



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** 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: Adult Education at Regency Mall: Shopping for Your Future  
Program Category: Community and Economic 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 students in the school division's trades-related programs are helping design and build a 48,000-square-foot educational facility inside an existing mall with a reimagined approach to providing continuing education for the adults. Most construction companies choose not to allow individuals under 18 to work on commercial projects due to regulations and insurance costs. By creating a hands-on commercial construction classroom, the "Adult Education Program Center at Regency Mall" project enabled younger HCPS students to gain valuable instruction in commercial construction. The school division will incorporate career-focused opportunities in licensed practical nursing, apprenticeship training, earning certifications and licenses, and financial literacy along with traditional programming for adults. By creating a one-stop shop adult students will be able to discover and embark on the next steps in their careers. The unique mall design will maintain the concept of "career storefronts" to advertise career opportunities. Because of the mall location, students will have opportunities to eat meals or shop before and after class. The hallway in the portion of the mall housing the new education center will become a common area where students can mingle and work in groups. The environment will resemble a college, but in a mall setting.

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

This project addresses two primary challenges but our program aims to manage a 2-in-1.

- Making returning to a school environment more appealing to adults
- Providing hands-on commercial building experience to our high school students, helping prepare them to fill the thousands of unfilled jobs that exist in the trades areas

**Making education more appealing to adults:** Historically, many adult students are not comfortable returning to a school setting to gain more education, either because they have had bad experiences or because it is inconvenient to take courses in a school environment. Transportation to a school in the evening is also a barrier for many adults. The solution was to find a location where adults are comfortable, one with conveniences such as access to food and public transportation.

**Providing hands-on experience to help fill jobs in the trades:** The second problem was to help meet the growing needs of a skilled trades workforce while providing students under the age of 18 with real-world commercial building experience. Most contractors want students to be at least 18 and have commercial construction experience.

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

Visitors to the site say that this project is a game-changer on many levels. It exposes high school students to career opportunities in the commercial trades and gives adults opportunities to learn in an environment designed specifically to meet their needs. It is an equalizer. It provides a location to serve underserved populations and an economic stimulus to help reinvigorate a mall property and the surrounding community. The fact that businesses have the opportunity to be engaged in the development and ongoing implementation of the program is a win-win for everyone. If the space is generating tax revenue, the community's needs are being met through educational opportunities, jobs are being advertised and filled — everyone wins. While counties are involved in many projects, not many can claim that every aspect of the program provides opportunities for their community. Having students participate on the project has saved millions. Most localities have adult education needs, challenging retail areas and students seeking hands-on experience. This project is a model for other counties to generate solutions in all three areas at an affordable price.

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

The program's objectives were formed separately but uniquely became one project with a variety of outcomes — planned and unplanned. The first objective was to find a way to make adult programs more accessible and attractive to people with challenges which prevented them from getting educational opportunities to advance in careers or gain the needed credentials for employment. Henrico County's Regency Mall was the perfect location to create a new game-changing location for adult education. The nearly 50-year-old mall reinvents itself as a multifunctional facility with housing, recreation and shopping.

In the past, the main focus of adult education was to help students earn a GED or gain fluency in the English language. A GED is often needed to gain employment or advance in a current job. Many of these students are immigrants or drop out of school before graduating. For many of these students, the thought of going to a "traditional school" environment was a hurdle. Transportation to a school location was often difficult, and most schools were not on a public bus line. Even upon completion of a GED, many adults still needed additional support to help them learn about careers and opportunities, secure a job or career path, and learn how to borrow money effectively with short-term and long-term financial planning. As for personal convenience, many adults come to class right after work. It is often not convenient to get food beforehand or find a location to study with others. The traditional setting was not meeting the needs of Henrico County's adult learners.

Even the classrooms and furniture were not designed for adult students. The goal was to create a one-stop shop for adult students that is comfortable and safe. This location would also house a Pearson Vue Testing Center where students can take their GED tests, as well as other important exams that would empower participants with certifications they need to progress in their careers. The goal was to create a career-focused learning environment that would allow adults to easily envision and embark on their next steps to success, where:

- Certifications for needed skills could be taught and earned.
- Opportunities were always on display and answers to questions were easily obtainable.

What better way to do this than in an environment that resembles a mall, where students can go and “shop” for their futures. In retail environments, the impact displays are often storefronts. Shoppers might walk by and see something that catches their eye right away or pass by several more times, but storefronts entice them to eventually enter to learn more about items in the window. The Adult Education Center at Regency Mall contains storefronts designed to lead career “shoppers” to their subsequent careers.

The second objective was to find a way to expose students under the age of 18 to high skills, high-demand, high-paying jobs in commercial construction. While there is a high demand for skilled tradespeople, students under age 18 have traditionally only been able to observe these jobs from a distance. s. Because of insurance costs and regulations, most construction companies choose not to allow individuals under 18 to work on commercial projects. Many students were interested in these career paths but needed exposure to learn what to do. In Henrico County Public Schools, we are always looking for creative ways to provide students with skills and knowledge to help prepare them for their futures. We needed a classroom that was also a hands-on commercial construction site. The Regency Mall project provided that “classroom” space. Students had the opportunity to design, demo, build steel stud walls, install drywall, design and install HVAC equipment, lay out and construct multiuser bathrooms, and install ceiling grids, sprinklers, network wiring, flooring and doors. This project was an opportunity to expose students to all aspects of commercial construction and educate them on the techniques and hazards related to commercial construction. It was an “educational commercial construction classroom.” The large size of the space is equivalent to an elementary school, and not only did our students get to design and build out the space, but they also had to establish deadlines, as in a real-world setting.

