

Recognizing the Best in County Government Programs!



# 2014 Achievement Awards



## 2014 VACo Achievement Awards

Deadline: June 2, 2014

### Application Form

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2014.**

#### Program Information

Locality Henrico County

Program Title Family Engagement through Family Advocates

Program Category Health and Human Services (Youth, Elderly and Others)

#### Contact Information

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#### Signature of county administrator or chief administrative officer

Name John Vithoukas

Title County Manager

Signature 

## Call for Entries

**Program Category:** Health and Human Services (Youth, Elderly and Others)

## **1. Overview of the Program**

Family advocates serve as a link between families, communities and schools, and are positioned in all 20 elementary schools in Henrico County that receive federal Title I funds. Schools and school districts eligible for Title 1 funds are those with a high percentage of students from low-income families. The 20 positions were created in September 2012 in response to stakeholder feedback and staff research showing that increased family engagement has a positive effect on student achievement, particularly for at-risk students. Their mission is to empower families by bridging gaps and building connections between schools and communities. This connection presents the opportunity for families to become more engaged in their child's education, to volunteer in schools, to attend events and workshops and to serve on school or parent committees. Goals of the program are to reduce the truancy rate, including tardiness and early dismissals; to bridge the gaps among schools, home and the community; and to boost family involvement in the schools.

## **2. The Problem/Need for the Program**

Family engagement is an ongoing process that increases participation, communication and collaboration among parents, schools, and communities with the goal of educating the whole child to ensure student achievement and

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success. Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS) is committed to providing quality educational, health, nutritional and social services to students and families. The HCPS federal programs preschools are committed to engaging parents and community members in children's learning experiences. Title I staff members and preschool staff members work collaboratively in each school to provide opportunities for family engagement. In recent years, however, family participation in volunteer opportunities, workshops, events and committee memberships has been at an all-time low.

### **3. Description of the Program**

Family advocates serve as the link among families, school and the community. This connection allows families to be more involved in their child's education by volunteering in the school, attending events and workshops and serving on school and family committees. The goals of the program are to reduce the truancy rate, including tardies and early dismissals; to bridge the gaps between schools, home and the community; and to boost family involvement in the schools. To best accomplish this, every Title I school has a family advocate on staff.

Family Advocate duties include:

- Develop and maintain a parent volunteer program
- Coordinate school-business partnerships

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- Communicate, monitor, and coordinate services to support daily student attendance
- Conduct home visits to maintain family-school communication
- Support the free and reduced lunch application process
- Communicate information to families on school and community events
- Plan school events that address student/family needs
- Align resources to avoid duplication of efforts

After a Family Needs Assessment (FNA) is completed, preschool family advocates make contact with preschool families to begin building relationships, where the advocates explain their role. They review the FNA, inquire about resources the family may need and encourage the family to participate in school activities. Home visits may be conducted for students in grades K-5 as needed.

An FNA is required for all preschool families, and all families of students in grades K-5 when they make an initial request for assistance. Once an advocate reviews a family's FNA, he or she identifies their needs and goals. The advocates rate the families' needs as high, medium or low priority and contact the high-priority families first. Subsequent family contacts range from monthly to twice yearly, according to a family's priority rating.

Along with the FNA, a Family Goal Setting Form (FGSF) is completed with each preschool family to set goals and strategies.

The family advocate serves as a valuable source of information to families on topics they identify in the FNA and during discussions at other times. He or she provides information on topics such as financial literacy, taxes, basic needs, health and nutrition, safety, education, employment, parenting, child development, pregnancy and infant care.

Effective communication is key during the school year. Family advocates are required to spend two hours each month visiting preschool classrooms. By doing this, they become familiar with the students and classroom environment and can communicate effectively with families. Classroom visits are not required for grades K-5. Advocates greet families as they drop off students for school each morning and are also visible to families during dismissal.

Advocates communicate with families in face-to-face conversations, letters, newsletters, phone calls and emails. Effective communication is also just as vital between the advocate and the school administration and staff.

