

**Harvard Institute for School Leadership  
Application Essay Newport News Public Schools  
Newport News, Virginia**

***Describe your current theory of action and how you align district practices and resources for long-term improvement. Please include two key successes or failures.***

Newport News Public Schools focuses its improvement efforts around the theory of professional learning communities as a means for continuous growth; our division motto, *Communities Committed to Learning*, reflects our focus on this theory. The theory of professional learning communities is evidenced in action by an emphasis on professional learning, reflective dialogue about data and practices, and distributed leadership. School division practices and resources are aligned for the purpose of achieving five strategic goals:

- Improve academic achievement for all students while closing achievement gaps.
- Establish and maintain school climates and facilities that are safe, orderly, nurturing, and supportive of quality teaching and learning.
- Provide services to enhance the management, efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of the school division.
- Implement policies, procedures, and programs to promote the recruitment, professional development, and retention of a quality workforce.
- Promote strong home, school, business, and community relationships.

The division uses a continuous monitoring plan to ensure that the strategic goals are realized through strategic action.

The division's focus on building a professional learning community whose mission is achieving our five strategic goals has resulted in success for the students in Newport News. The number of schools meeting the Virginia *Standards for Learning* has increased from one in 2000 to 38 (of 41) in 2005. The division met all federal NCLB requirements for AYP in 2005. Our five high schools were ranked among the top 1000 high schools in the United States in 2004 and 2005 by *Newsweek* magazine, as measured by the number of seniors enrolled in AP classes.

**What do you or your team hope to gain by attending this institute?**

We hope to solidify our direction and coherence for future improvement initiatives and to gain insight into strategies for operationalizing improvement efforts and strategies to accelerate improvements in achievement for all students.