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Foci of long -range /strategic plans: Externally accountable or internally systemic? An analysis of early 21st century K-12 planning documents

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Foci of Long-range/Strategic Plans: Externally Accountable or Internally Systemic?

An Analysis of Early 21st Century K-12 Planning Documents

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FOCI OF LONG-RANGE/STRATEGIC PLANS: EXTERNALLY ACCOUNTABLE OR INTERNALLY SYSTEMIC?

ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to determine what planning components were present in long-range plans in Virginia school districts; explore the similarities that existed between the planning components and the recommended components suggested by research and related literature; identify the content of goals and objectives; identify similarities among long-range plans; and determine to what extent external and internal forces generally impacted upon the content of planning documents. Content analysis methodologies were used to examine planning documents. Findings indicated that the planning components noted in the research were generally present in long-range plans of Virginia school districts. It was also apparent that planning components appeared in long-range plans at similar frequencies. Eleven themes emerged from an analysis of goal statements. These themes were: *instruction, support systems, accountability, employment, achievement, students, community involvement, planning, special needs programs, organizational climate,* and *character.* The findings of this study revealed that large numbers of Virginia school districts included planning components and themes that were likely driven by external forces.

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PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY, PLANNING AND LEADERSHIP

THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY

A Comparative Analysis of Virginia K-12 Long-range and Strategic Planning Documents

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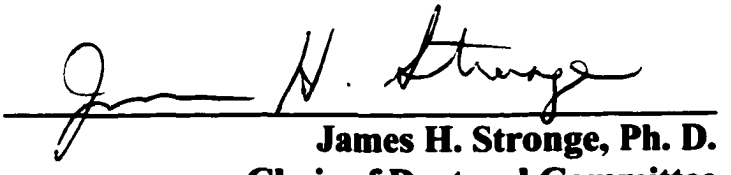
Approved April 2003 by



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CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Has the weight of the accountability movement crushed long-range planning in Virginia? Have school district leaders become so concerned with meeting state assessment mandates that they no longer plan for the future of the school district? The accountability movement, along with accompanying assessment efforts, has changed the face of public education in the last decade. This study will explore the current face of long-range planning.

School districts are under scrutiny from multiple stakeholder groups. Parents, community members, and policy makers at the local, state, and federal levels are all interested in improving the quality of public education. Often, these groups seek assurances that students are receiving a good public school education. Currently, school district leaders in Virginia are held accountable for the quality of instruction and educational services rendered in their districts through academic assessments, called the Standards of Learning. In Virginia, leaders are even evaluated, in part, based upon how well students in the district perform on standardized tests (Virginia Department of Education, 2002).

Asp (2000) suggested that the focus placed on assessment results has produced a number of unintended consequences. First, the public perception of the quality of public education has diminished due to poor initial assessment results; these poor results also served as a platform for detractors of public education who used them to justify their anti-public school agendas. Second, many public school teachers began teaching to the test as a result of increased testing and higher accountability standards resulting in a narrower curriculum. Third, test scores were used to make

comparisons between schools that were dissimilar and that operated within different parameters causing schools to be perceived favorably or unfavorably based solely upon student performance on standardized tests (Asp, 2000). As contemporary policy makers continue to view assessment as an engine for change in schools, assessment will continue to be a critical issue for which school districts must plan (Linn, 1998).

Levers of Educational Reform

Public education is currently held accountable to external stakeholders through the use of assessment initiatives (Linn, 1998). Assessment initiatives have become the lever of choice for educational reform due to low administrative costs and the apparent surge in student learning that seems to appear as test scores rise (Linn, 1998). National initiatives such as the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994* and the National Governors' Association Conference in 1996 have led to the establishment of standards for student achievement in every state, with 48 states establishing a standards based testing program (Herman, 1997). And, most recently, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* has cemented the role of assessment as a tool for educational reform. Only the passage of time will enable onlookers to determine whether assessment initiatives are the ideal levers of educational reform that supporters tout them to be.

Long-Range Planning: A Tool for Systemic Change

Prior to the current fervor with which educational reformers and policy makers have embraced assessment, there was an equal ardor for long-range planning. In fact, long-range planning has been used since the 1950's as a tool for instituting organizational change (Byrne, 1996; Stewart & Bailey, 1991). The long-range plan has provided a formal context within which knowledge conversion could occur (Fullan, 1999). It has also provided a written record of organizational beliefs, goals, vision, mission and strategies. The plan has helped to focus

organizational energy to ensure that members of the organization work toward the same goals and objectives while assessing and adjusting the organization's direction in response to its changing environment (Support Center, 1999).

One commonly accepted definition of systems thinking is that it is a developing awareness of complexity, interdependencies, change and leverage within an organization (Richmond, 2000). It is focused less on event or issue management and more on the perceived organization as a whole. It ascribes a proactive approach to problem solving that takes into consideration the dynamic complexities that are inherent in any organization. Systems thinking methodologies are an inherent part of the long-range planning process. Systems thinking requires that school district leaders evaluate the potential impact of decisions made in one part of the organization on the organization as a whole. This process-oriented approach to decision making and planning is an essential premise of the systems thinking paradigm. Senge (2000) suggested that organizations learn on a continuous basis in order to foster self-renewal and to effectively meet stakeholder needs. This process requires that educational leaders look at events that occur within the school district as symptoms of larger issues. Identifying the patterns of behavior, underlying structures, and mental models that support the occurrence of current crises and events enables educational leaders to identify the points of leverage where leaders can institute a change that causes the greatest impact on the organization.

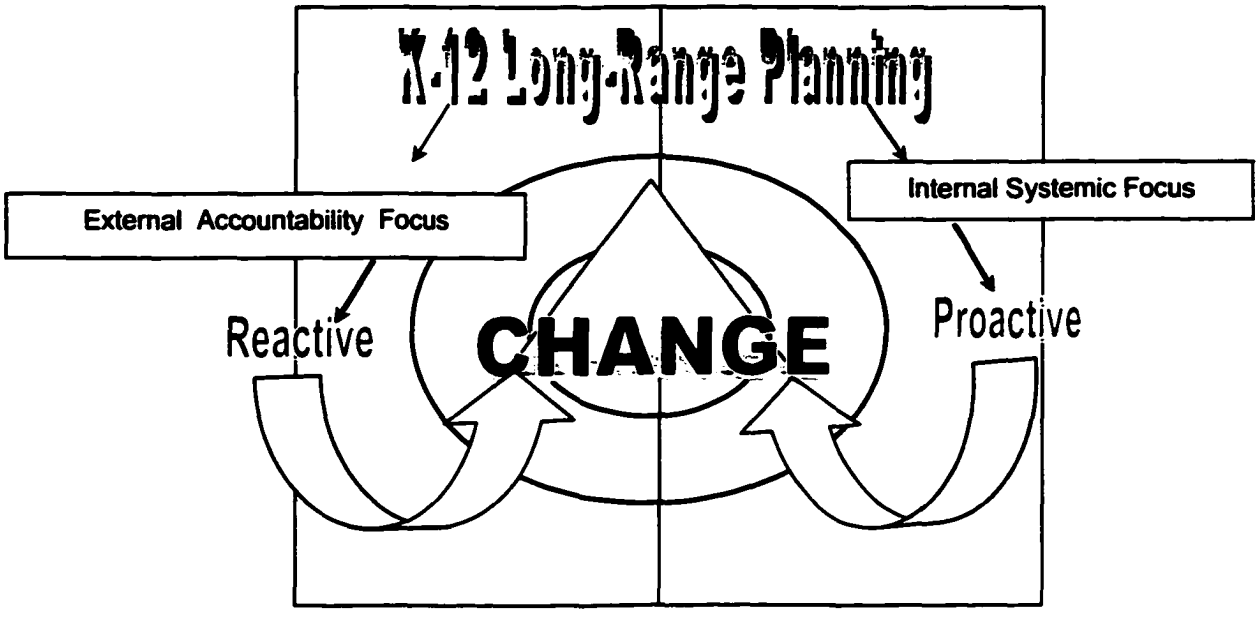
Richmond (2000, p.6) suggested that systems thinking was made up of seven types of thinking: *dynamic, system as cause, forest, operational, closed-loop, quantitative*, and *scientific*. *Dynamic thinking* requires the framing of a problem in terms of a pattern of behavior over time. *System as cause thinking* suggests that individuals see internal actors who manage the policies and "plumbing" of the system as responsible for resulting behaviors. *Forest thinking* looks

beyond the details of current events to the contexts of relationships in which the event details are embedded; *operational thinking* requires the understanding of how a behavior was actually generated. *Closed-loop thinking* views causality as an ongoing process, not a one-time event, with effects feeding back to influence causes. *Quantitative thinking* suggests that persons know how to quantify information and *scientific thinking* requires that an individual know how to define testable hypotheses (Richmond, 2000). Each type of thinking lends itself to the identification of issues that significantly impact upon the future of a school district. The long-range plan serves not only as a way to process information about key issues and address ways to deal with issues in writing, but also serves as a written record of how the school district has dealt with an issue over time.

Long-Range Planning and Levers for Systemic Change

As school districts revisit long-range plans at the beginning of the 21st century, most are forced to deal with external accountability issues. How are these issues addressed in long-range plans? The conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 elaborates upon Fox's (1998) work. The framework illustrates the relationship between long-range planning, an external accountability focus; and an internal systemic focus. Fox (1998) suggested that the focus of a long-range plan could lead to either reactive or proactive organizational change. When a long-range plan was primarily focused on meeting external accountability goals and objectives, changes that occurred would likely be reactive. While these changes would seem sustainable, they would only address the most volatile issues and not map out a clear path to the future for the school district (Fox, 1998).

Figure 1. Organizational Change as a Function of Long-Range Planning



Long-range planning is at a critical point in history. Its continued use by school districts may depend upon how well planning documents facilitate the achievement of external accountability goals as well as maintain a meaningful internal systemic focus. By examining planning documents through content analysis methodologies, the researcher can determine to what extent planning has been overly influenced by external accountability forces. This research methodology also enables the researcher to identify emerging planning topics. By shedding light on the content of long-range plans and by determining to what extent long-range plans have been adapted to meet the current requirements of the accountability movement, the researcher will greatly inform the practice of educational planning.

Statement of the Problem

As district leaders strive to meet the increasing external demands placed upon them by the current accountability movement, many may take on a reactive perspective in their long-

range plans. Although this reactive perspective positions the district to meet external accountability demands, it may hinder a district's ability to plan proactively for the future. This study will explore the current content of long-range plans to better understand the current state of long-range planning.

Research Questions

The researcher will address five central questions:

1. Are the planning components noted in the research present in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts?
2. Do the planning components noted in the research appear in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts at similar frequencies?
3. What is the content of goals and objectives of long-range plans in Virginia school districts?
4. Is the content of K-12 long-range goals and objectives similar in Virginia school districts?
5. To what extent do external and internal forces impact long-range planning in Virginia school districts?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, the researcher identified the planning components found in district plans in Virginia. By examining these components, the researcher would likely uncover planning components related to external accountability forces and internal systemic forces, if they existed. This would reveal how district leaders were addressing related issues within the context of the long-range plan. Second, this study provided an overview of long-range planning literature, from educational and corporate perspectives, which enabled the

researcher to examine educational planning within the broader planning context. Third, the results of this study provides educational leaders in Virginia with knowledge of how long-range plans in Virginia compare to the criterion established in research, as well as how individual plans compare to the plans of other school districts within the state of Virginia. Fourth, this study lays a foundation for future research aimed at identifying the relationship between planning and performance. Fifth, while long-range plans are frequently used to allocate limited resources in K-12 settings, little research has been done to support the effectiveness of long-range planning as a practice (Mintzberg, 1994); this study sheds light on this frequently overlooked topic. Finally, the results of this study identify to what extent a long-range planning paradigm actually exists among K-12 school districts in Virginia.

Definition of Related Terms

- *Assessments.* Assessments, as used in this study, refer to standardized tests given to students to measure their knowledge in key subjects, such as reading, math, science, and history. In Virginia, state assessments are called the Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests and are currently given to students in grades 3, 5, and 8 as well as at the end of specific courses at the secondary level. The term also references other standardized tests given in Virginia such as the Stanford 9, and Degrees of Reading Power.
- *Long-Range Goals.* Long-range goals are highlighted, both thematically and textually, within long-range plans. They are worded to convey key areas of district planning focus.
- *Long-Range Plans.* Long-range plans are those documents that leaders in K-12 school districts craft to record district goals, objectives, strategies, and other related decisions. Long-range plans address current topics and usually impact organizational decision-making for three to five years. Allison and Kaye (1997) suggested that writers of long-range plans

differentiated themselves from writers of strategic plans by assuming that the organizational environment remained relatively stable. *Strategic plans*, however, were written under the assumption that the organizational environment was dynamic and difficult to predict and that decisions made today effectively positioned the organization to meet the challenges of the future.

- *Planning Components.* Planning components are the various strategies, objectives, action plans, and other parts of the *Long-Range Planning Document.*
- *Policymakers.* Policymakers are elected officials who create the educational legislation that govern school districts.
- *Stakeholders.* Stakeholders are individuals, or groups of individuals who have a vested interest in public education. These individuals include teachers, parents, students, community members, and policymakers.

Delimitations of the Study

The analysis of K-12 long-range planning documents was limited to Virginia school districts.

Limitations of the Study

The study had two limitations. First, the researcher was limited by the number of long-range plans that were available at the time of the study. Plans that were under revision, for instance, were not released to the researcher. Second, the researcher was limited to studying K-12 planning documents and not the K-12 planning process. While the planning process was a critical part of developing a long-range plan, it was considered beyond the purview of this study.

Major Assumptions

1. This study assumed that the planning criterion established in the literature review represented best practice methodologies.
2. Each school district in Virginia with an official long-range plan would provide a copy of the plan to the researcher.
3. Each school district had developed a long-range plan that was intended to meet the needs of the district effectively and efficiently.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

For many years, school districts across the nation have engaged in long-range planning initiatives. Dissatisfied stakeholders, poor performing schools or visionary leaders were frequent catalysts for planning efforts. This review examines long-range planning from several perspectives. First, the notion of long-range and strategic planning is compared and contrasted. Then, planning is discussed from an historical perspective and from a systems thinking perspective. Finally, planning is discussed using a hierarchical approach where three distinct planning stages are examined.

Long-Range Planning and Strategic Planning

While many researchers use the terms *long-range planning* and *strategic planning* interchangeably, Allison and Kaye (1997) suggested that the two differ in their assumptions about the external environment. Long-range planning, according to Allison and Kaye (1997), is conducted based upon the belief that knowledge of the current environment provides a sufficiently reliable foundation upon which to base the reliability of the plan throughout its implementation. Strategic planning, on the other hand, assumes that an organization maintains a flexible stance which enables it to react to its dynamic environment. In strategic planning, the emphasis is on establishing organizational direction and not on predicting year-to-year objectives. Long-range planning views the future as predictable, and planning as a periodic process. It also assumes that current trends will continue and identifies a probable future and then maps out a year-to-year sequence of events to ensure that the probable future is realized

(Allison & Kaye, 1997). Kaufman, Herman, and Watters (1997) further differentiated between the two types of planning by suggesting that conventional (or long-range) planning approaches differ from strategic planning approaches in that they poise the organization in a reactionary stance, where strategic planning places an organization in a more proactive stance.

Supporters of strategic planning view the future as unpredictable and planning as a continuous process. They assume that new and unexpected trends and changes will occur and that possible futures must be thoughtfully considered based upon a thorough analysis of the current environment. Long-range planners ask, "*What business are we in?*" Strategic planners ask, "*What business should we be in* (Allison & Kaye, 1997)?"

Although Allison and Kaye (1997) and Kaufman et al. (1997) make a distinction between long-range and strategic planning, many researchers do not. Because the terms are frequently used interchangeably, research related to both types of planning will be referenced in this literature review. In this study, both types of planning will be referred to as long-range planning. Use of both long-range and strategic planning literature facilitates a more thorough discussion of planning and adds to the comprehensiveness of the literature review.

History of Long-Range Planning

K-12 long-range planning and *change* have been partnered since the beginning of the 20th Century. It was at that time that John Dewey suggested that public schools were the real shapers of society's destiny and not the community as posited by Plato circa 428-c. 347 BC (Dewey, 1998; Encarta, 2001). Dewey (1998) believed that planning was a critical part of public education. This paradigm shift from the community as educator to the public school system as educator signified a major shift in thinking and figured into the established need for long-range planning. Dewey (1998) stated the following: "A philosophy of education, like any theory, has

to be stated in words ... but so far as it is more than verbal it is a plan for conducting education. Like any plan, it must be framed with reference to what is to be done and how it is to be done. (p.17)" Dewey (1998) believed that planning was a critical part of public education. However, long-range planning within the context of public education did not gain immediate popularity. In fact, it was only in times of perceived national economic distress that long-range planning was fervently embraced by educational leaders.

In the 1950's, the United States' economy transitioned from largely agricultural to mostly commercial (Amocida, 1991; Moses & Cob, n.d.; Stewart & Bailey, 1991). The strong commercial economy, along with the influence of the post war era (Armocida, 1991), promulgated the notion that long-range planning was an effective tool for insuring national economic preeminence. Later events in the 1950s, such as the launch of Sputnik by the Russians in 1957, further increased the perceived importance of long-range planning. It was at this time that long-range planners shifted the focus of planning from 'maintaining the status quo' to 'strategically changing the status quo' leading to the frequent use of the term *strategic planning*. By the 1960's, corporate leaders in the U.S. perceived the nation to be in a time of economic distress and began to plan strategically to recapture the economic preeminence that the nation had previously experienced (Byrne, 1996; Stewart & Bailey, 1991).

In the 1970's, business and industry continued to use long-range planning extensively (Amocida, 1991; Byrne, 1996; Furman, 1994; Stewart & Bailey, 1991). It was not until the 1980's that school districts began to reevaluate their operational methods and join the long-range planning bandwagon in force. The organizational structures in many school districts became less static and more dynamic; setting the stage for a type of planning that would incorporate the need for change within the school structure (Byrne, 1996; Stewart & Bailey, 1991).

Interestingly, as school districts began to adopt long-range planning methodologies, the business world began to rethink their usefulness. General Electric (GE), for instance, had been a forerunner in the planning movement and had established a department that handled planning exclusively. However, by 1983, GE's CEO, John Welch, dismantled the once heralded planning department and abandoned the abstract, sterile, and top-down notions of the company's original planning model (Byrne, 1996). A more democratic process that involved a spectrum of individuals, from laborers to senior managers replaced the top-down model. This move toward openness set the stage for a more collaborative planning model in other settings as well.

