



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the 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: County of Henrico
Program Title: Proximos Pasos/Next Steps
Program Category: Regional Collaboration

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Victoria Davis
Title: Public Relations Specialist
Department: Public Relations
Telephone: 804-501-4933 Website: www.henrico.gov
Email: dav127@henrico.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Monica Smith-Callahan
Title: Deputy County Manager for Community Affairs
Signature: 

Program Overview

In October 2023, Henrico County Public Schools held its "Próximos Pasos (Next Steps)" event, part of the school division's Cultural Heritage Series. The event exemplifies a transformative approach to advancing diversity, equity and inclusion. Developed in collaboration with the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and HCPS' Equity and Diversity Advisory Committee, the initiative was organized in the months before Hispanic Heritage Month. The event — aimed at Hispanic and Spanish-speaking students and families — featured an information fair that offered insights into college and military options and career paths.

Outreach to school counselors, English-as-a-second-language teachers and school newsletters encouraged broad participation. Free bus transportation ensured accessibility from nearby schools. The event's highlight was a bilingual panel moderated by Hispanic students, on how to Hispanic students' future steps. Incorporating cultural elements such as candy from a local family-owned business enhanced the event's inclusivity.

Student "passports" and a raffle for a free cake encouraged engagement with resource fair tables. Information sheets provided information on paths to adult education, college and the military. The event attracted more than 100 participants, fostering cultural exchange through traditional music and dance.

The program supports Hispanic students as they navigate employment, enrollment and enlistment opportunities, and promotes equity and diversity.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

According to the Virginia Department of Education's School Quality Profile of Henrico County Public Schools, during the 2022-23 school year, the school division's students had a dropout rate

of 6.6%. Still, Hispanic students had a dropout rate of 20%. In the same year, all HCPS students had a 90.7% on-time graduation rate, while Hispanic students had only a 76.5% on-time graduation rate. In the 2019-20 school year, the broader HCPS student population had a postsecondary enrollment rate of 68%. During the same year, only 47% of HCPS' Hispanic students were enrolled in a postsecondary educational experience.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

The "Próximos Pasos (Next Steps)" event warrants recognition and an achievement award from the National Association of Counties for its exemplary contribution to fostering diversity, equity and inclusion within Henrico County. The Próximos Pasos (Next Steps) event was a thorough, collaborative effort by the Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity, along with dozens of school and community partners, including some Hispanic-owned businesses, to help Hispanic students maximize their futures and connect with their school and local communities. Próximos Pasos (Next Steps) was able to successfully highlight post-high school opportunities for Hispanic students in employment, enrollment in a post-secondary institution of learning or trade school, or enlistment in the military. By exposing Hispanic students to opportunities, they may be more likely to stay in school and pursue paths to post-high school opportunities. This was also accomplished with involvement from current Hispanic students at HCPS, which is a key detail in establishing the connection needed in a future-focused event like this. All of these efforts resulted in an equitable, inclusive and valuable evening for HCPS' growing Hispanic and Spanish-speaking population, and all of these efforts can be replicated with collaboration between school, government and private entities in any locality committed to serving a diverse population.

How Program Was Carried Out

The Próximos Pasos (Next Steps) event was conceived in August 2023 as an addition to HCPS'

annual Cultural Heritage Series, presented by HCPS' Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity. The event was built on community partnerships with the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and our division's Equity and Diversity Advisory Committee. The event was in development and planning for the three months leading up to Hispanic Heritage Month. Our target audience was Hispanic and Spanish-speaking students and families living in Henrico County. As part of this event, we had Hispanic community representatives from the United States Marine Corps, the Great Aspirations Scholarship Program, the Virginia Hispanic Foundation, Reynolds Community College, Old Dominion University, Randolph-Macon College, Henrico County Public Schools Adult Education, Molina Healthcare and Futuro Latino. These community representatives set up tables for an information fair where students and families could browse and get valuable information about a variety of fields.

Advertisements for the event were sent to all HCPS high school counselors, all high school English-as-a-second-language teachers and HCPS world languages teachers. It was disseminated to the HCPS community through "The Binder" e-newsletter, sent to all families and students. It was also included in "The Clipboard" staff e-newsletter and sent to families as messages using the division's ParentSquare family communications account. Free bus transportation was provided from neighboring schools with large Hispanic student populations. Hispanic students from J.R. Tucker High School's Equity Ambassadors student group moderated a panel conversation with participating representatives. The panel took place in both Spanish and English. The panelists answered five questions: 1. How do you see your role in supporting the next steps for students of Hispanic/Latin(e) heritage? 2. What is a path to and what are some benefits of college? 3. What is a path to and what are some benefits of the military? 4. What are some paths and benefits of different careers? 5. How would you recommend students navigate barriers in their next steps?

Candy was purchased from a local Hispanic family-owned business, Dalia's Dulceria, and served throughout the event to those in attendance. Student "passports" were created and passed out to students in attendance. If students got passport stamps from five different resource fair tables, they were entered in a raffle to win a free cake from Dalia's Dulceria.

