ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2020.** 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: Making Professional Development Meaningful for Assistant Principals

Program Category: Organizational Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Victoria Davis

Title: Public Relations Specialist

Department: Public Relations

Telephone: 804-501-4933   **Website:** www.henrico.us

Email: dav127@henrico.us

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Brandon Hinton

Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration

Signature:

Program Overview

The "Problem of Practice" program is an innovative professional development initiative for assistant principals in Henrico County Public Schools. Professional development for assistant principals has been associated with better classroom instruction, teacher retention and positive climate in schools. However, it is often not included in division-level professional development efforts. To support Henrico assistant principals, the Department of Professional Learning developed the Problem of Practice program as part of monthly cohort meetings with all 163 assistant principals.

Representing 72 schools, they were led through individual research and problem-solving models as they identified problems within their schools, researched solutions, designed interventions, measured outcomes and disseminated findings among themselves. This work occurred through a partnership with six universities in central Virginia and provided individualized expert coaching for each assistant principal throughout the year.

At the end of the program, assistant principals share their findings with each other and the community in a "What Works Fair." This program, in its first year, has shown an increase in the self-efficacy of participants to solve problems in their building, their comfort in using research and data to guide their decisions as leaders, and the opportunities to collaborate with other professionals in the division.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

In the field of professional development for educators, there has been a recent outcry for more targeted and specific training for school administrators at the division level (Miller, 2012). In an effort to meet the many needs of teachers in a public school system, the school leaders

themselves can become underserved in the types of training and support offered to them. In addition to this overall need for simply more learning resources for principals and assistant principals, research suggests that individualized and job-embedded professional learning is often not the norm when it comes to training being provided by divisions (Kinoshita, 2007). In particular, the training of assistant principals in meaningful ways has been identified as an area of critical need in supporting engaging instruction across multiple schools in a school division, supporting teacher retention, and establishing positive school culture (National Research Council, 2004). Despite the link between their training and positive school outcomes, assistant principals are overlooked in division-level professional learning plans (The Wallace Foundation, 2019).

While Henrico Schools has traditionally offered a variety of options for principals in terms of professional learning, there was no targeted, divisionwide professional learning program for the 163 assistant principals working in schools before 2019. When surveyed, these educators expressed the desire for a program uniquely tailored to professional development for assistant principals to build their skill sets as leaders before they became administrators. In addition, more than half indicated that they "strongly desired" some sort of personalized training where they were supported in building skills to solve their own problems within their buildings.

Based on the research-based best practices in professional development, the lack of unique support for assistant principals in the county, and their self-identified learning needs, the HCPS Department of Professional Learning and Leadership adopted an "action research" approach to professional development for all of the assistant principals in the division. Action research provides the type of individualized professional growth opportunities to help strengthen leaders and has shown to significantly increase the efficacy and effectiveness of building level leaders (Sagor & Williams, 2017).

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

While this work is still in its first year, the problem of practice program is worthy of this VACo honor because of its innovation and effectiveness. It has had an overwhelmingly positive response from assistant principals. Traditionally, division-led professional development initiatives for leaders are either nonexistent or overly directive (NEA, 2004; Wallace Foundation, 2019). Receiving positive feedback from assistant principals concerning professional learning is evidence of the program's success.

To create this program, Henrico Schools had to: seek out university partnerships; design a unique action research model; create training materials based on the model; lead every participant in the division through the highly individualized and rigorous process of in-building research; provide ongoing coaching and support to meet the needs of so many different learners, and host an event that allowed their successes to be shared and recognized. In working with so many community partners and thoughtfully creating a training program and model that is replicable, the division will be able to not only impact its 72 schools and more than 50,000 students but also share the program with other school divisions. Most of all, this work was able to provide support for some of the most underserved unsung heroes in our community — assistant principals. These administrators often have workloads as demanding as principals but must meet those demands with less training, resources and recognition. Finally, this work is powerful because of the multiplying effect of action research, where individuals are empowered to solve their own problems, collect their own data, and share their own success. As public schools are needed to serve more and more needs within the community, any training and support that helps build school-level leadership is exceedingly valuable. With this work, we increased the confidence and ability of the assistant principals in our county, and we know the community will reap the benefits of their work.

How Program Was Carried Out

The goals of this program are:

- To increase Henrico's assistant principals' self-efficacy (confidence) as instructional leaders.
- To build Henrico's assistant principals' ability to problem solve within their buildings.
- To provide networking opportunities for Henrico assistant principals within the school division and in the higher education community.
- To increase assistant principals' comfort using educational research and multiple forms of data to positively affect their school communities.

