



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your 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: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Category: \_\_\_\_\_

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Category:** Criminal Justice & Public Safety

## **Executive Summary**

Chesterfield Juvenile Justice Services recognized a growing number of arrests and school suspensions for vaping in school. Our school partners were frustrated by the lack of intervention options for these students. Possessing an illegal drug in school is an automatic 10-day suspension for a first-time offense. Ten days is a long time for a student to be out of school, disengaged, and with no supportive service or intervention. In collaboration with Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS), the Court Services Unit (CSU) and Mental Health Support Services (MHSS), we designed an optional program for students to attend during their 10-day suspension.

The Substance Use “Vision” program is comprised of ten sessions administered by the Adolescent Resource Pathways with the assistance of a licensed clinician provided by Prevention Services from MHSS. The program offers parents the option of having their students attend the Day Reporting Program, providing structure, accountability, and educational support as opposed to unsupervised time at home while on suspension. In addition, the students receive resources to learn why and how to avoid further use of illegal substances.

## **The Problem or Need for the Program**

Chesterfield Juvenile Justice Services regularly meets with other youth-serving agencies in the county to determine the issues negatively impacting our children with the goal of collective problem-solving and developing positive interventions. In one such meeting, we learned that vaping in schools was reaching epidemic proportions. Juvenile intake was seeing a spike in arrests for these vaping incidents. We learned that vapes can contain a myriad of substances, including nicotine, THC (marijuana), and even fentanyl. Vaping is particularly popular because the vapes can be smokeless and scentless, so student vaping is often undetected. Vaping has become so common among our young people that they do not recognize its dangers.

Juvenile Justice Services wanted to provide an intervention that would offer information as well as tools to avoid future use of vapes or other illegal substances.

## **Description of the Program**

Any high school student suspended on a first-time possession charge is offered the option of attending the Vision program for their 10-day suspension (which is required for a substance rule violation). The Vision program, facilitated by a licensed clinical therapist, provides information to youth about the dangers of using substances. In addition to the substance use education, youth are required to report to the Day Reporting Program building to complete schoolwork and participate in other group activities.

Youth attend Day Reporting for the entire day to participate in a structured, supportive program rather than staying home unsupervised. Additionally, they have access to CCPS teachers and can keep up with their schoolwork. The targeted population is middle and high school aged youth suspended for having been caught with illegal drugs or alcohol in school. The program started off

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with just serving high school students but will expand to include 8<sup>th</sup> graders for the 2026- 2027 school year. This program is considered a Crime Prevention Program as the youth are at risk of formal court involvement if their behavior does not change. Depending on the circumstances, youth may be charged with a criminal offense. In these cases, they are referred to the Juvenile Court Substance Abuse Diversion Program, which has been in place for several years. Another Chesterfield Juvenile Services program provides community service opportunities for youth referred for diversion. When youth have completed SA Vision, they do not have to complete the community service piece of the diversion program, though they do have to complete the other requirements of diversion.

When youth enter the program, they are administered the SASSI (Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory) by a certified provider on staff. This screening informs our staff and the Mental Health clinician about frequency of use, substance of choice and whether the use is experimental or potentially problematic. It also tells staff if the youth is minimizing his/her use. Armed with this information, the interventions, discussed within the group format, are targeted to the specific client needs.

Ten groups are delivered, with each group building on the information presented in the previous group(s). The groups are derived from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy techniques, which are widely recognized as most effective with adolescents in influencing change in behavior and thoughts. Group worksheets are attached. Group topics are:

1. group expectations,
2. social use vs. addiction,
3. consequences of use,
4. coping scenarios,
5. circle of trust,
6. relationships,
7. values,
8. graduation,
9. choosing right, and
10. five issues to work on

Additionally, youth must complete the Virginia Rules curriculum, as appropriate, related to illegal substances and juvenile laws. According to their website: "Virginia Rules is an educational program designed to help instructors, parents, and students understand the laws that apply to Virginia teens in their everyday lives."

