

# **An Assessment of High School Websites: A Proposal for a Creating a New Website**

**Prepared for:  
Willcot County Public Schools**

**Prepared by:  
Better Designs Inc.**

**November 30, 2018**



**Willcot County Public Schools**  
2323 Grove Street  
Richmond, VA 23555

October 15, 2018

Jane Taylor  
Principal Consultant  
4540 High Street  
Farmville, VA 23901

Dear Ms. Taylor:

Subject: Evaluation of High School websites

Last year, Willcot County Public Schools broke ground on a new high school to accommodate our growing population. Throughout the construction process, members of our community have been calling the school board asking for information about the new Willcot County High School. The school does not yet have a website, and we believe that creating one is a necessary next step to give the public access to the information they are looking for. Therefore, Willcot County has decided to dedicate resources towards building a website for Willcot County High School.

As we discussed on October 10, 2018, we would like to commission your company to evaluate and recommend three excellent public high school websites within Virginia. These websites will serve as inspiration for Willcot County High School's own website. We would also like for you to create a set of criteria for evaluating these school websites that reflects the three most important elements of an effective public school website.

We would like to complete the website by December 28, 2018. To meet this deadline, we must receive your report by November 30, 2018.

We look forward to receiving your report. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Tim Shore at 434-954-0668, ext. 23.

Sincerely,

*Allie Potts*

Allie Potts  
Superintendent

**Better Designs Inc.**  
4540 High Street  
Farmville, VA 23901

November 30, 2018

Allie Potts  
Superintendent's Office  
2323 Grove Street  
Richmond, VA 23555

Dear Mrs. Potts:

Subject: High school website proposal completion

Here is your report evaluating high school websites for the creation of a website for Willcot County High School, which you requested in your letter on October 15, 2018.

We have recommended three websites that adequately convey overall content, presentation, and accessibility:

- **Prince Edward County High School**
- **Buckingham County High School**
- **Langley High School**

We are assured that these three websites incorporate elements that will be helpful in the creation of Willcot County High School's website.

We have enjoyed analyzing and gathering information for this report. We would like to thank Tim Shore for assisting us by providing our company with evaluation criteria needed for a high school website to be effective. If you have any questions or comments about the report, we will be happy to provide answers. I can be reached by phone at 804-344-9987, ext. 2.

Yours sincerely,

*Jane Taylor*

Jane Taylor  
Principal Consultant

Enclosure: Report on high school websites

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## Executive Summary

Willcot County High School is new to the county, and the creation of a school website is essential for students, faculty and parents. The school is currently the only high school in Willcot County without a website.

A high school's website is one of the first places to which students, parents, faculty, and staff turn when searching for information about their school. The quality of education that students receive is strongly linked to the cooperation of all these parties, and a strong website provides a hub where all can connect and become informed.

Willcot County Public Schools contracted Better Designs Inc. to analyze current trends in school-specific web design. Successful use of web design in the three model websites evaluated within this report will serve as inspiration for Willcot County High School's new website. These model websites were:

- **Prince Edward County High School** | [pechs.ss8.sharpschool.com](http://pechs.ss8.sharpschool.com)
- **Buckingham County High School** | [bchs.bcpschools.org](http://bchs.bcpschools.org)
- **Langley High School** | [langleyhs.fcps.edu](http://langleyhs.fcps.edu)

As part of the analysis, the students, faculty, and parents from Willcot County participated in a survey that determined what elements of a high school's website were most important to them. The top three rated elements were used as criteria in the analysis of the other schools' websites. The following criteria are a result of that survey:

- **Presentation:** visual appeal, use of color and shape, page layout
- **Accessibility:** ease of navigation, logical menu bars, language translation options
- **Content:** available information, effectiveness of drop-down menus, resources

Analysis with these criteria led us to conclude that components of all three websites can serve as examples in building of Willcot County High School's new website. Overall, Buckingham County's website offered the most strengths, and we recommend that the new website emulate that one most closely.

The goal of this report is to provide Willcot County Public Schools a sophisticated set of criteria for creating a new website. We are confident that our analysis and recommendations will support Willcot County Public Schools in creating an excellent website.

## Introduction

A high school’s website is one of the first places to which students, parents, faculty, and staff turn when searching for information about their school. The quality of education that students receive is strongly linked to the cooperation of all these parties, and a strong website provides a hub where all can connect and become informed.

