



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2021.** Please include this submission form with the 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: Equity Ambassadors
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

Henrico County Public Schools' Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity designed a divisionwide program for high school students that amplifies student voices by engaging and educating them on issues of equity and inclusivity (belonging within a culture of dignity). The program's aims align with our office's strategic pillar of equity and opportunity, and were to:

- Create opportunities for students to engage in “daring dialogue” on current equity issues impacting our school communities (providing them with the skills to engage with peers outside the program).
- Provide students with the knowledge and leadership skills they need to design and facilitate efforts to address the equity and diversity (inclusivity) issues within their school and the greater community.
- Expand students' scope of awareness and understanding by providing an intentional framework for them to engage with diverse students from across the school division.

Every year we identify an area that we believe will amplify student voices in the work of equity and determine supporting programming. This year we focused on empowering students to build bridges towards belonging, inclusion and respect for those within their schools and the greater community.

Problem /Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

In spring 2018, circumstances in our school division prompted the decision for an increased focus on equity and diversity. In response, a division “cabinet-level” position was created to champion these efforts. Following the hiring of this position, the new director engaged in meet-and-greet sessions throughout the school division and collected qualitative data and quantified this data to establish areas of opportunity. The five most significant areas addressed perceptions of:

- Inequality of resources among schools within the school division.

- Lack of cultural responsiveness shown in instructional delivery and curriculum.
- Lack of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity by staff and students.
- Lack of opportunity for student and community voice pertaining to issues of equity and diversity.
- The need for enhanced communication and transparency.

One way that the Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity (EDO) responded to these concerns was by suggesting that the divisionwide high school Student Congress be reimagined. The Student Congress was an organization made up of accomplished students from each of HCPS' nine high schools, who came together periodically to help solve issues affecting the school division. There was a general feeling from staff and students that HCPS' Student Congress was not impactful and did not adequately represent the diverse voices within the school division. After advocating that this student organization move to the EDO office, the program was repurposed and the mission changed to respond to the needs identified by stakeholders — amplifying student voices on issues of equity. In 2018, the HCPS Student Congress was officially changed to HCPS Equity Ambassadors. The mission was revised to focus on amplifying student voices, ensuring diverse representation, promoting student leadership and championing school-based issues of equity.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Henrico County Public Schools' Equity Ambassadors program is a groundbreaking endeavor that empowers students with the educational support for learning, discussing, strategizing and implementing equity work within their own lives and throughout their school communities. The catalog of opportunities offered to students in the Equity Ambassadors program serves as a conduit for positive change, bridging the gaps related to race, ethnicity, gender identity, religious affiliation, socioeconomic status and abilities, that otherwise could separate students on opposite

ends of the school division and even within the same schools. This program can serve as a model for other school divisions and youth organizations that seek to educate and empower students to engage in equity work within their communities.

How Program was Carried Out

With the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020-21 Equity Ambassadors operated using a virtual model. While we loved to meet in person, as we have done in the past, that was not an option during the pandemic. We recognized that many students wanted to participate and be a part of Equity Ambassadors. The Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity worked diligently to design a program we hoped would be engaging, educational, transformative. It was designed to support our overall mission to support dialogue on equity issues, give students knowledge and skills to address equity issues in their schools and community, and enable them to engage with students from across the school division.

Every year we seek to design programming with explicit goals to support this mission. In 2019-20 we focused on laying the groundwork for daring dialogue. In 2020-21, we focused on leadership in the space of equity, with the goal of providing skills that empower students to build bridges to peace, inclusion and respect for all, to foster a sense of belonging within their schools and the greater community. This year we had to make changes due to our switch from in-person to virtual programming. In the past, we met with students four times per school year and provided opportunities in support of belonging and equity.

Equity Ambassador staff sponsors, or “equity champions,” are leaders at the schools. They are charged with selecting students and sponsoring school-based events. In the past, equity champions have participated in professional learning sponsored by the EDO office during the in-

person quarterly student meetings. The goal for sponsors is to deepen their skills in leading equity and inclusivity initiatives at their home schools.