The Virginia Rules courses include:

- Alcohol, tobacco/nicotine and marijuana
- Drugs – Overview
- Prescription Drugs
- Opioids
- Keeping Your Driver's License
- Juvenile Justice in Virginia

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- Student Responsibilities

In addition to the Day Reporting Program and the ten sessions, families and students may express a need for additional services. Our staff provide a list of resources in the community, online resources and can make a referral to Chesterfield Recovery Academy. The Recovery Academy, operated by CCPS, is a year-round program for youth who are recovering from addiction.

### **The Cost of the Program**

The program is under the umbrella and operated by the staff of the Chesterfield Adolescent Resource Pathways (CARP) so there are no additional costs to operate SA Vision. A portion of the Assistant Director's time is dedicated to administering this program. We had staff trained to administer the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Instrument (SASSI) as a screening tool. While this provides helpful information, it is not imperative to delivering the program. Additionally, the staff of our Day Reporting Program transport students to and from the program and already prepare breakfast and lunch. Chesterfield Mental Health Support Services generously provides the licensed clinician's time and expertise in delivering the cognitive behavioral groups at no additional cost to CARP. This would constitute an additional cost if a private vendor was used.

If a locality were to replicate this program, an administrator to serve as the school liaison, arrange speakers and instruction, and award a certificate of completion for students would be necessary. Youth must be provided, at least, lunch for a full day program. While we provide transportation, localities could use public transportation or arrange for parents to transport. Similarly, while we have teachers available, youth who have access to online schoolwork would not necessarily need a teacher present.

Space for students to study and a group area (which may also double as a lunch area) would be necessary.

### **The Results/Success of the Program**

Forty-three students were referred to the SA Vision program and thirty-nine completed the program, which represents 91%. Of those who completed the program, 100% of participants completed all classes and 100% of participants pledged not to use illegal substances in the future.

### **Worthiness of Award**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that 35% of high school seniors used marijuana in the last month (CDC website). Youth commonly experiment with drugs and alcohol. Unfortunately, the introduction of fentanyl and nitazene in recreational drugs has made this experimentation much more dangerous and sometimes has deadly consequences. Chesterfield Juvenile Justice Services has made the safety and well-being of our youth a priority by constantly engaging with our partners to collaboratively address issues and hopefully, solve problems that are threatening their well-being and safety. This straight-forward program, using already existing resources, is an easy way and cost-effective way to reach youth who may be experimenting or have found themselves on the path to becoming addicted to substances.

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As noted, we screen all our clients with the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory (SASSI). The SASSI is a questionnaire students complete pertaining to alcohol and drug use. The SASSI provides two possible results, either “High probability of having a substance use disorder” or “Low probability of having a substance use disorder.” Additionally, there are flags to “consider further evaluation for prescription drug use” and to alert the screener if individuals may be misrepresenting or minimizing their use (false negative). We have found that 98% of the students we served score “High Probability of having a substance use disorder.” Our team found this to be quite eye-opening when we consider how much youth minimize their need for substances. Chesterfield is not unlike other localities throughout the Commonwealth, so it is highly likely that other localities are experiencing similar challenges with their youth population. This approach to intervention is a first step in getting assistance for students using illegal substances. The program also offers schools an optional referral for students, so that they can begin to curb the use of illegal drugs, particularly vaping, in schools, not to mention the added benefit of providing a safe, structured and supportive environment for those students while they are out of their mandatory suspension.

**Supplemental Material (optional)**

Vision Worksheets

[Group worksheets](#)

SASSI



SASSI.pdf

**Statement of support:**

Dr. Chad Knowles, Director of Student Conduct for Chesterfield County Public Schools said the following:

*The Vision program provides students and families with several valuable resources. Students are given an assessment when entering the program. The students receive educational materials to learn about the risks of using controlled substances as well as strategies to stop using controlled substances. Students get the opportunity to complete Virginia Rules and benefit from that curriculum. This all occurs while getting direct instructional support in a small group setting from CCPS teachers in a monitored, structured environment. Students and their families are provided a list of resources and agencies should the family desire additional support from agencies outside CCPS. The Visions program has been positive for Chesterfield students and parents dealing with controlled substance use and abuse.*