Family advocates encourage parents and families to become involved in their child's education by attending workshops, becoming active members of the

preschool subcommittee, School Family Engagement Committee (SFEC) and Henrico Federal Programs Advisory Council (HFPAC).

All activities and meetings are a collaborative effort of federal program staff at each school. At the beginning of each year, the parents in federal programs meet at their respective schools and elect officers to serve on the family engagement committee. Each school must have a committee that consists of a chairperson, recorder/secretary and two representatives to attend the HFPAC. While all parents are automatically members of their SFEC, other members can include interested people in the community, including parents of former federal programs preschool students.

The preschool subcommittee lets families, community representatives and staff work together to make sure that all programs are aligning with the funding requirements. The subcommittee consists of preschool families from the SFEC, community representatives and a school board member. Principals and staff members may serve in an advisory capacity. Parents are elected for subcommittee at the SFEC meeting. Community representatives are selected by the parent members. All preschool subcommittee members are encouraged to serve on HFPAC. Family advocates are responsible for assisting teachers with recruiting preschool families as representatives to serve on the committee. Family advocates also provide parents with transportation to the meetings if

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requested. Family advocates and elected parent representatives attend the monthly meetings.

The research is clear that when schools and families support each other, students of all backgrounds and various abilities achieve at higher levels. HCPS believes that parents, schools, families and communities working together through programs like the advocates initiative can create meaningful partnerships – partnerships that will ultimately lead to significant gains in student achievement.

### **4. Use of Technology**

The technology used for the program:

- Intranet
- Internet
- Websites
- Software (ChildPlus, Microsoft Office, Google Docs, etc.)
- Databases
- Email

## **5. The Cost of the Program**

- Salaries and benefits for 20 family advocates: \$578,000 annually
- Professional development and conferences: \$6,500 annually
- Office setup and supplies for 20 advocates: \$160,000 (one-time cost)
- Equipment for 20 advocates: \$67,000 (one-time cost)

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

An evaluation process was created during a pilot for the family advocates program. The evaluation focused on development; the first-year focus; the second-year focus; and recommendations. The development phase began evaluation process by assigning a project manager, establishing program goals, planning for needed resources and program activities and identifying evaluation indicators. The first-year pilot of the evaluation focused on the fidelity of program implementation and the (current) second-year of the evaluation focuses on the outcomes and progress made toward meeting the program goals. The data collection process will continue to monitor program implementation and data reporting consistency. Finally, recommendations will be made to the School Board as to the effectiveness gleaned from this evaluation process.

Indicators of the evaluation model measured to determine effectiveness of the family advocates program include:



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- Number of home visits conducted
- Number of parent events held
- Number of family contacts
- Number of family needs assessments completed
- Number of assistance requests
- Number of hours of staff development attendance

Outcomes:

- Reduction in the achievement gap on SOL assessments
- Decreased truancy
- Reduction in tardiness and early dismissals
- Increased parent involvement through event attendance
- Increased parent volunteerism

Indicator	Total #	Average	Range	Year 1 Target	Year 2 Target
Home Visits	89	8.9	0 - 35	Establish a baseline.	36 average
Parent Events	117 events 6,131 parents	11.7 events 613.1 parents	7 – 18 events 258 – 1,187 parents		12 average

Family Contacts	5,248	524.8	195 - 1,213		600 average
Family Needs Assessments	288	28.8	18 - 36		
Assistance Requests	372	37.2	9 - 97		40 average
Staff Development Attendance (hours)	662	66.2	61-73		66 average

**5. Worthiness of an Award**

The use of family advocates in Henrico County Public Schools has increased family engagement; decreased tardiness and early dismissals by 30 percent; and enhanced citizen participation by engaging with schools across the county that receive Title I funds. All of these advancements contribute to the overarching division goals of closing the achievement gap and having students read at grade level by the end of third grade.

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**Program Category:** Health and Human Services (Youth, Elderly and Others)

**Submitted By:** Gail Jones