



# 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](#).

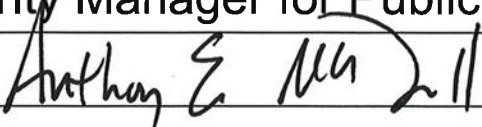
### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico  
Program Title: Amy's Passport: Introducing a School Leader to a Community  
Program Category: Communications

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Victoria Davis  
Title: Public Relations Specialist  
Department: Public Relations & Media Services  
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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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

## **Program Overview**

In June 2018, Henrico County Public Schools hired Amy Cashwell as its new superintendent. Cashwell came to the Henrico County, Virginia, school division to replace the retiring Patrick Kinlaw. Whereas Kinlaw had been with Henrico Schools since 1997 and was well known in the community, Cashwell arrived from Virginia Beach and was not. Cashwell set out on an ambitious countywide tour to learn more about our diverse county, while introducing herself to its residents.

To chronicle her many visits, to introduce her to Henrico County, and to communicate her vision for Henrico Schools, Cashwell's travels and meetings were published as "Amy's Passport." It first debuted as a blog on Henrico Schools' website, at <https://henricoschools.us/amypassport/>, and then as a small passport-style booklet that was distributed in the community. The passport theme arose from Cashwell's impressions of Henrico County's diversity, and the feeling that she could "travel the world right here at home." Through Amy's Passport and its associated events, Henrico Schools' Department of Communications and Public Relations aided in introducing Cashwell and her vision to the various constituencies of her new community.

With a community invested in the success of its schools, introducing a new leader and helping her communicate her vision was a priority. Henrico Schools' Department of Communications and Public Relations created a creative communications solution that played on the unique nature of our community. The cohesive narrative, online and in print, played a central role in introducing our new superintendent to our community, and helping her communicate her vision as a new leader.

### **Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality**

When a new leader comes into any organization from outside its ranks, it's important that he or she get off to a good start. For a large school system with a community heavily invested in its identity and success, this is particularly crucial. Superintendents are visible community leaders with constituencies that cut across all segments of a community. The superintendent of Henrico County Public Schools oversees a school division with 50,000 students and nearly 7,000 employees. The leader of the school system must connect effectively with families, students and employees, as well as members of the media and leaders in government, business, religion and other fields.

Patrick Kinlaw had served in various capacities with Henrico Schools since 1997. He was well known in Henrico County, and when he moved from assistant superintendent to superintendent in 2014, there was little need to introduce him to the community. When Kinlaw retired, the school division hired Amy Cashwell as his replacement. Cashwell had grown up in Virginia Beach and had spent her entire career with Virginia Beach City Public Schools. She was not well known in our community.

Henrico County is an engaged community with tremendous support for its public schools, which enjoy a strong reputation. In 2013 citizens approved a meals tax to renovate aging schools, and in 2016, approved \$273 million in bonds for schools projects.

The community was also heavily involved in the process to choose a new superintendent, which began in spring 2018. Thousands of community members completed surveys detailing the qualities they wanted in a new superintendent, and input sessions enabled them to talk directly

with School Board members about their wishes. With a community so invested in the success of its schools, introducing a new leader and helping her communicate her vision was a priority.

### **How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria**

Introducing a new public leader to a community is a challenge faced at times by almost all school divisions and local governments. By embracing a creative approach such as "Amy's Passport," local governments can emphasize their strengths and create strong connections that can be crucial to public success.

### **How Program Was Carried Out**

The Henrico School Board announced its hiring of Amy Cashwell as the school division's leader in June, 2018. She was introduced to an applauding crowd of teachers and community members in the Board's auditorium. She had been chosen after a national search that included extensive involvement. She began work as Henrico's superintendent July 1. She was selected by the Henrico School Board after a national search, and came to Henrico from her position as chief academic officer for Virginia Beach Schools' Department of Teaching and Learning. Cashwell oversaw a number of departments, including those dealing with instruction, instructional technology, student support services, exceptional education, and opportunity and achievement. She became the first woman in the school division's history to serve as superintendent.

Before her introduction as superintendent, Cashwell sat down for a brief talk with members of Henrico Schools' Department of Communications and Public Relations. Cashwell talked about

the importance of getting to know Henrico County – and having community members get to know her:

“Community is important to me, so as I begin my time in Henrico, I’ll be excited to get to know the community at large – including the business community, the broader educational community and higher ed institutions – and think about how we can work together to strengthen opportunities for students in Henrico County Public Schools. It will be important to develop those community connections and get a sense of what the broader community sees as needs and priorities. How can we create strong connections, pathways, opportunities and internships? That’s very important to me.”

The Communications Department helped organize, publicize and orchestrate a series of opportunities to introduce the superintendent to Henrico County. Five August meet-and-greet sessions were held at public libraries across Henrico County. There, attendees completed handwritten feedback cards about what they like, wish for, or want from Henrico Schools. In September and October, the new superintendent presided over a series of five additional formal town-hall meetings, which involved a presentation and question-and-answer sessions.