As new students and parents have questions about the newly built Willcot County High School, it will be especially crucial to provide thorough information about the school in an accessible and aesthetically pleasing way.

Better Designs Inc.’s task was to prepare a report on current trends in school-specific web design. The company’s 22 years of experience in website design, extensive work with public schools across the East Coast, and specialty in budget-friendly websites make it an expert in this type of work.

To create a set of recommendations for Willcot High School’s new website, Better Designs Inc. evaluated the websites of three existing public high schools in Virginia. Analysts selected two schools from counties with demographics comparable to Willcot. The third school is from a county with a more diverse population and a higher socioeconomic status. These schools were chosen to provide a wide variety of styles and strategies from which Willcot High School may choose when building its own website. The schools are listed below:

- **Prince Edward County High School** | [pechs.ss8.sharpschool.com](http://pechs.ss8.sharpschool.com)
- **Buckingham County High School** | [bchs.bcpschools.org](http://bchs.bcpschools.org)
- **Langley High School** | [langleyhs.fcps.edu](http://langleyhs.fcps.edu)

A survey of 100 students, parents, faculty, and staff within the Willcot County School System found that presentation, accessibility, and content are considered to be the most important elements of a high school website (see Figure 1). This report will focus on those three criteria as follows:

- **Presentation:** visual appeal, use of color and shape, page layout
- **Accessibility:** ease of navigation, logical menu bars, language translation options
- **Content:** available information, effectiveness of drop-down menus, resources

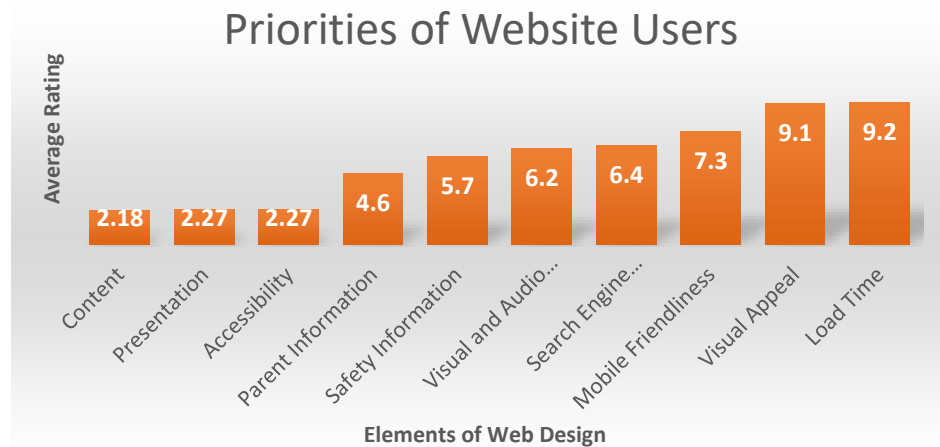


Figure 1: Survey results reporting Willcot County citizen’s priorities for a high school website. A score of 1 indicates high importance.

# Analysis of Prince Edward County High School Website

[pechs.ss8.sharpschool.com](http://pechs.ss8.sharpschool.com)

