opportunity!**

#### **The Transformation Process at T.C. Williams**

The Transformation Model proposed for T.C. Williams High School focuses on high achievement for each student. The transformation we are seeking moves us from a good high school to a great high school through attention to individuals... students and staff.

Our belief is that each student can achieve at even higher levels.

Our belief is that the T.C. Williams staff is committed to assure the success of each student through our professional accountability, responsiveness, responsibility, standards, clear expectations, and unwavering devotion to all students.

Our belief is that partnerships with parents and the community are an important and essential part of students’ success.

The transformation process implements enhancements and modifications of content, pedagogy, and relationships at T.C. Williams and the middle schools. The process stems from ACPS’ commitment to high school renewal and the imperative for an effective response to TC’s designation as “persistently lowest achieving” among Virginia Title I-eligible high schools.

The first stage of TC’s transformation will be implemented in the 2010-11 school year. The work of the TC Vision and Action Committee will complement the initial transformation efforts and continue as ACPS addresses increasing enrollments, changing programs, and high levels of expectations for all students.

#### **Goals of the T.C. Williams Transformation Process**

1. Embracing the purpose of public schools as the creation of literate, participating, and productive citizens in our democracy.
2. Equipping every learner with 21st century skills through a fundamental shift in how we think about student learning and how we work.
3. Operating with a shared vision and drive committed to ensuring the success of every learner.
4. Embodying the core belief that all students can learn by providing a useful, meaningful curriculum and exceptional instruction with immediate and long term benefits.
5. Creating clearly articulated policies, behaviors, and organizational practices that maximize student achievement.
6. Moving from a teacher-centered to a student-centered learning community that promotes rigor and efficacy for every student.

7. Reorganizing the school as a consensus-driven learning organization.
8. Building a well-articulated and explicit commitment to a Pre-K-12 learning environment that is personalized, customized, engaging, and which advocates for each student.
9. Embodying the concepts and goals outlined in the ACPS Strategic Plan and Education Plan, resulting in a coordinated K-12 plan for a world-class school system.

### **Key Components of the T. C. Williams Transformation Process**

The following are the key components of a unified system of reform and transformation:

- Individual Achievement Plans (IAPs)
- Professional Learning Plans (PLPs)
- Related School Support Programs and Structures
- Accounting and Monitoring to Ensure Individual Student Achievement
- Collaboration with External Partners and Organizations

#### **Individual Achievement Plans (IAP)**

*Aligned with Division Education Plan objectives: 1, 3, 17*

1. All middle and high school students will have an IAP in English and Mathematics.
2. Counselors' responsibilities will include serving as case managers for students' IAPs. Additional staffing will assure a reduced counselor/student ratio below 200 students.
3. English teachers will implement and monitor the English portion of the IAP for each student in their classes as they encourage all students to achieve at the highest possible levels. Additional staffing in the English Department will assure a reduced teacher class load of four sections.
4. Mathematics teachers will implement and monitor the Mathematics portion of the IAP for each student in their classes as they encourage all students to achieve at the highest possible levels. Additional staffing will assure a reduced teacher class load of four sections.
5. Department chairs' responsibilities will include data management connected to teachers' progress with students.

#### **Professional Learning Plans (PLP)**

*Aligned with Division Education Plan objectives: 23, 25*

1. Professional Learning Plans will encourage staff to reflect on their understanding and professional expertise in key areas of content, pedagogy, and relationships.
2. Staff will be asked to self-assess progress in these three areas as "Beginning, Developing, or Advancing."
3. Teachers will work with administrators to identify strategies to promote growth and professional learning.

4. An annual staff portfolio will highlight areas of progress and correlations with individual and aggregate student progress.
5. The Professional Learning Plans will align staff evaluations and professional development with student achievement/learning results.

### **Related School Support Programs and Structures**

*Aligned with Division Education Plan objectives: 5, 11, 12, 13, 17*

1. Programs will be implemented as part of the initial phase of the TC transformation:
  - a) Writing Center
  - b) Mathematics Center
  - c) Expanded on-line learning opportunities
  - d) Extended school learning options (e.g., summer school, tutoring, flexible schedules, senior experience, community service, summer college essay courses, summer theatre, AP Academy, and the possibility of a longer school day)
  - e) Possible continuation of Titan Up (TC's weekly in-school tutoring period) or an alternative tutoring program
  - f) Other program considerations include the International Baccalaureate Programme, increased opportunities for student participation in the arts and athletics, dual credit courses (earning both college and high school credits)
2. Personnel responsible for providing school-based support:
  - a) Internal Lead Partner (required position)
  - b) Executive Associate Principal of Athletics and Student Activities
  - c) Executive Associate Principal of Curriculum and Instruction
  - d) Academy One Principal: (Pathways to Graduation) will oversee the efforts of Academy One and related alternative education programs for all TC students.
  - e) Academic Principals: Supervise teachers and staff by content areas
  - f) Deans of Students
    - i. Each dean will advance with his or her grade level until graduation.
    - ii. Responsibilities will include personalization, student support, parent outreach, discipline, and support of a positive learning environment.
  - g) Assistant Director of Counseling added to current position of Director of Counseling.
3. Incentives will include staff grants for innovative program development.
4. Committees related to the transformation process include
  - a) Transformation Steering Committee
  - b) TC Vision and Action Committee
  - c) Staff Leadership Committee
  - d) Professional Learning Committees
  - e) Superintendent's Student Advisory Committee.

### **Accounting and Monitoring to Ensure Individual Student Achievement**

*Aligned with Division Education Plan objective: 7*

1. The transformation process will center on the monitoring of individual student achievement.

2. Individual and school-wide professional development and assessment will focus on evaluation of students' achievement of college readiness competencies, including:
  - a) writing across the content areas
  - b) reading comprehension and interpretation
  - c) collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data and evidence.
3. Student discourse will be emphasized, especially content-based discourse and inquiry (e.g., thinking like a biologist, historian, writer, etc.).
4. Monthly monitoring of student achievement is required by the state via the ISTAR computerized adaptive testing program.
5. Additional standardized assessments will include:
  - a) Quarterly criterion-referenced assessments (including performance assessment tasks)
  - b) Virginia Standards of Learning tests
  - c) SATs, ACTs, and PSATs
  - d) Advanced Placement Examinations
  - e) Other standardized assessments (TBD).

### **Collaboration with External Partners and Organizations**

#### ***Aligned with Division Education Plan objectives: 1-17***

1. Transformation (including ongoing focus group and interview data): Dr. Bena Kallick, author of Habits of Mind, and Dr. Marty Brooks, Executive Director of Tri-State Consortium
2. Pedagogy and Curriculum Design: Research for Better Teaching (RBT): Dr. Fran Prolman and Dr. Jon Saphier
3. Mathematics: Dr. Steve Leinwand
4. English Language Arts: Writer's Project (Columbia Teachers College)
5. Coaching and Instructional Rounds: Dr. Lucy West, author of Content-Focused Coaching: Transforming Mathematics Lessons and former Director of Mathematics for the esteemed Community School District 2 in New York
6. Relationships: Conspiracy to Succeed and the Tripod Model (Content, Pedagogy, Relationships): Dr. Ron Ferguson, Harvard University
7. College Readiness Skills: NCREST (Staff from Stanford and Columbia Universities)
8. Oversight of Implementation: Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, Stanford University

## Imagine the Titans