Equity Ambassadors are thoroughly trained in equity work, including daring dialogue and the Culturally Responsive Education Model (CREM), and are provided with opportunities to create and execute school-based projects specific to the needs for equity in their school communities. Equity Ambassadors are the young adult trailblazers of their communities. They have willingly volunteered to read, discuss, inquire, challenge and grow as scholars and citizens in an effort to “be the change they want to see in the world.” HCPS’ Equity Ambassadors program builds the platform on which equity work can reach thousands of students at Henrico County Public Schools’ nine high schools.

With HCPS’ switch to predominantly virtual learning, the EDO team crafted an online program that provides asynchronous leadership courses that included four self-paced activity modules using Schoology, our learning management system. These modules are designed to speak to the mission of Equity Ambassadors as it relates to student leadership with the 2020-21 focus on building bridges to peace, inclusion and respect for all. The modules focused on:

- Solidifying common language around this work.
- Establishing the building blocks of cultural responsiveness.
- Principles of servant leadership and how to use them as tools to improve leadership skills.
- Advocacy skills and how they can be used to address equity concerns specific to a student’s school.

Students who want to receive the yearly Equity Ambassador Leadership Program certificate must complete the asynchronous leadership modules, actively participate in the meetings and assist with their school-based equity event. The equity champion (sponsor) has discretion in identifying

students as "active participants." Students must have received two certificates to be eligible for the Equity Ambassador Medal, awarded at graduation. Students are recognized either in-person or virtually. The Equity Ambassador Medal is awarded to graduating students who have been awarded school-based Equity Ambassador Leadership certificates for at least two years. In addition, they are able to request a personal recommendation from HCPS' chief officer of equity, diversity and opportunity, but must provide an equity activism resume outlining all of the school and community work they have done over their high school career.

As in previous years, a select group of students participates in a division-level initiative with Equity Ambassadors from other schools. Because of recent social unrest focused on issues of race, we provided Equity Ambassadors the (voluntary) opportunity to participate in a cross-division book club using "Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You" by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi. This book is written for teens, but it is an unapologetic history of racism against Black people in America. It is made up of essays that show how often every step forward for Blacks in America has often led to a step backward in many ways. The book introduces Black activists and leaders and there is a focus on learning about Black women (or really, the absence of rights for Black women) throughout each movement. The students were broken into cross-division groups named after activists and leaders who have fought for marginalized groups. Students from different schools and various backgrounds read the book using a study guide that included supporting articles and videos. They engaged in monthly discussions. During the second semester, participants will create a podcast about the book study that combines ideas from the reading and the lived experiences of a person or persons of the participant's choosing. The podcasts will be used as tools for teaching the importance of equity in schools and communities.

The Equity Ambassadors program is designed to create a safe place for students across the school division to discuss current issues affecting our school communities. It also provides students with the knowledge and leadership skills to assist them in promoting equity and diversity (inclusivity) efforts in their school community. The Ambassadors work within their schools to develop projects such as mentoring students for whom English is their second language; creating cultural awareness activities for the classroom; encouraging cultural diversity; or food fairs to encourage respect and appreciation for the “funds of knowledge” of their diverse student populations. These activities serve to include and respect every student in the celebration of their uniqueness. In addition, the Ambassadors respond to racial and social unrest in the school, community and the world by meeting with their sponsors to discuss underlying causes and what they can do to promote understanding and change the hearts of people within their schools.

Financing and Staffing

The estimated operating budget for 2019-20 in-person was \$7,187. This includes:

- Lunch for approximately 200 students (15 per high school) four times a year.
- Equity ambassador T-shirts for all participating students and sponsors.
- Equity medals for all graduating seniors if they met requirements.
- Equity champions (sponsors) payment for summer training.
- EDO office staff resources (not included in expense).

