Virginia Association of Counties

ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

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: Henrico County, Virginia

Program Title: Closing the Skills Gap: Empowering Future-Ready Learners

Program Category: Health and Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Summary:

In a rapidly changing world influenced by technological advancements, including the rise of artificial intelligence, Henrico County Public Schools is empowering students with life-ready skills — critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creative thinking, character and citizenship. As industries continue to evolve, employers consistently report a growing gap in "durable" skills among graduates, emphasizing the urgent need for students to develop competencies that extend beyond traditional academic knowledge. The Henrico Learner Profile — the school division's blueprint for learning, provides a framework that defines what every student needs to be "life-ready," ensuring they can adapt and thrive in a dynamic global environment. By embedding these skills within authentic learning experiences, HCPS aims to bridge the gap between classroom learning and workforce expectations, equipping students to meet the demands of a rapidly shifting economic landscape.

Henrico County Public Schools has implemented an innovative initiative to cultivate deeper, learner-centered engagement and empower students with the durable skills included in the Henrico Learner Profile. This occurs through expanded opportunities for student "presentations of learning" across the division. Presentations of learning, or POLs, are authentic learning experiences where students demonstrate their knowledge, reflect on their growth and exhibit durable skills through real-world tasks. By expanding these presentations throughout the division, HCPS helps ensure that all students are life-ready, equipped to thrive academically, professionally and personally.

To support the initiative, HCPS designed and delivered targeted professional development sessions, comprehensive resources and ongoing coaching to help educators facilitate impactful POL experiences. By embedding POLs in the culture of HCPS schools, the program enhances student agency, strengthens family and community connections and provides equitable opportunities for learners to apply their skills in meaningful ways.

The problem or need addressed by the program:

HCPS recognizes that traditional approaches to assessment often fail to foster and measure the kind of durable skills that outlive rapidly changing social and workplace conditions. As a result, students are less equipped to meet the challenges of modern careers and active civic engagement.

The Presentations of Learning Initiative was developed to address the gap in traditional assessment methods. It provides opportunities for students to apply and demonstrate their learning in meaningful, real-world contexts. More importantly, Presentations of Learning address the community's growing need for a highly skilled, adaptable workforce. This initiative helps HCPS prepare students to meet academic benchmarks and develop the skills needed for lifelong success.

Program description:

In 2019 Henrico County Public Schools undertook a process to reimagine its divisionwide celebration of learning to emphasize the durable skills outlined in the Henrico Learner Profile. The event highlighted the best of "life-ready" learning at the division level, showcasing students' abilities to think critically, communicate effectively and solve real-world problems. Inspired by the success and impact of the divisionwide exhibition, HCPS recognized the potential to bring similar opportunities to all students at the school level.

In 2021, the division launched the Presentations of Learning Initiative to provide all students with authentic, learner-centered experiences. Through POLs, students develop and demonstrate the skills of the Henrico Learner Profile by applying their knowledge in meaningful contexts, presenting to authentic audiences and reflecting on their personal and academic

growth. This initiative underscores HCPS' commitment to preparing students for success beyond the classroom by blending academic rigor with real-world applications.

The objectives of the POL Initiative are to:

1. Empower students to showcase their learning, growth and skill-development through authentic tasks and public presentations.
2. Equip students with the durable skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education, the workforce and civic life.
3. Build students' confidence and agency by providing meaningful opportunities to reflect on and articulate their learning journeys.
4. Provide professional development and resources for educators to design and facilitate effective POLs.
5. Strengthen community connections by involving families, community members and local employers in the learning process as audience members and partners.

The POL Initiative was conceived and piloted in the 2020–21 school year as part of HCPS' efforts to align instruction with the Henrico Learner Profile and the commonwealth's Profile of a Virginia Graduate. During the pilot phase, self-selected schools integrated POLs in their instructional practices to assess their impact on student engagement and skill development.

Following the success of the pilot program, the POL Initiative was expanded throughout the division in 2021-22. HCPS implemented a phased approach to scale up the initiative, which included:

- Developing a countywide framework for POLs that is aligned with the Henrico Learner Profile and instructional best practices.
- Providing ongoing professional development for educators, focusing on designing and implementing POLs effectively.

- Creating a library of resources, including templates, guides and examples, to support schools in embedding POLs in their cultures.

- Establishing feedback and reflection mechanisms to refine the program based on stakeholder input.

HCPS' Innovation Department worked collaboratively with school leaders, teachers and community stakeholders to design a Presentations of Learning framework. Specific contributions included:

- **Leadership and vision**: The program aligns with HCPS' commitment to deeper, learner-centered education through the Henrico Learner Profile. The division's leadership set clear expectations and provided the resources necessary to make POLs a core instructional practice.

- **Professional development**: HCPS invested in extensive training for educators, offering workshops, coaching and collaborative planning sessions to ensure they had the skills and confidence to implement POLs successfully.

