



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: 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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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 and social challenges. 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 a lack of respect — for police officers and their jobs. It was thought 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.

Twelve Henrico County police officers, including two of Varina High School's school resource officers, participated in the conversation and dining to help bridge the two groups. The officers' energy allowed for a safe space for the students to be open to asking and answering questions. The engaging sound of talking and laughing opened the door for 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 who protect our community to fear the students or other citizens who 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 were positive and not always negative. She desired to break down walls and open 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 are a big part of the community at Varina. They invited 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 by creating bonds and reducing fear.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

This type of program brings together local schools and police in an innovative solution to building better community relationships.

How Program Was Carried Out

After realizing the need for this community-unifying activity, the teacher first spoke with Varina's two school resource officers. They loved the idea because they built relationships with most students while serving on 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 how the Henrico County Police Division operates and develop mutual respect and understanding.

Students worked all morning to prepare the meals for 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 bit of apprehension but soon realized that officers were laughing, joking and complimenting them on their professionalism. After the officers were served, students made a plate and 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 stigma of 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 dinners" with other groups in the school and local community, but this dinner on Oct. 22, 2019, was one that the students and officers did not soon forget.

Financing and Staffing

The culinary class is budgeted through 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 built between the police officers and our culinary students. While there is no quantitative data to show the success, the qualitative data of the conversations held between the students and the police officers spoke volumes. Trust and bonds were formed 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 as a police officer. They were able to see that they had much in common with some of the officers, but that this was a side that they rarely had the opportunity to see. This evening will have a profound effect on many of our students, as well as the officers.

Brief Summary

In an effort to alleviate expressed distrust between students and police officers, Henrico County Public Schools utilized a culinary arts program in order to bring both groups together. Students from Varina High School prepared a meal to be shared with police officers and school resource officers, sparking positive and open conversations about each group's perspectives. The "family meal" provided a key opportunity for students to be able to think and ask questions in an informal setting, while police officers were able to more comfortably speak about the important topics that the students were asking about. This culinary program proved to be instrumental in enhancing the relationship between the community at Varina High School and the county's police officers.

Local Police Department and Students Build Relationships Supplemental Material