Structure:

The "AP Cohort Problem of Practice" is a part of a larger training program for the 163 assistant principals working in Henrico Schools. In this program, assistant principals meet monthly with division-level central office staff, and community and university research partners to learn the action-research process and apply it to a self-identified problem of practice within their building. The assistant principals work in teams to move through seven major processes of action research: (1) identify problems within their building, (2) develop research questions, (3) consult educational research and gather data, (4) design a solution to the problem, (5) implement it, (6) assess its effects, and (7) disseminate the findings with other stakeholders.

During each monthly meeting, assistant principals are led by the Professional Learning and Leadership Team through professional development modules that support their problem of practice work occurring in their buildings. The seven meetings occur during a more extensive daylong training session for assistant principals and last for about 2.5 hours. Each training session is designed to guide assistant principals through the action research model, in each of the seven major processes of action research. Rather than traditional "sit and get" sessions, these professional development sessions allow for teams of assistant principals to work at their own

pace, assess research and data gathered from their schools and apply it to the action research model. To ensure that the goal of networking and collaboration among assistant principals is met, a priority is placed on allowing for peer feedback and critique among the assistant principals as they work toward honing and addressing their problems of practice.

Another key element of this work is the use of expert coaching for the assistant principals in the problem of practice. Division-level leaders from Henrico County, alongside university experts from multiple higher education institutions in the community, come to each meeting and work with specific groups throughout the problem of practice process to offer advice, help interpret data, assist in problem-solving, and make connections with outside stakeholders. In the 2019-20 problem of practice initiative, 20 coaches were recruited by the Department of Professional Learning and Leadership and given a short training session on best practices when working with research groups. This team of coaches, both from the division and outside, were paired with teams based on their unique expertise and areas of interest and met with the assistant principal teams consistently throughout the program.

One of the critical pieces of action research is the dissemination of results. This was also an area that the assistant principals identified as an area of need in terms of professional growth at the outset of the work (over 60% of assistant principals acknowledged that they are usually uncomfortable sharing the results of their school based initiatives with others in a preliminary survey). The problem of practice concludes with a "What Works Fair," where the 163 assistant principals, working in more than 50 collaborative teams, share their results with one another, principals, division leadership, universities, and stakeholders. The What Works Fair is held in a school, after hours, and set up as a community event to highlight the yearlong professional development conducted by the assistant principals in the problem of practice. It begins with an

opening "ignite session," where six of the teams share their results from their problem of practice work during consecutive 5-minute presentations. Afterward, the remaining teams disseminate their findings by presenting in front of conference-style research posters printed by the division. The goal of this event is to give the assistant principals positive experiences celebrating their work as professional learners and instructional leaders, thereby increasing their comfort and ability to be strategic problem-solvers in their building. It is the culminating event in the problem of practice program as it seeks to build professional leadership within the division.

Development and Implementation Timeframe and Partnerships

The development of this program occurred over the summer of 2019. The HCPS Department of Professional Learning and Leadership worked in collaboration with the Medical College of Virginia School of Health Administrators to develop a workable action research model to guide our professional development. From here, training modules, a digital handbook and session materials were created by the division to support the problem of practice work. When creating the modules, the team worked with the Medical College of Virginia and the Metropolitan Education Research Association in Richmond to design high-quality training materials that could be replicated and used in training sessions in future years. Once initial materials were created, the division consulted with education faculty members from the University of Richmond, Averett University, Virginia State University, Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Virginia during this work. The consultations ensured that the most current research and best recommended practices were being used in the training of instructional leaders. This collaboration occurred during two separate planning meetings in June and August of 2019.

The first meeting was in September 2019, where the problem of practice work was explained to the assistant principals. In addition, a pre-survey was given to all 163 assistant principals, measuring their comfort with each element of the action research process, as well as their efficacy

as instructional leaders (program goal 1), comfort as problem solvers in the building (goals 2 and 4), and desire to network with others (goal 3). The pre-test confirmed a strong desire in the need for this program and confirmed the design of the training initiative. The results of the pre-survey are shared in supplemental materials. Still, they indicated that less than half of the assistant principals expressed comfort in using educational research to inform actions, their own ability to design and implement meaningful change in their building, and in sharing about programs they have initiated with other educators.

Many of the partnerships included in this work have been outlined. Still, it is worth noting that Henrico Schools worked with six different university partners as well as a local research group. Also, community members are invited to the What Works Fair to see the success in the professional learning of the assistant principals.