Interestingly, at the same time that GE revamped it's planning formula a significant educational report was released by the federal government entitled, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission Excellence in Education, 1983). This report suggested that schools were not adequately equipping young people to meet the business and industry needs of the nation. And, that the nation would again be at risk of loosing economic preeminence should this educational trend continue unchecked. The report served as the catalyst for the educational community to adopt the new collaborative planning model that was currently espoused by the business sector. School district leaders hoped that the collaborative model would set schools on a path to success (Stewart, 1991). See Table 1 for an overview of the history of long-range planning.

Table 1. **History of Long-Range/Strategic Planning**

	Amocida, 1991	Byrne, 1996	Furman, 1994	Moses, 2001	Sosniak, 2001	Stewart, 1991	
1. Paradigm shift from Plato's philosophy (the community as educator) to Dewey's philosophy (public schools as shaper of society's destiny)					◆		
2. 1950's: U.S. no longer the #1 commercial power	◆			◆		◆	
3. Influenced by the post war era	◆						
4. 1960's: Corporate paradigm shift from long-range planning to strategic planning		◆				◆	
5. 1970's: Extensive use of strategic planning by business and industry	◆	◆	◆			◆	
6. 1980's: School systems become dynamic versus static		◆				◆	
7. 1983: General Electric abandons strategic planning		◆					
8. 1983: "A Nation At Risk" published						◆	

Systems Thinking and Long-Range Planning

Systems thinking is an effort "to enact change throughout an organization instead of in one narrow domain" (Senge, 2002; p. 79). Three systems thinking dynamics are discussed in this section: understanding organizational realities; logical incrementalism; and organizational change.

System Thinking as a Way of Understanding Organizational Realities

Senge (2002) suggested that several questions can lead educational leaders from perceiving events as a series of unrelated occurrences, to viewing the underlying patterns that connect all of them together:

> "What just happened? What's been happening? Have we been here or some place similar before? What are the forces at play contributing to these patterns? What about our thinking allows this situation to persist (p. 80)?"

These questions help to identify the happenings, trends, systemic structures, and mental models that support the events that school districts face. These events are often unplanned crises that require immediate attention. The systems thinking approach to long-range planning suggests that these unplanned crises be viewed as manifestations of larger issues. And that, once historical patterns and trends are identified, organizational leaders thoughtfully consider the root causes and interrelated forces that created each crisis, which will then facilitate more effective problem solving within the organization (Senge, 2002).

Senge (2002) also suggested that beneath every pattern of behavior is a systemic structure. He defined systemic structure as "a set of unrelated factors that interact, even though they may be widely separated in time and place, and even though their relationships may be difficult to recognize" (Senge, 2002, p. 82). Careful examination of systemic structures can reveal key points of leverage where the slightest amount of effort can bring about a significant change within the organization. Systemic structures are based upon mental models. Mental models are the ways of thinking that are prevalent within the organization and which enable the systemic structure to persist. These models are composed of the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the people in the organization. Once the mental models are revealed, misconceptions can be clarified and ideas can be challenged to bring about a closer approximation of truth concerning the state of the organization (Senge, 2002).

Logical Incrementalism as a Component of Systems Thinking

Quinn (1980) coined the phrase "logical incrementalism," to describe the slow, steady pace at which strategy develops. He suggested that this process be driven by conscious managerial thought. Long-range planning incorporates stakeholder input; however, stakeholder input can easily be focused too narrowly on the specific needs of stakeholder constituency

groups (i.e. schools, departments, grade levels, etc.). From the logical incrementalist's perspective, the long-range plan serves as the cohesive unit that connects the localized input provided by stakeholder groups to the district's goals and objectives. The long-range plan also provides a flexible framework of assumptions that guide future decisions making (Quinn, 1980).

Additionally, long-range also provide a mechanism by which earlier long-range planning efforts can be confirmed; provide a methodical way to evaluate and adjust annual budgets, and help to efficiently implement new initiatives (Mintzberg, 1994). In addition, they provide a systematic way to examine information, expand the perspective of operating managers, and help to allay fears about the future (Mintzberg, 1994).

Organizational Change as a Result of Systems Thinking

Organizational change is the only conduit through which an organization can facilitate movement from one accepted system of operation to another. Changing an organization is a complex process that requires systemic thought. Often rationally construed reform efforts do not achieve the desired results because they are not able to operate efficiently in a rapidly changing environment (Fullan, 1999).

Long-range planners who attempt to institute a significant change within an organization must be careful not to add too much structure to the organization as an organizational gridlock may result; adding too little structure could cause organizational chaos (Fullan, 1999). One key to developing meaningful structure within a changing organization, however, is to convert tacit knowledge (skills and beliefs below a level of awareness) to explicit knowledge (words and numbers that can be communicated using hard data) (Fullan, 1999). Fullan (1999) suggested that middle managers are key in this knowledge conversion process; he stated: "Middle managers can help mediate external and internal forces toward purposeful knowledge creation by attacking

incoherence resulting from overloaded and fragmented situations, i.e. the normal situations we find these days on the edge of chaos" (p. 16). Long-range planning is a tool that can be used to assist school district leaders in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization as well as help the organization focus its energy on the same goals and objectives. The plan also helps leaders monitor the district's response to its changing environment (Support Center, 1999). Ensuring that a plan is maintained will enable the organization to continuously improve itself as it embraces change.

The Three (3) Stages of Long-Range Planning

While the systems thinking perspective provides an understanding of the thought processes involved in long-range planning, the three stages of long-range planning provide insight into the development of the plan as well as its content. These three stages are a framework suggested by the researcher after careful review of the literature. The researcher grouped the processes involved in long-range plan development into three distinct stages: *Plan Organization*; *Plan Implementation*; and *Plan Maintenance*. Tables 2, 3, and 4 summarize 51 research articles on the topic of long-range planning. Tables in the Appendix summarize additional resources referenced in this discussion as well.

Kaufman (1994) and Kaufman, Herman, and Watters (1997) provided a comprehensive summary of the key issues associated with long-range planning. Kaufman et al. (1997) divided planning activities into three clusters: *scoping*, *planning*, and *implementation/continuous improvement*. Scoping required the development of an ideal vision; planning required the development of a plan based upon the results of an environmental analysis; and implementation/continuous improvement enabled planners to put the plan to work, monitor

progress, and compare actual accomplishments to stated objectives (Kaufman et al., 1997). These findings are incorporated into the three stages of planning found in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2. **Long-Range/Strategic Planning: An Overview**

Components of the Long-Range Planning Process	Allison & Kaye, 1997	Armocida, 1991	*Ashby, 2001*	Bacal, 1998	*Bass et. al, 1999*	Berman, 2000	Blick, 1998	Bollin et. al 1991	*Briggs et. al, 2000*	Byrne, 1996	Curtin, 2001	DeMoulin, 1993	*Finch, 1999*	Focke, 1995	Fox, 1998	Fullan, 1996	Furman, 1994
Stage I: Plan Organization																	
1. Championed by organizational leader(s)			♦			♦		♦		♦			♦			♦	
2. Involve stakeholders		♦	♦	♦			♦	♦	♦	♦		♦		♦	♦		
3. Understand local/state/societal mandates			♦					♦					♦				
4. SWOT analysis								♦							♦	♦	
5. Collect data														♦			
6. Identify core beliefs/values		♦															
7. Identify needs					♦												
8. Identify market niche																	
9. Develop a clear and compelling vision		♦				♦		♦		♦		♦					♦
10. Develop mission		♦					♦	♦						♦	♦		
11. Identify goals and objectives (long & short term)				♦				♦							♦	♦	
12. Develop action/tactical plans		♦						♦							♦		
13. Develop measurable performance indicators		♦		♦	♦		♦								♦		♦
14. Use of high level thinking skills						♦		♦						♦		♦	
Stage II: Plan Implementation																	
15. Implementation		♦	♦	♦	♦	♦							♦	♦	♦	♦	♦
16. Development of coherent support systems		♦	♦		♦	♦		♦		♦					♦	♦	
17. Use of action plans					♦	♦										♦	
18. Use of measurable performance indicators											♦		♦				♦
19. Use of data driven decision-making				♦							♦			♦			
20. Effective and coherent organizational design		♦	♦	♦	♦	♦			♦	♦						♦	
Stage III: Plan Maintenance																	
21. Collection of measurable outcomes			♦											♦	♦	♦	
22. Conduct an evaluation (formative/summative)											♦			♦	♦		
23. Evidence of continuous improvement				♦	♦									♦	♦		
24. Poised to react effectively to change	♦																
25. Organizational direction is established	♦																

Table 3. **Long-Range/Strategic Planning: An Overview**

Components of the Long-Range Planning Process	*Gareis, 1996*	Guerard, 2001	*Henry, 1996*	Herman, 1993	Hiatt, 1999	*Hipp, 1997*	Kaufman, 1994	Kaufman, 1995	Kaufman, 1996	Kaufman et al. (1997)	Keaster et. al, 1999	Kotler, 1981	MacPherson, 1996	Malandro et. al, 1999	McNamar, 1997	McNamara, 1999	Moldorf, 1993
Stage I: Plan Organization																	
1. Championed by organizational leader(s)					♦	♦	♦				♦			♦		♦	
2. Involve stakeholders	♦		♦	♦		♦			♦		♦		♦	♦	♦		♦
3. Understand local/state/societal mandates			♦	♦			♦	♦			♦				♦		♦
4. SWOT analysis			♦	♦		♦	♦	♦				♦			♦		♦
5. Collect data		♦	♦			♦	♦	♦			♦		♦		♦	♦	
6. Identify core beliefs/values						♦					♦						
7. Identify needs					♦		♦				♦	♦			♦		
8. Identify market niche							♦					♦			♦		♦
9. Develop a clear and compelling vision					♦	♦	♦	♦	♦		♦				♦		♦
10. Develop mission	♦					♦	♦	♦	♦		♦				♦		♦
11. Identify goals and objectives (long & short term)					♦	♦	♦		♦			♦			♦	♦	♦
12. Develop action/tactical plans					♦		♦	♦	♦		♦	♦		♦	♦	♦	♦
13. Develop measurable performance indicators							♦		♦		♦						♦
14. Use of high level thinking skills									♦								
Stage II: Plan Implementation																	
15. Implementation							♦	♦									
16. Development of coherent support systems	♦				♦	♦		♦	♦				♦	♦			♦
17. Use of action plans																	
18. Use of measurable performance indicators		♦	♦	♦			♦						♦				
19. Use of data driven decision-making		♦					♦						♦				
20. Effective and coherent organizational design									♦			♦		♦		♦	♦
Stage III: Plan Maintenance																	
21. Collection of measurable outcomes								♦			♦						
22. Conduct an evaluation (formative/summative)							♦						♦		♦		
23. Evidence of continuous improvement							♦	♦	♦		♦					♦	♦
24. Poised to react effectively to change										♦							
25. Organizational direction is established										♦							

Table 4. Long-Range/Strategic Planning: An Overview

Components of the Long-Range Planning Process	Moses et. al, 2001	New York Times, 2001	*Newmann et. al, 1997*	*Nir, 2000*	Online Women's..., 1997	Paige, 2001	*Rowley et. al, 1995*	Sadowski, 2001	Scwahn et. al, 1998	Sosniak, 2001	Stewart et. al, 1991	Support center, 1999	Thompson, 1999	Viadero, 2001	Winter, 1995	Wolk, 2000	Wolverton et.al, 1999
Stage I: Plan Organization																	
1. Championed by organizational leader(s)			◆		◆				◆		◆	◆	◆			◆	◆
2. Involve stakeholders			◆			◆	◆		◆	◆	◆		◆	◆	◆		◆
3. Understand local/state/societal mandates		◆	◆	◆			◆			◆	◆				◆	◆	◆
4. SWOT analysis				◆							◆				◆		
5. Collect data			◆					◆						◆	◆		
6. Identify core beliefs/values	◆						◆		◆								
7. Identify Needs	◆				◆		◆				◆		◆	◆			
8. Identify market niche					◆						◆	◆		◆			
9. Develop a clear and compelling vision					◆		◆		◆	◆	◆		◆		◆		◆
10. Develop mission					◆		◆		◆			◆					◆
11. Identify goals and objectives (long & short term)		◆		◆	◆			◆			◆	◆			◆		
12. Develop action/tactical plans				◆										◆	◆		
13. Develop measurable performance indicators		◆			◆					◆							
14. Use of high level thinking skills				◆	◆						◆	◆	◆				◆
Stage II: Plan Implementation																	
15. Implementation	◆		◆	◆	◆		◆				◆	◆		◆	◆	◆	
16. Development of coherent support systems	◆		◆					◆	◆					◆	◆	◆	
17. Use of action plans																	
18. Use of measurable performance indicators	◆	◆				◆		◆	◆					◆			
19. Use of data driven decision-making								◆				◆					◆
20. Effective and coherent organizational design	◆		◆	◆	◆	◆			◆		◆	◆	◆	◆			◆
Stage III: Plan Maintenance																	
21. Collection of measurable outcomes					◆	◆	◆			◆							
22. Conduct an evaluation (formative/summative)										◆					◆		
23. Evidence of continuous improvement							◆		◆		◆	◆	◆				◆
24. Poised to react effectively to change																	
25. Organizational direction is established																	

Stage I: Plan Organization

Organizing the plan is a critical first step in the planning process. Several authors suggested that successful long-range planning endeavors were initially championed by an organizational leader (or leaders) who kept the channels of communication open between organizational leaders and subordinates (Kaufman, 1994; see also Hipp, 1997; Thompson, 1999; Malandro & Weiss, 1999). This champion ensured that what needed to get done actually got accomplished. Most of the articles reviewed suggested that involving stakeholders was a critical component of the planning process. See Tables 2, 3, and 4 for further details.

In addition to a discussion on involving stakeholders, authors addressed issues concerning local, state and societal mandates (Kaufman, 1994; see also Henry, 1996; McNamara, 1997; Wolverton & Gmelch, 1999; Zemesky, Massy, & Oedel, 1993). Zemesky et al. (1993, p.56) said that the modern citizenry "...expects from schools what it expects elsewhere: better service, lower costs, and higher quality." Understanding the needs and wants of the public is critical in establishing a doable long-range plan. Another critical part of the long-range planning process was conducting an environmental analysis. Bryson (1995) referred to this as a *"SWOT" Analysis"* where "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats," both within and outside of the organization were examined. An organization's strengths and weaknesses were often quite similar (likewise, were the opportunities and threats) the duty of educational leaders was to maximize the strengths and opportunities while minimizing the weaknesses and threats (Bryson, 1995).

Long-range planning literature from the higher education perspective provided insight into conducting an environmental analysis. Kotler & Murphy (1981) suggested that colleges and universities monitor multiple environments to include internal, market, public, competitive, and

macro environments that could impact upon the institution. One high school used its environmental analysis of the market to develop an effective strategy for educating low-income Hispanic high school students. The high school prepared these students for higher education through a solid intervention program based upon its understanding of its environment and by capitalizing on its market niche (Viadero, 2001). Viadero (2001) suggested that the problem with many high schools was not that they had failed, but that they had allowed themselves to become obsolete in the face of the changing academic demands of the workplace due to a lack of planning.

When educational organizations conducted environmental analyses, they did so through data collection. McNamara (1997) suggested that educational organizations use three guiding questions to direct data gathering efforts: *"Where are we now? Where do we want to go? How do we get there?"* (p. 2).

Identification of core beliefs, values, and needs was also discussed throughout the literature. It was suggested that core beliefs and values were an inherent part of any strategic planning effort. Schwahn and Spady (1998) went so far as to suggest that if a staff was unable to state the "compelling purpose" of the organization in their own words from memory and with enthusiasm, that the organization did not have one. In a related article, Armocida (1991) suggested that there was a relationship between the personal paradigms of high school principals engaged in long-range planning and their actions and beliefs as planners. This concept suggested that the individual beliefs of principals involved in a district-wide planning effort could influence the corporate belief of an organization.

Another important component of the planning process involved developing a clear and compelling vision and mission. This was seen as important because the vision and mission

provided a central theme around which organizational members could unify, which resulted in organizational cohesiveness (Bryson, 1995; Carr & Harris, 2001; Robert, 1998; and Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997). Vision refers to a desirable future state of an organization. It connects the organization's intended purposes to the direction taken by the organization. Visions are typically inspirational which encourages organizational members to work toward them (Bush & Coleman, 2000). Mission statements, on the other hand, are best used to explain overall aims and organizational philosophy and are often captured in a brief sentence or passage. Usually, the mission is memorable and provides a guide to action for organizational members (Bush & Coleman, 2000). Schenk and Schaid (2002) further suggested that a school district use the mission statement to strategically distinguish itself from competing forces. Although the mission statement was an important part of the planning process, Rowley et al. (1997) felt that it should be developed after internal and external scans were performed, thereby enabling planners to make the mission statement more realistic.

Winter (1995) looked at the use of vision in school planning. He stated, "In the educational context, vision provides long-term direction for such concerns as planning facilities and developing educational programs (p.46)." Winter (1995) generally defined the vision as a one or two page written narrative that described a picture of what the school organization would look like in the distant future. The vision also addressed the most essential issues that affected the organization and represented a substantial gap between how the organization looked presently and how it would look in the future. Moldorf (1993) suggested that a good mission statement should meet certain criteria such as state the higher purpose of the educational organization; describe what should be achieved in measurable terms; distinguish the organization from others like it; and paint a picture of the organization's future.

One study focused just on mission statements developed by school districts in Virginia. Using a content analysis methodology, the researcher found that although school districts in Virginia developed mission statements separately, they had unknowingly reached de facto consensus concerning the content of the statements (Gareis, 1996).

Other key components of long-range planning noted in the literature included identification of critical organizational goals and objectives, development of action/tactical plans, and development of measurable performance indicators. Bollin and Eadie (1991) suggested that the identification of goals and objectives was an important part of planning. Goals and objectives, they believed, provided pivotal information, which was necessary to establish the ongoing management process required to successfully implement the recommendations of a long-range plan. Bollin and Eadie (1991) also noted that it was this dynamic balance between an organization's vision, mission, goals, strategies, resources and external environment that enabled an organization to invest resources over the long term. This investment enabled organizational leaders to take full advantage of strengths and opportunities while coping with weaknesses and threats (Bollin and Eadie, 1991). However, Schenk and Schaid (2002) cautioned that many districts had difficulty generating measurable objectives because leaders were often more process oriented than results oriented. They suggested that districts make sure that goals were quantifiable to prevent aimless district wandering (Schenk & Schaid, 2002).