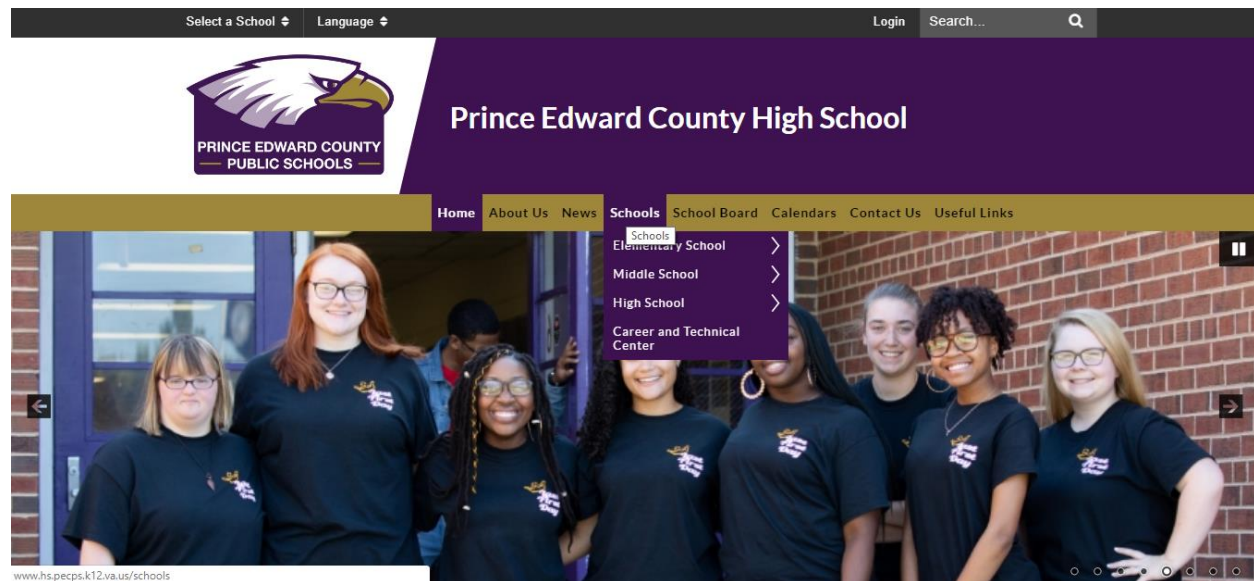


Figure 2: Homepage for Prince Edward County High School.

## Presentation

The overall presentation of Prince Edward County's website reflects a focus on student and school life through simple shapes and space management. The homepage is broken into a large banner (see Figure 2), which is followed by two columns of popular public announcements and three columns of school-specific information such as a school calendar, location, and directory (see Figure 3). The focal point of the homepage is a photo gallery that shows students, staff, clubs, and classroom activities. While school colors dominate the top of the page, the columns are left colorless. This reflects a duality in the school's approach to student life and professional, formal navigation.

The duality of professionalism and focus on community extends to the submenus and pages of the website. The pages are white and use a simple left-aligned format. There is minimal wording on the pages, making them both efficient and easy to read. There are no pictures or media either, so the focus of each page is kept singular.

## Accessibility

The website for Prince Edward High School is housed within the Prince Edward Public Schools site, which leads to a confusion during navigation. The options in the menu bar at the top of the site lead to pages with information about the school district as a whole rather than Prince Edward High School, so it is unclear what information pertains to the high school itself. A "Quick Links" menu within the homepage for the high school (see Figure 3) does lead to other pages specifically about the high school. This navigation tool makes information easily accessible. The one exception to this is the quick link button for "Program of Studies," which leads to an error page.



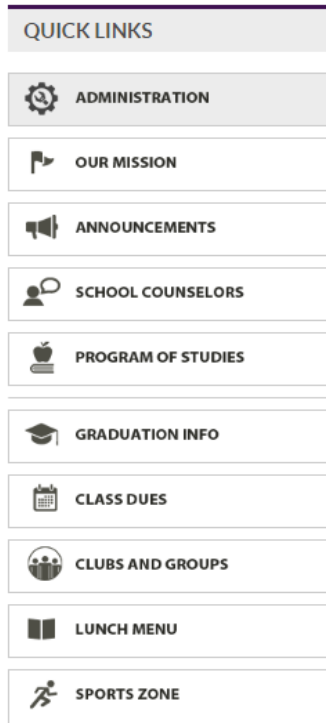


Figure 3: Quick Links menu on PECHS website.

The website has ten options for languages. However, the site uses the Google Translate service to translate the text on the page, and the service seems not to be compatible with the website. When a language other than English is displayed, the formatting of the website changes and becomes confusing. Perhaps more importantly, the text on many of the buttons, including the quick links menu, remain in English. In effect, the website is only minimally accessible to individuals who are not English-speaking.

## Content

The content on the website is very spread out. The “Quick Links” (see Figure 3) and “Useful Links” are not combined to make one drop down with all links that are quick and useful. The audience is not well-defined, as there are no links for students, faculty and staff, and parents. The drop-down options do not have information pertaining to the audience to easily access material. However, the content on the website within each topic is well defined and clear for the topic it discusses.

As users look through the drop-down menus, they have the option of reviewing the “News” tab, which leads not only to current news but also to morning news programs, announcements, and other information about current events at the school. This makes the content more cohesive and thorough, as the viewer has more of an option when reading the content looking for an answer.

