



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: Hispanic Heritage Autumn Festival Unites and Prepares CTE Programs

Program Category: Health and Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Leslie Perry

Title: Event Planning and Work-based Learning Coordinator

Department: Henrico County Public Schools Department of Workforce and Career Development

Telephone: 804-738-5912 **Website:** _____

Email: lherry@henrico.k12.va.us

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Eileen Cox

Title: Chief of Communications, Henrico County Public Schools

Signature: *Eileen M. Cox*

1. Summary

Henrico County Public Schools' Hispanic Heritage Autumn Festival was organized by students in the Event Planning and Tourism Marketing program in the division's Advanced Career and Education Centers. The students in this program were charged with increasing awareness of how important it is for students to learn to work with peers from various cultures. Today, many students grow up alongside peers from various cultures. However, some students still struggle with feeling comfortable engaging with other cultures. Student organizers were responsible for planning the Hispanic Heritage Autumn Festival event by forming teams. Among their tasks, the students:

- Chose their target audience.
- Created invitations.
- Planned decorations.
- Lined up food, beverages and music related to the culture.
- Contacted a videographer and a florist for greenery.

The event was created in collaboration with HCPS' Culinary Arts Baking and Pastry class, as well as radio and broadcasting, journalism, TV media, graphics and horticulture programs.

Whether students participate in festivals or plan community awareness events, HCPS aims for students to build bonds and become a more diverse community. Because the ACE Center at Hermitage was about to open its new building — one which would play host to many school division events in the future — the event was envisioned as an important way for ACE Center students to get real-world experience preparing for an event.

2. The Problem or Need for the Program

Henrico County Public Schools focuses on preparing students for success. The school division prepares students to seek postsecondary education, look for full-time employment or to enroll in the military upon graduation. Career-exploration is a key component to the experiences that HCPS works to provide. Work-based learning experiences play a vital role in the preparation. Students have an opportunity to learn various skills and trades that prepares them for being enrolled, employed or enlisted. The division encourages students to work together and learn from each other; sometimes this may require them to work with members of the community and employers to be successful. For instance, the hospitality industry is one of the largest employers in the world, and requires comfort with a widely diverse society. The skills that HCPS students receive in a hospitality-industry-related class give them an advantage when seeking employment. Many students are not familiar with how successful they can be when joining the hospitality industry, and that working with various diverse cultures can be an important factor in success.

3. Description of the Program

The HCPS Hispanic Heritage Autumn Festival was an opportunity for students in the division's Advanced Career Education Centers to unite and connect with Henrico County's Hispanic community. In addition, because the ACE Center at Hermitage was about to open its new building — one which would play host to many school division events in the future — the event was envisioned as an important way for ACE Center students to get real-world experience preparing for an event.

The event was planned as a way for Event Planning and Tourism Marketing students to showcase their planning skills — important skills required by Henrico County Public Schools. The festival required students to plan, prepare and execute a public event that would bring Hispanic students together at the Advanced Career Education Center at Hermitage.

Program development and implementation:

The festival was conceived by students as a chance to plan an event for the new ACE Center building slated to open in January 2024. To make this celebration a meaningful success, students were asked to plan an event that would enable them to collaborate with other HCPS career and technical education classes, primarily programs that would be affected by events once the new ACE Center building opened. The students chose to do a community awareness event during Hispanic Heritage Month. Organizers invited culinary, radio and broadcasting, journalism, TV media, graphics and horticulture programs to participate and use some of their skills to help carry out the event. The collaboration demonstrated the camaraderie among various programs in the school community.

Events details and implementation timeline

Organizers chose the outdoor courtyard of Hermitage High School for the festival site — an area that planning and tourism marketing students were using while the new ACE building was under construction. The purpose was for the students in the various career and technical education courses to come together to build a camaraderie together, joining forces together to build relationships and fellowship in the school’s Hispanic community. The event-planning students invited other classes, as well as families to join the festivities. The highlight was for students to get to know each other better through various games, activities, food, music and fellowship. Hispanic students in event-planning classes did a skit to showcase their heritage and how they wanted others to be able to celebrate. Some of these students also gave speeches in their native languages and then interpreted in English to other attendees.

Students began working on the Hispanic Heritage Autumn Festival when school started in the fall and had several weeks to plan and pull off the celebration. Collaboration with culinary,

baking, radio and broadcasting, journalism, TV media, graphics and horticulture programs was important and these students were all invited to attend. Among their tasks, the students:

- Chose their target audience.
- Created invitations.
- Planned decorations.
- Lined up food, beverages and music related to the culture.
- Contacted a videographer and a florist for greenery.

HCPS culinary arts students prepared refreshments for the event — all Hispanic-themed food. Baking and pastry students prepared Hispanic-themed desserts. Radio, broadcasting and journalism students created a themed playlist. Graphics students assisted with flyers and printing invitations for the event-planning students. Horticulture students prepared small floral arrangements to display, and event-planning students created some decorations by hand, and purchased others. The event took place in October, at the end of Hispanic Heritage Month.