Fox (1998) suggested that school districts develop goals and objectives using proactive planning and policy-development teams. Ideally, these teams would be composed of organization leaders. Once a school district had a clear mission and goal and had an opportunity to identify the goals and objectives that were most critical to the success of the organization, its leaders could more effectively create meaningful action and tactical plans. The following five

steps were suggested by Fox (1998) for developing action and tactical plans (Fox, 1998, p. 47-48):

1. *Evaluate the district's current condition.* Look at several things including student achievement, teacher performance and job satisfaction, parent satisfaction, administrative effectiveness, school board operations.
2. *Design a treatment plan for the district.* The plan should contain specific goals, timelines, and names of people who are to be held accountable for completing the goal.
3. *Put the treatment plan into action.* Each stakeholder inside and outside the organization must accept a share of the responsibility for the success of the plan. Students must have good attendance and work hard; parents must encourage and assist their children when needed; the community must provide financial and volunteer support; and the school system must work toward continuous improvement.
4. *Evaluate the outcomes.* Gauge customer (students, parents, and taxpayers) satisfaction through surveys; look at hard data, i.e. test scores; track top student performance in academic competitions; and seek the opinions of local business people.
5. *Put outcome data to good use.* Use data for continuous improvement initiatives.

Each of the aforementioned steps is relevant and appropriate for district planning. Fox (1998) suggested that school districts typically worked from a

reactive perspective instead of a proactive one. In order to realistically plan for the future, school districts must act proactively

Stage II: Plan Implementation

Plan implementation requires the allocation of resources to under gird emerging practices and training on a continuing basis. The implementation stage also requires that attention be paid to the unique characteristics of the community, district, and staff members (Holcomb, 2001). Holcomb (2001) suggested that overall coordination was necessary to balance the need for shared control with the inevitable pressures that arise when leaders communicate clear expectations for organizational change. School systems often have a difficult time implementing long-range plans because other initiatives are implemented simultaneously that undermine the synergy of the entire endeavor. Stage II planning components attempt to get the document off the shelf and into the hands and minds of the people who are actually tasked with using it to make positive changes within the organization.

Multiple factors can affect how well leaders are able to bring a long-range plan to life. One factor is the presence of site based decision-making. When school administrators make decisions that are in the best interest of their buildings or departments but not necessarily in line with the district long-range plan--poor implementation may result. An unpublished literature review conducted by the researcher, examined the implementation of long-range plans in schools and school systems that had embraced a philosophy of site-based management. The author found that researchers had difficulty measuring the success of long-range planning initiatives due to negative interactions with site based management; unique characteristics of schools; and the impact of assessment mandates (Finch, 1999). The author found that the effectiveness of district-wide strategic planning was limited by site-based decision making practices. The typical top

down implementation procedures employed by long-range planners frequently ignored staff perceptions, which limited the degree of success that was seen during the plan's implementation stage. O'Donoghue and Dimmock (1996) supported this finding and suggested that long-range planning and site-based management could work in opposition within a school district.

Establishing a coherent and effective organizational design with strong support systems was another component of successful long-range plan implementation. In Berman's (2000) discussion of implementing a service learning initiative within a school district, he suggested that implementing such a program required that a school district communicate the various aspects of the program to individuals across all aspects of the organization. He believed that successful implementation would result if the entire organization was saturated with the new concept (Berman, 2000). Once this saturation occurred, students would receive the same message from all units of the organization. This full implementation would lead to the eventual fulfillment of the vision.

A successful implementation is based upon a well developed organizational design and an extensive support system within the organization that supports change. Once support systems are in place, planners can significantly affect the quality of the school district through the use of long-range plans.

The direction from which planning support flows is also critical. Robert (1998) suggested that support that consistently flowed from leaders to subordinates would best suit a business setting. Bryson (1995) believed that this type of support could be appropriately suited to non-profit settings as well, but noted that it was even more effective when combined with support structures that flowed from subordinates to leaders. Both Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence(1997) and Carr and Harris (2001) suggested that bottom-up support systems were most

effective within academic settings because they enabled representatives of various stakeholder groups to support the long-range planning process. However, Robert (1998) believed that the involvement of individuals at the operational level in planning initiatives was a needless endeavor since these workers lacked the ability to plan strategically.

Stage III: Plan Maintenance

The final stage of the planning process centered on maintaining the plan. Bacal (1998) suggested that a plan must inform decision making; help staff members determine work and employee objectives; inform staff development and personnel functions; and form a foundation for continuous improvement. Bacal (1998) noted that only rarely were long-range plans maintained properly within an organization. He suggested several ways to insure that a long-range plan maintained a place of distinction within an organization's structure. These suggestions included: linking the plan (and its related processes) to other organizational functions; use of the plan systematically by workers as a basis for their own short-term operational planning; departmental plans informing the district plan; and routine referencing of the plan by managers in decision-making conversations with staff (Bacal, 1998). The long-range plan should impact the organization's budget, personnel development, objective setting and performance management as well as guide the allocation of resources within the organization (Bacal, 1998).

Assuring that long-range plans are implemented properly is not only important to individuals inside the organization, but outside of the organization as well. Grantors are especially interested in proper implementation of long-range plans. Focke (1995) interviewed grantors who funded educational programs based largely upon the quality of planning proposals. He found that many granting organizations were interested in seeing grantees focus attention on

how their organizations did business. Focke (1995) found that granting organizations believed that evidence of planning indicated that an organization was self-aware. Planning was also described as a continuous process-- one that required continuous assessment, re-thinking; and openness to change (Focke, 1995).

In the current accountability movement, assessment has become a critical part of long-range plan maintenance. Researchers from The College of William and Mary conducted a case study in a rural school district and found that successful maintenance of a long-range plan did not result in positive change within the school district. Bass, Rozzelle, and Tucker (1996) examined the impact of four years of restructuring efforts on a rural school system. Bass et al. (1996) found the following:

> The superintendent's strategic plan for systemic change emphasized ongoing improvement to prepare the school district for the future. Her plan for restructuring focused on all aspects of the system: Instruction; Leadership; Administration and Organization; Staff Development; Staff, Student, and Community Relations; Management of Services and Facility; and Evaluation. The intent of the project was to look at the whole system before making decisions on any of these components.
>
> In order to gauge the effects of the organizational and curricular changes, this school district implemented a standardized testing program in which the *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills* (ITBS) were administered every year to all elementary grade students. While vast changes were being made in this school system during the four years of restructuring, standardized ITBS

> scores have not increased. In fact, scores have declined somewhat for many grade levels during that period. (p.1)

Researchers offered explanations for the decrease in standardized test scores given the significant reform efforts that had taken place in the school district. The following hypotheses were offered to explain the decline in test scores:

1. *Ineffective practices:* the reforms did not contribute to increased achievement
2. *Non-generalizable practices:* reforms may work but not in this rural school system
3. *Standardized assessment measures:* reforms contributed to increased student learning but not increased performance on a standardized achievement test
4. *Ambivalent teachers:* reforms did increase student learning when implemented by teachers who were motivated and knowledgeable about the effective use of the practices
5. *Insufficient resources:* the reforms worked when coupled with competent teachers and sufficient instructional materials, collaborative planning time, and administrative support
6. *Changing student demographics:* the reforms worked but the current student population was less prepared and motivated to achieve academically.
7. *Delayed impact:* the reforms will work but it will take time before the results can be measured

8. *Multiple interactions:* some reforms increased student learning while others interfered with it in this rural system
9. *Dynamic complexity:* reforms impacted the school system in complex, dynamic, and unpredictable ways -- change in this system was nonlinear and was influenced by internal and external factors that affected student achievement (Bass et al., 1996, p. 2-7).

Like other school districts across the state that adopt school reform initiatives, this rural district expected to implement a reform effort and see immediate positive results. However, a good long-range plan can be implemented and maintained adequately yet factors beyond the control of the planners hinder the success of the initiative. The hypotheses provided by Bass et al. (1996) offer logical explanations for why the reform initiatives in the rural school district resulted in a decrease in standardized test scores. Successful maintenance of long-range planning initiatives did not guarantee positive results. However, thoughtful review of assessment results during the maintenance stage of planning facilitates reflection and provides an opportunity to make district changes as needed. The use of data that accurately reflects achievement enables schools and school districts to determine, in part, whether long-range planning goals and objectives are actually being accomplished (Keaster & Sloan, 1999).

Summary of Literature Review

In summary, long-range planning has been historically embraced by K-12 school districts during times of perceived national crises. While advocated by Dewey (1998) in the early twentieth century, it was not until the middle to latter part of the century that planning took root in school districts.

Planning can be viewed from several perspectives to include logical incrementalism, organizational change, and from a hierarchical perspective where plan organization, implementation, and maintenance are examined. Long-range planning is an intricate process that requires strategic thought and action. Once developed, an effective plan provides a framework in which district leaders can monitor the progress of the organization and take the role of proactive change agent.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

There were five purposes for this study. First, this study determined what planning components were present in long-range plans in Virginia school districts. Second, this study explored the degree of congruence that existed between the planning components of K-12 district long-range plans in Virginia school districts and the recommended components suggested by research and related literature. Third, this study identified the content of goals and objectives of long-range plans in Virginia school districts. Fourth, the study identified similarities among long-range plans in Virginia school districts. Last, this study identified the primary force which likely drove Virginia school districts to include each planning component or theme in their respective long-range plans.

Research Questions

The researcher will address five central questions:

1. Are the planning components noted in the research present in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts?
2. Do the planning components noted in the research appear in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts at similar frequencies?
3. What is the content of goals and objectives of long-range plans in Virginia school districts?
4. Is the content of K-12 long-range goals and objectives similar in Virginia school districts?
5. To what extent do external and internal forces impact long-range planning in Virginia school districts?

Target Population

The target population for this study was the 132 school districts in the state of Virginia. Long-range plans from all school districts in the state represented the total population to be studied. The small size of the target population and its easy accessibility made the use of a sample population unnecessary.

Data Analysis Matrix

Data analysis occurred in three phases. Phase I required the development of coding categories using planning components noted in the research. These coding categories were used to generate frequency tables and thematic analyses to facilitate school district comparisons. In Phase II, the researcher used quantitative data analysis software to analyze the content of planning goals and objectives. Results obtained from this analysis were also compared. Frequency counts were used extensively in the analysis of results in both Phase I and Phase II. In Phase III, the researcher developed a rubric that clearly distinguished between internal and external forces that contribute to the inclusion of planning components and themes in long-range plans. This rubric was used to assign either an external or internal label to coding components and themes developed in Phases I and II. See Table 5 for further details.

Table 5: **Data Analysis Matrix**

Phases of Research	Research Question	Methodology	Data Collection & Instrumentation	Analysis
Phase I	Question #1. Are the planning components noted in the research present in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts?	Development of coding categories; Subsequent Content Analysis (within case) of Long-Range Plans	Categories reflective of planning components in the literature review; trained coders to check a sample of the long-range planning components, goals, and objectives coded by the researcher	Categorical Frequency Tables; Thematic Analysis
	Question #2. Do the planning components noted in the research appear in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts at similar frequencies?	Development of coding categories; Subsequent Content Analysis (within case) of Long-Range Plans	Categories reflective of planning components in the literature review; trained coders to check a sample of the long-range planning components, goals, and objectives coded by the researcher	Categorical Frequency Tables; Thematic Analysis
Phase II	Question #3. What is the content of goals and objectives of long-range plans in Virginia school districts?	Development of coding categories; Subsequent Content Analysis (within case) of Long-Range Plans	Categories reflective of planning components in the literature review; trained coders to check a sample of the long-range planning components, goals, and objectives coded by the researcher	Categorical Frequency Tables; Thematic Analysis
	Question #4: Is the content of K-12 long-range goals and objectives similar in Virginia school districts?	Cross case Analysis using coding results obtained in Phase I	Categorical Frequency Tables developed in Phase I	Categorical Frequency Tables; Thematic Analysis
Phase III	Question #5: To what extent do external and internal forces impact long-range planning in Virginia school districts?	Defining the use of terms: 1) external force 2) internal force	Develop a decision making rubric which enables the researcher to assign a "primary force" to planning categories that emerge during Phases I & II	Subjective Interpretation

Procedures

The examination of documents for research purposes is typically done using content analysis methodologies. Berelson (1952) classically defined *content analysis* as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18).

For this study, a composite of the most frequently sited long-range planning components was extracted from data found in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5. The components were then used to analyze 23, online K-12 long-range plans in a pilot study. The results from the pilot study along with the aforementioned components were used in the development of coding categories for this study. Once finalized, the coding categories were used to conduct within-case and cross-case analyses of long-range plans. Within case analyses allowed the researcher to examine one long-range plan at a time using a content analyses methodology. Cross-case analysis enabled the researcher to compare the findings from individual long-range plans to the findings of other plans as well as to the findings of the group (Creswell, 1998).

Determination of Coding Unit

Weber (1990) identified four potential coding units--*word, word sense, sentence,* and *theme.* Each coding option is described below:

- *Word.* A word can have more than one meaning.
- *Word sense.* Constitutes a semantic unit
- *Sentence.* Used when the investigator is interested in words or phrases that occur closely together.
- *Theme.* A unit of text with no more than one perceiver, agent of action, action and target of the action. (p. 21-22)

In this study, the researcher coded planning components by theme; specific goals were coded by word. Using the theme as a coding unit for planning components enabled the researcher to identify key ideas. While coding specific goals and objectives by word provides for a literal interpretation of the content.

Instrumentation

Determination of Categories

The literature review revealed a generally accepted method for engaging in K-12 long-range planning efforts, however, the content of long-range planning documents was not spelled out specifically. Since specific document content characteristics were not noted in the literature, evidence of the planning components discussed in the research were used as the basis for conducting the content analysis. In a pilot study conducted in 2001 by the researcher, the planning components identified in Tables 2, 3, and 4 were used as coding units. The researcher found that 18 of the 23 planning components appeared in all 23 of the online plans examined. See Table 6 for a list of planning components appearing in the online plans.

Table 6. **Planning Components Noted in On-line Long-Range Plans**

		Totals	
		# Present	% Present
1	Organization Leader(s) Champions Planning Process	4	17%
2	**Stakeholder Involvement***	**20**	**86%**
3	**Shows Understanding of Local/State/Societal Mandates***	**13**	**56%**
4	**Evidence of SWOT Analysis***	**8**	**35%**
5	**Collection of Data***	**7**	**30%**
6	**Identification of Needs***	**7**	**30%**
7	**Clear and Compelling Vision***	**8**	**35%**
8	**Clear and Compelling Mission***	**12**	**52%**
9	Evidence of Action/Tactical Plans	1	4%
10	Evidence of High Level Thinking Skills	2	9%
11	Evidence of Thoughtful Execution of the Plan	2	9%
12	**Evidence of Coherent Support Systems***	**5**	**22%**
13	**Use of Measurable Performance Indicators***	**7**	**30%**
14	**Use of Data Driven Decision-Making***	**5**	**22%**
15	**Evidence of an Effective/Coherent Organizational Design***	**12**	**52%**
16	Evidence of an Evaluation Component (Formative/Summative)	3	13%
17	**Evidence of Continuous Improvement***	**13**	**56%**
18	**Identification of goals and objectives (long/short term)***	**19**	**83%**

**Categories found in 20% or more of on-line plans in a pilot study conducted by the researcher in 2001.*

Of the 18 planning components that appeared in the plans, six occurred in more than 50% of the plans. These planning components were *stakeholder involvement*; *show understanding of local/state/societal mandates*; *evidence of an effective/coherent organizational design*; *evidence of continuous improvement*; and *identification of goals and objectives (long/short term).* Four planning components appeared in 30 to 49 percent of the plans; these included *evidence of SWOT analyses*; *identification of needs*; *clear and compelling vision*; and *use of measurable performance indicators.* Two planning components appeared in at least 20% of the documents—*evidence of coherent support systems* and *use of data driven decision-making.*

In this study, the 12 aforementioned planning components were revised as needed and used as coding categories. Planning components that had an occurrence rate of less than 20

percent in the pilot study were not coded individually. In addition to the coding categories noted in Table 6, the following two strategic planning components espoused by Allison and Kaye (1997) and Kaufman et al. (1997) were used as coding categories:

- *Poised to react effectively to change*
- *Organizational direction is established*

Bolin (1991), Fox (1998), Herman (1993), Hipp (1997), Kaufman (1996), Nir (2000), and others, suggested that the SWOT analysis was typically viewed as a strategic planning component; therefore, *Evidence of SWOT analysis,* along with the two aforementioned planning components were used to distinguish long-range plans from strategic plans.

Emergent Categories

Neuendorf (2002) described emergent variable identification as follows:

> When existing theory or research literature cannot give a complete picture of the message pool, the researcher may take a more practical approach. The researcher may need to immerse him or herself in the world of the message pool and conduct a qualitative scrutiny of a representative subset of the content to be examined. In this way, variables emerge from the message pool, and the investigator is well grounded in the reality of the messages. (p. 102)

In this study, emergent categories were defined as those categories with high frequency counts of words that emerged from an analysis of specific goals. In addition to examining planning components to determine their placement in the categories noted in Table 6, the researcher also conducted a separate analysis where emergent content was revealed through the use of frequency counts.

Calculating Frequencies

Calculating frequencies is a common data collection methodology used in content analysis (Weber, 1990). Weber (1990) suggested that higher frequency counts within categories reflect a high concern with the category. In this study, the researcher calculated counts by category for those categories starred in Table 6 as well as for all categories that emerged from the analysis of specific goals and objectives.

Reliability of Methodology

Reliability for this study was measured through the use of four coders. Coders were students enrolled in the *Educational Planning, Policy, and Leadership* doctoral program at The College of William and Mary. Each coder was trained by the researcher to code long-range plans using the categories established in Table 6. Coders were given long-range plans coded by the researcher and were asked to verify the accuracy of the researcher's use of coding units and categories.

Neuendorf (2002) indicated that an 80% or greater inter-rater agreement rating was generally acceptable for content analysis research. The following inter-rater reliability formula was used.

$$PA_o = A/n$$

Where, PA_o = proportion agreement; A = the number of agreements between coders; and n = the total number of units the two coders had coded for the test (this figure is also the maximum agreement the coders could achieve) (Neuendorf, 2002).