# Analysis of Buckingham County High School

[bchs.bcpschools.org](http://bchs.bcpschools.org)



Figure 4: Homepage for Buckingham County High School.

## Presentation

Buckingham County High School's website uses effective typeface and simple organization to guide the viewer's eye through the page. The format is similar to Prince Edward County High School's website, but the organization of the homepage is much simpler and more effective at directing the user's attention. It has only two columns, which focus on immediate events and news. This leaves the front page uncluttered and clean. The school color, green, is gentle on the eyes and contrasts easily with the white background that is used for the bottom half of the website.

The submenus and webpages in the school's website maintain the simple design of the home page (see Figure 4). Light green lines are used to separate headings from the body of text. The text stays well-spaced and allows the left-alignment to create a uniform order within the white space.

## Accessibility

Overall, Buckingham County High School's website is the easiest to navigate of the three schools. The website is separate from the main website of the Buckingham County school district. There is a single menu bar that stays consistent at the top of each individual page within the site (see Figure 4). Drop-down menus stemming from the menu bar provide further options for navigation. This clear, consistent organization of content makes it easy for a user to locate desired information from any page. Additionally, the menu bar includes sections for parents, students, and staff, which further assists users of the website in locating the information that is pertinent to them. All links are functional and clearly labeled.

The Buckingham County High School website uses the same Google Translate service with the same language options as Prince Edward High School. However, the format of this website is more compatible with the service, which makes the translation effective. All text is translated, including buttons for navigation. In addition, formatting is preserved throughout the website after translation, so the website design is still visually coherent and navigable.

## Content

There are shortcuts toward the bottom of the page, the titles of which are very broad. Additionally, the content in the page with dining information is not specific enough. The prices for the meals are available, but not a list of food items being sold on each day of the week. The audience is supposed to include athletics, but athletics is only addressed at the bottom of the page. Aside from those issues, the content on the website is informational and very detailed for each topic.

The website includes a tab for departments and has every department listed with additional information in each page. This makes it easy for the audience to understand class offerings and helpful resources concerning the subject. Overall, the content on the website is sufficient for viewers to find answers to any questions they may have.

# Analysis of Langley High School

[langleyhs.fcps.edu](http://langleyhs.fcps.edu)