Besides these gatherings with large numbers of families and community members, the new superintendent was extremely active in her “first 100 days” in meeting with a wide range of constituencies, including:

- Henrico County Council of PTAs
- Henrico Education Association
- Henrico Schools Lay Advisory Committee

- Henrico Schools Teacher Advisory Council
- Grant donors
- Henrico families at events such as the back-to-school kickoff event
- Henrico Partnership for Family and Community Engagement Council
- New Teacher Academy and Teacher Leadership Academy
- Henrico County government leaders
- Henrico County fire and police officers
- Chamber RVA business leaders

She also began to act on a goal of visiting each of Henrico Schools' 72 schools and program centers to visit with students and staff members, as well as holding one faculty meeting at each school throughout the school year.

Telling our community about the superintendent's efforts was an important part of the communications strategy for Henrico Schools Department of Communications and Public Relations. When she visited various parts of the county, Cashwell tweeted her stops on her personal account, and her visits were posted or reposted on HCPS' social media accounts. In addition, the department issued media advisories and news releases about her town hall meetings and meet-and-greet sessions, and shot photos and video of many of her visits for use on social media and the school division's cable and YouTube channels.

However, the superintendent's tour of the county needed a theme to connect the visits with a common narrative in order to communicate them more effectively. Also needed was a single place

where parents, guardians, students, employees and other constituencies could see the breadth of her visits, understand her vision for the school division, and get a feel for her personality.

In her visits across Henrico County, Cashwell noted that she was struck by the county's diversity.

"More than 80 languages are spoken in our schools, with families from all over the world," Cashwell said. "I felt like I could travel the world right here in Henrico County."

Add that to the county's geographic diversity – Henrico contains dense suburbs outside Richmond, rural areas and small towns – and "Amy's Passport" was born. The booklet is subtitled, "Travels, reflections and next steps."

Amy's Passport began as a blog on the school division's website, <https://henricoschools.us/amypassport/>. The project was conceived as a travel blog. As the superintendent logged more visits, blog entries detailed those from her point of view. The Communications Department designed a passport-themed web page, and members of the department worked with Cashwell to take photos of her visits and to create and post the blog entries.

As the superintendent approached her 100-day anniversary as the leader of the school division, the director of the Department of Communications and Public Relations conceived the idea of reimagining the Amy's Passport blog as a small bound passport-style booklet to sum up the superintendent's tour and to commemorate it. The print passport would be distributed to members of the School Board and other leaders across the school division, as well as government and community leaders.

Members of the department researched costs for the booklet and chose a format. The department's graphic designer created a design that mimicked a U.S. passport and a communications specialist adapted the blog posts for print. The 32- page print passport has a heavy stock cover with gold embossing reminiscent of a genuine passport. Its interior pages in full-color glossy paper.

While the Amy's Passport blog was mostly devoted to Cashwell's travels around Henrico and her impressions of the county, the print passport is also a policy document, and integral to presenting Cashwell's goals. In keeping with the booklet's subtitle, "Travels, reflections and next steps," the passport was divided into three sections. After the travelogue-style retrospective is a reflections section devoted to what she sees as the division's strengths and opportunities, aligned with the school division's four cornerstones: Safety and Wellness, Academic Growth, Equity and Opportunity, and Relationships. The final section, "Next Steps," outlines specific policy recommendations for the coming years.

At the December 2018 School Board meeting, the superintendent gave a presentation on her experiences since arriving in Henrico Schools. The presentation was aligned with the Amy's Passport booklet, which she distributed to members of the Board.

In support of the new print passport, the department created a news release with photos, and heavily publicized the passport to Henrico families through social media, emails, our "School Days" page in a local newspaper, web banners and regular blurbs in our e-newsletter, The Binder.

## **Financing and Staffing**



The only added cost of the Amy's Passport project was the cost of printing, which was \$2,153 for 700 copies of the book. The writing, editing, webhosting, web design, and videos and photos were all created by members of the Department of Communications and Public Relations. The print costs came out of the yearly budget of the HCPS Department of Communications and Public Relations.

### **Program Results**

Eventually, within the world of school public relations word got out that "Amy's Passport" was a unique approach to introducing a new superintendent. The HCPS Communications and Public Relations team was asked to host three 30-minute sessions on the plans and implementation during the November 2018 conference of the Chesapeake Chapter of the National School Public Relations Association held in Richmond, Va.

"Amy's Passport" is set to go national. The Henrico Schools Communications and Public Relations team was invited to present an hour-long "skill session" during the July 2019 National School Public Relations annual seminar in Washington, D.C where school communicators from coast to coast will convene and hear the Henrico story.

#### Amy's Passport "By the Numbers"

- 4: Convocations held for HCPS teachers and staff
- 5: Summer meet-and-greets held
- 5: Fall town hall meetings held

**31:** "Passport" stops documented in printed booklet.

**49:** Recommendations and next steps underway in 2019.

**56:** Strengths and opportunities identified in the "Passport."

**77:** "I like, I wish, I want" comment cards collected.

**79:** Citizens who attended a Fall 2018 Town Hall meeting.

**700:** Printed copies of the "Passport", distributed to elected officials, government leaders, school principals, various civic organizations and interested citizens.

**3,060:** Number of "reads" of the Amy's Passport digital booklet from Dec. 13 to Feb. 14.

**6,148:** Screens reached from Dec. 13 to Feb. 14.

**53%:** Percentage of readers on mobile devices, indicating a connection with audiences that are "on the go."

## **Brief Summary**

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