A New Day in Vallejo City Unified School District
Building Momentum for the 2011-2012 School Year
‘Equity, Excellence and Educational Effectiveness’

Dr. Ramona Bishop, Superintendent

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Building momentum for the school year in Vallejo City Unified School District is centered around all stakeholders communicating with one voice towards a new day in VCUSD. That voice is anchored in the community and extends throughout the district office, administration, school sites, and students and families. Led by new superintendent Dr. Ramona Bishop, VCUSD has been gathering diverse voices to identify, synthesize, and amplify their talents, dreams, and determination into one voice to guide the coming year. This new year is guided by a fresh ‘Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals’ document that was developed through a collaborative review of data and listening to the many stakeholder’s in VCUSD as they shared their celebrations, challenges, and visions for the future. The goals are aggressive, the execution demands shared responsibility, and the community is motivated to create the needed change.
Figure 2: Vallejo City Unified School District’s newly ratified Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
<th>Vision Statement</th>
<th>Core Values</th>
<th>Goals 2011-14</th>
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| **Our Mission** is to meet or exceed our goals in the area of **equity, excellence, educational effectiveness** and **economic sustainability** which determines our daily efforts. We will foster collaborative teamwork to accomplish these goals. We recognize that we must build powerful home to school relationships that support the success of all students. Because safety is critical for each school campus; we will enforce high adult visibility and respond to student matters in a timely manner.  
  - In order to assess whether students are meeting academic and social expectations, we will consistently monitor student progress using a variety of data: observations, walkthroughs, progress reports, test scores, etc., and commit to focusing our resources to best support our students. | **Our Vision** is for our diverse learners to be empowered, prepared and equipped with academic and life skills needed to be productive citizens, who can positively contribute to society.  
  - **Our Goal** is for every student to have clear attainable pathways to career and/or college success.  
  - **In Support of our Vision**, we will attract and retain highly qualified staff, as well as, leverage community resources to provide support systems for all students and their families. | **We Value Equity**  
  - Every adult is responsible for every student’s success  
  - Every student has the opportunity to learn and successfully reach their goals  
  - Every student will be engaged in the learning process  
  - **We Value Excellence**  
  - We will recognize and celebrate excellence among students and staff members  
  - We will have high expectations for ourselves and our students  
  - Each student will have the opportunity to adapt and evolve into productive community members  
  - **We Value Educational Effectiveness**  
  - Every classroom will have an engaging learning environment  
  - Every learning environment will be safe  
  - Every adult and student will model honesty, integrity, and respect  
  - **Economic Sustainability**  
  - Actively pursue additional resources through grants and donations  
  - Invest in our human resources  
  - Gain full authority over district fiscal management | **Equity**  
  - All students performing at grade level on 3rd grade STAR testing program  
  - All students performing at grade level on 6th grade STAR testing program  
  - All students passing the high school exit exam the first time  
  - Safe and supportive school environments for all students  
  - **Excellence**  
  - All students graduating with A-G requirements met  
  - Involved and supportive parents and community partners  
  - Employees - attract and retain excellent teachers, administrators and support staff  
  - **Educational Effectiveness**  
  - Achievement gap eliminated  
  - Student attendance and enrollment rates increased  
  - Dropout rate significantly decreased  
  - Reduce referrals, suspensions and expulsions  |
To begin transforming these ‘Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals’ into reality at VCUSD, Dr. Bishop initiated three scaffolded professional development retreats on July 19th and 21st, and August 4th 2011 for the VCUSD Executive Cabinet, Cabinet, and school-site leadership teams respectively. The first day’s retreat was for the five members of the Superintendent’s Executive Cabinet: Lisa Grant-Dawson, Business Services Division Chief Business Officer; Mel Jordan, Administrative Services Division Assistant Superintendent Administrative Services; Alana Shackelford, Director Partnerships and Community Engagement; and Cheri Summers, Academic Achievement and Accountability Chief Academic Officer. Dr. Bishop explained her strategic choice of bringing in UC Davis CRESS Center partners to act as master facilitators of the retreats to aid in ‘bringing the solutions out of our community’ rather than looking for answers elsewhere.

The Executive Cabinet focused their work on identifying how to transform VCUSD’s culture into a highly functioning system based on working together and establishing one voice. Each Executive Cabinet team member began work on creating a work plan for their division to reach the ‘Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals’. The group emphasized the need to continue to speak in one voice as they became leaders in sharing their work in upcoming retreats.

**Photo:** Cabinet members’ motivational ‘bumper stickers’ for VCUSD’s new day. Executive Cabinet member Lisa Grant-Dawson’s contribution: “Public education: Embrace the gift”

The second retreat day was for all Cabinet members from VCUSD to continue the work begun by the Executive Cabinet. The stated objective of the day was for ‘all stakeholders in the VCUSD organization to understand their role in ensuring that district goals are met’.

