



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: York County

Program Title: Lunch with a Firefighter

Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Stephen P. Kopczynski

Title: Fire Chief

Department: Department of Fire & Life Safety

Complete Mailing Address: P.O. Box 532, Yorktown, VA 23690

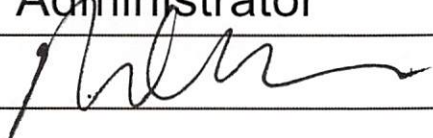
Telephone: (757) 890-3600 Website: www.yorkcounty.gov/fire

Email: flsafety@yorkcounty.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Neil Morgan

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

**2017 VACO Achievement Award Program
Nomination Summary
York County**

Program Title: Lunch with a Firefighter

Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

Program Overview

The York County Department of Fire and Life Safety believes that firefighters can enact positive change and influence when acting as role models in their community. It is our goal to use an effective public outreach program in order to develop constructive relationships between firefighters and the students/children within the community. In order to achieve this goal, our department works alongside the York County School Division under the *Lunch with a Firefighter* program.

Each week, first responders from our department visit a local elementary school for the *Lunch with a Firefighter: First Responder Friday* subset of the program, where we circulate throughout the cafeteria to meet and speak with primary-level students. On a monthly basis, a local middle school hosts visiting firefighters and allows our personnel the chance to have lunch in a small-group setting with five selected students. If additional first responders are able to attend, they are permitted to enter the cafeteria and visit with other students. Both the elementary and middle school levels of this outreach initiative allow students the chance to interact with firefighters in a comfortable and welcoming environment—while also giving the firefighters the ability to check-in periodically on students who may benefit from exposure to positive and caring influences. The building of these relationships is important not only to our department, but to the members of our school division, the staff of the schools, the students, parents of the students, and to the

overall health of the community.

1. The Problem/Need for the Program:

The York County School Division has identified multiple students that suffer from low self-confidence and a lack of positive role models in their lives. This causes concern not only within the schools, but within the community as a whole. Children benefit from mentors and role models—a lack of motivation and inspiration from adults can lead to long-term problems for the youth. Children imitate the people they look up to—in looks, actions, and character. Though children may talk more about celebrities or athletes they admire, they are still heavily influenced by the adults they respect in their own community and homes. It is our belief that low self-esteem and exposure to negative role models is an ongoing and problematic issue within our schools, and that by intervening early in the lives of students and providing positive examples of behavior, character, and action, we will do a large part in exacting change.

2. Description of the Program:

Through intergovernmental cooperation, the York County School Division and the York County Department of Fire and Life Safety have established a program capable of boosting the self-esteem of the selected, in-need students. The purpose of the program is to create a positive bridge between the students in the community and those who help keep them safe. This program works to form a bond of trust between the students and the first responders.

At the middle school level, teachers identify five students that could use additional attention and affirmation. They aim to select students that are often overlooked by peers or neglected within extracurricular activities due to their mid-range academic levels, low

self-esteem, and/or non-dominant personalities. Once selected, these students will have lunch with firefighters each month in a small conference room instead of in the cafeteria. Additional firefighters circulate throughout the cafeteria during lunch to talk with the remainder of the student body.

At the elementary school level, firefighters move from table to table visiting with students and faculty. Firefighters take time to share stories about their job with the students, and make efforts to engage in the students' lives, as well. As the children grow familiar with certain firefighters, they are more likely to share their own stories and let the first responders know how they are doing/what problems they may have.

Positive reinforcement and attention provided by adults outside of their teachers and family-members will go far in supporting healthy growth in the students' attitude. Knowing first responders on a personal level will increase a sense of community and help to de-escalate crisis when students and first responders see each other in settings outside of the school building.

To ensure successful execution of this program, both at the elementary and middle school levels, firefighters and administrative members of the York County Department of Fire and Life Safety have ongoing discussion and coordination with school staff. Communication between the two government bodies is necessary to ensure the students' needs are properly being met.

3. Cost of the Program:

Sodexo Food Services is the company that provides lunches for York County Schools. They have partnered with the elementary school and allocated resources to cover the cost of 30 lunches. Each month, we coordinate with the schools to ensure the firefighters stay within the 30 lunch limit. At the middle school level, the school pays

\$13.50 each month to cover the cost of the provided lunches. Over the course of a ten-month school year, this would equal \$135. This support follows the Sodexo values of creating community and giving back to the schools where kitchens are run by Sodexo.

