



## 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: Local Police Department and Students Build Relationships  
Program Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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Signature: *Brandon Hinton*

## **Program Overview**

Varina High School is one of Henrico County Public Schools' nine comprehensive high schools. Varina has approximately 1,600 students, some of whom face economic challenges. Fifty-one percent of Varina students receive free or reduced-price meals. The Family and Consumer Sciences Department offers various classes on subjects from relationships to culinary arts.

During a class discussion, students had expressed fears — and sometimes lack of respect — for police officers. The culinary arts teacher decided that the best way to dispel this way of thinking would be to bring them together through a “family” meal. Twelve Henrico County police officers, including the two of Varina High School's school resource officers, came together in the kitchen for a meal prepared by the students. Students had questions prepared to ask the officers and the conversation flowed between them. By the end of the meal, everyone involved was talking, laughing, and most importantly, gaining a greater understanding of each other's perspectives.

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

About 70% of Varina's student population is African American. Many students have articulated a fear of police officers with the increase of media coverage of police brutality and protests sparked by George Floyd's death in Minnesota. The program's creator didn't want her students to fear the people who protect our community, and she didn't want the people that protect our community to be fearful of the students or other citizens that looked like her students.

The teacher stated, “We are all members of this community, and the officers are mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles.”

She believed that the students and officers needed to have time to build relationships that are positive and not always negative. Her desire was to break down walls and open up communication

between two sets of people who would normally not have this interaction and opportunity. She wanted her students to see officers as humans and in a positive light. Varina's school resource officers Thompson and Gentry are a big part of the community at Varina. The two of them were asked to invite members of the Henrico County Police Division to join the class for lunch and a relationship-building conversation. Participants expressed pleasure at the opportunity to enjoy a meal together, as bonds were created and the levels of fear were reduced.

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

The culinary arts teacher and her classes go above and beyond just learning the required competencies associated with their class curriculum. She believes in teaching her students life skills that can be taken with them beyond the classroom. She is intentional about her students having a purpose and goals beyond high school, whether they are in the workforce, enlisted or enrolled in college.

When the teacher sees a need in her class or community, she innovatively forms a plan to address it and involves her students as much as possible. She teaches the students to give back and serve their peers and elders with both professionalism and integrity. Some teachers turn a blind eye towards tough issues, however, she tackles them. Her courage to do so teaches her students so many other lessons not found in a textbook.

This is a program that can be replicated in other youth programs and schools divisions, providing invaluable connections between young people in the community and police officers.

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

After realizing the need for this community-unifying activity, the teacher first spoke with the two school resource officers at Varina. They loved the idea because they have built relationships with

most of the students while serving on their campus. The officers invited colleagues of various talents and authority levels to participate in this opportunity to understand a student's perspective. The program would also enable students to see the entire scope of what the Henrico County police division does and develop mutual respect and understanding.

Students worked all morning to prepare the meal to be shared with the police officers. The students prepared a pasta dish with red sauce and garlic bread. The students followed normal lab protocol as they would with every meal preparation. Each student was assigned specific tasks, whether it was prepping, cleaning, cooking or arranging food on plates. Anticipating that there might be a lack of conversation initially, the teacher had the students write questions on index cards. Students served the officers with a little apprehension, but soon realized that officers were laughing, joking and complimenting them on their professionalism. After the officers were served, students made a plate, began to ask their respective questions to the officers and the conversation started to flow. As the event progressed, the students were visibly more comfortable asking questions, answering questions, and laughing with the officers. In return, the officers enjoyed answering uncomfortable questions, clearing the air on misconceptions, and getting to know the students in their element. The officers continued to compliment the students on their professionalism and work ethic. This made the students feel important, empowered, and less fearful of officers outside of their school environment. This was also posted on Twitter, and the responses were plentiful. The teacher has held various "family meals" with other groups in the school and local community, but this lunch on Oct. 22, 2019, was one that the students and officers did not soon forget.

## **Financing and Staffing**

The culinary class is budgeted through the Henrico County Public Schools yearly lab fee of \$7.50 per student. Learning how to prepare various types of meals is already accounted for in the program outline.

## **Program Results**

The success of this program was in the relationships that were built between the police officers and our culinary students. While there is no quantitative data to offer to show the success, the qualitative data of the conversations that were held between the students and the police officers spoke volumes. A trust and bond were formed between many that evening.

The students were afforded an opportunity to get to know their community officers in a more personal way. They were able to get to know them as a person and not just a police officer. They were able to see that they had much in common with some of the officers, but that this is a side that they rarely have the opportunity to see. This evening had a profound effect on many of our students, as well as the officers.

## **Brief Summary**

Hearing her students fears and other emotions associated with interactions with police officers, the culinary arts teacher at Varina High school knew that building trust and relationships was needed to begin to build bridges. She proposed bringing students and police officers together through a “family” meal as a start to that work.

Twelve Henrico County police officers, including Varina High School's school resource officers, came together in the kitchen for a meal prepared by the students. Students had questions prepared to ask the officers and the conversation flowed between them. By the end of the meal,

everyone involved was talking, laughing, and most importantly, beginning to gain a greater understanding of each other's perspectives.

# Local Police Department and Students Build Relationships

## Supplemental Materials

