

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2017.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico

Program Title: Student Congress

Program Category: Regional Collaboration

CONTACT INFORMATION

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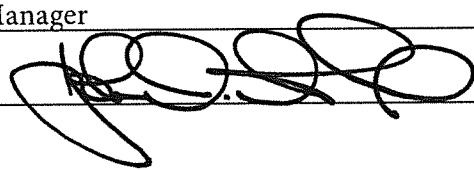
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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: John Vithoukias

Title: County Manager

Signature: 

1. Program Overview

The Henrico County Public Schools' (HCPS) Student Congress was formed in 2004, for students to research, brainstorm, collaborate, and advocate for necessary changes to countywide practices, regulations, buildings, and curricula. Each of Henrico County's ten high schools sends ten student representatives to serve on the HCPS Student Congress. One of those ten students is selected to serve on the HCPS director of high schools' Executive Caucus. During the caucus, information is given to these students before meeting with Congress as a whole. The makeup of HCPS Student Congress reflects the county's diversity in its culture, race, and academic achievement.

These student leaders come together quarterly to learn about leadership skills and team dynamics. They work collaboratively with local educational leaders, School Board members, business partners, and other experts in related fields. Henrico Student Congress is a platform for student opinion that allows their involvement in the decision-making that directly affects their education and community. Additionally, the experience allows students from different backgrounds and locales to come together and appreciate the community's diversity. The outcomes of Student Congress shift from year to year based on the current needs of the students and the school division.

2. Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

This program provides students with a more prominent voice in decisions that affect their educational career and future. Student Congress selects problems and issues that they deem important to their life as high school students. They research solutions and make policy proposals to the School Board at the end of the year and, sometimes, throughout the school year.

While this program has been around for more than a decade, the focus has shifted because of the changing demographics and needs of the school division. The school division's desire to close achievement gaps, improve disproportional behavior outcomes, and recognize that we are now a "majority-minority" county has changed the kinds of information and outcomes division leaders need from these 100 student leaders. The focus now places a strong emphasis on students being able to learn leadership skills and lessons they can take back to their schools; engage in lessons of diversity they learn from each other; and build foundational problem-solving skills. However, these student leaders are also considered county leaders as they weigh in on major decision-making discussions. Examples would be the adoption of computer software, grading-scale changes, changes to school security, and lunch menus.

Student Congress is important to Henrico County. As educators, we realize that we are in the habit of making decisions for students without always involving them in the decision-making process. This program affords them the chance to help school and division leaders make decisions with key student input and feedback. HCPS values students' opinions and their unique perspectives when making decisions.

3. How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Student Congress has proved to be an innovative way to bring together students to participate in school decision-making; to bridge gaps in a large, diverse school system; to accomplish service programs; and to provide county leaders across departments a forum to gain valuable insight to make informed decisions. The program is innovative, collaborative, and replicable by other localities.

4. How Program Was Carried Out

HCPS Student Congress was formed in 2004, to bring the county's selected student leaders together in quarterly meetings to discuss, research, share, plan, organize, and brainstorm issues pertinent to the success of the school system. The program was created to ensure student voices were heard as decisions were being made that affected them. Student Congress does not only include academically, advanced students. The GPAs of the student representatives may vary from 2.0 to 4.6 or greater. Some of the students may have disciplinary infractions. However, the purpose of Student Congress is to let these students know they are student leaders in the county and must lead by example at all times. The strategies and techniques that are implemented with this program have changed the mindset of students and have inspired them to make changes in their schools, as well as on county, state, and national levels.

When the students meet quarterly, they are provided meaningful lessons and scenarios that give them the necessary skills to become effective leaders. While serving on Student Congress, students have the opportunity to participate in community service programs throughout the school year. The projects in which they participate enlighten the students on many levels and encourage them to continue and expand on community service. Student Congress collaborates with business leaders such as the Henrico Christmas Mother, the Boys and Girls Club of Richmond, Hands Up Ministries, and the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities. Student leaders regularly express gratitude for the opportunity to participate in these projects and state that serving the community is a rewarding and heartfelt experience. In turn, community members are grateful and appreciative of the level of service and participation that Student Congress members provide to their organizations.

Annually, students participate in a student exchange day, on which they visit a different school attended by a selected peer. The day is designed to have students visit a school in another magisterial district where the culture, climate, and demographics may be different than their home schools. This provide them with an idea of their peers' daily school experiences. Students are able to see some of the obstacles, issues and problems their peers may face. They are also able to see rewards and benefits their own schools may not offer. Since the implementation of student exchange day, student leaders have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate. The process has given them an appreciation and a better understanding for their peers' experiences. This has also encouraged new relationships among students. Upon the completion of the day, students come together and make suggestions regarding opportunities for growth at these schools.