The estimated operating budget for 2020-2021 virtual was approximately \$9,000. This includes:

- Equity medals for all graduating seniors if they met requirements.
- Stipend for equity champions (sponsors).
- 150 copies of “Stamped” for the book study.
- EDO office staff resources (not included in expense).

Program Results

Student participation in the two years the program has been in place has not only doubled, but the number of students engaged in equity-focused work has increased considerably. A total of 315 students signed up to be an Equity Ambassador and 140 students chose to participate in the book study and podcast opportunity.

In 2019-20 the focus was on “daring dialogue” about issues of equity and belonging. Every school met its requirement to conduct two equity or belonging programs. Below are examples of some of the student-led activities:

- Coordinated a Cultural Luncheon Meet-and-Greet that included food from different countries and engaged in “get to know you” games to promote recognition of differences and similarities in cultures.
- Facilitated “Daring Dialogue Library Talks” that included empathy-building activities with their fellow students and teachers.
- Filmed “Daring Dialogues Conversations” (in a car) for a website they created.
- Facilitated a sports tournament, which included students with physical disabilities being paired with athletes. After the event students held discussions with participants about what they had learned from their experiences.
- Coordinated a movie discussion about Richmond’s Confederate monuments (prior to the racial discord during summer 2020) using a film that was crafted by an HCPS student Equity Ambassador.
- Sponsored a clothes closet for professional dress attire to assist fellow students with clothes needed for job interviews and other events that require more formal clothing.

Intermittent surveys were conducted during the 2019-20 school year in order to assess the effectiveness of Equity Ambassadors programming. Related to the three goals of the Equity Ambassador opportunity for students, the following is feedback received after a session designed to have students engage with other students from across the school division to engage in conversations about culture:

- “I learned that there are other people like me who had ties to their own communities that they could tap into. All the ideas that they brought to the table showed me that we need every culture to be represented if we want to make Henrico and especially Douglas Freeman High School a better place.”
- “I learned how to be a more active listener when other people shared personal stories and insights.”
- “I learned how our identities can enhance and improve our leadership skills.”
- “I learned that everyone should use their unique characteristics and what sets them apart from everyone else to their advantage. We, as a community, should use our ‘superpowers’ to help each other and grow together.”
- “I learned that people tend to have more similarities than differences and when you get to know them you find that out. I will use this to relate with others, as a leader, to create connections to advance forward in both equity ambassadors and life!”

Equity Ambassadors engaging in programming at division-level meetings:

Brief Summary

HCPS’ Student Congress was repurposed and the mission changed to focus on one of the needs identified by stakeholders across the division — amplifying student voices on issues of equity. This group became the HCPS Equity Ambassadors. The mission was revised to focus on amplifying student voices, ensuring diverse representation, promoting student leadership and

championing school-based issues of equity. Equity Ambassadors are thoroughly trained in equity work, including daring dialogue and the Culturally Responsive Education Model (CREM), and are provided with opportunities to create and execute school-based projects specific to the needs for equity in their school communities.

Student participation in the two years the program has been in place has not only doubled, but the number of students engaged in equity-focused work has increased considerably. A total of 315 students signed up to be an Equity Ambassador and 140 students chose to participate in the book study and podcast opportunity.

In 2019-20 the focus was on “daring dialogue” about issues of equity and belonging. Every school met its requirement to conduct two equity or belonging programs. Examples include a variety of opportunities in each school for daring dialogues, inclusive sports tournaments, creation of clothes closet, and meaningful discussion and engagement in community-based equity issues. Students participating in equity ambassador activities report feeling more knowledgeable about equity issues, more self-aware of their own perspectives that impact equity and empowered to participate in and lead equity-based activities and dialogue in their communities.

Equity Ambassadors Supplemental Material

Equity Ambassadors engaging in programming at division-level meetings:



Cultural Awareness Activity

Volunteering with the Henrico Christmas Mother program for families in need.



Hermitage High School event to bring diverse students together to spread positivity.



Highland Springs High School event to foster inclusivity with students with disabilities.