Key participants and their roles

This event was so successful because the event-planning students and teacher relied heavily on the in-house career and technical education community to help carry out the event. The event was also a trial-run of teamwork, as the students would be required to work together on many occasions once they moved into the large new ACE Center building. The building affords them the opportunity to assist many HCPS groups, and organizations from a variety of industries and cultures. The students were solely responsible for inviting guests to the event, including lining up the participation of the other career and technical education students. This required teamwork, problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Most events of this type typically have some type of food involved and the festival was no exception. HCPS culinary arts and baking and pastry students played a vital role in assisting in the effort to make the event a success. The event succeeded because the students were able to work together.

Programs goals and outcomes

The Hispanic Heritage Autumn Festival sought to bring Hispanic students together to increase awareness of their cultures with other students of different ethnic backgrounds. The students had a place to be recognized and celebrated for their culture and what they bring to their school environments each day. The teachers and students were able to learn more about the Hispanic community and celebrate the differences of their peers.

The event was an opportunity for greater awareness and respect for students from various cultures who see each other in school, but may not really know each other. The event gave students, teachers, administrators and other community members a chance to celebrate differences.

4. Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Hispanic students comprise 14% of Henrico County Public Schools' student population. The students represent a wide array of cultural experiences and traditions, languages and perspectives. Hispanic students enrolled in HCPS' event-planning class have shown their teachers and peers how to have a more inclusive learning experience. Many of the Hispanic students in the career and technical education programs are either bilingual or learning English as a second language. Schools value this opportunity to connect students by promoting crosscultural community understanding. This is a benefit to teachers and to Hispanic students. The Event Planning class teacher and students sought to embrace diversity. This event advanced that desire and helped students learn more about the contributions of the Hispanic community.

As with other students considered a minority in schools, many Hispanic students have faced disparities with respect to education. Programs in place are making strides to change this narrative. The Event Planning course and others have endeavored to create chances for

students to share their differences and help them become more successful. Taking the initiative to learn to communicate better with students learning English is a benefit to teachers and peers. This event enables English-learner students and those for whom English is their primary language an opportunity to understand each other, including some challenges that Hispanic students face.

The event was designed to enable Hispanic students enrolled at Hermitage High School and the ACE Center at Hermitage to feel welcomed by all students. When students leave Henrico County Public Schools, they should be ready to become enrolled in college, enlisted in the military or to enter the workforce. As they do, they will meet people from many walks of life. Of course, Hispanic community members will be among this group and it will be vital to form relationships.

The hospitality industry is large and includes employers from the Hispanic community.

Incorporating an event like the Hispanic Heritage Autumn Festival in the curriculum was an effective way to help students connect and reflect on their perspectives and life differences.

While no event can change disparities immediately among students, the festival gave students an opportunity to recognize and appreciate the diversity of students in their school. An important goal was to make sure that Hispanic students understood how vital they are to the school and school division.

5. The Cost of the Program

The total budget for the event was approximately \$200. Some of the items were donated, once the Event Planning class students shared with others what they were doing and the purpose of the event. The Event Planning class primarily had to purchase the decorations and assist with some of the food costs. The Culinary Arts and Baking and Pastry class assisted with some of

the costs. Radio broadcasting, journalism, TV and media production, graphics and horticulture donated their time and work to the event.

6. The Results/Success of the Program

The Hispanic Heritage Autumn Festival was a success: it recognized the Hermitage Hispanic student community. Students got an opportunity to learn about each other's differences.

Hispanic students said that they felt appreciated. Some students said they had not been recognized before the event in such a special way.

Because the ACE Center at Hermitage was about to open its new building — one which would play host to many school division events in the future — the event was an important tool for helping ACE Center students get real-world experience preparing for an event.

Because it was an afternoon event, fewer families attended than was originally hoped and this is something that will be considered for similar events.

The event promoted a sense of pride in the school's Hispanic community, because they were able to share their cultural differences and be celebrated. Some of the most important highlights of the event were that students had a chance to speak and share their languages with other students, as well as things that were important in their lives and their families' lives.

Being able to work with the other career and technical education classes and students was a major win. Hispanic students in those courses said they felt appreciated and valued. They expressed the sentiment that, thanks to their peers, they were happy to be part of a special school activity that honored them and their heritage.

The event was also a launching pad, a trial run planning for events in the new ACE Center building, and for cultural celebrations that students will be able to implement in the future.

7. Worthiness of Award

The combination of student engagement, planning, interprogram collaboration make this program worthy of a VACo award. When its cultural goals are also included, the program's benefits are even more clear.

By creating a vehicle for collaboration with other HCPS career and technical education classes, students fostered camaraderie and prepared for a critical aspect of life in the work world:

cooperating with other individuals, departments and companies to achieve common goals.

Involving primarily programs that would be involved in preparing events at the new ACE Center building gave the students a trial-run for the large new space that hosts numerous complicated events.

By increasing awareness of the Hispanic community at Hermitage and striving to form connections through the event, the program contributed to a happier school community where understanding is valued and practiced.

9. Supplemental Materials





Join Event Planning for our
**Hispanic Heritage
Celebration**
Thursday, October, 12
1:30 - 2:30pm
ACE at Hermitage
Courtyard
Join us for food, drinks, fun
activities, a performance, and
more!
Don't miss out!

A decorative graphic featuring a woman in traditional Hispanic attire with a colorful headdress and a necklace. Below her, several hands of different colors are reaching up to hold a small globe. The background is dark red with wavy patterns.