Annually, Student Congress members also have the opportunity to participate in conversations with the county's assistant superintendent of finance about countywide finances. The student leaders also give feedback to the director of high school education and the assistant superintendent of instruction about the county's annual calendar. Additionally, the HCPS Department of Technology presents information regularly to the student leaders to get feedback on software, computer choices, learning systems, and other innovative and creative tools about which the students have a unique perspective. When the students meet quarterly, two teacher-sponsors accompany them.

5. Financing and Staffing

The only expenses for the Student Congress program are the costs of providing lunches for the students at their quarterly meetings, and the director of high schools is provided an annual budget for these expenses. The total cost of lunches per meeting ranges from \$100-\$300. Affordable

lunches are often prepared by students in HCPS' culinary classes, which involves even more students in the collaboration process and showcases their talents. The HCPS Department of Career and Technical Education works with Student Congress to defray the cost of these meals. The partnership is beneficial for HCPS' Student Congress and the Department of Career and Technical Education and Culinary Arts program because students on all levels are showcased and applauded for their services and expertise. Students from all departments and programs are able to learn the talents of their peers and witness the decision-making processes in which the student leaders participate.

6. Program Results

Henrico County is extremely pleased with the program's success. The students repeatedly exceed expectations and are very instrumental in informing countywide decision-making processes.

Examples of the program's successes include:

- Working annually with the Henrico Christmas Mother program. Students meet with the Christmas Mother and program workers to pack and prepare holiday food, clothing, toiletries, and toys for the needy.
- Assisted with the implementation of SAT preparation courses as electives.
- Assisted with the implementation of online physical education courses. Physical education credit is offered for sports activities completed outside of school, which allows students to take other necessary courses during the school day. A teacher monitors this program.
- Assisted with the implementation of online textbooks.

- Formed, organized, and spearheaded the, “Henrico County 804 Invitational Basketball Game.” Because of this event, Student Congress is able to make an annual donation to the Boys and Girls Club.
- Assisted with changing the academic grading scale to a 10-point scale.
- Participated in the process of choosing new computers for secondary students.
- Weighed in on discussions of possible elimination of midterm exams for the 2017-18 school year.
- Contributed to the discussion on the possible elimination of class rankings.
- Participated in the 20/20 Vision Initiative, a process of conducting audits of HCPS’ high school specialty centers. Many changes have been made because of Student Congress feedback. Some include name changes and increasing the number of internship programs and community service hours.

The program’s results have been robust. Many of the county’s directors and specialists are able to use Student Congress as a means of making decisions for their departments, to the benefit of the whole county. Student Congress is an avenue that many division leaders use to inform their decisions. Without these students, division leaders would not have a readily available forum for vetting ideas. Student Congress provides them with a thoughtful and experienced sounding board.

HCPS Student Congress is highly respected in Henrico County, and its level of service is unwavering. These students take pride in being able to participate in this program and know that they serve as the liaisons between county officials and the student body. The input and feedback of these students has prompted and informed many profound decisions. When changes need to be made, these students make sure their voices are heard. They are intelligent, articulate, and

committed to ensuring the success of their peers and of Henrico County. HCPS Student Congress is a program that is held in high regard because of the group's leadership skills and level of commitment. The program is a boon to the students, the school division, and Henrico County.

7. Brief Summary

HCPS Student Congress was formed in 2004, for students to research, brainstorm, collaborate and advocate for necessary changes to countywide practices, regulations, buildings, and curricula. Each of Henrico County's ten high schools sends ten representatives to serve on HCPS Student Congress. The makeup of HCPS Student Congress reflects the county's diversity in its culture, race, and academic achievement.

These student leaders come together quarterly to learn about leadership skills and team dynamics. They work collaboratively with local educational leaders, School Board members, business partners, and other experts in related fields. Henrico Student Congress is a platform for student opinion that allows their involvement in the decision-making that directly affects their education and community. Additionally, the experience allows students from different backgrounds and locales to come together and appreciate the community's diversity.

In addition to participating in the decision-making process of Henrico Schools, the students play a larger role: many of the county's directors and specialists are able to use HCPS Student Congress as a means of making decisions for their departments, to the benefit of the whole county. Without these students, division leaders would not have a readily available forum for vetting ideas. Student Congress provides them with a thoughtful and experienced sounding board.