4. The Results/Success of the Program:

This program has generated a number of positive results. Being selected to have private lunches with the firefighters have made many of the middle schoolers feel special and noticed, helping to build their self-esteem. By building relationships with firefighters, students have begun to feel important. The students that were able to spend time with the firefighters were extremely excited for the opportunity to learn about them and the service they provide our community. Teachers and school staff have noticed the desire many students have to participate in this program, and the amount of enthusiasm it causes amongst them when selected. Several parents have contacted school staff in order to express their appreciation of the program, and have noted the enjoyment their kids experience when given the chance to have lunch with the firefighters.

This program has also helped to form a bond of trust between the students and the first responders—they are at ease with the firefighters, often joking and talking freely with the ones that have visited them frequently. We feel the trust we have built with the students is an extremely important result of this program. The students not only receive positive role models, but they have begun to associate positive interactions and relationships with first responders. These positive associations with first responders will, in theory, be remembered as they continue on into adulthood. In order to build strong communities, both children and adults must maintain a level of respect for the firefighters and first responders. We feel this program has been vital to the facilitation of respectful relationships for both the present and future.

Additionally, this program has helped to strengthen relationships between the York County School Division and the York County Department of Fire and Life Safety. In any community, the fire department must interact with the school division on matters of public safety. However, our department has provided additional value to our schools through our collaboration in the *Lunch with a Firefighter* program. This program has shown the school staff that they have resources and support beyond that which they receive from parents and internal staff. Many members of the school staff have reached out to our department to express their gratitude, as well as their observations of the program and its effects on the students. They have informed us that after each visit, the firefighters were all the students talked about. Teachers and other school staff have noted that our presence in the schools have enacted positive changes, such as our ability to engage students that were otherwise more difficult/resistant to school participation. We feel the building of strong York County School Division – Fire and Life Safety relationships is an important result and success of this program.

5. Worthiness of an Award:

The York County Department of Fire and Life Safety, along with the York County School Division, believes that this collective initiative is worthy of the recognition of this prestigious award. Both the York County School Division and the York County Department of Fire and Life Safety have dedicated employees that have put forth extraordinary efforts to coordinate and create an innovative and effective outreach program. The School Division and Fire and Life Safety have always placed the safety of our school children and community as its highest priority, and we believe this program has made a noteworthy impact on the emotional wellbeing of the students, as well as a positive impact on future relationships between students and first responders. This program reflects

our commitment to community-building, and the long-term effects of this program not only benefit members of the Department of Fire and Life Safety and the York County Schools, but every member of our community as a whole. The proactive approach taken by both the York County School Division and York County Fire and Life Safety will enhance the overall interaction of school-age children with first responders in an emergency situation, as well as their future interactions with first responders as adults.

It is felt that the *Lunch with a Firefighter* program will continue to strengthen bonds between the young community and its role models, and in doing so has proved worthy of an award.

6. Brief Program Summary:

Growing up is a difficult thing to do in today's world. Children are exposed to more and more information – and not all of it is positive. In addition, many children lack positive role models in their lives, instead looking to celebrities for guidance on how to dress, act, and interact with others. The York County School Division and the County's Department of Fire and Life Safety developed this program that allows local firefighters/first responders to visit select middle school students to interact with them and provide them with positive role models and influences by which to model their own behavior. In addition, firefighters/first responders visit with local elementary schools each Friday and have lunch with schoolchildren, giving them one-on-one time with the people who may be coming to their aid during a difficult time in their lives. The schoolchildren love seeing the firefighters arrive and are anxious to have them sit at their tables. Similarly, the middle-schoolers look forward to interacting with these staff members, learning of their careers and challenges, and perhaps even personal stories from their own adolescence. As an added benefit, the firefighters/first responders appreciate and enjoy this outreach program and their time spent with the younger members of our

community.

7. Supplemental Materials Attached:

Photos of firefighters/first responders are shown participating in the *Lunch with a Firefighter* program.

Program Title: Lunch with a Firefighter



A York County Firefighter has lunch with students at the Elementary level.



Administrative members of the York County Department of Fire and Life Safety attend the Lunch with a Firefighter program.



At the Middle School level, York County Fire and Life Safety staff interacts with students in a small-group setting.