



## 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: Progress Through Community Conversations  
Program Category: Communications

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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

Name: Brandon Hinton  
Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration  
Signature: 

## **Program Overview**

In June 2020, the Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS) Family and Community Engagement Department introduced the first of five planned “Community Conversations.” The series was created in response to a need to provide spaces for Black voices in Henrico County and to discuss ongoing and needed progress to ensure safety and equity for all students, staff, and families.

Throughout the five-session series, participants heard from Henrico County Public Schools and Henrico County General Government representatives, parents and guardians, community members and most importantly, students. The feedback and participation were overwhelmingly positive — from those who participated in the live virtual events and those who watched the event recordings later online.

Responses to the series indicated that more opportunities for open communication and dialogue were created following the format of the community conversations. The series was administered by the department’s Family and Educator Resource Center, a part of the Family and Community Engagement Department.

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

The Community Conversations series originated in response to global protests sparked by the May 25 death of George Floyd in Minnesota. Floyd’s death lit a worldwide spark of concern regarding racism, injustice and inequity. Because staff members of HCPS’ Family and Community Engagement — or FACE — Department, responded personally to the unrest, it was clear that students and families were also experiencing similar emotions. During the planning process for the series, social media platforms began to feature students speaking out about times they may have experienced or witnessed discrimination in Henrico County Public Schools. It became apparent that one “Community Conversation” would not be adequate. In an effort to ensure that our school division is a safe space to listen and engage in dialogue, the Family and Community

Engagement Department created the series as a way to hear from our stakeholders and take appropriate action to support student and family needs.

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

The Community Conversations series was the first division wide event of its kind offered by Henrico County Public Schools. It has continued to be an impactful, innovative format of communication and feedback with county stakeholders. After the successful engagement brought on by the first sessions of the series, the series spawned other related events. Those events included the “Students for Change” call to action and planning sessions, the Henrico School Board Student Town Halls, and the Exceptional Education Virtual Town Hall. Participants in the sessions have expressed gratitude for the platform to heal and connect in an environment that is safe, supportive and progressive.

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

The goal of the Community Conversations series is to provide a safe space for stakeholders to collaborate and provide feedback (positive and critical) in a form that supports dialogue and understanding. The FACE Department wanted to ensure that our school division is a safe space to listen and discuss, with the purpose of supporting student and family needs. The meetings were held virtually through Google Meet and then switched to Microsoft Teams after the second session.

The sessions began with a welcome and meditation activity to set the tone and atmosphere of the session. The brief meditation sessions were guided by a community partner, Bare Soul Yoga. After this “mindful moment,” panelists were asked questions based on community needs, previous feedback and current topics designed to support thoughtful discussion. A strategic method of

using an online form to respond to questions was used in order to direct questions to the appropriate panelist or roll it into a future session. Each session had a panelist scheduled to focus on HCPS' four main stakeholders: our staff, parents and guardians, community partners and students.

“Community Conversations: A Call to Action” included panelists Rev. Tyrone Nelson, Varina District representative on the Henrico County Board of Supervisors and pastor of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church; Roscoe Cooper III, Fairfield District School Board representative, Dr. Monica Manns, director of the HCPS Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity; Sharita Bryant, president of the Henrico County Council of PTAs; and a student representative from HCPS' Equity Ambassadors program. This first session had about a two-week turnaround time and the virtual event had reached capacity before it began.

“Community Conversations: Student Voices” featured the voices of student panelists from across Henrico County as they discussed their perspectives on racial equity and their experiences in Henrico County Public Schools. Students also talked about their actions and commitment to social change in their schools and their community. Examples of the discussion included a middle school student who created a T-shirt, with proceeds going to support the Black Lives Matter Movement; a student with a five-point plan to increase equity and inclusion in his school; and a student representative from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

“Community Conversations: Parent and Guardian Perspectives” consisted of a panel of parents and guardians from across Henrico County who responded to comments and perspectives of other parents in the school division. They also spoke about their own experiences with HCPS and their commitment to positive change in their school communities.

“Community Conversations: School Insights” focused on hearing from school and division leaders, including William Noel, director of the HCPS Student Support and Disciplinary Review Office; Monica Manns, director of the HCPS Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity; Jentae Scott Mayo, HCPS school counselor; and Ashley Waddell, HCPS school social worker. These HCPS representatives provided unique perspectives based on their positions in the school division, their experience, and their training. Panelists were also able to address questions that had been submitted from participants at previous Community Conversations sessions. Among the questions were those concerning school discipline, racism, and support for staff members, students and parents.

The fifth installment featured voices of individuals and organizations working in our community to support HCPS students. The panelists in the virtual discussion consisted of Va. Del. Lamont Bagby, Alicia Atkins, Varina District School Board representative, Erica Carson, community member; David Ross of Henrico Area Mental Health and Developmental Services’ prevention services team; and Kathy Nussbaum of Henrico Area Mental Health and Developmental Services’ youth and family services team.