- **Resource development**: The school division created comprehensive resources to support schools, including planning templates, assessment rubrics and examples of POLs. A "Presentations of Learning" microcredential was also developed as a professional opportunity to help teachers learn how to design and implement mini-presentations of learning in their own classrooms.

- **Technology support**: HCPS used its robust technology infrastructure to support POLs, particularly during the pandemic, when many presentations were conducted virtually.

- **Monitoring and evaluation**: HCPS established processes to gather feedback from students, educators and families, using the data to refine and improve the program over time.

By 2023-24, 68% of HCPS schools were holding community events to actively engage students in POLs, tailoring the experiences to meet the unique needs of different grade levels and communities.

The success of the POL Initiative was amplified by the contributions of key partners, including:

- **Families and community members**: Families and community stakeholders played a vital role in POLs by serving as audience members, mentors and evaluators. Their participation added authenticity to the process and helped students see the real-world relevance of their learning.

- **Local employers and organizations**: Partnerships with local employers and organizations provided opportunities for students to connect their learning to industry practices and community needs. For example, some students presented their work to local employers as part of internships or collaborative projects, adding an authentic element to their work.

- **Professional organizations**: HCPS collaborated with educational organizations, such as the Virginia Leads Innovation Network to stay informed about national trends in learner-centered instruction and authentic assessment. HCPS also built a strategic partnership with leaders from Fairfax County Public Schools, who are working toward similar goals.

The Presentations of Learning Initiative exemplifies Henrico County Public Schools' commitment to innovation, equity and excellence in education. By providing students with authentic opportunities to apply their learning and develop durable skills, POLs prepare HCPS students to thrive in an ever-changing world. The initiative has been recognized as a leading model in learner-centered education, with other school systems seeking to replicate its success. HCPS' leadership, combined with the support of families, community partners and educators,

has made the initiative a model for how school divisions can foster deeper learning and build stronger connections with their communities.

Responding to economic downturn:

The Presentations of Learning Initiative was developed and expanded when HCPS, like many others, faced financial challenges brought on by economic uncertainty. By using existing resources, fostering collaboration and using innovative approaches, HCPS supported the program without placing undue strain on the county's budget.

To minimize costs, HCPS used its existing infrastructure, including its robust professional learning network and technology platforms such as the "HCPS U" professional learning resource to support the implementation of POLs. Existing virtual platforms originally used for instruction and collaboration during the pandemic were repurposed for student presentations, enabling broader participation from families and community members while optimizing resources and accessibility. This approach significantly reduced the need for additional physical resources.

Rather than relying on costly external consultants, HCPS capitalized on internal expertise to provide professional development for educators. Instructional coaches, school leaders and teacher leaders facilitated workshops, shared best practices and provided on-the-ground support, ensuring high-quality implementation without significant financial investment. This collaborative approach empowered educators and fostered a culture of continuous improvement. The creation of an internal microcredential to aid teachers in creating POL opportunities was also established as a cost effective method to support teachers.

HCPS deepened its collaboration with local employers, community organizations and families to enrich the POL experience. These partnerships enhanced the program's authenticity by connecting student learning to real-world applications and reduced financial strain by tapping

into community resources. Local employers and community members provided mentorship and feedback to students. At the same time, families served as audience members and evaluators for presentations, fostering a shared investment in student success at no additional cost.

The POL Initiative demonstrates how HCPS successfully prioritized innovation and equity during an economic downturn, ensuring all students have access to transformative learning experiences without placing additional financial strain on the county's budget.

Advancing diversity, equity and inclusion:

To ensure all residents have what they need to achieve their fullest potential, county leaders are taking actions to integrate diversity, equity and inclusion in county operations. If applicable, describe how the program advances diversity, equity and inclusion priorities within the county or addresses existing racial and socioeconomic disparities. Approximately 375 words.

HCPS' Presentations of Learning Initiative is designed to advance diversity, equity and inclusion by creating opportunities for all students, regardless of background, to engage in meaningful, authentic learning experiences that reflect their unique identities, voices and strengths. This initiative fosters an equitable learning environment where all students are empowered to demonstrate their knowledge and growth in ways that align with their lived experiences and cultural contexts.

POLs provide a platform for students to showcase their learning through tasks that reflect real-world challenges and solutions, emphasizing the importance of diverse perspectives. Educators are trained to design presentations that honor students' unique cultural identities and lived experiences by embedding culturally responsive teaching practices in the program. This approach ensures that students from historically marginalized communities see their voices and contributions valued in their educational journeys.

POLs also address systemic barriers faced by students from low-income families by providing equitable access to resources and support. For example:

- Schools provide the necessary materials, tools and technology for students to complete their presentations so no student is disadvantaged due to financial constraints.
- Professional development for educators emphasizes strategies to support POLs for students with varying academic-readiness levels, language proficiency and learning needs.