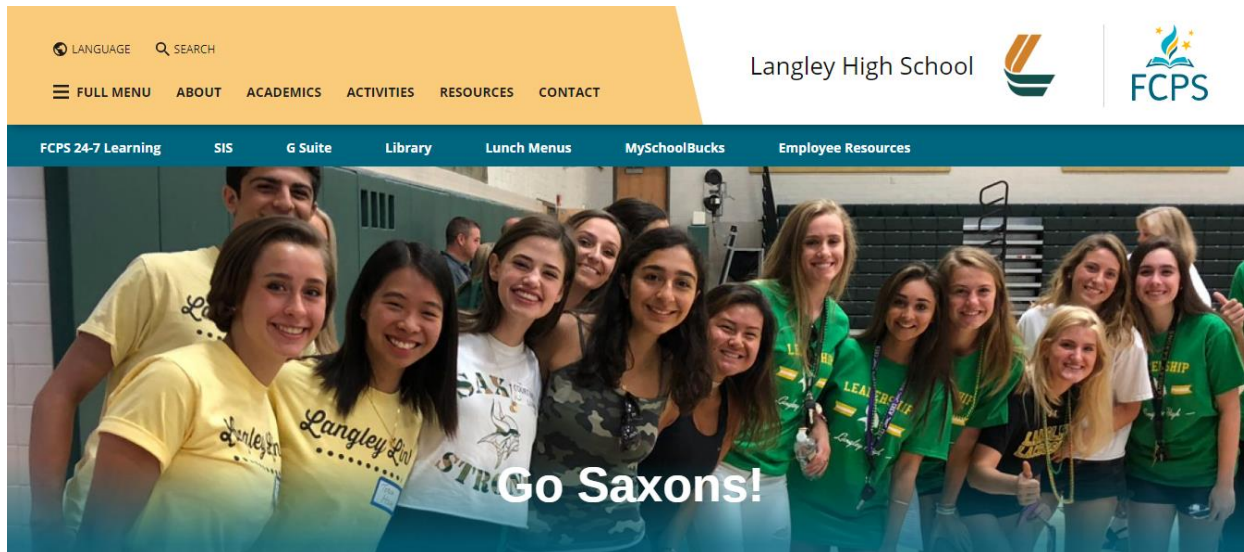


Figure 5: Homepage for Langley High School

## Presentation

The presentation heavily relies on white space management to ensure a neatly organized website. The website uses a large font and icons to indicate different pages and sections, making the interface visual-friendly. The individual sections are further divided into large columns. The font size often distracts from the vertical columns, confusing the reader's eye with reading horizontally while looking vertically. The text on banners also crowds the page with information, disrupting the clean organization made by the horizontal banners.

## Accessibility

Langley High School's website is separate from the main website of its school district, which makes it clear that the information contained within its pages pertains to the high school itself. However, the website has two menu bars at the top of the page in addition to a full menu that pulls out from the side of the site (see Figure 5), which complicate the process of locating information. The full menu offers a comprehensive overview of information that may be found on the website, while the upper menu bar offers a smaller selection of topics. The lower menu bar poses several problems to accessibility. First, the titles of the options use acronyms and other jargon specific to the school community which are not accessible to new members of the school. Second, the menu options are links to external sites of specific service providers, none of which open in new browser tabs. These external service providers require users to input credentials before accessing information. Though this protects privacy of student information, it also restricts the information that a user of the website can gather about the school.

The website's language accessibility is beyond reproach. The site offers eighty-one language options in a menu at the top of every page. When a new language is selected, all text within the site

transitions seamlessly into the new language. Nothing about the layout, aesthetics, or organization of the pages changes at all. Offering a multitude of language options on its website is particularly important for Langley High School, as the population of students the school serves come from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Therefore, wide, high-quality linguistic accessibility is particularly important for this school.

## Content

The information on Langley High School website is very spread out, as is the content for each drop-down menu. As a viewer scrolls down they will come across features twice. The information is not easy to find, as it is in two different sections. There are two drop down menus at the top of the page labeled “SIS” and G Suite”. These two drop downs can be confusing for parents who are viewing the page because these are two terms that are consistent with students and not specifically relevant to parents.

There is a section on the website that states “Follow Langley High School on Social Media” but has no link or attachment to any social media platform. In not making it convenient to follow the school on social media, the website fails in its attempt to persuade users to take action. The content on this website could be better, as it could be more condensed instead of spread throughout the page. The drop-down menu at the top of the page only pertains to employees as the audience and has no tab for students or parents.

The content under the “Resources” tab is filled with crucial information that relates to parents, teachers and students. These resources are important for the health and well-being of the students, but also are a wealth of knowledge about topics such as mental wellness, clinic, anti-bullying, and community and family resources. When users click on the lunch menu tab, they would expect to see the lunch menu for Langley High School. Instead, this tab directs the viewer to a list of schools in Northern Virginia, and users have to scroll to find Langley High School. This makes it difficult for the viewer to access the lunch menu for Langley High School. If the viewer is on a specific school website, the lunch menu should reflect that certain school.

## Conclusion

To determine what key qualities to analyze in different websites, a survey was taken among parents, students, and faculty of Wilcox County Public Schools. The survey required each participant to rate the most important qualities of a school website. The top three results were presentation, accessibility, and content.

Better Designs Inc. chose the following websites to analyze for favorable qualities of presentation, accessibility, and content:

[pechs.ss8.sharpschool.com](http://pechs.ss8.sharpschool.com), [bchs.bcpschools.org](http://bchs.bcpschools.org), and [langleyhs.fcps.edu](http://langleyhs.fcps.edu).

While each website was put under the same level of scrutiny and analysis, [bchs.bcpschools.org](http://bchs.bcpschools.org) was found to be the most favorable of the selected websites overall. Its simple and clean design allows for an aesthetically pleasing and accessible display of information. The website also provides easy access to its ample content through well-spaced and orderly menus. [Pechs.ss8.sharpschool.com](http://pechs.ss8.sharpschool.com) boasts in having precise information for each page. The pages are concise and direct in their purpose and do not distract the user with external links or media. With that said, the website's coverage of news outside of the school is superior to the other selected websites. Finally, [langleyhs.fcps.edu](http://langleyhs.fcps.edu) is exemplary when it comes to content, available resources, and accessibility for non-English speakers. However, the organization of information on this site left much to be desired.

