



Virginia Association of Counties ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico
Program Title: #TheALEXProject
Program Category: Organizational Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Anthony McDowell
Title: Deputy County Manager for Public Safety
Signature: *Anthony E. McDowell*

Program Overview

In fall 2016, a group of caring volunteers joined forces and created #TheALEXProject at Donahoe Elementary School in Henrico County, Virginia. Since then, the innovative volunteer initiative has paired one or two adult volunteers with each class at the school. The pairing of volunteers with classroom teachers enabled each classroom to have a weekly volunteer who worked with students to provide academic and emotional support. The project aims to cultivate a community that is **Actively Loving** and **Encouraging eXcellence**. The project has also provided funds for teachers, students and the entire school, providing resources for a wide variety of projects throughout Donahoe Elementary School.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Before the creation of #TheALEXproject, Donahoe Elementary School had few volunteers working with students or supporting its staff members. Although the school was usually able to recruit volunteers for field trips, sometimes field trip volunteers did not show up, resulting in a last-minute scramble to send a school staff member along to maintain the necessary ratio of chaperones to students. Donahoe's PTA had been relatively inactive before the project, meaning there were few funds to provide teachers with classroom resources.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

For the past three years, #TheALEXproject has teamed with the school to provide a weekly volunteer for each homeroom. By providing this consistency of volunteer help in collaboration with the community, the initiative has positively affected students and teachers alike, and could be replicated by school divisions with similar challenges. The project has ensured that we have the required number of chaperones for school field trips without drafting staff members, and has provided teachers with money to help start their year.

How Program Was Carried Out

#TheALEXProject is named for Alex Moore, who died in 2015. Alex was a 2009 graduate of Hanover High School and a 2013 graduate of James Madison University. While Moore had first pursued a career in business, he later decided to go into a life of service. Moore lost his life just days before his graduation as a new Hanover County sheriff's deputy. Moore enjoyed serving others and was looking forward to serving and protecting the citizens of Hanover County. He had a zest for life and wanted to make a lasting, positive impact. #TheALEXProject's namesake embodied the characteristics of love, service and kindness.

In summer 2016, Kelly Chenault, a concerned local resident and friend of Moore's family, approached Henrico Schools' director of school improvement and professional development, with a new idea to support a school in need. Chenault was introduced to Rebecca Roper, principal of Donahoe Elementary School. Kelly pitched her idea: to provide a volunteer in each classroom once a week, all year, creating a program to help honor Alex Moore. At the time, Donahoe had little active community volunteer support, and the scope of the project was ambitious. The program was developed and implemented in 2016 with the objective of providing at least one volunteer to support each homeroom teacher, in kindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms. In addition, the program works to provide material and financial support through drives and fundraising.

In fall 2016, Roper told the Donahoe staff about the new project and introduced the teachers to Kelly Chenault, as well as Moore's parents, who talked about their son and the proposed project. Staff members were deeply moved when the couple described their desire to help create an environment that embodied Alex's characteristics: **Actively Loving** and **Encouraging eXcellence**. After the staff heard the story of Alex's life and the vision for the project, 24 newly recruited

volunteers strode into the Donahoe library and surprised the assembled faculty. This constituted one volunteer for each Donahoe homeroom.

The volunteers had been recruited by Chenault and had no prior affiliation with the school. Volunteers included some of Chenault's friends, relatives, coworkers or people who had heard about the project via word-of-mouth or social media.

Kelly organizes the volunteers, assigning them to classrooms, and is the main point of contact should the school need anything. All donations the project receives are organized and distributed through the school's counselor.

The principal paired each homeroom teacher with one or two ALEX volunteers. Volunteers were approved through the county's screening process and attended an orientation led by the school counselor. The volunteers and teachers were introduced at the initial meeting and discussed the specifics of how a volunteer could best support his or her classroom. Each volunteer and teacher worked to decide on schedules and frequency of visits.

Since that initial meeting, "ALEXes" have served the school each week. They work with small groups of students to support reading and math. They meet with students to help support social and emotional needs, to help build relationships and provide an extra hand in the classrooms wherever needed. ALEX volunteers help coordinate special projects in the classroom, make copies and decorate for special events. They often serve as chaperones for field trips, ensuring the school has the necessary ratios, while continuing to build relationships. The male ALEXes have even bought the fifth-graders neckties and taught them how to tie them. In addition to their support during the school day, the ALEXes work to build relationships during school events. Volunteers participate in evening Title 1 events, manning stations and working with students. They

also provide incentives for the families who attend those events. At each grade-level performance for a PTA night, several ALEXes will be in attendance to encourage the students. The ALEXes regularly find ways to support the school socially, physically and mentally.

Volunteers have worked with schools and businesses to seek donations and help raise funds for Donahoe. Large numbers of books have been donated to teachers and students to take home. They have supplied the clinic with clothes, with particular attention to warm clothing such as jackets, gloves, and scarves for harsh winters. Before Winter Break this year, volunteers donated enough snacks to fill a classroom cabinet. Recently the school's custodian passed away and the ALEXes showed up to support the teachers. They brought doughnuts and flowers, as well as love and support during a difficult time.

Since 2016, #theALEXproject has grown in its volunteer numbers and financial support. In 2018-19, volunteers have moved beyond the homerooms and are now helping in the "encore" classes (specialized disciplines that host other classes in rotation, such as P.E., art, music, library and STEAM programs). Through significant donations they were able to provide \$125 each to homeroom teachers as well as to the encore teachers. #TheALEXproject donated additional money to the school that was used to purchase supplemental reading materials, tools to help students' emotional needs, and additional supplies for lessons.