Validity of Methodology

The term validity is often misinterpreted in content analysis research (Weber, 1990). It is used to define the correspondence between two sets of items --such as concepts, variables,

methods, and data-- and it is also used to reference the generalizability of results, references and theory (Weber, 1990). Weber (1990) suggested that there were five types of validity to consider when performing content analyses:

1. ***Semantic validity*** required that the words defined by a single coding unit have similar connotations as measured by different people.
2. ***Face validity*** referred to the match between the investigators' preconceived notions about a given concept and the concepts' measurable categorical definition.
3. ***Construct validity*** referred to the extent that the study corresponded to some other measure of the same construct.
4. ***Hypothesis validity*** referred to the expected presence of a variable response as predicted by a theory.
5. ***Predictive validity*** occurred when the research successfully forecasted an external event or condition. (p. 18-19)

Two types of validity were used in this study, *semantic validity* and *face validity*. *Semantic validity* was used in this study because its use was congruent with the use of coders and was also congruent with the nature of long-range plans. Long-range plans are typically written by stakeholders who are attempting to convey a specific message to both internal and external school district audiences. As these individuals typically labor over the connotations of words and phrases, semantic validity seemed the most appropriate measure as it allowed for subjective interpretation. *Face validity*, on the other hand, was used to assign a likely primary force behind the inclusion of each planning component and theme included in the long-range. This type of

validity was appropriate as it enabled the researcher to match preconceived notions about external and internal forces with categorical definitions.

Limitations

The researcher determined the degree of congruence that existed between the content of planning components, goals, and objectives of K-12 district long-range plans in Virginia and the recommended planning components, goals, and objectives suggested by research and related literature. The study facilitated the identification of emergent components appearing in long-range planning goals and objectives. Lastly, the researcher pinpointed similarities that existed among Virginia school districts.

Ethical Safeguards

Content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text (Weber, 1990; p. 9). It is an inherently unobtrusive form of research as content is the object of research and not people. Because of the unobtrusive nature of content analysis, ethical safeguards were of less concern for this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

The purposes of this study were to determine what planning components were present in long-range plans in Virginia school districts; explore the similarities that existed between the planning components of K-12 district long-range plans in Virginia school districts and the recommended components suggested by research and related literature; identify the content of goals and objectives of long-range plans in Virginia school districts; to identify similarities among long-range plans in Virginia school districts; and to determine to what extent external and internal forces impacted upon the long-range plans of Virginia school districts. Content analysis methodologies were used to examine long-range planning documents from across the state of Virginia. The following research questions were investigated:

1. Are the planning components noted in the research present in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts?
2. Do the planning components noted in the research appear in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts at similar frequencies?
3. What is the content of goals and objectives of long-range plans in Virginia school districts?
4. Is the content of K-12 long-range goals and objectives similar in Virginia school districts?
5. To what extent do external and internal forces impact long-range planning in Virginia school districts?

As the researcher began gathering data for this study, it became apparent that the desire to examine long-range planning goals and objectives for each school district was an overly zealous ambition. Due to the traditional time allotments allocated for dissertation research, the researcher chose to examine long-range planning goals exclusively. There were several reasons for this decision. First, many districts did not include objectives in their long-range plans thereby hindering the researcher's ability to compare districts. Second, some districts appeared to value brevity and conciseness in their planning documents and therefore limited the number of objectives included in their plan. This decision, on the part of school districts, may have been misinterpreted by the researcher as a lack of interest in a particular planning area. Third, based upon the collaborative nature of the planning process and the subsequent development of the planning document, the researcher inferred that the goal statements included in planning documents were fairly indicative of the content of their underlying planning objectives. For these reasons long-range planning objectives were not included in the study as the researcher believed that long-range planning goals adequately represented the general content of planning documents.

Response Rate

A long-range planning document was requested from each of the 132 school districts in Virginia. Ninety-three (93), or 66%, of school districts responded to the request. Seventy-seven (77) districts sent useable long-range plans to the researcher; 13 informed the researcher that their long-range plan was under revision and therefore unavailable; and three stated that their district did not have a planning document. Seventy-seven (77) useable plans were analyzed which represented 58% of the school district plans in Virginia.

Homogeneity of Responses

In order to quantify the characteristics of responding school districts, the researcher described all school districts using three pieces of publicly available data: average daily membership; free and reduced lunch percentages; and per pupil costs. Use of these descriptors enabled the researcher to meaningfully describe respondents. The researcher acknowledges that a disproportionately high number of larger districts participated in the study; a disproportionately high number of wealthy districts participated in the study; and, districts with moderate per pupil costs were disproportionately underrepresented. See Table 8 for further details.

Table 8: Homogeneity of Responses

(Respondent School District Characteristics)				
Average Daily Membership (2001-02 School Year)	Number of Students in the District	Total # of School Districts	Total # of Plans Received	% of Plans Received
Very Large	40,000 or more	3	3	100%
Large	10,000 - 39,999	23	19	83%
Medium	3,000 - 9,999	48	27	56%
Small	1,500 - 2,999	37	20	53%
Very Small	1,499 or below	21	8	38%
(State enrollment = 1,124,547)				
Free & Reduced Lunch (2000-01 School Year)	% of Students in the District on Free & Reduced Lunch			
High Poverty	50% - 73%	29	15	52%
Moderate Poverty	30% - 49%	53	26	48%
Low Poverty	29% or below	50	36	72%
	(State Average = 31%)			
Per Pupil Costs (1999-00 School Year)				
High	8,000 - 12,000	15	9	60%
Moderate	6,550 - 7,999	61	33	53%
Low	6,549 or below	56	35	63%
	(State Avg. = 6,985)			

The researcher also acknowledges that the differences in responding district characteristics impacts upon the findings of this study. This impact will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Reliability of Methodology

Reliability for this study was measured through the use of four examiners. Examiners were enrolled in the *Educational Planning, Policy, and Leadership* doctoral program at The College of William and Mary. Each examiner was trained by the researcher to verify the researcher's coding of long-range plans. Examiners were given four long-range plans coded by the researcher and were asked to verify the accuracy of the researcher's use of coding units and categories. Since examiners did not actually code documents but verified the coding of the researcher, inter-rater agreement ratings were not calculated. However, examiners concurred with the researcher's coding choices at a rate of 99%. The following formula was used to calculate this rate:

$$PA_o = A/n$$

Where, PA_o (proportion agreement) = 99%; A (the number of agreements between coders) = 174; and n (the total number of units the examiners verified) = 176.

Categorical Analysis of Planning Components

Question 1: Are the planning components noted in the research present in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts?

Table 9 lists the planning components that were identified in the literature base as being critical to long-range planning. Strategic planning components have been starred and are included as well.

Table 9: *Content Analysis Rubric for K-12 District Plans*

	Planning Components	FOUND? (Y)Yes (N) No
1	**Stakeholder Involvement:** Input from individuals or groups of individuals who have a vested interest in public education is included in the document. These individuals include teachers, parents, students, community members, and policymakers.	
2	**Shows Understanding of Local/State/Societal Mandates:** The document would generally meet the reasonable expectations of a locality, state, and of the society at large.	
3*	**Evidence of SWOT Analysis:** The document contains references to an external and/or internal analysis of its environment. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and/or threats have been acknowledged.	
4	**Collection of Data and Use of Measurable Performance Indicators:** The document references quantitative targets to improve organizational functions.	
5	**Clear and Compelling Vision and/or Mission:** The document prominently displays a statement that conveys an impactful future image of the school district and/or displays a statement that provides organizational purpose and direction.	
6	**Use of Data Driven Decision-Making:** The document contains themes that suggest that the school district uses quantitative or qualitative data to make key organizational decisions.	
7	**Evidence of an Effective/Coherent Organizational Design and Support Systems:** The document contains references and thematic connotations that suggest the existence of a well-designed systemic structure within the school district that would likely contribute to the successful implementation of the plan.	
8	**Evidence of Continuous Improvement:** The document suggests that the school district has a structure in place that enables it to address key and systemic organizational problems as they arise.	
9	**Identification of goals and objectives (long/short term)**	
10*	**Poised to React Effectively to Change:** The document contains evidence that the organization is flexibly positioned to maintain relevancy within its dynamic environment.	
11*	**Organizational Direction is Established:** The document contains themes that suggest that the school district is looking beyond the content of the current plan into the distant future. The document does not simply predict annual objectives.	

Yes, the component is thematically present in the document.

No, the component is not thematically present in the document

Numbers delineating long-range planning components are in plain text while those representing strategic planning components are in bold and are starred (*).

NOTES:

The rubric noted in Table 9 was used to evaluate 77 planning documents. It was found that all components were present at varying frequencies in the documents examined; specific frequencies are noted in Table 10.

Table 10: Planning Component Frequency Count for All Planning Documents

	(Total # of Plans = 77)	# of Occurrences	% of Occurrences
1	Stakeholder involvement	70	91%
2	Shows understanding of local, state, and/or societal mandates.	73	95%
3	*Evidence of partial or full SWOT analysis	59	77%
4	Collection of data and/or use of measurable performance indicators	70	91%
5	Clear and compelling vision and/or mission	61	79%
6	Use of data-driven decision making	59	77%
7	Evidence of an effective/coherent organizational design and/or support system	67	87%
8	Evidence of continuous improvement	44	57%
9	Identification of goals and objectives.	73	95%
10	*Poised to react effectively to change	24	31%
11	*Organizational direction is established	22	29%

Numbers delineating long-range planning components are in plain text while those representing strategic planning components are in bold and are starred (*).

Interestingly, eight out of eleven planning components appeared in over 75% of planning documents. The five most frequently occurring planning components were:

- Identification of goals and objectives (9)
- Shows understanding of local, state, and/or society mandates (2)
- Collection of data and/or use of measurable performance indicators (4)
- Stakeholder involvement (1)
- Evidence of an effective/coherent organizational design and/or support system (7)

Two of the three strategic planning components occurred least frequently in plans; these two components were: *poised to react effectively to change (10)* and *organizational direction is established (11)*. These components were the only two that occurred in less than fifty percent of plans.

K-12 Planning Component Congruency to Research and Related Literature

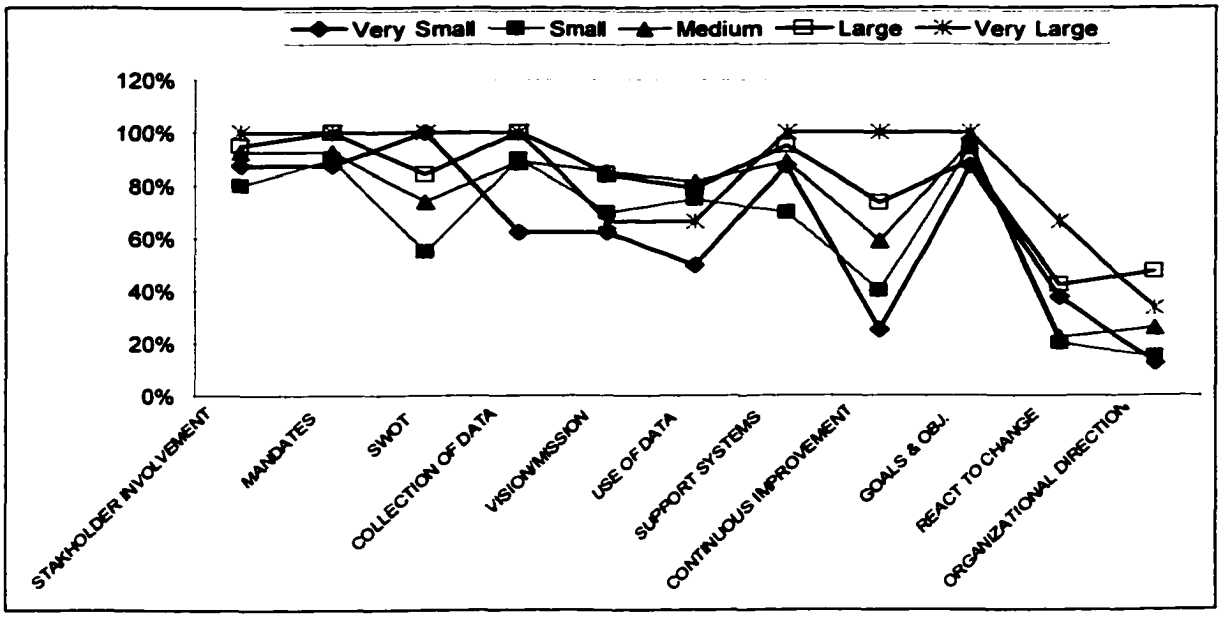
Question 2: Do the planning components noted in the research appear in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts at similar frequencies?

In order to answer this question, the researcher used the school district descriptors introduced earlier; average daily membership; the percent of students on free and reduced lunch; and per pupil costs. Planning components were examined using these descriptors and findings are provided in Tables 11, 12, and 13 and in Figures 2, 3, and 4.

Table 11: Planning Components and Average Daily Membership

ADM	Very Small			Small			Medium			Large			Very Large		
	Total # of Districts	# of Districts w/Plan Component	% of Districts w/Plan Component	Total # of Districts	# of Districts w/Plan Component	% of Districts w/Plan Component	Total # of Districts	# of Districts w/Plan Component	% of Districts w/Plan Component	Total # of Districts	# of Districts w/Plan Component	% of Districts w/Plan Component	Total # of Districts	# of Districts w/Plan Component	% of Districts w/Plan Component
1 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT	8	7	88%	20	16	80%	27	25	93%	19	18	95%	3	3	100%
2 MANDATES	8	7	88%	20	18	90%	27	25	93%	19	19	100%	3	3	100%
3 SWOT	8	8	100%	20	11	55%	27	20	74%	19	16	84%	3	3	100%
4 COLLECTION OF DATA	8	5	63%	20	18	90%	27	24	89%	19	19	100%	3	3	100%
5 VISION/MISSION	8	5	63%	20	14	70%	27	23	85%	19	16	84%	3	2	67%
6 USE OF DATA	8	4	50%	20	15	75%	27	22	81%	19	15	79%	3	2	67%
7 SUPPORT SYSTEMS	8	7	88%	20	14	70%	27	24	89%	19	18	95%	3	3	100%
8 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	8	2	25%	20	8	40%	27	16	59%	19	14	74%	3	3	100%
9 GOALS & OBJ.	8	7	88%	20	19	95%	27	26	96%	19	17	89%	3	3	100%
10 REACT TO CHANGE	8	3	38%	20	4	20%	27	6	22%	19	8	42%	3	2	67%
11 ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTION	8	1	13%	20	3	15%	27	7	26%	19	9	47%	3	1	33%

Figure 2: Planning Components and Average Daily Membership

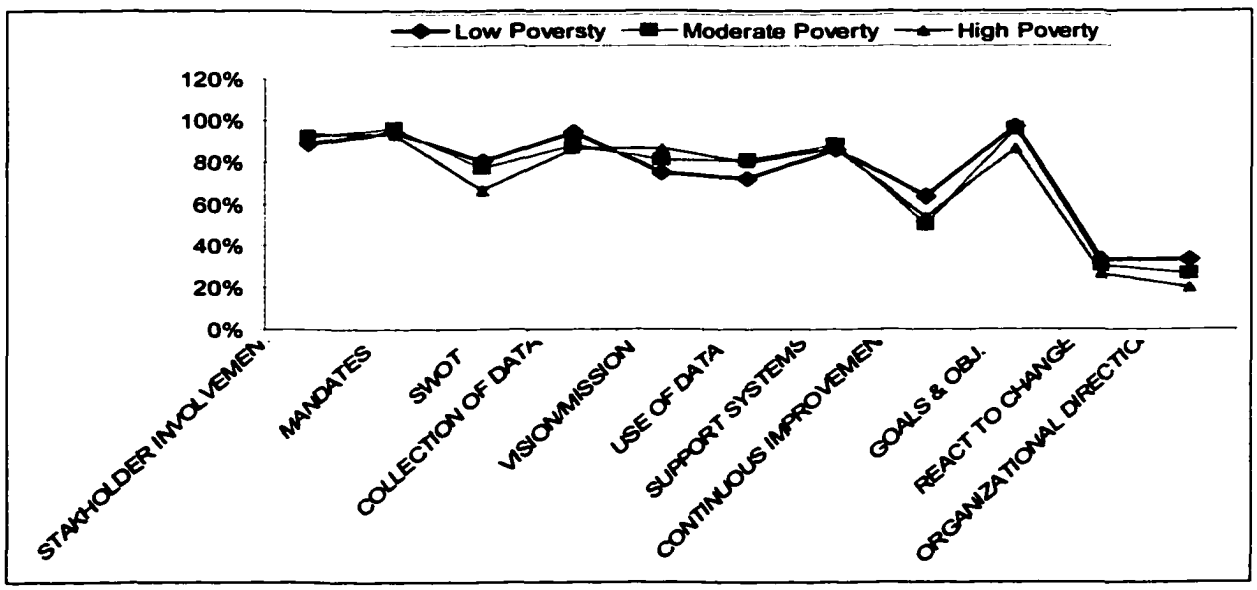


Average Daily Membership. Overall, very small, small, medium, large, and very large districts included planning components at different frequencies. While certain components such as those related to *stakeholder involvement (1); mandates (2); vision/mission (5); and goals & objectives (9)* were embraced at relatively the same level regardless of district size; some planning components were not as unanimously embraced. These components were *SWOT analysis (3); collection of data (4); use of data (6); continuous improvement (8); react to change (10) and organizational direction (11).* Inclusion of planning components related to *react to change (10)* tended to increase as the size of the school division increased. This was also noted for planning components related to *organizational direction (11)*, which appeared more frequently as the size of the district increased when very small to large districts were examined. Figure 2 indicates that there is relative consistency in the number of districts that included evidence of planning components in their planning documents. See Table 11 and Figure 2 for further details.