One of the core elements of POLs is empowering students to tell their own stories and take ownership of their learning. By centering student voices, the initiative allows all learners — especially those from underrepresented groups — to share their perspectives, articulate their aspirations and reflect on how their experiences shape their learning. This practice not only builds student confidence but also helps to dismantle biases and stereotypes, fostering a school culture that celebrates diversity.

POLs also serve as a bridge between schools and the broader community, engaging families, local organizations and employers. This engagement brings diverse voices in the educational experience, strengthening the sense of inclusion and belonging for students and their families.

By prioritizing DEI through thoughtful initiative design and implementation, the POL Initiative advances HCPS' broader commitment to equity and inclusion.

PROGRAM COST:

HCPS' Presentations of Learning Initiative was developed with a focus on cost-effectiveness and sustainability. The program uses existing resources and donor contributions to minimize financial impact while maximizing student outcomes.

The annual operating costs for the POL Initiative are modest, reflecting the division's strategic use of existing resources and infrastructure. Current costs include:

- **Professional development:** Facilitators for microcredential training sessions receive an annual stipend of $1,400. These facilitators help educators develop the skills necessary to design and implement effective POLs.
- **Divisionwide POL event:** The annual presentations of learning divisionwide event in a large central venue has a dedicated budget of $15,000 to cover event logistics, materials and outreach.
- **Resource development:** HCPS relies primarily on planning templates, rubrics and instructional guides that have been developed internally, resulting in minimal additional expenses.
- **Technology support:** Existing platforms such as HCPS U and video conferencing tools are used for virtual POLs, requiring no significant additional costs.

With strategic planning and efficient use of resources, the POL Initiative is a **scalable and financially sustainable** program. Other school systems can replicate it with minimal initial investment and long-term operational costs, ensuring equitable access to transformative learning experiences without significant financial strain.

Program results/success:

The Presentations of Learning Initiative has successfully empowered students to develop and demonstrate the durable skills outlined in the school division's Henrico Learner Profile, preparing them for success in academics, careers and civic life. By engaging in authentic tasks and public presentations, students have grown as communicators, collaborators, critical thinkers and creative problem-solvers.

Key outcomes

- **Skill development and increased student agency:** Students who participate in POLs consistently report improved confidence in public speaking, critical-thinking and problem-solving. POLs have given students greater ownership of their learning by allowing them to connect core content to their individual interests.

- **Equity in engagement:** Schools have made accommodations to ensure that all students, including English-learners and students with disabilities, can participate fully in POLs.

- **Shift to learner-centered practices:** Educators and school Leaders have embraced POLs as a tool to foster deeper learning. Teachers have shared success stories of students who previously struggled with traditional assessments but excelled during presentations by demonstrating creativity and critical-thinking.

- **Stronger community ties:** POLs have strengthened connections between schools and the community. Many schools invite families, local employers and community leaders to serve as audience members and provide feedback on student presentations. For instance, a high school invited local entrepreneurs to evaluate business pitches created by students, leading to real-world mentorship opportunities for several participants.

Outcome measures

- In the 2023-24 school year, 68% of HCPS schools hosted a POL event, with a goal of increasing participation to 80% in the 2024-25 school year.
- HCPS' on-time graduation rate remains strong at 90.7%, reflecting the program's alignment with goals to prepare students for future success.

The Presentations of Learning Initiative has successfully fostered student growth, strengthened educator practices and engaged the community. By aligning with the Henrico Learner Profile and preparing students for life beyond school, POLs have become a cornerstone of deeper learning in HCPS.

Worthiness of award:

Henrico County Public Schools' Presentations of Learning Initiative embodies innovation, impact and sustainability, aligning seamlessly with the National Association of Counties' criteria for recognizing outstanding programs. This initiative serves as a model of how public education can evolve to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world, equipping students with essential durable skills, outlined in the Henrico Learner Profile, essential for success in an era shaped by technological advancements such as artificial intelligence.

The initiative is impacting students, educators and the community by providing equitable, authentic learning experiences that foster deeper engagement and reflection. It empowers students to take ownership of their learning journeys and prepares them for future academic, career and civic responsibilities. Additionally, the initiative advances diversity, equity and inclusion by ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have opportunities to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in meaningful ways.

By strengthening community partnerships with families, local organizations and employers, POLs foster collaboration and shared investment in student success. For its innovative approach, measurable impact and commitment to educational equity, Henrico County Public Schools POL Initiative is deserving of a VACo Achievement Award.

Supplemental materials:
- [Henrico Learner Profile](#)
- Henrico Learner Profile progressions: [Elementary](#) | [Secondary](#)
- [Presentation of Learning Toolkit](#)
- [Presentations of Learning Highlights](#)
- [Division Presentation of Learning](#)