

2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

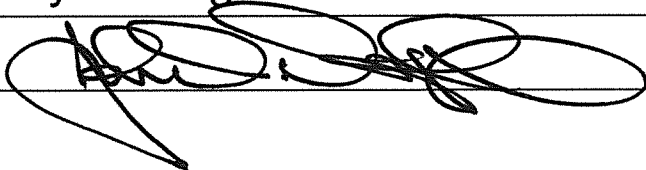
PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Henrico County
Program Title: A Systematic Process for Evaluating Educational Programs
Program Category: Organizational Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: John A. Vithoukas
Title: County Manager
Signature: 

Overview/Summary of the Program

Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS) has developed a systematic process to enable administrators and public leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs. This process is designed to ensure that quality programs are implemented with consistency and fidelity, and ultimately contribute to positive student outcomes. The model helps division leaders make data-driven decisions about whether programs should continue, and if so, how to improve or expand them to meet the needs of stakeholders while ensuring fiscal responsibility.

The Problem or Challenge

School divisions implement a multitude of programs and initiatives to better the lives and learning experiences of students. Many times, programs are created and delivered without plans for how their impact will be measured. Over the past several years, due to the economic downturn, school divisions have been forced to make difficult decisions regarding program funding. The program evaluation model was developed and implemented to ensure that programs and initiatives did what they were designed to do. This gives the school division a standardized and reliable basis for decision-making and ensures that public dollars are spent on high-quality endeavors.

In 2010, Henrico County Public Schools developed a comprehensive, five-year strategic plan using input from over 200 students, parents, community members, business leaders and staff. One of the plan objectives was to establish a

process to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs and initiatives.

Stakeholders recognized that it was essential to be able to assess program quality and effectiveness to make sure resources were going to the programs that were working best and had the greatest potential for future success.

HCPS looked at how other school systems across Virginia evaluated their programs and adopted its own program evaluation process. An evaluation of a program begins at the suggestion of a member of the HCPS Division Leadership Team, comprised of the superintendent, assistant superintendents and selected directors. Once a program is approved for evaluation, the process includes four phases that occur over a two-year period.

The first phase is the development of an evaluation plan. This occurs during the planning cycle of the program and before program implementation. The staff member responsible for the delivery of the program collaborates with staff members from the HCPS Department of Research and Planning, who oversee the evaluation process. Together they decide which areas of the program will be studied, how the data collection will occur, the involvement of stakeholders and which indicators will be measured to determine effectiveness. Staff members work together to complete a “logic model” outlining the following components of the evaluation:

- Program or project manager: The person responsible for overseeing the implementation of the program and the collection of data to be used for the evaluation

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- Implementation date: The timeframe for program delivery
- Description of the program: A brief overview of the program purpose, stakeholders being served and activities
- Program goals: One or two goals that will be met through the delivery of the program
- Resources: All resources needed to accomplish the program activities, including human, material, financial and organizational resources
- Activities: A complete list of activities that will occur to accomplish the program goals
- Implementation indicators: A list of evidence or progress-monitoring indicators showing fidelity and consistency of service delivery aligned with the program activities
- Outcomes: Measurable results that are expected in one to five years if program activities are implemented with fidelity and consistency

Upon completion, the logic model is reviewed and approved by all appropriate departments and staff and serves as the framework for monitoring the program's progress. After approval, the program is implemented.

The second phase of the process occurs at the end of the first year of implementation. At this time, a progress report is provided to division leadership focusing on the fidelity of program implementation during the first year. Using the predetermined indicators from the development phase, data is analyzed and

reported to determine whether the program is being fulfilled as it was designed.

For example, in 2012-13, the process was used to evaluate a new program aimed at increasing parent involvement by stationing a family advocate in 10 Henrico elementary schools. At the end of the program's first year, a progress report was provided to the Henrico County Public School Board. The report included data on a host of indicators, including the number of home-visits conducted, the number of parent events held and the number of family contacts made. Using the data collected and reported from the first-year program indicators, program staff members were able to establish targets for the second year. The program leader worked closely with the in-school advocates and their principals to help them meet the targets and to ensure that the program was being implemented consistently in all 10 schools.