Table 12: Planning Components and Free and Reduced Lunch Percentages

F&R		Low Poverty			Moderate Poverty			High Poverty		
		Total # of Districts	# of Districts w/Plan Component	% of Districts w/Plan Component	Total # of Districts	# of Districts w/Plan Component	% of Districts w/Plan Component	Total # of Districts	# of Districts w/Plan Component	% of Districts w/Plan Component
1	STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT	36	32	89%	26	24	92%	15	14	93%
2	MANDATES	36	34	94%	26	25	96%	15	14	93%
3*	SWOT	36	29	81%	26	20	77%	15	10	67%
4	COLLECTION OF DATA	36	34	94%	26	23	88%	15	13	87%
5	VISION/MISSION	36	27	75%	26	21	81%	15	13	87%
6	USE OF DATA	36	26	72%	26	21	81%	15	12	80%
7	SUPPORT SYSTEMS	36	31	86%	26	23	88%	15	13	87%
8	CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	36	23	64%	26	13	50%	15	8	53%
9	GOALS & OBJ.	36	35	97%	26	25	96%	15	13	87%
10*	REACT TO CHANGE	36	12	33%	26	8	31%	15	4	27%
11*	ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTION	36	12	33%	26	7	27%	15	3	20%

Figure 3: Planning Components and Free and Reduced Lunch Percentages



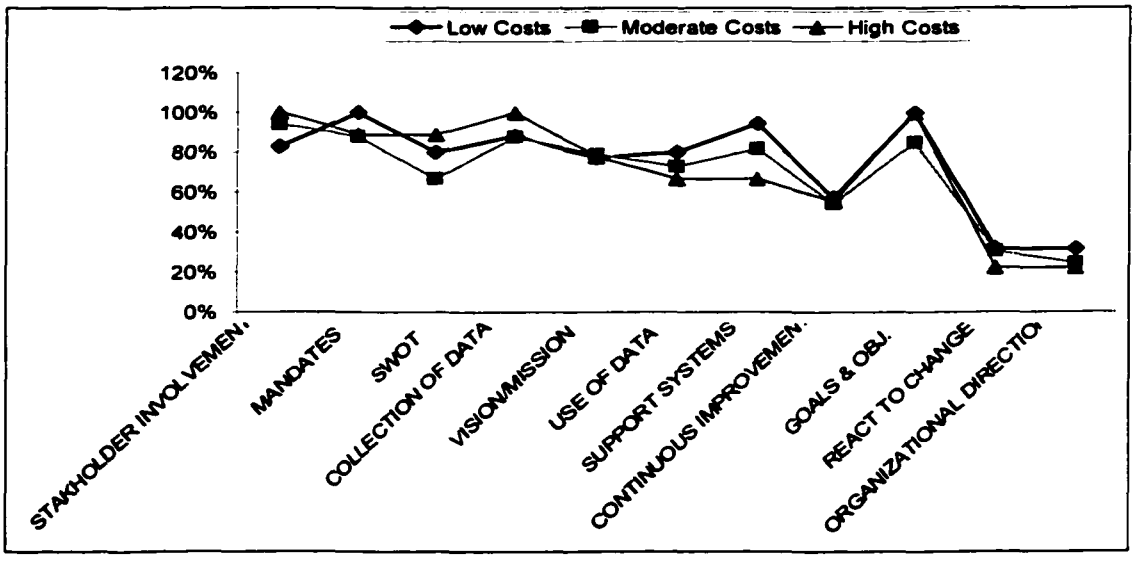
Free and Reduced Lunch. Planning components tended to appear in planning documents at the same frequency regardless of district poverty levels. However, three components tended to vary along with the poverty level of the district. These components were *collection of data (4)* and *vision/mission (5)* which occurred in higher frequencies as the district poverty level increased. However, evidence of a *SWOT analysis (3)* decreased as the poverty level of the

school district increased. Figure 3 indicates that similar numbers of districts included evidence of all planning components. See Table 12 and Figure 3 for further details.

Table 13: Planning Components and Per Pupil Costs

Per Pupil Costs	Low Costs			Moderate Costs			High Costs		
	Total # of Districts	# of Districts w/Plan Component	% of Districts w/Plan Component	Total # of Districts	# of Districts w/Plan Component	% of Districts w/Plan Component	Total # of Districts	# of Districts w/Plan Component	% of Districts w/Plan Component
1 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT	35	29	83%	33	31	94%	9	9	100%
2 MANDATES	35	35	100%	33	29	88%	9	8	89%
3* SWOT	35	28	80%	33	22	67%	9	8	89%
4 COLLECTION OF DATA	35	31	89%	33	29	88%	9	9	100%
5 VISION/MISSION	35	27	77%	33	26	79%	9	7	78%
6 USE OF DATA	35	28	80%	33	24	73%	9	6	67%
7 SUPPORT SYSTEMS	35	33	94%	33	27	82%	9	6	67%
8 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	35	20	57%	33	18	55%	9	5	56%
9 GOALS & OBJ.	35	35	100%	33	28	85%	9	9	100%
10* REACT TO CHANGE	35	11	31%	33	10	30%	9	2	22%
11* ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTION	35	11	31%	33	8	24%	9	2	22%

Figure 4: Planning Components and Per Pupil Costs



Per Pupil Costs. The frequency count of the majority of planning components remained constant regardless of per pupil costs, these included: *mandates (2); collection of data (4); vision/mission (5); continuous improvement (8); react to change (10);* and *organizational direction (11).* Three components tended to vary according to per pupil costs. The frequency count for *stakeholder involvement (1)* increased as per pupil costs increased. Use of *data (6)* and

support systems (7) decreased as costs increased. Figure 4 indicates that similar numbers of districts included evidence of all planning components. See Table 14 and Figure 3 for further details.

Two of the three strategic planning components, *react to change (10)* and *organizational direction (11),* tended to occur at the lowest frequency for all three descriptors. Since these two strategic planning components appeared infrequently in planning documents, it would appear that strategic planning as defined by Allison and Kaye (1997) was not fully embraced by school districts in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Categorical Analysis of the Content of Goals and Objectives

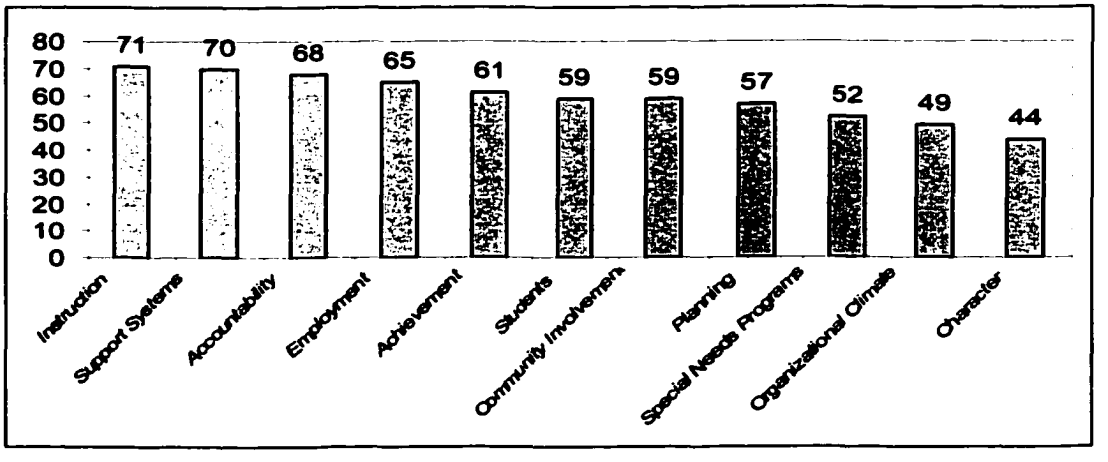
Question 3: What is the content of the goals of long-range plans in Virginia school districts?

To answer this question, the researcher analyzed all of the words used in each goal statement in each long-range plan provided by responding school districts. Two of the seventy-seven (77) districts provided the researcher with a planning document that had no clear goals. This reduced the number of plans with long-range planning goals to seventy-five (75). Words were used by the researcher as the basis for analysis. Eleven general themes emerged from the analysis. These themes were: *Instruction; Support Systems; Accountability; Employment; Achievement; Students; Community Involvement; Planning; Special Needs Programs; Organizational Climate; and Character.* The aforementioned themes are listed in Table 14 in descending order according to the frequency of inclusion in district plans.

Table 14: Themes Found in the Goals of Planning Documents

Emergent Themes (Total # of plans with long-range goals = 75)	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
Instruction	71	95%	*419*
Support Systems	70	93%	*333*
Accountability	68	91%	*411*
Employment	65	87%	*252*
Achievement	61	81%	*332*
Students	59	79%	*241*
Community Involvement	59	79%	*206*
Planning	57	76%	*293*
Special Needs Programs	52	69%	*143*
Organizational Climate	49	65%	*148*
Character	44	59%	*139*

Figure 4: Numbers of Plans Containing Themes



Instruction. Instruction appeared most often in the long-range goals examined. Seventy-one (71) of the 75 available sets of district goals that were examined referenced instruction. These references fell within several subcategories which included: *Teaching and Learning;*

Curriculum; Instructional Resources; Venues for Instruction; Coursework; Attendance and Enrollment; and Equal Access to Education. Table 15 lists specific counts for each subcategory.

Table 15: Emergent Theme: Instruction

Instruction Emergent Subcategories *(Total # of plans with long-range goals = 75)*	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
Teaching & Learning	66	87%	243
Curriculum	23	30%	46
Instructional Resources	18	24%	32
Venues for Instruction	17	22%	23
Coursework	15	20%	57
Attendance & Enrollment	7	9%	11
Equal Access to Education	5	7%	7
Total			419

Sample key words and phrases for each subcategory are listed below:

Teaching and Learning

- ... impact on ... student **instructional time**
- ... provide differentiated **instruction**
- ... acquire **knowledge** needed for education

Curriculum

- ... a sound articulate **curriculum**
- ... continue **alignment** of local curriculum
- ... maintain on-going **curriculum development**

Instructional Resources

- ... incorporate **materials**
- ... **equipment** should be available

- ... will provide **supplies**

Venues for Instruction

- ... within the **regular classroom**
- ... **placement** that increase students' potential for achieving success
- ... improve **instructional programs**

Coursework

- ... learning tests in **mathematics**
- ... **international baccalaureate** courses will be maintained
- ... generate knowledge and appreciation of **arts**

Attendance & Enrollment

- ... **enrollment** for Black and Hispanic students
- ... a forecast of **enrollment**
- ... create schools that attract **enrollment** of all students

Equal Access to Education

- ... will adopt a series of instructional **accommodation** plans
- ... will provide **equitable** resources to enable each student
- ... will provide **equality** of opportunity

Support Systems. Support Systems was the second most frequently occurring theme in the long-range goals examined. Seventy (70) of the 75 sets of available district goals referenced support systems; these references fell within the following subcategories: *Facilities and Grounds; School District; Technology; Administration & Leadership; Funding; Operations; Policies & Procedures; Departments; Transportation; and External Support Systems.* Table 16 lists specific counts for each subcategory.

Table 16: Emergent Theme: Support Systems

Support Systems Emergent Subcategories *(Total # of Plans with long-range goals = 75)*	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
Facilities & Grounds	42	55%	86
School District	38	50%	85
Technology	40	53%	72
Administration & Leadership	15	20%	24
Funding	14	18%	18
Operations	10	13%	14
Policies & Procedures	12	16%	14
Departments	6	8%	7
Transportation	6	8%	7
External Support Systems	3	4%	6
Total			333

Sample key words and phrases for each subcategory are listed below:

Facilities & Grounds

- ... provide optimal **school facilities**
- ... upgrades for [all] renovations and **new school construction**
- ... to improve **school facilities**

School District

- ... the **school division** must be able to prepare all children to be lifelong learners
- ... the **school system** will recruit and retain highly qualified teachers
- ... develop a **division wide** public relations parent involvement plan

Technology

- ... optimize **technology**
- ... bring [all] schools up to (a certain standard as related to) their **technology profiles**

- ... the division will ensure that sufficient **technology** tools are available

Administration & Leadership

- ... to provide **leadership** for curriculum development
- ... central office **administrative** ... department will provide innovative and quality products and services
- ... **leadership** development for current and potential (school district functions)

Funding

- ... will seek **multiple funding sources**
- ... to seek appropriate **financial resources**
- ... continuing with the **budget** process

Operations

- ... (school district provides) administration, transportation, **operations** and maintenance
- ... improve **operational** capabilities
- ... improvement shall be sought through a community that is informed and involved in school **operations**

Policies & Procedures

- ... make dedication to highest quality, highest aspirations and highest results a cornerstone of [all] **policy**
- ... establish **policies** and programs that provide the very best opportunities possible to ensure the successful education of all our students
- ... apprise the citizens of the regulations and **policies** governing the operation of the school system

Department

- ... food services **departments** will provide innovative and quality

Transportation

- ... (a) learning environment exists on [all] school grounds and on [all] **school buses**
- ... will provide **transportation** for students that is safe and efficient
- ... will provide adequate ... transportation

External Support

- ... to encourage continued positive **interaction** between the school system and other agencies
- ... collaboration of **regional services**
- ... to establish guidelines for **regional** cooperation

Accountability. Accountability was the third most frequently occurring theme in the long-range goals examined. Sixty-eight (68) of the 75 available sets of district goals that were examined referenced accountability. References fell within the following subcategories: *Quality of Schooling; Productiveness; Disaggregation of Data; Federal and State Mandates; Assessment; and the District as the Responsible Party.* See Table 17 for specific counts.

Table 17: Emergent Theme: Accountability

Accountability Emergent Subcategories *(Total # of Plans with long-range goals = 75)*	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
Quality of Schooling	43	57%	97
Productiveness	44	58%	89
Disaggregation of Data	38	50%	83
Federal & State Mandates	29	38%	66
Assessment	18	24%	45
Division as the Responsible Party	15	20%	31
Total			411

Sample key words and phrases for each subcategory are listed below:

Quality of Schooling

- ... develop a **comprehensive** instructional plan
- ... to retain its **high quality** of services
- ... to meet **rigorous** graduation requirements

Productiveness

- ...plan **effectively** to meet the evolving needs of students
- ... **maximize** its efforts to be competitive in the national job market
- ... to develop a(n).... **efficient** and manageable system

Disaggregation of Data

- ...**each** student .... Succeed in the context of the school
- ...all students **regardless** of ability, creed, gender, geographic location

Federal & State Mandates

- ... maintain **full accreditation** of all division schools
- ... pass the **Standards of Learning** Algebra I test
- ... meet and exceeding state and national **standards**

Assessment

- ... to incorporate authentic **assessment**
- ... **measurable indicators** of achievement
- ... test **scores**

Division as the Responsible Party

- ... staff **accountable** for student progress
- ... the school board **recognizes** its responsibility in providing ... the highest quality educational program
- ... an educational environment that is conducive to learning and **appropriate** to instructional expectations

Employment. Employment ranked fourth in frequency. Sixty-five (65) of the 75 available sets of district goals referenced employment. References fell within the following subcategories: *General Workforce; Hiring Practices; Professionalism; Training; Teachers; Administrators; and Salary.* See Table 18 for specific counts.

Table 18: Emergent Theme: Employment

Employment Emergent Subcategories *(Total # of Plans with long-range goals = 75)*	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
General Workforce	49	64%	99
Hiring Practices	35	46%	73
Professionalism	20	26%	24
Training	15	20%	23
Teachers	16	21%	18
Administrators	7	9%	8
Salary	5	7%	7
Total			252

Sample key words and phrases for each subcategory are listed below:

General Workforce

- ... achieve the highest possible standards ... in terms of **career** and technical education
- ... other **school based personnel** will increase their capacity to
- ... sustain a highly qualified **staff** for all positions

Hiring Practices

- ... to **retain** its high quality of services
- ... the school system will **recruit** ... highly qualified teachers ....
- ... attracting developing and **retaining** professionals

Professionalism

- ... retain quality staff that is **well trained**
- ... sustain **highly qualified** staff for all positions

Training

- ... provide effective **staff training**
- ... evaluate a **staff development** program
- ... schedules and **in-service training** for support personnel

Teacher

- ... recruit and retain **competent teachers**
- ... ensure that **educators** are prepared to adapt
- ... scores will narrow ... through training and support of... **teachers**

Administrators

- ... qualified teachers, **administrators**, and support staff
- ... retain teachers and **administrators**
- ... through training and support **administrators** and teachers

Salary

- ... to seek competitive **salaries**
- ... improve teacher **salaries**
- ... **pay schedules** ... must receive the same commitment

Achievement. Achievement ranked fifth in frequency. Sixty-one (61) of the 75 available sets of district goals referenced achievement. References fell within the following subcategories: *Performance on Tests; High Relative Performance; Achieve Personal Long-Range Goals; Improve Achievement; Achieve School Related Short-Range Goals; Complete Schooling; and Student Ability Levels.* See Table 19 for specific counts.

Table 19: Emergent Subcategories-Achievement

Achievement Emergent Subcategories *(Total # of Plans with long-range goals = 75)*	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
Performance on Test	42	55%	115
High Relative Performance	31	41%	57
Achieve Personal Long-Range Goals	28	37%	47
Improve Achievement	25	33%	45
Achieve School Related Short-Range Goals	24	32%	39
Complete Schooling	12	16%	17
Student Ability Levels	9	12%	12
Total			332

Sample key words and phrases for each subcategory are listed below:

Performance on Tests

- ... students scoring **above** the national average
- ... will increase by **ten percent**
- ... exceed the state **average**

High Relative Performance

- ... achieve the **highest** possible standard
- ... maximize its efforts to be **competitive** in the national job market
- ... **high expectations** for academic achievement

Achieve Personal Long-Range Goals

- ... achieve success in their individual **futures**
- ... to be **lifelong** learners

Improve Achievement

- ... in order to **raise** student achievement
- ... **increasing** opportunities for ... students
- ... will demonstrate **rising** achievement

Achieve School Related Short-Range Goals

- ... **master** basic skills and fundamental processes
- ... each student will **attain** grade level literacy
- ... **progressing** according to their IEP goal

Completing School

- ... preparing students for **college**
- ... our students **graduate**
- ... expand career/technical **certified** (programs)

Student Ability Levels

- ... develop intellectual **abilities**
- ...comparable to their level of **ability**
- ... serve a broader **range** of students with disabilities

Students. Students was one of two themes that ranked sixth in frequency. Fifty-nine (59) of the 75 sets of available district goals referenced students. References fell within the following two subcategories: *General* and *Diversity*. See Table 20 for specific counts.