Based on the strengths and weaknesses of the three model websites, Better Designs Inc. suggests four main strategies for optimizing Willcot County High School's new website.

First, Buckingham County High School's website uses a neat typeface to write concise phrases that don't clog up the screen with information. This choice is important for both visual appeal and legibility, and we recommend that Willcot County emulate this.

Second, Langley High School has an exemplary language translation function with a myriad of language options and flawless execution. However, considering that nearly all non-English speakers in Willcot County speak Spanish, quantity of language translations offered should not be a priority for Willcot High School. Instead, resources available for language translation should be focused on providing a thorough and accurate Spanish translation option. With this strategy, the new website should be able to avoid the kind of translation problems seen in Prince Edward County High School's website without raising the cost of the project.

Third, Prince Edward County High School's website includes useful links that take users to portals that pertain to their needs. Willcot County High School's website should include such links. This section should group the links according to the type of user who will need them. Potential user categories include students, parents, teachers, and athletes.

Finally, Better Designs Inc. recommends that Willcot County use both images and text to emphasize the elements of school life that make Willcot County High School an attractive learning environment. These elements could include clubs, athletics, academics, supportive teachers and administration, and resources for students who are struggling.

## **Recommendations**

We recommend that Willcot County Public Schools use the techniques from the content, accessibility, and presentation of the three analyzed high school websites to create a thorough and approachable website of their own as follows:

- Utilize a simple typeface and write in concise phrases.
- Focus resources for language accessibility on one or two languages that meet the needs of Willcot County citizens.
- Provide links to resources for the distinct groups of users who will visit the site.
- Emphasize the elements of school life that make Willcot County High School an attractive learning environment.

## Appendix A: Survey on Key Elements of a High School Website

This survey was authorized by Willcot County Public School System for dissemination to students, parents of students, teachers, and administrators within Willcot County. The survey’s purpose was to determine what elements of web design future users of Willcot County Public High School valued most.

The full survey can be found at <https://goo.gl/forms/ed3S8nrBEsa73Fqw2>.

Please rank the following aspects of a school website in order according to their importance to you.  
1 = Most Important, 10 = Least Important

1. Presentation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. Accessibility	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. Content	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. Visual Appeal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. Visual & Audio Media	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. Search Engine Optimization	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. Safety information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. Parent information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. Load time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. Mobile friendliness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



## Appendix B: Key Elements of a High School Website Survey Results

Of the 150 surveys sent out, 100 were completed and returned. The following chart shows the average ratings of each element of web design. The data has been arranged in descending order from most to least important.

Element of Web Design	Average Rating
Content	2.18
Presentation	2.27
Accessibility	2.27
Visual Appeal	4.6
Parent Information	5.7
Safety Information	6.2
Visual and Audio Media	6.4
Search Engine Optimization	7.3
Mobile Friendliness	9.1
Load Time	9.2

## **Appendix C: Minutes from Progress Meetings**

### **Better Designs Inc.**

#### **Weekly Progress Meeting**

#### **Greenwood Library**

**Friday, November 9, 2018, 12:20 PM**

### **AGENDA**

- I. Call to Order-** 12:22 PM
  - A. Present-** Kristin Wilcox, Hannah Auerbach
  - B. Recording Secretary-** Kristin Wilcox
- II. Approval of Agenda:** Kristin moved, seconded by Hannah. Passed unanimously.
- III. Previous Minutes**
  - . No previous minutes.
  - A. Items arising from minutes (if any): None.
- IV. Designers report** (Jeremy)
  - . Jeremy has no reports.
- V. Organization Analyst report** (Hannah)
  - . Hannah has no reports
- VI. Other Items**
- VII. Next Meeting** (Kristin)
  - . Meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 13<sup>th</sup> at 2:30 PM.
  - A. In a previous class, we discussed and planned meeting times. The November 13<sup>th</sup> will be our second meeting. A vote was taken to meet in the Greenwood Library again in the atrium. Greenwood Library won 3 to 0. Each member will be expected to be present at this next meeting on November 13<sup>th</sup>.
  - B. Each member is assigned a part of each analysis and will complete a draft by next meeting in order to review and edit each others parts. If these parts of the analysis are not completed by next meeting, another meeting will be held. This was agreed on unanimously.
- VIII. New Business**
  - . There was no new business.
- IX. Adjournment**
  - . Hannah moved that the meeting be adjourned. Passed unanimously. Meeting ended at 1:15 PM.