After the second year of program implementation, the program evaluation focuses on the outcomes and progress made toward meeting the program goals. Using the outcome measures established during the development phase, data is collected and analyzed to determine if the goals of the program are being achieved. For instance, in the example of the family advocate program evaluation, the program is ultimately expected to reduce the achievement gap – the gap in educational success between African-American and Hispanic student groups, and white and Asian student groups. The program is also expected to decrease truancy; increase parent involvement in events and in volunteerism; and reduce student tardiness. At the end of the 2013-14 school year, the data

was analyzed to determine if the program achieved these outcomes.

In phase four – the end of the process – a final report is prepared documenting the results found in the two years. Recommendations are made regarding program continuation, improvement and expansion. The final report is provided to the HCPS Division Leadership Team for their consideration in planning decisions.

Response to Economic Downturn

Although program evaluation is considered a best practice, school divisions may lack the time and resources to implement a thorough process for documenting program success. With the recent economic downturn, school systems have received fewer funds – even as their student enrollments continue to increase. In Henrico County Public Schools, enrollment in grades K-12 has increased over the past five years, from 48,447 in 2010 to 49,812 in 2014. During this time, state and federal accountability systems continue to raise the expected student performance standards for schools and divisions.

In these situations, school systems must prioritize their needs and provide fiscal support to those programs that are proven to be most effective in improving the educational experience for students. As school leaders have less flexibility in exploring new, unproven programs, they must use programs that have been confirmed to support student progress.

Use of Technology

- Internet
- Microsoft Office
- Data tracking systems (e.g., Google Docs)

The Cost of the Program

There are no monetary costs for implementing the program evaluation model.

It is a system that can be implemented with current staff in a school division.

Staff time is needed, however.

Results

The programs that are currently being evaluated confirm the success of the evaluation model. Two division programs are undergoing the process and are in the second year of the evaluation. One program has fully completed the two-year process. The strength of the model is that it demands that a program be well-designed before it is implemented; the model requires substantial planning and purposeful program activities to achieve the desired outcomes. Additionally, since a program's progress indicators and outcomes are predetermined, the model puts a premium on oversight and accountability to the program design.

Based on program findings from the Family Advocate program evaluation, the model has given program managers a systematic way to collect data. They now have the information they need to assess how activities are meeting the program goals, and make data-driven changes if needed. In this example, the

evaluation findings also allowed program managers to refine how data was being collected and offer suggestions for strengthening program activities at each school.

Implementation data tracked during the first two years of the Family Advocate program utilizing this evaluation model revealed significant increases in home visits (average increase 24.7), family contacts (average increase of 409.3), and completed family-needs assessments (average increase 17.3). Outcome measures directly measuring progress towards the programs overall goals showed increases in parent event attendance (average increase 11.1), reduction in tardies and early dismissals (60.8 percent reduction), and reduction in unexcused absences (20.7 percent reduction). Without the preplanned evaluation process, systems to collect and analyze data such as this may not have been implemented. Due to the evidence to demonstrating its effectiveness, the program has continued and expanded to additional schools.

Because Henrico County Public Schools strives to provide the best education possible for each student, the division must be able to move quickly, nimbly and reliably when making decisions. Without the right information and a systematic way of collecting it, decisions may be only hunches. The division's program evaluation model provides a framework for assessing the many initiatives that a large school division must undertake to provide an excellent education. In lean economic times, deciding whether and how to improve, expand or cut programs becomes even more important. To this end, HCPS' new program evaluation

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model is proving to be a crucial tool in deciding how to move strategically to provide the best learning experiences for students in the most fiscally responsible ways possible.

Program Category: Organizational Development

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