



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** 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

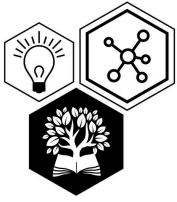
County: Powhatan County
Program Title: Powhatan County Public Schools Locally Developed Geography Curriculum & Local History Unit
Program Category: Organizational Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Bret Schardein
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 



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DATE: June 26, 2024
TO: Virginia Association of Counties
FROM: Beth Teigen, Ph.D., Superintendent
Ton V. Kilpatrick, K-12 History and Social Studies Curriculum Specialist
Powhatan County Public Schools
RE: Virginia Association of Counties Achievement Awards Submission

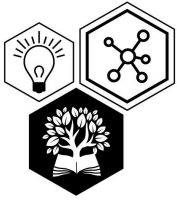
The 2023-2024 school year was one of transition for our history course progression in Powhatan County Public Schools. The challenge for us was moving our Virginia Studies course down a grade level to alleviate the testing burden on our 5th grade teachers and students. This transition was successful, however it left a gap in our instructional program for fifth grade. The solution: design an in-house geography course that would:

- Fill the gap in our instructional program so that students would not miss a year of social studies instruction.
- Address knowledge gaps in student understanding of geography.
- Align with the Virginia Department of Education's requirement that all local school divisions provide an instructional unit on local history.

Our K-12 History and Social Studies Specialist embraced the challenge of charting this new course, and as a result, Powhatan County Public Schools now has a robust and engaging locally developed curriculum with a strong focus on local history that sparks pride in our town, honors our past, celebrates our future, and inspires our posterity. Historically, geographic education often overlooks local contexts, leaving students disconnected from the land they inhabit. This curriculum bridges that gap by immersing students in the history and geography of Powhatan County. Our local history unit aims to promote understanding of Powhatan County's

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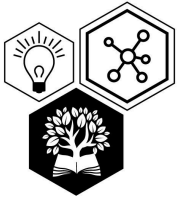
rich history with an emphasis on how geographic features served as barriers for early settlers, yet praises their resilience as they developed creative solutions to address the challenges faced when interacting with the environment. Additionally, it acknowledges the original inhabitants of the land called Powhatan County, who were the Monacan people, and challenges students to ponder why our county's founders would choose Powhatan when naming the county (despite having no evidence to show that Chief Powhatan ever stepped foot in this region of Virginia). Students gain a holistic understanding of the county's development and its impact on its people.

This curriculum meets the VACo Achievement Awards criteria in several key ways:

- **Innovation:** Our local history unit provides rich connections between student understanding of content and key historical thinking skills. Specifically, the five themes of geography are embedded throughout the unit as students investigate our local history. This enables richer discussion about the people, places, and environments of the past and present, giving deeper insight in understanding the human-environment interactions that led to the development of our county. This is a novel approach within the curriculum of Powhatan County Public Schools.
- **Cooperation:** Collaboration with a retired specialist from Henrico county ensured a depth and richness to the content, while a partnership with the Powhatan Historical Society ensured both accuracy and relevance, fostering community engagement and intergovernmental cooperation.
- **Model Practice:** The curriculum serves as a model for integrating local history into geographic education, providing a template for other counties to adapt to their own

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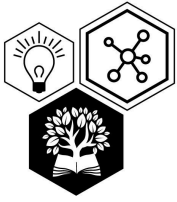
contexts. In fact, K-12 History and Social Studies Specialists in other localities are currently using our framework and approach as models when developing their own local history units for implementation in their school divisions.

Program Implementation: After identifying a key set of standards from the Virginia Department of Education’s Standards of Learning, we began writing our geography course by using an expanding horizons framework. Curriculum that adheres to this model begins with students' everyday experiences while slowly broadening the lens in a way that cause students to examine their local area, their state, the larger country, and lastly, the world. We chose this approach so that our unit on local history could be the first unit of study for the course. We also knew that we wanted our students to truly engage with the five themes of geography, so this was identified as a goal for the course. These considerations were followed as each unit was developed. As a note, the five themes of geography are: location (absolute and relative), place (human and physical characteristics), region (unifying characteristics that define an area), movement, and human-environment interaction (the idea that humans shape the landscape through their interaction with the land, which has both positive and negative effects on the environment). Using these themes, we knew each unit needed to include groups of people, land features, water features, and climate, and most importantly a way to provide rich self to world connections for our students.

The task was monumental. As such, our K-12 History and Social Studies Specialist requested that additional assistance be provided via a retired specialist (Carol Simopoulos). Using curriculum writing funding, we were able to bring in this additional support. She began

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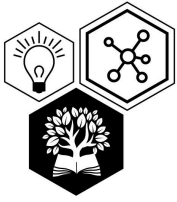
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researching right away. Two texts proved invaluable: Richard Couture's *Powhatan: A Bicentennial History* and Margaret Palmore's and John Kerr's *Powhatan Pathways*. Additionally, we consulted with Powhatan County's Economic Development Agency when looking for maps and resources. Once research was complete and content was compiled at a level appropriate for the age of the students, consultation with the Powhatan Historical Society began. John Rothert of the Powhatan Historical Society read through the content making edits and additions, sharing knowledge and insight that really brought the curriculum to life. He shared invaluable anecdotes, such as the rationale for naming the county that added a richness and depth to our unit of study. Next, we designed an authentic assessment for students to show their understanding of Powhatan's History. After designing this assessment, we recruited teachers to serve on a curriculum writing team. In collaboration with our K-12 Social Studies Specialist, teachers Sarah Dillon (Powhatan Elementary School) and Nicole Hannaford (Flat Rock Elementary School) wrote engaging lessons and designed thoughtful activities to enhance instruction while making history tangible and relevant to students' lives. Careful consideration was taken to include activities that recognize people who serve our community in a variety of ways, such as our Board of Supervisors and other government employees, local first responders, teachers, and local business owners.

Results of Implementation: Since its introduction, our local unit of study has received positive feedback from educators, students, and the community alike. Students have shown increased interest and comprehension of local geography and history, as evidenced by heightened engagement in classroom discussions. Moreover, the program has sparked community pride and

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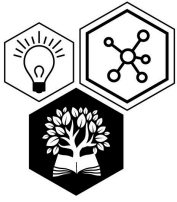
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involvement, with local businesses and organizations offering support and resources to enrich the learning experience.

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Executive Summary:

The 2023-2024 school year marked a pivotal transition for Powhatan County Public Schools' history curriculum, specifically in response to testing burdens for fifth grade. To address this challenge, the course was moved to a lower grade level, prompting the need for a new geography curriculum to fill the gap. Powhatan County Public Schools successfully developed an in-house geography course tailored to address gaps in geographic knowledge among students, while meeting the VDOE's requirements for local history education. Led by the K-12 History Specialist, the unit emphasizes Powhatan County's local history, integrating geographic education to foster a deeper connection between students and their environment. This approach not only honors the county's heritage but also encourages civic pride and future engagement. The curriculum's innovative design incorporates the five themes of geography throughout the units, enhancing students' understanding of historical contexts and human-environment interactions unique to Powhatan County. Collaboration with retired specialists and local historical societies ensured accuracy and community relevance, making it a model for integrating local history into geographic education. Implemented under a comprehensive framework aligned with Virginia's Standards of Learning, the curriculum expands students' perspectives from local to global scales, enhancing their awareness of geographic features, historical developments, and community contributions. Engaging assessments and activities further enrich student learning experiences, fostering increased interest and participation in local history. Since its introduction, the curriculum has received positive feedback from educators, students, and the community, demonstrating improved engagement and comprehension of local geography and history.

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