



#VaLIN Cohort Site Visit

Poquoson County Public Schools
West Point County Public Schools
Middlesex County Public Schools



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Overview:

The Poquoson / West Point / Middlesex team is a unique Cohort of small divisions that has bonded together with a strong willingness for and history of collaboration. Because of their small sizes, they are accustomed to partnering within their divisions, across schools divisions, and with representatives from higher education to leverage opportunities to share best practices and resources, and deepen understanding of learning.

Educators from the Cohort believe that engaging, deep, challenging learning is learning that provides learners with the knowledge, skills and dispositions they need to be 'life-ready'. They describe this learning as hands-on, real-world, authentic work, that incorporates the 5 C's of collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking and citizenship. Examples of this learning include a PBL Veterans Project, inquiry driven lessons, classes with embedded experiential learning and opportunities to engage in real world experiences with community/business members. Through these experiences learners are discovering their voice, mastering skills, cultivating a love of learning, and passionately pursuing interests, while also focusing on contributing to the greater good of their communities.

This Cohort is leveraging the expertise within the *Virginia is for Learners* network to explore unique and powerful ways to deepen connections with businesses and the community in surrounding areas **to provide community engagement opportunities for learners**. They recognize the value of mentorships, internships, externships, career exploration, and job fairs. Because of their sizes and geographic locations, they are not divisions that are bustling with an abundance of businesses or industries that are readily available to provide direct support to their learners. However, they are close enough to larger cities that do have those who can serve as potential resources. Through the network they are exploring additional avenues that can provide learners with authentic learning experiences, enhanced exposure to needed occupations, and the development of related skills in ways that are both feasible and economical.

Most recently the Cohort has collaborated with a higher education partner (i.e. SURN) to invite learners to have a voice in their learning. Focus groups of learners were brought together to provide feedback on their experiences and perceptions of engagement within their schools and division. Facilitators from SURN helped facilitate some of the focus groups and shared that it was interesting to hear some of the learners comment that they were really glad that their principal and superintendent were asking the questions and opening up conversations and sincerely hoped that they would continue into the future. Responses to the discovery

questions (available in the file linked below) are being used to inform next steps in the design of curriculum and opportunities available.

Artifact:

[Innovation Network Team - Student Focus Group 2019](#)