



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Tuesday, April 7, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact **Gage Harter** with any questions.

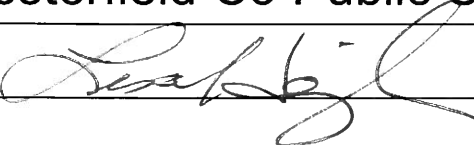
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Chesterfield County
Program Title: Work-Based Learning - Dominion Energy Apprenticeship Program
Program Category: Community and Economic Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Lisa High
Title: Chesterfield Co Public Schools Deputy Superintendent
Signature: 

Work-Based Learning - Dominion Energy Apprenticeship Program
(Community and Economic Development Category)

Executive Summary:

Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS) CTE in partnership with Dominion Energy, has developed a comprehensive experiential learning continuum that introduces students to energy careers beginning in middle school and culminates in a paid high school apprenticeship within Dominion Energy's System Operations Center (SOC). Through guest speakers, career exploration events, job shadows, and structured workplace learning, students experience multiple touchpoints with Dominion's workforce before applying for the competitive Student Worker/Apprenticeship Program. Selected rising seniors begin a paid summer internship (\$16/hour) and continue working two to three days per week during their senior year while completing related technical instruction. Upon graduation, students transition into full-time assistant system operator roles and enroll in Dominion-funded postsecondary training. This partnership creates a direct, debt-free pathway from high school to high-wage, high-demand careers in electric transmission and grid operations, strengthening the regional workforce pipeline while expanding meaningful career opportunities for students.

Problem or need addressed by the program:

Like many communities nationwide, Chesterfield County faces a growing demand for skilled workers in energy, infrastructure, and advanced technical fields. Electric transmission system operators are critical to maintaining grid reliability and public safety; however, the industry faces an aging workforce and increasing retirement rates. Without intentional workforce development strategies, shortages in highly specialized roles, such as transmission system operators, could threaten long-term system stability. At the same time, students and families increasingly seek alternatives to traditional four-year college pathways due to rising tuition costs and student debt.

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Many students desire high-wage, hands-on careers but lack awareness of opportunities within essential infrastructure sectors, such as electric grid operations.

Dominion Energy recognized that building a sustainable workforce pipeline requires backward mapping beginning career exposure in middle school and continuing through high school with progressively deeper engagement. CCPS shares a responsibility to provide career readiness experiences aligned with regional labor market demands under Virginia's Profile of a Graduate and Career and Technical Education (CTE) requirements. This partnership was developed to address three critical needs: early career awareness in high-demand energy fields, structured, paid workplace learning opportunities for high school students, and a seamless transition from high school to industry-recognized credentials and employment. By aligning public education with private industry workforce needs, CCPS and Dominion Energy have created a replicable model that strengthens economic development while offering students a direct pathway into a stable, high-wage career field.

Program Description:

The Dominion Energy Apprenticeship Continuum is a five-year partnership between CCPS and Dominion Energy designed to intentionally build a workforce pipeline in electric transmission system operations.

Phase 1: Career Awareness (Middle School)

Dominion Energy representatives participate in career fairs, STEM events, and classroom presentations to introduce students to energy careers and infrastructure operations.

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Phase 2: Career Exploration (Early High School)

Students engage in guest speaker sessions, workplace tours of Dominion's Magnolia System Operations Center, and structured job shadowing experiences. These opportunities provide authentic exposure to transmission operations, grid reliability, and power dispatching.

Phase 3: Career Preparation (Junior Year)

Interested students complete prerequisite coursework in mathematics, engineering, electricity, or related CTE programs. Students apply through the GoPursue platform and complete a competitive selection process, which includes a minimum 3.0 GPA requirement, three letters of recommendation, the System Operator/Power Dispatching (SOPD) aptitude exam, and a panel interview with Dominion Energy staff

Phase 4: Student Worker Apprenticeship (Senior Year)

Selected students begin employment the summer between junior and senior year, earning \$16/hour and continue working two to three days per week during senior year. Students will train alongside certified system operators. They will learn outage coordination, modeling, and fault analysis, and visit substations and generating plants.

Phase 5: Post-Graduation Employment & Education

Upon graduation, students transition to full-time Assistant System Operator roles (approximately \$50,000 annually) and complete Dominion-funded coursework through Bismarck State College's Electric Transmission Systems Technology program. CCPS provides coordination, student identification, scheduling flexibility, and work-based learning oversight. Dominion Energy provides paid employment, mentorship, structured training, and tuition coverage.