After interest was gauged and feedback was collected from the programs, from student groups, and from social media pages, it was agreed that another session was needed to better address students’ concerns. From the “Community Conversations: Student Perspectives” session, interested students were encouraged to participate in a “Students for Change” event, which focused on listening, educating and empowering HCPS students of color and their allies to bring forth plans of action for school leadership. This program was done in conjunction with HCPS’ Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity and Henrico County National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. At the end of the program, students were able to outline goals

and suggested action plans that were communicated to school division leadership.

### **Financing and Staffing**

There was no additional cost associated with implementing this virtual event.

### **Program Results**

At the conclusion of the initial five editions of the Community Conversations series, we had more than 2,000 families participate through the live session and recordings. During the first session, each participant mentioned “call-to-action” items and goals that focused on a variety of concerns that had been brought up in Henrico County. At the conclusion of the fifth session, all of the call-to-action items had either been resolved or slated for further discussion and planning to ensure follow-through.

President Theodore Roosevelt said that, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Through HCPS’ Community Conversations series, Henricoans got a new vehicle for understanding how much the community cares about Henrico County and our students’ experiences. The initiatives and ongoing programs that have followed the series have created a new stream of open and effective communication. As these have sprouted, students reported feeling more autonomy in their learning environments, and families who may not feel comfortable speaking out at School Board meetings have formats to air their concerns.

In reflecting on the initial five discussions of the Community Conversations series, we received positive feedback overall, as well as positive feedback for improvement over the course of the series. Below are a number of comments that were left by session participants.

- “Thank you, panelists! Thank you for this space! I am motivated to be better for our children! HCPS and all other schools have a lot of work to do to STOP systematic racism!

I am all in and ready to help where it is needed! I love being a teacher but had to walk away from Elko Middle school due to racism!”

- “Thank you to the panelists and to all who attended this call to action! Let’s keep this conversation going.” – Amy Cashwell, HCPS superintendent.
- “Always worth the time. Great conversations with the community.”
- “Powerful conversation. Thank you!”
- “It is so exciting to be in a meeting with like-minded folks who are willing to fight for equity for all of our children. It really does take a village.”
- “Thank you, Dr. Noel for explaining the HCPS Code of Conduct as well as sharing your thoughts.”
- “Great job, Jentae! Thank you for advocating for our profession.”
- “Thanks so much to all the speakers! Also, thanks to HCPS for hosting these conversations.”
- “Thank you to your department. All of your conversations have been needed and powerful!”
- “Thank you for sharing words from your heart and fears that need to be recognized.

### **Brief Summary**

In response to a need to provide spaces for Black voices in Henrico County to be heard and to discuss equity and safety needs for all students, staff, and families in the division, “Community Conversations” were developed. Beginning in June 2020, the Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS) Family and Community Engagement Department introduced the first of five planned conversations. Throughout the five-session series, participants were provided a forum and heard from Henrico County Public Schools and Henrico County General Government representatives, parents and guardians, community members and most importantly, students. The feedback and participation were overwhelmingly positive — from those who participated in the live virtual events and those who watched the event recordings later online. Responses to the series indicated that more opportunities for open communication and dialogue were needed. These were then created following the format of the community conversations. The series was administered by the

department's Family and Educator Resource Center, a part of the Family and Community Engagement Department.



## Progress Through Community Conversations Supplemental Material

The Video links for the Community Conversations are listed below:

Call to Action: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGl1gzZf0T8&list=PL0Rn8Ah-Yg4sZ5Hu6rdKsSPfbAOrROi\\_i&index=40](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGl1gzZf0T8&list=PL0Rn8Ah-Yg4sZ5Hu6rdKsSPfbAOrROi_i&index=40)

Student Voices: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cZkr\\_8zmzU&list=PL0Rn8Ah-Yg4sZ5Hu6rdKsSPfbAOrROi\\_i&index=37](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cZkr_8zmzU&list=PL0Rn8Ah-Yg4sZ5Hu6rdKsSPfbAOrROi_i&index=37)

Parent and Guardian Perspective:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSA\\_25nmoyl&list=PL0Rn8Ah-Yg4sZ5Hu6rdKsSPfbAOrROi\\_i&index=34](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSA_25nmoyl&list=PL0Rn8Ah-Yg4sZ5Hu6rdKsSPfbAOrROi_i&index=34)

School Insight: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stY5v5erfjA&list=PL0Rn8Ah-Yg4sZ5Hu6rdKsSPfbAOrROi\\_i&index=32](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stY5v5erfjA&list=PL0Rn8Ah-Yg4sZ5Hu6rdKsSPfbAOrROi_i&index=32)

It Takes A Village: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t0SR7Tvar0&list=PL0Rn8Ah-Yg4sZ5Hu6rdKsSPfbAOrROi\\_i&index=29](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t0SR7Tvar0&list=PL0Rn8Ah-Yg4sZ5Hu6rdKsSPfbAOrROi_i&index=29)

# Community Conversations: It Takes a Village

Tuesday, August 4 • 6-7 p.m.



<https://tinyurl.com/HCPSCommunityConversations>



# Community Conversation: A Call to Action

Monday, June 8 • 6 p.m.



**Meeting ID:** [meet.google.com/fvk-gsis-xvs](https://meet.google.com/fvk-gsis-xvs)

**Phone:** (U.S.) + 1-650-535-0652

**PIN:** 627 238 773#