Financing and Staffing

For the pilot year of this program, the operating cost for this program was low. Aside from the time, it took the Department of Professional Learning and Leadership to develop the training materials and the cost of the What Works Fair as the culminating event; there are few costs of note.

Item	Description	Cost
Food during training	Various snacks for the six major training meetings purchased in bulk and set out twice per meeting.	$150
Printing of Research Posters	Cost to print 24" x 36" research posters (the department already owned the printer, paper and ink.)	$250
What Works Fair	Coffee, decorations and food for the culminating event	$1,000

If other counties wished to replicate this program, all of these costs could be scaled up or down based on budget availability and community partnerships. As all of the research coaches were either division employees or university partners who saw the opportunity to work with and learn from school leaders as mutually beneficial, there was no cost in stipends for the coaches.

Program Results

Though this program is currently ongoing, the division already considers the work a success based on the learning goals and the data collected. 95% of assistant principals surveyed in January reported that they "find the problem of practice work to be beneficial to me as a leader," showing a holistic approval of this type of professional development. In addition, the midyear survey showed a 30% increase in the number of assistant principals who feel "comfortable or very comfortable" in using research to guide their work as leaders. The number of assistant principals reporting they feel "comfortable or very comfortable" in their ability to solve problems in their building has already risen by 28%. The team sees these results as reliable indicators of high-quality professional learning, especially considering both the lack of targeted professional development offered to assistant principals in the past, and the sometimes-prevalent view that professional development can be a time conflict in the busy schedule of administrators.

In addition, the group has conducted interviews and surveys of participants. The themes emerging from the analysis of the open-ended question "Has this program helped you in your practice as an instructional leader? If so, how?" are:

1) An appreciation for the individualized professional learning
   (e.g. "I've really enjoyed being able to take this work where I want and make it apply to my job. I'm focusing on English Language Learners and it's something I've become really passionate about.").
2) The growth in leadership through working with a coach

(e.g. "It felt really good to be assigned a coach that works specifically with our topic. She came prepared with additional resources to assist and that was extremely helpful.").

3) The perceived value in getting to present work to peers and other school leaders

(e.g. "I'm excited that we aren't just doing this work, but we are being taught how to present as leaders to others. I feel like before this I never knew how to show the impact I have.").

4) The growth in practice through peer-to-peer collaboration among assistant principals

(e.g. "I love working with partners who aren't in our building. It gives us opportunities to practice the coaching techniques that were being taught and connect with others.").

Finally, because each of these 50+ projects produces its own initiative, the benefits to the division are vast. Teams have focused on topics like increasing the number of minority students in AP classes, ways to support teachers in providing engaging math instruction, better practices for selecting classroom books that reflect a diverse culture, and many others. The goals of the program specifically are to increase the efficacy and ability of assistant principals in building-level problem-solving and to connect them with one another, and our data shows this is occurring; however, the self-selected goals happening in each project are also being achieved through the action research process in a way that makes this initiative unique in its ability to produce multiple positive outcomes for the division's schools and students.

Brief Summary

The "Problem of Practice" program is an innovative professional development initiative for assistant principals in Henrico County Public Schools. Professional development for assistant principals has been associated with better classroom instruction, teacher retention and positive climate in schools. However, it is often not included in division-level professional development efforts. To support Henrico assistant principals, the Department of Professional Learning

developed the Problem of Practice program as part of monthly cohort meetings with all 163 assistant principals.

Representing 72 schools, they were led through individual research and problem-solving models as they identified problems within their schools, researched solutions, designed interventions, measured outcomes and disseminated findings among themselves. This work occurred through a partnership with six universities in central Virginia and provided individualized expert coaching for each assistant principal throughout the year.

At the end of the program, assistant principals share their findings with each other and the community in a "What Works Fair." This program, in its first year, has shown an increase in the self-efficacy of participants to solve problems in their building, their comfort in using research and data to guide their decisions as leaders, and the opportunities to collaborate with other professionals in the division.

Making Professional Developmental Meaningful for Assistants Principals Supplemental Material

Material 1: Problem of Practice Examples: (Some of the research topics chosen by assistant principals; names of assistant principals not included).