Table 20: Emergent Theme: Students

Students Emergent Subcategories *(Total # of Plans with long-range goals = 75)*	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
Students in General	56	74%	206
Diversity	16	21%	35
Total			241

Sample key words and phrases for each subcategory are listed below:

Students in General

- ... plan which support **student** achievement
- ... to help **young people** make responsible (decisions)
- ... meet the needs of **students**

Diversity

- ... the gap between **minority** and **majority** students scores will narrow
- ... users of technology knowledgeable of various **racial** and **ethnic** cultures
- ... live and work in a community that uses its **diversity**

Community Involvement. Community involvement also ranked sixth in frequency. Fifty-nine (59) of the 75 sets of available district goals referenced community involvement in some way. References fell within the following subcategories: *Stakeholders; Developing Partnerships with the Community; Clear Line of Communication; School Board Relations with the Public; Business & Industry; and Cultural Influences Within the Community.* See Table 21 for specific counts.

Table 21: Emergent Theme: Community Involvement

Community Involvement Emergent Subcategories *(Total # of Plans with long-range goals = 75)*	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
Stakeholders	47	62%	103
Developing Partnerships with the Community	26	34%	32
Clear Lines of Communication	21	28%	23
School Board/Public Relations	10	13%	22
Business & Industry	12	16%	14
Cultural Influences within the Community	10	13%	12
Total			206

Sample key words and phrases for each subcategory are listed below:

Stakeholders

- ... members of the **community** will be actively involved
- ... the community, **parents**, and students to help young people ...
- ... **draw on multiple stakeholders** in the community

Developing Partnerships with the Community

- ... **working together**, we will ensure
- ... parents **input** is essential
- ... maintaining **full partnership** with the community

Clear Lines of Communication

- ... to enhance **communication** ...
- ... use broader internal and external **communication channels**
- ... given in every **conversation** about its students

School Board/Public Relations

- ... **school board** recognizes the need to
- ... importance of **public support**
- ... **public involvement** is a fundamental component of meaningful planning for our schools

Business & Industry

- ... be competitive in the national **job market**
- ... parent, **business**, and community participation
- ... further develop ... **business** partnerships

Cultural Influences within the Community

- ... local **heritage**
- ... reflect **cultural** diversity
- ...knowledgeable of various racial and ethnic **cultures**

Planning. Planning was ranked seventh in frequency. Fifty-seven (57) of 75 plans referenced planning in some way. References fell within the following subcategories: *Planning for Change; Prioritization; Systemic Focus of Planning; Planning in General; Maintaining the Status Quo; Long-Range Planning; Short-Range Planning; and Planning & Time.* See Table 22 for specific counts.

Table 22: Emergent Theme: Planning

Planning Emergent Subcategories *(Total # of Plans with long-range goals = 75)*	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
Planning for Change	32	42%	65
Prioritization	28	37%	58
Systemic Focus on Planning	30	39%	56
Planning in General	23	30%	44
Maintaining the Status Quo	22	29%	27
Long-Range Planning	11	14%	18
Short-Range Planning	12	16%	15
Planning & Time	10	13%	10
Total			293

Sample key words and phrases for each subcategory are listed below:

Planning for Change

- ... **implement** quality curricula
- ... **improve** operational capabilities
- ... in this time of **accelerated change**

Prioritization

- ... provide students with a **balanced** educational program
- ... allocation of financial resources based upon **identified** results
- ... a primary **focus** will be in reading, math, and oral communication

Systemic Focus on Planning

- ... evaluate a staff development program which supports the ... schools **mission**
- ... individual schools will operate in feeder **patterns** that provide consistent comprehensive opportunities
- ... to provide a **framework** for shared resources that address the needs of the workplace

Planning in General

- ... will identify and approve a coordinated and flexible **plan**
- ... **planning** a system of ongoing program improvement
- ... update the vocational **plan**

Maintaining the Status Quo

- ... course will be **maintained**
- ... **sustain** highly qualified staff
- ... **keep** open communication with the community

Long-Range Planning

- ... school enrollment **forecast**
- ... implement a comprehensive **long-range** facilities plan
- ... recognizes its responsibility in providing **long term strategies**

Short-Range Planning

- ... new school construction meet **current** standards
- ... to plan for **short range** ... needs
- ... provide an instructional program that is relevant to the **short term** ... needs of our students

Planning & Time

- ... continue to provide efficient, accurate, and **timely** accounting services
- ... we will ensure the best use of **time**

Special Needs Programs. Special needs programs ranked eighth in frequency. Fifty-two (52) of the 75 sets of available district goals referenced special needs programs. References fell within the following subcategories: *General Programs; Health & Physical Fitness; High Achievers; Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, & Violence; Special Education; Vocational Education; Counseling; and Early Childhood Education.* See Table 23 for specific counts.

Table 23: Emergent Theme: Special Needs Programs

Special Needs Programs Emergent Subcategories *(Total # of Plans with long-range goals = 75)*	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
General	40	53%	75
Health & Physical Fitness	17	22%	24
High Achievers	7	9%	11
Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, & Violence	5	7%	9
Special Education	6	8%	9
Vocational Education	6	8%	7
Counseling	4	5%	4
Early Childhood & Preschool	4	5%	4
Total			143

Sample key words and phrases for each subcategory are listed below:

General

- ... to provide program of **adult education**
- ... increasing opportunities for **Title I students**

- ... (use of) **career education program** to prepare all students for the world of work.

Health & Physical Fitness

- ... to enhance ... **physical education**
- ... broadening ... **athletic** activities
- ... (to provide activities that support) **personal wellness**

High Achievers

- ... to enrich the experiences and opportunities available to **gifted and talented** students
- ... juniors and seniors enrolled in **advanced placement**
- ... to provide supplemental experiences for students in our **gifted program**

Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, & Violence

- ... (reduce) the rate of recidivism for suspensions due to acts of **violence**
- ... provide **drug, alcohol, tobacco,** sexual harassment and weapon free work places
- ... (make) decisions concerning **alcohol, tobacco** and other **drugs**

Special Education

- ... increasing **special education** students' living skills and opportunities
- ... (meet the needs of) **exceptional needs** (students) within the regular classroom
- ... **non-base school** programs will decrease by five percent

Vocational Education

- ... to provide competitive ... **vocational education** (programs)
- ... to emphasize workplace and **vocational program options** for students
- ... to promote student ... **vocational interests**

Counseling

- ... improve student ... **guidance** initiatives

- ... will provide **counseling** services that motivate students

Early Childhood & Preschool

- ... to provide a **preschool** program for all four-year-old children
- ... to enhance and develop **early childhood programs**
- ... implement a district wide **early intervention** program

Organizational Climate. Organizational climate ranked ninth in frequency. Forty-nine (49) of the 75 sets of available district goals referenced organizational climate. References fell within the following subcategories: *General Climate; Safety & Discipline; and Positive Climate.* See Table 24 for specific counts.

Table 24: Emergent Theme: Organizational Climate

Organizational Climate Emergent Subcategories *(Total # of Plans with long-range goals = 75)*	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
General Climate	34	45%	55
Safety & Discipline	34	45%	60
Positive Climate	22	29%	33
Total			148

Sample key words and phrases for each subcategory are listed below:

General Climate

- ... succeed in the context of the school and its **climate**
- ... in an inclusive, dynamic **school environment**
- .. to improve the **school culture**

Safety & Discipline

- ... enhance **safety**

- ...work in a **safe** and nurturing ... environment
- ... to ensure a **bully free** environment

Positive Climate

- ... an environment **conducive** to learning
- ... provide a ... caring learning environment
- ... to foster a positive learning environment

Character. Character ranked tenth in frequency. Forty-four of 75 sets of available district goals referenced character. References fell within the following subcategories: *Preferred Personality Traits; Citizenship; Reinforcing Traditional Values; Developing a Positive Self-Concept; and Cooperativeness*. See Table 25 for specific counts.

Table 25: Emergent Theme: Character

Character Emergent Subcategories *(Total # of Plans with long-range goals = 75)*	Number of Plans Containing Theme	Percent of Plans Containing Theme	Total Number of Thematic Words Found in Plans
Citizenship	32	42%	47
Cooperativeness	9	12%	9
Preferred Personality Traits	27	36%	48
Developing a Positive Self-Concept	10	13%	12
Reinforcing Traditional Values	14	18%	23
Total			139

Sample key words and phrases for each subcategory are listed below:

Citizenship

- ... develop **involvement**
- ... appreciate the basic principles of **citizenship**
- ... develop ethical **standards of behavior**

Cooperativeness

- ... schools to work **cooperatively** with members of the community
- ... Partnerships will work **collaboratively** with community resources
- ... establish guidelines for regional **cooperation** ...

Preferred Personality Traits

- ... generate knowledge and **appreciation** of arts ...
- ... develop **personal habits** for continuing physical health
- ... develop **trusting** mutual relationships

Developing a Positive Self-Concept

- ... realistic **self-image**
- ... acquire a sense of **personal worth**
- ... develop **intellectual** abilities

Reinforcing Traditional Values

- ...develop **ethical** standards of behavior
- ... established core **values**
- ... demonstrate ... pillars of **character**

In general, the eleven general themes of *Instruction, Support Systems, Accountability, Employment, Achievement, Students, Community Involvement, Planning, Special Needs Programs, Organizational Climate,* and *Character* were noted in plans. These themes summarize the general content of long-range plans in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Categorical Analysis of K-12 Planning Component Similarities

Question 4: Is the content of K-12 long-range goals and objectives similar in Virginia school districts?

The researcher used three descriptors to quantify the characteristics of responding school districts: average daily membership; percent of students on free and reduced lunch; and per pupil costs. These descriptors measure district size, district poverty, and district spending, respectively. The occurrences of themes were discussed using each descriptor as a basis for comparison.

District Size. Average daily membership is a traditional measure of district size. In this study, there was evidence that interest in emergent planning categories and subcategories often varied by district size. Only the planning theme/category of *Instruction/Teaching & Learning* was included in the majority of long-range plans regardless of the size of the district. For many other themes and categories, inclusion in planning goals seemed to vary along with the size of the district. Table 23 provides data concerning the relationship of planning themes and categories to district size.

Table 26: District Size

Emergent Themes (Total # of Plans = 78)	Number of Plans Containing Theme	District Size														
		V.Large			Large			Medium			Small			V.Small		
		Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme
Instruction																
Teaching & Learning	66	3	3	100%	19	13	68%	27	24	89%	20	19	95%	8	7	88%
Curriculum	23	3	1	33%	19	4	21%	27	9	33%	20	4	20%	8	5	63%
Instructional Resources	18	3	1	33%	19	5	26%	27	6	22%	20	1	5%	8	5	63%
Venues for Instruction	17	3	1	33%	19	1	5%	27	8	30%	20	3	15%	8	4	50%
Coursework	15	3	1	33%	19	1	5%	27	7	26%	20	0	0%	8	6	75%
Attendance & Enrollment	7	3	1	33%	19	2	11%	27	2	7%	20	1	5%	8	1	13%
Equal Access to Education	5	3	1	33%	19	0	0%	27	2	7%	20	0	0%	8	2	25%
Accountability																
Quality of Schooling	43	3	2	67%	19	13	68%	27	12	44%	20	10	50%	8	5	63%
Productiveness	44	3	3	100%	19	13	68%	27	12	44%	20	13	65%	8	2	25%
Dissaggregate Data	38	3	1	33%	19	9	47%	27	14	52%	20	11	55%	8	3	38%
Federal & State Mandates	29	3	1	33%	19	5	26%	27	13	48%	20	6	30%	8	4	50%
Assessment	18	3	1	33%	19	4	21%	27	7	26%	20	6	30%	8	0	0%
Division as the Responsible Party	15	3	1	33%	19	5	26%	27	4	15%	20	4	20%	8	1	13%
Support Systems																
Facilities & Grounds	42	3	2	67%	19	8	42%	27	11	41%	20	15	75%	8	6	75%
School District	38	3	1	33%	19	10	53%	27	12	44%	20	12	60%	8	3	38%
Technology-Infrastructure & Maintenance 65-38	40	3	3	100%	19	8	42%	27	13	48%	20	12	60%	8	4	50%
Administration & Leadership	15	3	1	33%	19	1	5%	27	6	22%	20	5	25%	8	2	25%
Funding	14	3	1	33%	19	4	21%	27	6	22%	20	3	15%	8	0	0%
Operations	10	3	0	0%	19	2	11%	27	3	11%	20	5	25%	8	0	0%
Policies & Procedures	12	3	1	33%	19	2	11%	27	4	15%	20	3	15%	8	2	25%
Departments	6	3	0	0%	19	0	0%	27	3	11%	20	2	10%	8	1	13%
Transportation	6	3	0	0%	19	1	5%	27	3	11%	20	1	5%	8	1	13%
External Support Systems	3	3	0	0%	19	0	0%	27	1	4%	20	1	5%	8	1	13%
Achievement																
Performance on Test	42	3	2	67%	19	12	63%	27	14	52%	20	11	55%	8	3	38%
High Relative Performance	31	3	1	33%	19	7	37%	27	12	44%	20	9	45%	8	2	25%
Achieve Personal Long-Range Goals	28	3	1	33%	19	7	37%	27	9	33%	20	9	45%	8	2	25%
Improvement	25	3	2	67%	19	7	37%	27	6	22%	20	8	40%	8	2	25%
Achieve School Related Short-Range Goals	24	3	2	67%	19	7	37%	27	10	37%	20	4	20%	8	1	13%
Complete Schooling	12	3	1	33%	19	2	11%	27	3	11%	20	6	30%	8	0	0%
Student Ability Levels	9	3	1	33%	19	1	5%	27	3	11%	20	4	20%	8	0	0%
Planning																
Planning for Change	31	3	1	33%	19	8	42%	27	9	33%	20	9	45%	8	5	63%
Prioritization	28	3	1	33%	19	5	26%	27	11	41%	20	8	40%	8	3	38%
Systemic Focus of Planning	30	3	1	33%	19	6	32%	27	10	37%	20	7	35%	8	4	50%
General	23	3	1	33%	19	4	21%	27	9	33%	20	8	40%	8	1	13%
Maintaining the Status Quo	22	3	1	33%	19	7	37%	27	6	22%	20	4	20%	8	4	50%
Long-Range Planning	11	3	0	0%	19	4	21%	27	4	15%	20	3	15%	8	2	25%
Short-Range Planning	12	3	1	33%	19	1	5%	27	3	11%	20	5	25%	8	2	25%
Planning & Time	10	3	0	0%	19	3	16%	27	2	7%	20	3	15%	8	2	25%

Table 26: District Size *(Continued)*

		District Size														
Emergent Themes (Total # of Plans = 78)	Number of Plans Containing Theme	V.Large			Large			Medium			Small			V.Small		
		Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme
Employment																
General Workforce	49	3	1	33%	19	11	58%	27	21	78%	20	13	65%	8	3	38%
Hiring Practices	35	3	2	67%	19	10	53%	27	9	33%	20	11	55%	8	3	38%
Professionalism	20	3	0	0%	19	4	21%	27	6	22%	20	8	40%	8	2	25%
Trainiing	15	3	2	67%	19	3	16%	27	6	22%	20	4	20%	8	0	0%
Teachers	16	3	1	33%	19	2	11%	27	6	22%	20	6	30%	8	1	13%
Administrators	7	3	1	33%	19	2	11%	27	3	11%	20	1	5%	8	0	0%
Salary	5	3	0	0%	19	0	0%	27	2	7%	20	3	15%	8	0	0%
Students																
General	56	3	2	67%	19	14	74%	27	20	74%	20	16	80%	8	4	50%
Diversity	16	3	3	100%	19	4	21%	27	6	22%	20	2	10%	8	1	13%
Community Involvement																
Stakeholders	47	3	0	0%	19	13	68%	27	16	59%	20	13	65%	8	5	63%
Developing Partnerships with the Community	26	3	1	33%	19	8	42%	27	5	19%	20	8	40%	8	4	50%
Clear Lines of Communication	21	3	1	33%	19	5	26%	27	8	30%	20	5	25%	8	2	25%
School Board Relations with the Public	10	3	0	0%	19	1	5%	27	3	11%	20	6	30%	8	0	0%
Business & Industry	12	3	0	0%	19	5	26%	27	3	11%	20	2	10%	8	2	25%
Cultural Influences within the Community	10	3	1	33%	19	3	16%	27	2	7%	20	3	15%	8	1	13%
Special Needs Programs																
General Programs	40	3	1	33%	19	7	37%	27	11	41%	20	15	75%	8	6	75%
Health & Physical Fitness	17	3	1	33%	19	4	21%	27	4	15%	20	5	25%	8	3	38%
High Achievers	7	3	1	33%	19	0	0%	27	4	15%	20	1	5%	8	1	13%
Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, & Violence	5	3	1	33%	19	1	5%	27	0	0%	20	2	10%	8	1	13%
Special Education	6	3	1	33%	19	0	0%	27	1	4%	20	4	20%	8	0	0%
Vocational Education	6	3	0	0%	19	1	5%	27	1	4%	20	3	15%	8	1	13%
Counseling	4	3	0	0%	19	1	5%	27	2	7%	20	0	0%	8	1	13%
Early Childhood & Preschool	4	3	0	0%	19	1	5%	27	1	4%	20	1	5%	8	1	13%
Organizational Climate																
General	34	3	2	67%	19	7	37%	27	12	44%	20	10	50%	8	3	38%
Safety & Discipline	34	3	2	67%	19	8	42%	27	10	37%	20	12	60%	8	2	25%
Positive Climate	22	3	1	33%	19	5	26%	27	8	30%	20	6	30%	8	2	25%
Character																
Citizenship	32	3	3	100%	19	8	42%	27	11	41%	20	9	45%	8	1	13%
Cooperativeness	9	3	0	0%	19	1	5%	27	4	15%	20	1	5%	8	3	38%
Preferred Personality Traits	27	3	3	100%	19	5	26%	27	11	41%	20	7	35%	8	1	13%
Developing a Positive Self-Concept	10	3	1	33%	19	2	11%	27	3	11%	20	3	15%	8	1	13%
Reinforcing Traditional Values	14	3	0	0%	19	2	11%	27	6	22%	20	5	25%	8	1	13%

Very large districts (average daily membership = 40,000 or more students) and large districts (average daily membership = 10,000 and 39,999 students) tended to include the following themes/categories in their objectives at high frequencies:

- *Instruction/Teaching & Learning;*

- *Accountability/Quality of Schooling;*
- *Accountability/Productiveness;*
- *Achievement/Performance on Tests;*
- *Employment/Hiring Practices;*
- *Students/Students in General.*

Larger districts were less likely to include the following themes/categories:

- *Support Systems/Departments;*
- *Support Systems/Transportation;*
- *Support Systems/External Support Systems;*
- *Planning/Planning & Time;*
- *Employment/Salary;*
- *Special Needs Programs/Vocational Education;*
- *Special Needs Programs/Counseling;*
- *Special Needs Programs/Early Childhood Education & Preschool;*
- *Character/Cooperativeness.*

Medium size districts tended to embrace many planning themes and categories with an equal fervor. With this being the case, only two themes stood out as being meaningfully embraced by medium sized districts, these two themes were: *Employment/General Workforce and Students/Students in General.* Other planning themes/categories that were embraced by medium sized school districts included: *Accountability/Disaggregation of Data; Achievement/Performance on Tests; and Community Involvement/Stakeholders.* Medium sized districts tended to be less interested in *Special Needs Programs* that addressed *Drugs, Alcohol,*

Tobacco, & Violence, Special Education, Vocational Education, and *Early Childhood Education.*

Small districts tended to place emphasis on *Support Systems/School District* and *Support Systems/Technology* while very small districts tended to place more emphasis on planning categories related to the theme of *Instruction.* Both very small and small districts focused heavily on *Support Systems/Facilities and Grounds.* Small district planning goals focused on *Employment/General Workforce; Students/Students in General; Community Involvement/Stakeholders; Special Needs Programs/General Programs* and *Organizational Climate/Safety & Discipline.* While very small district planning goals focused on *Planning/Planning for Change; Community Involvement/Stakeholders;* and *Special Needs Programs/General Programs.* Interestingly, as district size increased, interest in *performance on tests* generally increased as well. As district size increased, concern for *general special needs programs* decreased. Also, medium and small districts were the only two groups that included verbiage related to salary in their goal statement. See Table 23 for further data concerning the relationship of planning themes and categories to district size.