After introducing the concept to Henrico County and school division leaders, we met with mall representatives and pitched the idea to them. Response to the vision was enthusiastic, and in May 2022, HCPS signed the lease for 48,000 square feet, which included mall office space and 11 individual “stores” in the mall. Many stores were still in use and had clothes racks and display shelves, all of which had to be removed before the demo and construction could begin.

This project has provided a major learning opportunity from its inception. In order to help sell the vision, computer-aided design students worked with architects to design possible layouts.

Students from various trades, including electrical, carpentry, HVAC, plumbing and masonry were involved in the demo and renovation of the space. The goal was to complete the demolition and renovation of the space in six months. With supply chain issues, labor trends and costs, this would have been a tremendous undertaking by experienced contractors in today’s market. However, with support from contractors who saw the value of working with and engaging students, the school division was able to make it happen in eight months.

Henrico County has helped with the budgetary obligations of renting and renovating the space, and has been engaged in numerous other ways. The first groups to join the project team were building inspections and firefighters. Because the primary use of the space was changing from a closed mall to a mixed-use facility, it was important to ensure that all local fire codes and building codes were addressed. By partnering with these groups, county inspectors became “teachers,” helping our students understand building codes and value the role of inspectors to ensure that all buildings are safe. The HCPS Department of Operations also partnered with our students to help with networking and plumbing. Students learned from working professionals as well as teachers. If you expose students to life-changing opportunities and careers, they might need help to discover.

Many of our community partners were excited to join the ranks of assisting with this opportunity to build out the space and work directly with future members of the workforce.

- Mosely Architects worked with our students to develop conceptual drawings to help convert the concept to actual plans that would be submitted to building inspectors for permitting.
- Wilton Construction partnered from the start, charging Henrico County only time and materials for the six months they have spent working with students on the site.

- Star Electric worked for four months, helping complete all electrical work in partnership with students in our electrical programs.
- The Virginia Fire and Sprinkler Association has partnered with HCPS and our students to donate all materials and labor to redesign and retrofit all sprinkler heads.
- Howell's Heating and Air has donated material and time to redesign and retrofit the entire HVAC system.

Numerous other partners have joined in this opportunity by sponsoring a storefront to advertise career options, providing equipment to outfit spaces, helping provide appropriate signage to the finished project, and even stationing paid employees on site to work with our students. Henrico County Federal Credit Union was one of the first partners that saw the value of the vision and paid to have one of the spaces renovated, so that they could provide financial workshops and learning opportunities to an underserved adult population.

When completed, this project will have afforded more than 400 students with a hands-on opportunity to be involved in the design and renovation of the space. Their work will enable thousands of adult learners each year to take advantage of the opportunity to “shop for their futures.”

As this project has been under construction, we have had many visitors from across the country travel to Henrico County to see its vision. They have voiced a desire to gain information they can take back to their localities to address the need for skilled workers and to help reinvigorate communities. This project provides opportunities for residents to not only gain additional education, but also learn about career opportunities and available training.

### **Financing and Staffing**

The cost of this project has two main factors that have to be considered. The first is the cost to renovate 48,000 square feet of commercial space. The typical cost to renovate this space in a conventional way ranges from \$75 per square foot to \$125 per square foot, which amounts to \$3.6 million to \$6 million. By involving students to help with all aspects of construction, and through the generosity of our business partners with donations of materials, time and resources, the total cost will be about \$1 million. This equates to less than \$21 per square foot.

The second component is the rent. Typical retail mall space costs about \$40 to \$50 per square foot, which does not include costs that the owner may incur to renovate the space, which would

be added into the monthly rent. After meeting with the mall owner and reviewing the mission of the project and the foot traffic it would generate, they proposed a rent structure of less than \$10 per square foot for a five-year period. While this is a huge discount for the rent, it does not factor in all the additional donations and opportunities provided by our community partners. For example, to install the new sprinkler heads, the water system has to be drained each day to perform the work, which can cost up to \$800 a day. The mall is waiving this cost. They have also allowed HCPS to use space in the mall temporarily for events at no cost.

### **Program Results**

The results of this program are just beginning. Beyond two typical classroom instructions and grades, students were able to gain valuable skills that could be included on their resume making them much more “marketable” to employers. Many students who have worked on the project have been offered jobs by contractors who have participated. It has provided a “commercial site” classroom that would not have been possible in the past. Once in operation, there will be more than 5,000 adult students taking advantage of learning opportunities each year. We expect this number to continue to grow since it meets the needs of adult learners in a way that has not been possible in the past.

### **Brief Summary**

Henrico County Public Schools is always looking for a way to enhance its resources related to adult learning and technical education. The Adult Education Program Center at Regency Mall project offered a perfect situation for HCPS to grow this program, with a dedicated space that adults will feel comfortable attending and an instruction element that will allow technical education students to influence the construction and planning of the project. In its final form, the Adult Education Program Center at Regency Mall will serve as a one-stop shop for many different career-learning disciplines, where adult learners can browse and “shop” for their futures just like they would shop at a mall. The benefit was immediate for the technical-education students involved in the construction process, as they got firsthand experience planning and executing the renovation for this 48,000 square foot space. Working with local businesses and the mall owner, the cost of this massive undertaking was not only viable but efficient. This project has the chance to revolutionize the way Henrico County Public Schools delivers career and technical education into the future, and the results are already experiencing that potential.

## Adult Education at Regency Mall: Shopping for Your Future Supplemental Material

Articles:

<https://www.sprinklerage.com/developing-your-workforce/>

Presentation videos:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1o6LcmkyibEPyIFSn7v7jfPHK7TyqTh\\_T/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1o6LcmkyibEPyIFSn7v7jfPHK7TyqTh_T/view?usp=sharing)

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