



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2022.** 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: Communication for All Students and Families
Program Category: Customer Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration
Signature: 

Program Overview

In the summer of 2020, Henrico County Public Schools initiated a partnership among multiple public and private entities to better communicate with and meet the needs of our growing population of multilingual residents and those speaking limited English. The partnership was formed and operates under the following mission:

We seek to support all students, including immigrants, refugees, new Americans and limited English-speaking families. By bringing together individuals, nonprofits, school officials, county officials, advocates, students and families to enhance communication with our diverse communities, elevate and collaboratively address their needs and advocate for the diverse community.

HCPS believes that our diverse community is one of our greatest strengths and seeks to increase opportunities, equity and access for our students and families. In collaboration with HCPS' Department of Teaching, Learning and Innovation, and the Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity, the partnership strives to share information between multiple entities to fully support the multilingual community in our area. We began the partnership as a response to COVID-19 to ensure all school families received critical school information but have expanded to become a way for school, government, nonprofit, business and faith-based entities to work together to serve our community.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

During March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic began to grip our nation, school divisions across Virginia shifted to virtual instruction. While first hopeful that this would be for a few weeks, the rapid spread of COVID-19 necessitated extending this for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year and through the beginning months of the 2020-21 year.

While HCPS did its best to communicate with all families during this time, the division recognized that many of our students and families, especially those with language barriers, struggled to connect to important information. Staff was unable to engage in the face-to-face communication strategies we so often used in order to ensure our students and their families understood expectations and were able to share their own needs. The Division of Learning recognized the challenges this presented for families and schools and was determined to address the underlying issues. This determination was rooted not only out of legal obligation, but also out of a moral and professional obligation to ensure we successfully communicated with all families. HCPS serves more than 8,000 families who speak a language other than English, with over 100 languages represented. While we do our best to use our interpreter services to translate and share information, we know this does not always reach our families for a variety of reasons including literacy challenges, lack of email or technology or other access issues. Therefore, HCPS initiated collaborations with various partners in our community who support immigrant, refugee parents and parents speaking limited English to find additional avenues to ensure that families received information in a helpful way and so that we could better understand our students' and families' emerging needs.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Henrico County Public Schools has provided a model for community engagement across multiple faith-based, private and public entities to directly meet the needs of our students, families and community that can be used by other localities and organizations. While community partnerships are sometimes made to directly support financial needs directly, this partnership truly serves as a means to support our students and a variety of needs for the larger community. It speaks directly to creating a culture of equity and inclusion as we value the vast diversity in our community. The

minimal expenses associated with this program and the utilization of existing resources allows this program to be easily replicated in other localities with similar communication needs and goals.

How Program Was Carried Out

While this program began as a means for communication, it has evolved over time. Our objective began as a way to engage in two-way communication to ensure that families had access to information from the school system and to hear the needs and concerns of our community by those who work most closely with them.

The journey began in August 2020 in a virtual format led by the chief officer of equity, diversity and opportunity and the English-as-a-second-language specialist, both from HCPS, as well as with the multicultural community liaison from Henrico County government. Initial partners included a few faith-based partners, two refugee agencies, a nonprofit immigrant and refugee support group, members from the Asian and Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, county government and the Henrico NAACP. Our immediate goal in beginning our group was to ensure that families knew their children would be learning virtually and had the resources (technology, internet, instruction tools, etc.) that were needed for students to access their education. The group shared specific support available from schools and took the opportunity to hear from the community about their specific needs. Our partners were open and honest in sharing feedback from the communities they represented. Our team learned quickly of the needs of the community including food, rental assistance, education around COVID-19, technology education, childcare, better access to communication and more.

The insight shared by our initial partners helped our school system better recognize the vast needs and to take action to meet them. The partnership group solidified and, in the first months,

met weekly or biweekly in order to work together to provide information and resources. Some of the group's early accomplishments included providing technology training to families who had never used a computer before, sharing child-care resources and ensuring that families had access to food and rental or bill assistance. Many of these accomplishments were made possible by our partners. Our partners in Henrico County government were able to share rental resources and child-care information. Our faith-based and nonprofit partners provided food through food banks, and the school division provided food cards to families.

As the school year moved along, we continued to meet monthly with our partners. This two-way communication allowed the school division to stay abreast of the most pressing needs of our families, to ensure our families knew when school changes were made, such as in returning to school in person, and to provide education around health and safety, including mitigation strategies, vaccines and more. Our partners have grown in number and have made connections to provide support in times of need.