Contact: Kindra F. Montgomery-Block, Director of Training and Community Relations
UC Davis School of Education, CRESS
kfmontgomery@ucdavis.edu
web sites: http://ccsp.ucdavis.edu
To continue the momentum of building that one voice, Dr. Bishop emphasized the importance of “creating a plan that goes from the school-site to the district.” Such a plan shifts the traditional positioning of the district office first followed by the schools, to instead focus on school sites first with the district office supporting and pushing as needed. This school-centered approach necessitates formulating work at the district Cabinet level that is relevant and intentional to translate to all school sites.

Using Ruiz’s ‘The Four Agreements’ and Fullan’s ‘Leading in a Culture of Change’ as resources, the full Cabinet focused on building a collaborative, motivated, and dedicated culture for how VCUSD will work together moving forward into the new school year. Dr. Bishop charged participants to internalize and use the ‘Four Agreements’ as a tool for creating positive spaces throughout the district office and school-sites. The ‘Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals’ work that VCUSD is setting out to do is both challenging and deeply personal as is evident in one powerful statistic referred to in workshop activities: Vallejo City Unified School District’s Dropout Rate – 49%. Through activities and discussions, the full Cabinet began to identify tools and strategies for tackling their shared work for the coming year.

Photo: One activity example - Prompts: What are your priorities for student success? Who are your stakeholders? What are the challenges? What are the key strategies for next steps? Where do you see opportunities?

Concluding Reflections: All departments help contribute to student success. Considering all prompts is helpful in our effort to move towards one voice.

Each division team then continued the work begun by their Executive Cabinet head by further translating broad goals into actionable plans of work with timelines and measurable outcomes.
Cabinet members had overwhelming positive feedback of the collaborative work they accomplished at the retreat. Some of the most helpful elements they identified included: ‘Developing synergy and building their team’; and “Having the planning tools to help clarify and specify my work next year.” Many of the offered suggestions involved wanting more time to do this work in order to take full advantage of the “excellent tools and resources for moving forward.” The full day of work concluded with Dr. Bishop’s charge that “each one of you is here for this moment when we transform our school system.” And there is no guesswork in how that transformation is going to occur; the teams’ action work-plans are the simple way they are going to do it.

The third and final day of the professional development retreats included all school leadership and was therefore “the critical day,” according to Dr. Bishop, because it connected the district office to the school-sites. According to Dr. Bishop, the most crucial role in that process – and in the district overall – is that of the principal.

The principals and school leaders, in partnership with the district office Cabinet, began by creating student profiles of their young people in order to bring that otherwise absent presence into the room. A second backdrop for the day was added through the group’s discussion of the ‘Four Agreements’ and Vallejo’s sobering graduation rate, when they came to the conclusion that ‘We are the district’. One participant described that activity as the most powerful part of the retreat because it reminded them to “step-up and represent my home better.”

Charged by the potential power in VCUSD central office and school-site partnerships, retreat members dove into creating detailed site-based work plans and timelines which align with the district ‘Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals’. School teams
labor to do that new, connective thinking in order to take away, as one principal described, “a tangible plan that is being developed collaboratively.”

Photos: School-site teams working, with the support of the Cabinet teams, on building one voice to translate broad ‘Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals’ to their action work-plans.

Executive Cabinet members met in small groups to share their work plans and shared voice, and Cabinet members circulated amongst the groups to offer input and contribute to creating a unified approach. The school-site leaders consistently mentioned having time to work with their teams as the most helpful part of the retreat. The “focus and work time following information” allowed teams to align their site goals with VCUSD’s “clear vision and goals.” Participants thus described being empowered by the “collaboration – consistency from top down.” School leadership and Cabinet members left the final day of the professional development retreats with a foundation for their continued work and the urging of Dr. Bishop to utilize the same strategies and processes at their own sites to further the collective effort. “We’re going to make this happen together.” – Dr. Bishop

The work of these three day-long retreats continues at each school-site through teachers, students, and families. The effort is ongoing and the district and school leadership focus must stay connected with the students, families, and communities that initially informed the revitalized ‘Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals’ in order to continue moving towards all speaking in one voice. As one retreat participant articulated, “It would be powerful to have a follow-up/check-in session [with all retreat participants] at some point throughout the year.” This need for continued urgency and desire to
continue working together speaks to the VCUSD’s choice to continue holding community listening sessions throughout the coming school year.

As VCUSD moves into this new school year, its charge will be to consistently align its current work with suggested next steps in ‘Equity, Excellence and Educational Effectiveness’. Following the same integrated model that guided each day’s retreat will likely aid in this effort: an explicit connection between the ‘Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals’; the Four Agreements; work plans; and continual reflection and revision at all levels. Above all, the interdependent and consistent relationship of partners displayed in the diagram presented at the start of this report should continue to serve as a guide for building one voice.