**Better Designs Inc.**  
**Weekly Progress Meeting**  
**Greenwood Library**  
**Tuesday, November 13, 2018, 2:30 PM**

**AGENDA**

- X. Call to Order-** 2:35 PM
  - A. Present-** Kristin Wilcox, Hannah Auerbach, Jeremy Derflinger
  - B. Recording Secretary-** Hannah Auerbach
- XI. Approval of Agenda:** Hannah moved, seconded by Kristin. Passed unanimously.
- XII. Previous Minutes**
  - . Kristin moved to approve previous minutes. Jeremy seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved.
  - A. Items arising from minutes (if any): None.
- XIII. Designers report** (Jeremy)
  - . Jeremy had no report.
- XIV. Accessibility Analyst report** (Hannah)
  - . Hannah shared her draft of the accessibility analyses for each website. She planned to finish the third analysis before the next meeting.
- XV. Content Analyst report** (Kristin)
  - .
- XVI. Other Items**
- XVII. Next Meeting** (Hannah)
  - . Meeting will be held on Friday, November 16 at 3:00 PM.
  - A. The group unanimously agreed that at least two more meetings would be necessary. Members discussed and planned future meeting dates and times. All unanimously agreed on Friday, November 16 at 3:00 PM and Monday, November 19 at 9:00 PM. A vote was taken to meet in the Greenwood Library atrium for both meetings. Greenwood Library won three to zero. Each member will be expected to be present at this next meeting on November 16.
  - B. Each member must complete his or her individual analyses and by next meeting so that we may edit and finalize the content for the analysis section during the final meeting. This was agreed on unanimously.
- XVIII. New Business**
  - . There was no new business.
- XIX. Adjournment**
  - . Hannah moved that the meeting be adjourned. Passed unanimously. Meeting ended at 3:25 PM.

Better Designs Inc.  
Website Consultant Meeting Minutes  
Greenwood Library  
Friday, November 16, 2018, 3:15pm

AGENDA

- I. **Call to order: 3:15pm**
  - a. **Present:** Hannah Auerbach (co-chair), Kristin Wilcox (co-chair), Jeremy Derflinger (co-chair, recording secretary)
  - b. **Absent:** none
  - c. **Recording Secretary:** Jeremy Derflinger
- II. **Approval of Agenda:** Kristen moved, seconded by Jeremy. Passed unanimously.
- III. **Previous Minutes**
  - a. Approval of minutes from last meeting. Hannah moved, seconded by Kristin. Passed unanimously.
  - b. Items arising from Minutes: None
- IV. **Co-Chair's report** (Hannah)
  - a. Hannah reported that her analyses of the three websites were complete.
  - b. She had found enough data to write an appropriate amount of analysis for the formal report.
- V. **Co-Chair's report** (Kristin)
  - a. Kristin reported that she too had gathered enough information from the three websites to write her share of analysis.
- VI. **Co-Chair's report** (Jeremy)
  - a. Jeremy reported that he had analyzed two of the three websites and had almost completed analyzing the third website by the time the meeting had begun.
  - b. He submitted the rest of his work while this meeting was underway.
- VII. **Other items**
  - a. **Date for next meeting** (Hannah)
    - i. Hannah suggested meeting on Sunday, November 18.
    - ii. Kristin said her schedule was busy on Sunday and requested another time.
    - iii. Moved by Hannah that the group would reconvene on Monday, November 19. Seconded by Jeremy. Passed unanimously.
- VIII. **New business**
  - a. Hannah was assigned to work on the introduction and background sections of the formal report.
  - b. Jeremy was assigned to work on the conclusion and executive summary of the formal report.
  - c. Kristin was assigned to work on the recommendations at the end of the formal report.
  - d. Hannah moved that the assignments would be due at the next meeting. Kristin seconded. Passed unanimously.
- IX. **Adjournment**
  - a. Jeremy moved that the meeting be adjourned. Passed unanimously. Meeting ended at 4:00pm.