This partnership has continued into the 2021-22 school year. It was important to our school community to continue and expand this partnership to ensure we were making changes to better support all families. We developed a purpose and mission in the fall of 2021. We continue to engage in the sharing of information and also to directly include the voices of our students and families. Both parents and students representatives are invited to join the partnership, and plans are being made for community fairs in which the school system can directly give families the information they need in their spoken language and to connect them with community resources, employment opportunities and more. With this partnership, HCPS will continue to ensure that equity, access and opportunity are available for all of our students and families, despite possible language or cultural barriers.

Financing and Staffing

Our community partnership program has had little to no cost associated. We have met mainly virtually to better accommodate people's time and personal or professional needs. We provided food and tokens of appreciation during our only in-person meeting, paid using budgetary funds of the Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity.

Program Results

The success of HCPS' community partnerships team has truly laid the foundation for student success. One measurable outcome is our partnership growth. We originally began with about 15 community partners but have grown to now include over 40 partners. Early success included our division's ability to respond to the wide spectrum of challenges our families faced. When our partners shared that many of our parents and students did not know how to use divisional technology tools, we used our technology department to train our partners, who, in turn, trained the families directly. We were able to directly connect families with food and financial support and increase our communication efforts to better support students' educational needs. For example, with support from one of our partners, we were able to distribute food bags directly from a school while sending other families to food pantries at local faith-based partners.

The information shared by our partners has increased our institutional knowledge and ability to educate key stakeholders that directly serve families. Additionally, with our partners' continued advocacy and open sharing that our messages were not always meeting families, we were able to advocate and secure increased funding for translation and interpretation services. These have allowed us to reach families at both the individual level and through large scale messages and have led to changes in practices. Our partners have been key in helping us specifically educate schools that were not yet aware of or fully using available resources to reach families. Our

partners have also aided our communication by directly sharing messages with those they support and by giving us outlets, such as the local Spanish radio station, to broadcast our information.

Additional successes include connections made throughout the school division. For example, our specialist for social studies has made direct classroom connections between teachers and students and various partners to engage in civic learning through service. Our director of school counseling has made connections with various partners to better support the mental health needs of immigrants and refugees, particularly those who have come from traumatic circumstances. When we have experienced other traumatic situations, such as a death of a student or incidents targeting individuals or groups based on ethnicity, we have been able to connect with our community partners. Their support enables us to best respond to situations in a culturally appropriate and respectful manner and assist our families. These partnerships allow us to directly connect families in need with someone in the community who speaks the same language and understands their history and culture.

Our partners have also made connections with each other to directly support the entire community. When our community began to see an influx of Afghan refugees, the YMCA — a community partner — and a faith-based partner from the Isma'ili community worked together to host a drive to collect food, clothing and school supplies to support the needs of two refugee agencies coordinating assistance in our area.

Brief Summary

This project began during the pandemic as a way to ensure that all families with students in Henrico County Public Schools had access to critical information about virtual learning and had the resources (technology, internet, instruction tools, etc.) that were needed for students to access

their education. Based on initial conversations, it quickly evolved into providing an ongoing means of collaboration between various public and private entities to enhance communication and better meet the needs of our diverse community. Internal partners include HCPS' Department of Teaching, Learning and Innovation, the Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity and the multicultural liaison from Henrico County government. External partners include multiple faith-based partners, two refugee agencies, a nonprofit immigrant and refugee support group, members from the Asian and Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, and the Henrico NAACP. Through this partnership, we increased our knowledge of the evolving needs of the community including food, rental assistance, education around COVID-19, technology education, childcare, better access to communication and more. Ongoing monthly meetings now take place.

This two-way communication allows the school division to stay abreast of the most pressing needs of our families. We continue to engage in the sharing of information and also to directly include the voices of our students and families. Both parents and students representatives are invited to join the partnership, and plans are being made for community fairs in which the school system can directly give families the information they need in their spoken language and to connect them with community resources, employment opportunities and more. With Henrico's growing diverse population of immigrants and refugees, this community partnership allows us to work toward meeting our goals in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion. The open and honest exchanges of information between the school division and our partners inform us when we are not meeting the needs of our students and families so that we can continue to improve and grow.