District Poverty. The percent of students on free and reduced lunch is a traditional measure of district poverty. While the inclusion of certain themes in long-range goals appeared to be related to this measure to some extent, it did not affect the inclusion of several themes within planning goals. For instance, all districts, regardless of free and reduced lunch percentages, focused on *Instruction/Teaching & Learning; Support Systems/Technology; Accountability/Productiveness; Students/In General;* and *Community Involvement/Stakeholders.* Table 24 provides data concerning the relationship of planning themes and categories to district poverty.

Table 27: District Poverty

		Free & Reduced Lunch								
Emergent Themes	# of Plans Containing Theme	High Poverty			Moderate Poverty			Low Poverty		
(Total # of Plan Goals = 76)		Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme
Instruction										
Teaching & Learning		15	9	60%	26	23	88%	36	30	83%
Coursework		15	1	7%	26	7	27%	36	7	19%
Curriculum		15	0	0%	26	11	42%	36	10	28%
Instructional Resources		15	3	20%	26	6	23%	36	9	25%
Attendance & Enrollment		15	3	20%	26	1	4%	36	3	8%
Venues for Instruction		15	2	13%	26	9	35%	36	6	17%
Equal Access to Education		15	2	13%	26	1	4%	36	2	6%
		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Support Systems		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Facilities & Grounds		15	7	47%	26	16	62%	36	19	53%
School District		15	7	47%	26	13	50%	36	18	50%
Technology-Infrastructure & Maintenance		15	8	53%	26	13	50%	36	19	53%
Administration & Leadership		15	1	7%	26	7	27%	36	7	19%
Funding		15	1	7%	26	5	19%	36	8	22%
Operations		15	0	0%	26	4	15%	36	6	17%
Policies & Procedures		15	1	7%	26	6	23%	36	5	14%
Departments		15	2	13%	26	1	4%	36	3	8%
Transportation		15	0	0%	26	2	8%	36	4	11%
External Support Systems		15	1	7%	26	1	4%	36	1	3%
		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Accountability		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Quality of Schooling		15	8	53%	26	12	46%	36	23	64%
Productiveness		15	10	67%	26	13	50%	36	19	53%
Dissaggregate Data		15	7	47%	26	14	54%	36	16	44%
Federal & State Mandates		15	2	13%	26	13	50%	36	13	36%
Assessment		15	5	33%	26	9	35%	36	4	11%
Division as the Responsible Party		15	3	20%	26	4	15%	36	8	22%
		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Employment		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
General Workforce		15	7	47%	26	18	69%	36	24	67%
Hiring Practices		15	7	47%	26	12	46%	36	16	44%
Professionalism		15	3	20%	26	7	27%	36	10	28%
Traininig		15	0	0%	26	4	15%	36	11	31%
Teachers		15	2	13%	26	6	23%	36	8	22%
Administrators		15	1	7%	26	1	4%	36	5	14%
Salary		15	0	0%	26	3	12%	36	2	6%
		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Achievement		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Performance on Test		15	10	67%	26	11	42%	36	21	58%
High Relative Performance		15	7	47%	26	9	35%	36	15	42%
Achieve Personal Long-Range Goals		15	4	27%	26	9	35%	36	15	42%
Improvement		15	8	53%	26	9	35%	36	8	22%
Achieve School Related Short-Range Goals		15	3	20%	26	6	23%	36	14	39%
Complete Schooling		15	2	13%	26	3	12%	36	7	19%
Student Ability Levels		15	0	0%	26	4	15%	36	5	14%
		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Students		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Students in General		15	12	80%	26	18	69%	36	26	72%
Diversity		15	3	20%	26	7	27%	36	6	17%
		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Community Involvement		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Stakholders		15	11	73%	26	17	65%	36	19	53%
Developing Partnerships with the Community		15	6	40%	26	6	23%	36	14	39%
Clearl Lines of Communication		15	6	40%	26	6	23%	36	9	25%
The School Board Relations with the Public		15	1	7%	26	6	23%	36	3	8%
Business & Industry		15	2	13%	26	5	19%	36	5	14%
Cultural Influences within the Community		15	2	13%	26	4	15%	36	4	11%

Table 27: District Poverty *(Continued)*

Emergent Themes (Total # of Plan Goals = 76)	# of Plans Containing Theme	Free & Reduced Lunch: High Poverty — Total Number of Respondents	High Poverty — Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	High Poverty — Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Moderate Poverty — Total Number of Respondents	Moderate Poverty — Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Moderate Poverty — Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Low Poverty — Total Number of Respondents	Low Poverty — Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Low Poverty — Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme
Planning		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Planning for Change		15	9	60%	26	11	42%	36	12	33%
Prioritization		15	4	27%	26	9	35%	36	15	42%
Systemic Focus of Planning		15	5	33%	26	11	42%	36	14	39%
General		15	4	27%	26	8	31%	36	11	31%
Maintaining the Status Quo		15	2	13%	26	8	31%	36	12	33%
Long-Range Planning		15	3	20%	26	2	8%	36	6	17%
Short-Range Planning		15	0	0%	26	7	27%	36	5	14%
Planning & Time		15	2	13%	26	4	15%	36	4	11%
		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Special Needs Programs		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
General Programs		15	7	47%	26	17	65%	36	16	44%
Health & Physical Fitness		15	4	27%	26	5	19%	36	8	22%
High Achievers		15	2	13%	26	3	12%	36	2	6%
Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, & Violence		15	3	20%	26	1	4%	36	1	3%
Special Education		15	1	7%	26	3	12%	36	2	6%
Vocational Education		15	0	0%	26	3	12%	36	3	8%
Counseling		15	1	7%	26	1	4%	36	2	6%
Early Childhood & Preschool		15	0	0%	26	3	12%	36	1	3%
		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Organizational Climate		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Climate		15	7	47%	26	13	50%	36	14	39%
Safety & Discipline		15	6	40%	26	10	38%	36	16	44%
Positive Climate		15	2	13%	26	8	31%	36	12	33%
		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Character		15		0%	26		0%	36		0%
Citizenship		15	5	33%	26	11	42%	36	16	44%
Cooperativeness		15	3	20%	26	3	12%	36	3	8%
Preferred Personality Traits		15	4	27%	26	10	38%	36	13	36%
Developing a Positive Self-Concept		15	1	7%	26	5	19%	36	4	11%
Reinforcing Traditional Values		15	1	7%	26	9	35%	36	4	11%

However, interest in planning themes and categories varied by the percent of students on free and reduced lunch in other areas. First, high poverty districts tended to focus on *Achievement/Performance; Achievement/Improvement;* and *Planning/Planning for Change.* Moderate poverty districts were more interested in *Support Systems/Facilities & Grounds*; *Accountability/Disaggregation of Data; Accountability/Federal & State Mandates, Employment/General Workforce, Special Needs Programs/ General,* and *Organizational Climate/General.* Low poverty districts were pretty well aligned with their high and moderate poverty counterparts. However, low poverty districts tended to include less verbiage in their long-range goals regarding the following categories/subcategories: *Instruction/Equal Access to*

Education; Support Systems/External Support; Employment/Salary; Special Needs Programs/Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, & Violence; and *Special Needs/Early Childhood Education.*

Low areas of interest for high poverty districts included:

- *Instruction/Curriculum;*
- *Instruction/Equal Access to Education;*
- *Support Systems/Departments;*
- *Support Systems/ Departments;*
- *Support Systems/External Support;*
- *Employment/Training;*
- *Employment/Administrators;*
- *Special Needs Programs/ Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, & Violence;*
- *Planning/Short-Range Planning;*
- *Special Needs Programs/ Early Childhood Education.*

Finally, as district poverty levels decreased the following planning categories/subcategories tended to increase in frequency: *Support Systems/Funding; Support Systems/Operations; Achievement/Achieve Personal Long-Range Goals; Planning/Prioritization;* and *Character/Citizenship.* As district poverty levels decreased the following planning categories/subcategories tended to decrease in frequency as well: *Achievement/Improvement and Planning/Planning for Change.* See Table 24 for further details.

District Spending. Per pupil cost percentages are a traditional measure of district spending and interest in planning themes and categories often varied by this indicator. While the inclusion of certain themes in long-range goals appeared to slightly vary with this measure, many other themes/categories maintained a relatively high frequency count across all three spending

categories. These themes/categories were: *Instruction/Teaching & Learning; Accountability/Quality of Schooling; Employment/Workforce; Student/In General; Community Involvement/Stakeholders* and *Special Needs Programs/General.* Table 26 provides data concerning the relationship of planning themes and categories to district spending.

Table 28: District Spending

		Per Pupil Cost								
Emergent Themes	**# of Plans Containing Theme**	High			Moderate			Low		
(Total # of Plan Goals = 76)		Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme
Instruction										
Teaching & Learning		9	9	100%	33	27	82%	35	28	80%
Coursework		9	1	11%	33	6	18%	35	8	23%
Curriculum		9	3	33%	33	11	33%	35	9	26%
Instructional Resources		9	2	22%	33	9	27%	35	7	20%
Attendance & Enrollment		9	1	11%	33	5	15%	35	1	3%
Venues for Instruction		9	1	11%	33	7	21%	35	9	26%
Equal Access to Education		9	1	11%	33	4	12%	35	0	0%
		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Support Systems		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Facilities & Grounds		9	4	44%	33	21	64%	35	17	49%
School District		9	6	67%	33	15	45%	35	16	46%
Technology-Infrastructure & Maintenance		9	3	33%	33	21	64%	35	16	46%
Administration & Leadership		9	2	22%	33	9	27%	35	4	11%
Funding		9	2	22%	33	7	21%	35	5	14%
Operations		9	0	0%	33	6	18%	35	4	11%
Policies & Procedures		9	3	33%	33	7	21%	35	2	6%
Departments		9	3	33%	33	2	6%	35	1	3%
Transportation		9	0	0%	33	2	6%	35	4	11%
External Support Systems		9	0	0%	33	3	9%	35	0	0%
		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Accountability		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Quality of Schooling		9	6	67%	33	19	58%	35	18	51%
Productiveness		9	5	56%	33	21	64%	35	17	49%
Dissaggregate Data		9	5	56%	33	16	48%	35	17	49%
Federal & State Mandates		9	4	44%	33	12	36%	35	13	37%
Assessment		9	5	56%	33	6	18%	35	7	20%
Division as the Responsible Party		9	2	22%	33	7	21%	35	6	17%
		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Employment		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
General Workforce		9	5	56%	33	18	55%	35	26	74%
Hiring Practices		9	5	56%	33	13	39%	35	17	49%
Professionalism		9	3	33%	33	9	27%	35	8	23%
Traininig		9	2	22%	33	6	18%	35	7	20%
Teachers		9	3	33%	33	8	24%	35	5	14%
Administrators		9	3	33%	33	2	6%	35	2	6%
Salary		9	0	0%	33	3	9%	35	2	6%
		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Achievement		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Performance on Test		9	5	56%	33	16	48%	35	21	60%
High Relative Performance		9	3	33%	33	14	42%	35	14	40%
Achieve Personal Long-Range Goals		9	3	33%	33	15	45%	35	10	29%
Improvement		9	4	44%	33	8	24%	35	13	37%
Achieve School Related Short-Range Goals		9	3	33%	33	9	27%	35	12	34%
Complete Schooling		9	2	22%	33	4	12%	35	6	17%
Student Ability Levels		9	1	11%	33	4	12%	35	4	11%
		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Students		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Students in General		9	7	78%	33	24	73%	35	25	71%
Diversity		9	2	22%	33	8	24%	35	6	17%
		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Community Involvement		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Stakholders		9	6	67%	33	23	70%	35	18	51%
Developing Partnerships with the Community		9	4	44%	33	10	30%	35	12	34%
Clearl Lines of Communication		9	3	33%	33	11	33%	35	7	20%
The School Board Relations with the Public		9	1	11%	33	4	12%	35	5	14%
Business & Industry		9	1	11%	33	6	18%	35	5	14%
Cultural Influences within the Community		9	1	11%	33	6	18%	35	3	9%
		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
		9		0%	33			35		

Table 28: District Spending *(Continued)*

		Per Pupil Cost								
Emergent Themes	**# of Plans Containing Theme**	High			Moderate			Low		
(Total # of Plan Goals = 76)		Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme	Total Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents Referencing Theme	Percent of Respondents Referencing Theme
Planning		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Planning for Change		9	5	56%	33	17	52%	35	10	29%
Prioritization		9	6	67%	33	12	36%	35	10	29%
Systemic Focus of Planning		9	5	56%	33	15	45%	35	10	29%
Planning in Genera		9	2	22%	33	13	39%	35	8	23%
Maintaining the Status Quo		9	3	33%	33	10	30%	35	9	26%
Long-Range Planning		9	1	11%	33	7	21%	35	3	9%
Short-Range Planning		9	1	11%	33	6	18%	35	5	14%
Planning & Time		9	2	22%	33	6	18%	35	2	6%
		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Special Needs Programs		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
General Programs		9	5	56%	33	17	52%	35	18	51%
Health & Physical Fitness		9	1	11%	33	10	30%	35	6	17%
High Achievers		9	1	11%	33	3	9%	35	3	9%
Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, & Violence		9	1	11%	33	1	3%	35	3	9%
Special Education		9	2	22%	33	2	6%	35	2	6%
Vocational Education		9	1	11%	33	3	9%	35	2	6%
Counseling		9	0	0%	33	4	12%	35	0	0%
Early Childhood & Preschool		9	0	0%	33	3	9%	35	1	3%
		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Organizational Climate		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
General		9	5	56%	33	16	48%	35	13	37%
Safety & Discipline		9	3	33%	33	15	45%	35	15	43%
Positive Climate		9	2	22%	33	10	30%	35	9	26%
		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Character		9		0%	33		0%	35		0%
Citizenship		9	3	33%	33	16	48%	35	12	34%
Cooperativeness		9	1	11%	33	5	15%	35	3	9%
Preferred Personality Traits		9	4	44%	33	14	42%	35	9	26%
Developing a Positive Self-Concept		9	1	11%	33	6	18%	35	3	9%
Reinforcing Traditional Values		9	1	11%	33	8	24%	35	5	14%

Interest in planning themes/categories varied by the level of district spending in several ways; first, districts with high per pupil costs tended to focus on *Support Systems/School Districts; Accountability/Disaggregation of Data; Employment/Hiring Practices; Achievement/Performance on Tests; Planning/Prioritization; Planning Systemic Focus of Planning;* and *Organizational Climate/General.* Districts with moderate per pupil costs were more interested in *Support Systems/Facilities & Grounds* and *Support Systems/Technology.* Districts with low per pupil costs were pretty well aligned with their high and moderate per pupil costs counterparts. However, districts with low per pupil costs tended to include less verbiage about the following three themes/categories: *Instruction/Equal Access to Education; Support Systems/External Support; Employment/Salary;* and *Special Needs Programs/Counseling.*

Low areas of interest for districts with high per pupil costs included: *Support Systems/Operations; Support Systems/Transportation; Support Systems/External Support; Employment/Salary; Special Needs Programs/ Counseling; and Special Needs Programs/Early Childhood Education.* Low areas of interest for districts with moderate per pupil costs included: *Support Systems/ Transportation; Support Systems/Departments; Employment/ Administration; Special Needs Programs/ Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, & Violence;* and *Special Needs Programs/ Special Education.*

Finally, as per pupil costs increased the following planning categories/subcategories tended to increase in frequency as well: *Support Systems/Policies & Procedures; Planning/ Prioritization; Planning/ Systemic Focus, Planning/ Maintaining the Status Quo; Planning/Use of Time Prioritization; Special Needs Programs/General; Organizational Climate/General; and Character/Preferred Personality Traits.* As per pupil spending increased the following planning categories/subcategories tended to decrease in frequency: *Instruction/Coursework; Instruction/Venues for Instruction;* and *Community Involvement/School Board Relations with the Public.* See Table 25 for further details.

Question #5: To what extent do external and internal forces impact long-range planning in Virginia school districts?

In Chapter 1 the researcher noted that long-range planning was historically embraced by K-12 school districts during times of perceived national crises. With this being the case, it was reasonable to assume that certain planning components were more likely driven by either an external or internal force. Although the assignment of primary force behind the inclusion of planning components and themes was based upon the subjective interpretation of the researcher, indicating a primary force provides a vehicle to facilitate further discussion.

In order to assign a primary force, the researcher constructed a rubric to facilitate comparison of external and internal forces. A definition, typical focus of goals and major characteristics were noted for each force. The content of the rubric was based upon the subjective interpretation of the researcher drawn from ten years of teaching experience; three years of administrative experience; numerous graduate and undergraduate courses; the review of 23 online planning documents; and the review of 77 long-range planning documents for this study. See Table 29 for differentiation of external and internal forces.