How can teachers develop more diverse classroom libraries to increase cultural awareness and sensitivity? Many of our students do not see themselves reflected in the literature in classroom libraries.
Effectiveness of Double Block Algebra I and if the same results can be obtained using 1st period.
African American males in grades 2 and 3 receive more office referrals for classroom and campus disruptions, work refusal, and disrespect than other groups in our schools. We would like to investigate how an increased use of classroom engagement strategies can positively impact student behavior, conduct, and work habits in this group of students.
How can differentiating interventions for trauma-affected students help them to improve their behavioral responses and interactions with staff and peers?
How does the ELL (ESL) classroom help students in their general content English classes (specific focus on the writing process)?
How can walk-through's support and improve teaching learning?
How to get EL parents actively involved in their child's progress through student led conferences.
Closing the opportunity gap in AP classes- increasing enrollment of all students, including minority students, in AP courses.
Equity/Racial Disparities in AP courses- increasing minority enrollment in AP classes
Is SRA-Corrective Reading an appropriate specially designed instruction for students with a specific learning disability in reading for students in grades 3-5.
How does building number-sense impact growth in math?
What got you here? Examining methods of recruitment for ACE Center students
Improving student engagement and achievement for 5th grade students with disabilities by increasing real-world connections.
Does providing targeted reading intervention to our fifth-grade students with disabilities, in addition to exceptional education services, increase their reading fluency when compared to peers who do not receive the additional intervention?

Material 2: Survey Results
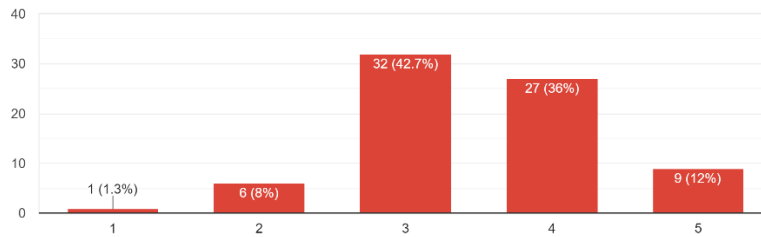Results from January survey (mid-year)

How beneficial do you feel this work (the Problem of Practice)
has been to your role as an instructional leader?
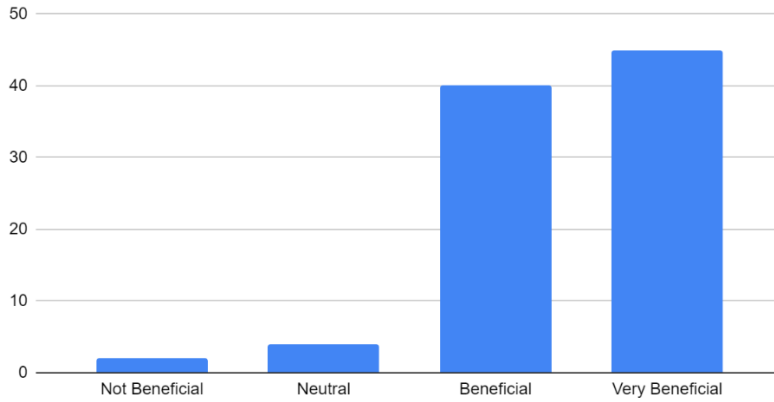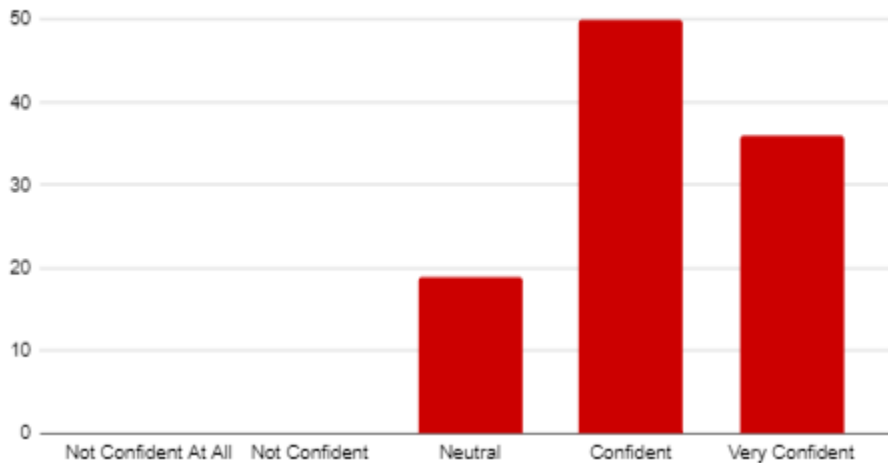

September Meeting Survey Results (Pre-Survey)

How confident do you feel in your ability to design and implement meaningful change in your
building as a leader?
75 responses

January Meeting Survey Results

How confident do you feel in your ability to design and
implement meaningful change in your building as a leader?

Material 3:
Examples of Modules for Action Research:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pksRCAKpDnIdi2jwLN-hMImmsPZQYYdq?usp=sharing