In 2018, #theALEXproject received nonprofit status, which has allowed the program to increase its fundraising abilities and financial support. The executive board of #theALEXproject meets annually with school administration and the school counselor to discuss program goals and initiatives. For the 2018-19 school year, the program goals are focused on providing a new book for each student in the third grade at his or her reading level; supporting incentives for academic

and behavioral success; and providing financial resources for materials to support students academically and behaviorally.

Staff members often remark about how they feel supported by the program and how encouraged they are by their ALEX. Not only does each ALEX provide encouraging words and often small treats for their assigned teacher, but they have worked together to provide that across the building. In 2018, a group of ALEXes worked together to re-cover the chairs in the teachers' lounge to create a sense of energy and appreciation. They keep the lounge supplied with coffee pods and snacks to make sure teachers have the energy they need to succeed. Multiple times during the year, #theALEXproject provides lunch or special treats for the staff, while adding excitement to faculty meetings and other special events with door prizes. #theALEXproject works to show the teachers that they are both appreciated and supported.

The students have benefited greatly by the relationships with the ALEXes. When an ALEX walks into a classroom, it is like Santa Claus has arrived. They're bombarded with hugs each time they join a class. Students greatly enjoy the extra love from adults and have developed strong relationships with the ALEXes. When students change grade levels, they often try to seek out their previous ALEX to get a hug or high five. The ALEXes also maintain relationships by seeking out students they know who have moved on to other classrooms. These relationships have encouraged the students to keep working hard and to keep putting their best foot forward. They don't want to ever disappoint an ALEX. In the three years since the implementation of #theALEXproject, Donahoe Elementary School has had the support it needs to succeed. Additional positive adult relationships for the students combined with teacher encouragement have helped support the growth we have seen in the school.

Financing and Staffing

#TheALEXproject is a nonprofit program that has raised funds for a wide variety of initiatives at Donahoe Elementary School. Each year, the project creates a GoFundMe account, and also accepts other donations to raise money for the many projects planned for the year. The project has raised at least \$5,000 annually for Donahoe. Each year, the project has given each classroom teacher and each encore teacher \$100-\$125 to use on classroom supplies.

The program also funded the purchase of books for classrooms and snacks for the students, and has adopted several students each year, providing them with presents and food during the holidays. The project has collected donations of items to award to teachers during faculty meetings and other celebratory events throughout the year. The project also works with schools in Hanover County, works with local businesses to donate books and games to the school, and secures donations of hats, gloves and coats.

Program Results

Donahoe teachers seldom had consistent volunteers in their classrooms before the launch of #TheALEXproject. Having a consistent volunteer has helped develop relationships that support the school's teachers and students. #TheALEXproject has built a support system for teachers and students inside and outside the school building. The ALEXes have an effect on student families and on the overall community by giving their time to assist in educational and social activities.

At the end of the #theALEXProject's first year, Donahoe regained its state accreditation after a gap of several years. Donahoe made a 5.5 percentage point gain in state SOL scores in English and a 1.7 percentage point gain in math. The school has continued to lower its out-of-school suspension rate each year that the #theALEXProject has been in operation.

Morale in the school has also improved, among both teachers and students. Teachers say they feel more supported. Instead of paying out-of-pocket for classroom materials, the materials are provided and paid for by funds raised by #theALEXProject. In short, teachers have the support of additional adults. ALEX funds are also used for surprises for the staff, like a lunch, pies, treats (candy, snacks and drinks) brought to their classrooms, and for prizes for games played in staff meetings.

The project brought in a local artist to paint signs for the teachers to hang in their classrooms as well as to paint positive sayings throughout the building. When students came back to school and noticed the affirmations, they reacted with delight. The phrases around them encourage them to believe they have the power to succeed.

The project makes a difference outside of school hours as well. This year alone, #theALEXproject provided holiday presents to 10 families and donated money for food during times when students are not at school.

Recently, Donahoe's beloved custodian died, which deeply affected the school community. When #theALEXproject heard the news, volunteers were in the building surrounding the students and staff. They brought donuts and orchids, but their support was deeper than the items they donated: they provided a shoulder to cry on when needed. They attended the funeral, showing unity in the Donahoe community as well as support to the grieving family.

Brief Summary

Before the creation of #TheALEXproject, Donahoe Elementary School in Henrico County, Virginia had few volunteers working regularly with students or supporting its staff members. Although the

school was usually able to recruit volunteers for field trips, sometimes field trip volunteers did not show up, resulting in a last-minute scramble to send a school staff member along to maintain the necessary ratio of chaperones to students. Donahoe's PTA had been relatively inactive before the project, meaning there were few funds to provide teachers with classroom resources.

In fall 2016, a group of caring volunteers joined forces and created #TheALEXProject at Donahoe. Since then, the innovative volunteer initiative has paired one or two adult volunteers with each class at the school. The pairing of volunteers with classroom teachers enabled each classroom to have a weekly volunteer who worked with students to provide academic and emotional support. The project aims to cultivate a community that is **A**ctively **L**oving and **E**ncouraging **eX**cellence. The project has also provided funds for teachers, students and the entire school, providing resources for a wide variety of projects throughout Donahoe Elementary School.

The love and compassion the project volunteers show the students and staff at Donahoe Elementary School is immeasurable. #theALEXproject has taken a young man's tragic death and turned it into an effective expression of his principals – love, service and kindness. The project participants have become “guardian angels” for Donahoe Elementary School, and the students and teachers are forever changed by the generosity of the project.