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Currently, two Chesterfield students have completed the inaugural cycle. Plans are in place to double participation in the upcoming year and expand the model across the Commonwealth.

Program Cost:

The Dominion Energy Apprenticeship Program is structured to maximize impact while minimizing direct public expenditure.

Operating Costs (CCPS):

- Work-based learning coordination and administrative oversight
- Staff time for student advising and scheduling flexibility
- Transportation coordination for workplace visits

Dominion Energy Investment:

- Student wages (\$16/hour during apprenticeship year)
- Full-time salary upon graduation (approximately \$50,000)
- Tuition payment for Bismarck State College program
- Mentorship, training, certifications, and exam costs

No capital costs were required by the county, as training occurs at Dominion's purpose-built Magnolia System Operations Center.

For replication, counties would need:

- A committed industry partner
- Work-based learning coordination staff
- Student transportation solutions
- Scheduling flexibility within high school timetables

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The majority of financial investment is borne by the private-sector partner, making this a fiscally sustainable public-private workforce model.

Results/Success of the Program:

The Dominion Energy Apprenticeship Program has demonstrated early but significant success in establishing a structured, sustainable workforce pipeline. Two Chesterfield students successfully completed the initial student worker cycle and transitioned into continued training and employment pathways. Dominion Energy has committed to doubling participation next year and expanding recruitment efforts across additional divisions. Students begin earning competitive wages in high school (\$16 per hour) and are eligible for full-time Assistant System Operator roles earning approximately \$50,000 upon graduation. With continued training and certification, long-term salaries exceed \$100,000. Participants gain hands-on experience in outage coordination, modeling, and fault analysis, mentorship from certified transmission operators and tuition-funded postsecondary credentials. Beyond wages, the program's greatest success lies in backward-mapped workforce alignment. Students receive multiple exposure points beginning in middle school, allowing them to affirm career interests before committing to an apprenticeship. This partnership strengthens economic development by ensuring local talent is trained for essential grid reliability roles while providing students a debt-free, high-wage career trajectory.

Measurable Outcomes:

- Two Chesterfield County students successfully completed the inaugural apprenticeship cycle.

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- 100% of participants transitioned into continued employment pathways.
- Program expansion is planned to double student participation in the upcoming year.
- Dominion Energy seeks 20–40 students annually across participating divisions

Students begin earning wages during high school (\$16/hour) and transition into full-time employment at approximately \$50,000 annually after graduation. Long-term earning potential exceeds \$100,000 as a transmission system operator, with senior roles reaching significantly higher compensation levels.

Student Impact:

- Real-world system operations experience
- Exposure to critical infrastructure and grid reliability
- Industry-recognized credentials
- Debt-free postsecondary education

Student testimonials reflect increased confidence, technical skill development, and clarity of career direction. Students report valuing hands-on training, mentorship, and the opportunity to enter a high-demand field without incurring student loan debt.

Community Impact:

- Strengthens regional workforce in essential energy infrastructure
- Supports economic mobility for students
- Aligns public education with high-wage, high-demand careers
- Serves as a replicable model for other counties across Virginia

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The partnership demonstrates how intentional alignment between school systems and private industry creates both immediate student opportunity and long-term economic resilience.

Worthiness of Award:

This program is innovative because it moves beyond traditional internships to create a fully backward-mapped workforce continuum beginning in middle school and culminating in a paid, credential-aligned apprenticeship with guaranteed employment pathways.

Key innovative elements include:

- Continuum Design: Career awareness → exploration → preparation → apprenticeship → full employment.
- Debt-Free Pathway: Students earn wages in high school and receive employer-funded postsecondary education.
- Critical Infrastructure Focus: Prepares students for electric grid reliability, an essential but often overlooked field.
- Private-Sector Investment Model: The majority of funding is employer-supported, reducing public financial burden.
- Structured Certification Pipeline: Integration of SOPD testing and NERC certification preparation during high school.

Few programs nationally offer direct entry from high school into electric transmission system operations with a clearly mapped progression from student worker to supervisor-level leadership roles. This partnership exemplifies how counties can align education, workforce development, and economic strategy to create sustainable, high-impact results.

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Supplemental Materials:

[Link](#) to Supplemental materials