Table 29: Differentiation of Primary Forces: External vs. Internal

Primary Force	**External**	**Internal**
Definition	a notion, idea, or initiative that has emerged from a stakeholder group based *outside* of the local school district whose major intent is to make positive and significant changes to the internal practices of the school district	a notion, idea, or initiative that has emerged from a stakeholder group based *within* the local school district whose major intent is to make positive and significant changes to the internal practices of the school district
Typical Focus of Goals	Quantitative	Both Quantitative and Qualitative
Major Characteristics *(Noted in Tables 30 & 31)*	E1: Acute involvement of individuals outside of the school district in key decision-making processes E2: Environmental factors outside of the school district impact significantly upon the functioning of the school district E3: Evidence that data is systematically collected and used by the school district E4: Extensive public reporting of macro and micro district information	I1: Acute involvement of individuals inside of the school district in key decision-making processes I2: Environmental factors outside and within the school district impact upon the functioning of the school district

Based upon the assignment of a likely primary force to each planning component, it was clear that larger numbers of school districts included planning components that were likely driven by external forces. See Table 30 for further details. Likewise, seven of the eleven planning themes found in planning documents had at their impetus an external force. See Tables 30 and 31 for further details.

Table 30: Planning Components, Primary Force, and Major Characteristics Used in Determination of Primary Force

			Major Characteristic Used in Determination of Primary Force (See Table 29 for explanation of codes)					
	(Total # of Plans = 77)	***Primary Force for Inclusion in Plan***	**E1**	**E2**	**E3**	**E4**	**I1**	**I2**
2	Shows understanding of local, state, and/or societal mandates.	*External*	♦	♦	♦	♦		
9	Identification of goals and objectives.	*External*				♦		
1	Stakeholder involvement	*External*	♦					
4	Collection of data and/or use of measurable performance indicators	*External*			♦			
7	Evidence of an effective/coherent organizational design and/or support system	*Internal*						♦
5	Clear and compelling vision and/or mission	*External & Internal*				♦		♦
3	*Evidence of partial or full SWOT analysis	*External & Internal*		♦				♦
6	Use of data-driven decision making	*External*			♦			
8	Evidence of continuous improvement	*Internal*						♦
10	*Poised to react effectively to change	*Internal*					♦	
11	*Organizational direction is established	*Internal*					♦	♦

Note: The numbers in the first column correspond to the planning components introduced in Table 9 on page 52.

Table 31: Themes Found in Planning Goals, Primary Force, and Major Characteristics Used in Determination of Primary Force

Emergent Themes	***Primary Force for Inclusion in Plan***	***Major Characteristic Used in Determination of Primary Force (See Table 29 for explanation of codes)***					
(Total # of plans with long-range goals = 75)		**E1**	**E2**	**E3**	**E4**	**I1**	**I2**
Instruction	*External & Internal*	♦				♦	
Support Systems	*Internal*					♦	
Accountability	*External*	♦	♦	♦	♦		
Employment	*External*		♦				
Achievement	*External*	♦		♦	♦		
Students	*External & Internal*	♦				♦	
Community Involvement	*External*	♦	♦				
Planning	*External & Internal*	♦	♦		♦	♦	♦
Special Needs Programs	*External & Internal*		♦				♦
Organizational Climate	*External & Internal*		♦			♦	♦
Character	*External & Internal*		♦				♦

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

The purposes of this study were to determine what planning components were present in long-range plans in Virginia school districts; explore the similarities that existed between the planning components of K-12 district long-range plans in Virginia school districts and the recommended components suggested by research and related literature; identify the content of goals and objectives of long-range plans in Virginia school districts; to identify similarities among long-range plans in Virginia school districts; and to determine to what extent external and internal forces impacted upon long-range plans in Virginia school districts. Content analysis methodologies were used to examine long-range planning documents from across the state of Virginia. The following research questions were investigated:

1. Are the planning components noted in the research present in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts?
2. Do the planning components noted in the research appear in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts at similar frequencies?
3. What is the content of goals and objectives of long-range plans in Virginia school districts?
4. Is the content of K-12 long-range goals and objectives similar in Virginia school districts?
5. To what extent do external and internal forces impact long-range planning in Virginia school districts?

Conclusions

This study provided an overview of what was known about long-range planning from educational and corporate perspectives. This overview enabled the researcher to examine educational planning within the broader planning context and to subsequently identify planning elements that were found in Virginia school district plans that were also supported by the research. The results of this study not only provide educational leaders in Virginia with knowledge of how long-range plans generated by Virginia school districts compare to the criterion established in the research base, but the results also enable leaders to determine to what extent individual plans compare to one another. By identifying similarities and differences among long-range plans generated by Virginia school districts, the researcher has provided a current analysis of the state of educational planning in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

School district leaders in Virginia have routinely used long-range planning as a tool to efficiently operate their districts. They have also used long-range planning to meet externally imposed mandates levied by the state and federal governments through such initiatives as the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*). Although long-range plans are frequently used to assist district leaders in achieving goals and objectives, little research has been done to support their effectiveness. Mintzberg (1994) believed that there was little empirical evidence to support the fact that planning was an effective practice. He stated:

> Planners have been notably reluctant to study their own efforts--not only what they really do but, more important, what they and their processes of planning really get done, in terms of impact on the functioning and effectiveness of their organizations. Planners have been so busy calling on everyone else to collect data and to be objective that they

have seldom gotten around to doing so about their own activities. (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 91)

Mintzberg's (1994) comments underscore the need for studies, such as this one.

The results of this study also suggested that school districts in Virginia share a common long-range planning knowledge base. The identification of the existence of this common knowledge base further legitimates the practice of long-range planning. Kuhn (1962) suggested that a common knowledge base implies the existence of a paradigm; and without such a commitment to a paradigm there could be no 'normal' science. Planning is not a science; however, establishment of a planning paradigm enables future planners to engage in meaningful discussions about planning around a core knowledge base. These discussions could result in meaningful debates that increase the overall effectiveness of all future planning endeavors.

Before entering into a detailed discussion of the conclusions of this study, it is helpful to note the broader context of the findings. The suggestion of an externally imposed accountability focus in Chapter 1 was substantiated, to some extent, in this study. The researcher sought to determine the degree of influence that the accountability movement had on the content of long-range plans in Virginia. The results of this research effort indicate that school districts are presently poised to meet the accountability requirements of the state more than they are positioned to proactively meet the future needs of the school district. However, the limitations noted in Chapter 3 and the homogeneity level of responding school districts should be considered as the results are reviewed.

Several general conclusions can be drawn from this study:

1. K-12 planning components in Virginia district plans are aligned with long-range planning components advocated in the research.

2. K-12 planning components in Virginia district plans are not aligned with strategic planning components advocated by Allison and Kaye (1997) and Kaufman et al. (1997).
3. K-12 planning documents in Virginia share many similarities.
4. The content of long-range plans tends to vary with district size more than with the percent of students on free and reduced lunch or with district per pupil costs.
5. It is likely that external forces have driven the content of long-range plans developed by Virginia school districts.

Research Question 1:
Are the planning components noted in the research present in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts?

The planning components noted in the research were present in the long-range plans of most Virginia school districts. Table 32 lists all eleven planning components noted in the research by frequency of occurrence in Virginia district plans.

Table 32: Planning Component Frequency Counts and Percentages

(Total # of Plans = 77)	# of Occurrences	% of Occurrences
Shows understanding of local, state, and/or societal mandates.	73	95%
Identification of goals and objectives.	73	95%
Stakeholder involvement	70	91%
Collection of data and/or use of measurable performance indicators	70	91%
Evidence of an effective/coherent organizational design and/or support system	67	87%
Clear and compelling vision and/or mission	61	79%
*Evidence of partial or full SWOT analysis	59	77%
Use of data-driven decision making	59	77%
Evidence of continuous improvement	44	57%
*Poised to react effectively to change	24	31%
*Organizational direction is established	22	29%

Fifty-seven percent or more of participating districts included 9 of the 11 planning components in their planning documents.

Research Question 2:
Do the planning components noted in the research appear in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts at similar frequencies?

In order to facilitate meaningful comparisons, the researcher used three descriptors to describe Virginia school districts. These descriptors were average daily membership; percent of students on free and reduced lunch; and per pupil costs. As noted earlier in Table 10, there was a high degree of congruence among planning documents in Virginia. In fact, nine of the eleven planning components noted in the research base appeared at least 57% of the plans examined and eight appeared in at least 77% of the plans. These findings suggested that agreement has been reached across the state concerning the planning components of long-range planning documents.

While the average school district had seven of the eight long-range planning components noted in Tables 9 and 10 in its planning document, the average district only had one of the three strategic planning components. In general, most school district planning documents were long-range in nature verses strategic. The following planning components were included in at least 60% of all planning documents which appeared to be indicative of their perceived value to school districts: *Identifying Goals and Objectives; Understanding Mandates; Collection of Data; Stakeholder Involvement; Support Systems; Having Vision/Mission; Use of Data-Driven Decision Making; and Use of a SWOT Analysis.*

The number of school districts that included long-range planning components and the number of school districts that included strategic planning components tended to correspond to average daily membership, percent of students on free and reduced lunch, and per pupil costs to some degree. The number of school districts that included long-range planning components, for

instance, tended to increase as the size of the district increased. This suggested that larger districts were more likely to develop a long-range plan that met the criteria established in the research base than smaller districts. In addition, the number of school districts that included strategic planning components decreased as the size of the school district decreased. However, when enrollment was less than 1,500, strategic planning components were embraced by school districts at higher levels. The number of school districts that included long-range planning components did not vary by percent of students on free and reduced lunch. However, the number of school districts that included strategic planning components did vary with this factor. It appeared that as poverty levels decreased, strategic planning tended to increase. Per pupil costs did not appear to vary significantly with either long-range or strategic plan ratings.

Research Question 3:
What is the content of goals and objectives of long-range plans in Virginia school districts?

Eleven themes emerged from the goal statements of the responding Virginia school districts; these themes are noted in Table 33 by frequency of occurrence. (Note: Objectives were not analyzed in this study.) Nearly sixty percent of participating districts referenced all 9 emergent themes in their planning documents.

Table 33: Planning Theme Frequency Counts and Percentages

Emergent Themes *(Total # of plans with long-range goals = 75)*	**# of Occurrences**	**% of Occurrences**
Instruction	71	95%
Support Systems	70	93%
Accountability	68	91%
Employment	65	87%
Achievement	61	81%
Students	59	79%
Community Involvement	59	79%
Planning	57	76%
Special Needs Programs	52	69%
Organizational Climate	49	65%
Character	44	59%

Research Question 4:
Is the content of K-12 long-range goals and objectives similar in Virginia school districts?

Similarities were noted in planning documents when plans were examined using average daily membership; free and reduced lunch percentages; and per pupil costs as descriptors. An examination of plans using average daily membership revealed that interest in emergent planning themes and categories often varied by district size. Only the planning theme/category of *Instruction/Teaching & Learning* was included in the majority of long-range plans regardless of the size of the district. When themes were examined based upon district poverty level, it appeared that all districts, regardless of free and reduced lunch percentages, focused on *Instruction/Teaching & Learning; Support Systems/Technology; Accountability/Productiveness; Students/In General;* and *Community Involvement/Stakeholders*. When district spending was examined, it was apparent that interest in planning themes and categories often varied by this indicator. While the inclusion of certain themes in long-range goals appeared to vary slightly with this measure, many other themes/categories maintained a relatively high frequency count across all three spending categories. These themes/categories were: *Instruction/Teaching & Learning;*, *Accountability/Quality of Schooling; Employment/Workforce; Student/In General; Community Involvement/Stakeholders* and *Special Needs Programs/General.*

Research Question 5:
To what extent do external and internal forces impact long-range planning in Virginia school districts?

The researcher assigned a likely primary force, either external or internal, as the impetus for the inclusion of planning components and themes in the long-range plans of Virginia school districts. These forces were noted previously in Tables 30 and 31. Based upon the assignment of a primary force for each planning component and theme, it became apparent that large

numbers of Virginia school districts included planning components and themes that were likely driven by external forces. This occurrence substantiated the researcher's original presumption that school districts in Virginia have allowed external forces to substantially influence the direction of their planning focus. These external forces include parents, community members, and policy makers at the local, state, and federal levels.

Insights and Implications for School Leaders

School leaders should keep the findings of this study in mind as they embark upon long-range planning endeavors. This study has revealed the tendency of most school districts in Virginia to take on a reactive stance in the wording of long-range planning documents. This stance is evidenced by high frequency counts of planning components and themes that are likely influenced by external forces. As district leaders engage in planning initiatives, they should strive to maintain a healthy balance between the reactive stance that may seem necessary to meet local, state and federal mandates and the proactive stance that is critical in nurturing a distinctive district image.

District leaders should also recognize the importance of district poverty, spending, and size when developing long-range plans. Leaders should keep in mind that of the three descriptors referenced in this study, district size tended to have the greatest impact on the content of long-range plans. Leaders of large school districts should expect to use the long-range plan as a platform for informing external stakeholders of the status and/or results of accountability efforts. Leaders of districts with high poverty levels should expect to incorporate language related to the implementation of major change initiatives and how the implementation will likely lead to improved student achievement and improved district functioning. Typically, leaders of districts

with relatively high spending can expect to use their long-range plan as a platform to demonstrate that the expectations of external stakeholders have been met.

As leaders embark on planning endeavors they should strive to include evaluative planning components in their planning documents. Mintzberg's (1994) belief that there was little empirical evidence to support the fact that planning was an effective practice was further substantiated in this study in that only a small minority of school districts had any meaningful evaluation components referenced in their plan. This lack of evaluation of the long-range plan or the planning process may lead to the frequent shelving of long-range planning documents and the ineffective implementation of plans overall.

Districts typically included language in their goal statements related to students and achievement at rates of 61% and 59%, respectively. This mediocre level of concern for such key issues was probably not as indicative of low interest in the topic as it was of high interest in controllable factors such as (delivery of) instruction (71%); (provision of) support systems; and (being) accountable (to stakeholders) (68%). Although the researcher recognizes that districts were striving to meet the needs of students and maintain adequate levels of academic achievement through the use of these planning components, leaders may want to include language that overtly indicates that the district is focused on students and achievement. This could be achieved by referencing students and achievement more frequently within the context of the long-range plan. More frequent use of these two terms would further support the indirect foci on students and achievement revealed in the aforementioned planning components.

Lastly, school district leaders should articulate a proactive planning stance in their long-range plan. This stance would not only position the district to react effectively to change, but would

also establish a clear organizational direction. Leaders must build into their planning documents enough flexibility to enable the district to monitor and adjust its course as the need arises.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has laid a foundation for future research in several ways. First by quantifying planning components using the rubric provided in Table 9, other researchers can explore the relationship between planning and other variables, such as student performance, teacher retention, and stakeholder satisfaction. Second, future researchers may choose to study the long-range planning process which was considered a critical part of the development of the long-range plan but was not examined in this study. Third, researchers may choose to examine the content of objectives as well as goals as originally intended by the current researcher. Finally, future researchers may study the degree of presence of the planning components identified in this study. The current researcher only considered whether a planning component was present or absent in a planning document and did not ascertain a degree of presence.

Final Thoughts

Long-range planning can be viewed from several perspectives to include logical incrementalism, organizational change, and from a hierarchical perspective where plan organization, implementation, and maintenance are examined. Long-range planning is an intricate process that requires strategic thought and action. Once developed, an effective plan provides a framework in which district leaders can monitor the progress of the organization and take the role of proactive change agent. The planning components and themes noted in this research effort can be found in K-12 long-range planning documents of school districts in the Commonwealth of Virginia. There is congruence among general planning documents and among specific long-range planning goals. As district leaders embark upon future planning

endeavors, they should do so by giving careful consideration to the findings of this study. By doing so, district leaders can look beyond the certain crises of the day and plan proactively for the uncertain crises of tomorrow.

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Appendix

Long-Range Planning: A Comparison of Texts

Factors Related to Strategic Planning	#1: Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations (Bryson, 1995)	#2: Strategy Pure and Simple II (Robert, 1998)	#3: Strategic Change in Colleges and Universities (Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997)	#4: Succeeding With Standards: Linking Curriculum, Assessment, and Action Planning (Carr & Harris, 2001)
4. Text is useful for academics	♦		♦	♦
5. Text is useful for policy makers	♦		♦	
6. Designed for business leaders		♦		
7. Develop coherent and defensible basis for decision-making	♦	♦	♦	♦
8. Bottom-up planning (Collaborative Leadership)	♦		♦	♦
9. Top-down planning (CEO as leader)	♦	♦		
10. Limit involvement of operational people		♦		
11. Rely on quantitative data	♦		♦	♦
12. Rely on qualitative data		♦		
13. Based on Single driving force		♦		
14. Based on Multiple driving forces	♦		♦	♦
15. Mission statement is critical	♦	♦	♦	♦
16. Emphasis on Strategic thinking		♦	♦	
17. Emphasis on Strategic action	♦	♦	♦	♦

Summary of Other Research Findings

Strategic Planning Components	Frequency of Occurrence in the Literature	Frequency of Overall Occurrence in the Four Texts	Total Frequency of Occurrence
• Championed by organizational leader(s)	20	3	23
• Involve stakeholders	30	3	33
• Understand local/state/societal mandates	19	4	23
• "SWOT Analysis"	14	4	18
• Collect Data	14	3	17
• Identify Core Beliefs/Values	6	3	9
• Identify Needs	12	3	15
• Identify Market Niche	8	2	10
• Develop a Clear and Compelling Vision	22	3	25
• Develop Mission	18	3	21
• Identify goals and objectives (long & short term)	19	3	23
• Develop Action/Tactical Plans	16	3	19
• Develop Measurable performance indicators	13	3	16
• Use of High Level Thinking Skills	11	2	13
• Execution of plan	22	3	26
• Development of Coherent Support Systems	23	2	25
• Use of Action Plans	3	3	6
• Use of Measurable performance indicators	14	3	17
• Use of Data Driven Decision-Making	9	3	12
• Effective and Coherent Organizational Design	24	4	28
• Collection of Measurable Outcomes	10	3	13
• Conduct An Evaluation (Formative/Summative)	8	3	11
• Evidence of Continuous Improvement	16	3	19
Mean # of Occurrences	15	3	18
Median (Mode)	14 (14)	3 (3)	18 (23)
Standard Deviation	7	.5	7