One-page informational sheets were created and handed out to participants in the resource fair, with local and updated information regarding various paths for students to enroll, enlist or be employed. The "Pathways to Adult Education and Careers" sheet laid out Henrico-specific information regarding Henrico Adult Education, the General Educational Development Test, Adult Basic Education classes, TABE pre-assessments, local testing times, locations and prices, Individual Student Alternative Education Plans, Henrico County Adult English Language Acquisition classes and general adult classes. The "Pathways to College" document shared step-by-step directions for students interested in applying to college. The "Pathways to the Military" document shared options including enlistment; Military Entrance Processing information; studying for the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery; enrolling as a commissioned officer; academies and colleges, ROTC programs; Officer Candidate School; direct commission officers and more. The HCPS Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity also provided free Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test prep books for interested students.

More than 100 participants attended the resource fair or the panel presentation. Participants were able to dance with their peers to traditional music provided by a Hispanic J.R. Tucker High School student who played the trumpet. Two students shared that they planned to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps after meeting with the recruiter at the event and hearing him speak during our panel.

Financing and Staffing

The development and implementation of the "Próximos Pasos (Next Steps)" event involved capital and operating costs, reflecting a commitment to excellence and inclusivity. The primary resource investment was the specialized expertise of an HCPS staff specialist, who dedicated months to meticulously planning and organizing the event. The professional ensured the program aligned with the goals of Henrico County Public Schools' Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity and the specific needs of the Hispanic and Spanish-speaking community.

The event cost between \$1,000 and \$2,000. This budget was allocated to various elements essential for the event's success. It covered expenditures such as promotional materials, venue arrangements at J.R. Tucker High School, transportation for interested students from Douglas S. Freeman and Hermitage high schools and the purchase of candy from a local family-owned business. The financial commitment reflects a strategic investment in creating a comprehensive and culturally enriching experience for the attendees.

The cost breakdown underscores the thoughtful consideration of the event's diverse components, including the bilingual panel discussion, resource fair, traditional music and dance. The allocation of resources aligns with the event's overarching goals of advancing diversity, equity and inclusion within Henrico County, emphasizing the importance of investing in human capital and financial resources to create a meaningful and impactful program.

Program Results

The "Próximos Pasos (Next Steps)" event achieved remarkable success, with tangible outcomes that underscore its impact on Henrico County's Hispanic and Spanish-speaking community. The event, part of the division's Cultural Heritage Series, attracted more than 100 participants who

actively engaged with the program's diverse offerings. Its primary mission was accomplished in several facets:

- **Engagement and participation:** The robust attendance demonstrated a strong interest and engagement among Hispanic and Spanish-speaking students and their families. Participants actively interacted with vendors at the information fair, gaining valuable insights into various paths to post-high school career opportunities.
- **Bilingual panel discussion:** The bilingual panel, moderated by Hispanic students, provided a platform for meaningful dialogue. Panelists addressed crucial questions about supporting Hispanic students' next steps, paths to college and the military and navigating career barriers. This inclusive approach ensured that language was not a barrier to understanding and participating.
- **Student incentives:** The innovative use of student "passports" and a raffle for a free cake incentivized active participation in the resource fair. Students collected stamps from different tables, which highlighted their exploration of diverse educational and career resources.
- **Recruitment success:** The event facilitated successful recruitment efforts, as evidenced by two students expressing interest in the U.S. Marine Corps after engaging with a recruiter during the panel discussion. This outcome directly aligns with the event's focus on employment, enrollment and enlistment opportunities.
- **Cultural integration:** Traditional music and dance, along with the inclusion of Hispanic and Spanish-speaking candy from a local family-owned business, created a culturally rich atmosphere. Attendees not only gained valuable information but also experienced a celebration of their heritage.
- **Information about paths forward:** The distribution of one-page informational sheets with local and updated information on paths to adult education, college and the military ensured

that participants left the event with practical knowledge and resources for their future endeavors.

- **Community collaboration:** The event's success was further amplified through community partnerships with the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the division's Equity and Diversity Advisory Committee. This collaborative effort enriched the event's content and outreach.
- **Broad outreach:** Strategic advertisements to high school counselors, ESL teachers and division e-newsletters, along with free bus transportation from neighboring schools, facilitated broad outreach and inclusion.

Brief Summary

In summary, the "Próximos Pasos" event exceeded its objectives in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion. The program's success is evident in the meaningful connections made, the recruitment outcomes and the positive feedback from participants. This event serves as a model for future initiatives to empower and support diverse communities in their educational and career journeys. This program, a standout in the Cultural Heritage Series, demonstrates innovative and inclusive practices, bringing together Hispanic and Spanish-speaking students and families in a transformative way. The bilingual panel discussion, resource fair and culturally enriching atmosphere showcased a holistic approach to addressing educational and career disparities.

Notably, the event's success is underscored by its significant impact on participants, with more than 100 individuals actively engaging in paths to adult education, college and the military. The strategic outreach to diverse stakeholders, including high school counselors and ESL teachers, coupled with partnerships with community organizations, exemplifies a comprehensive and collaborative effort. The program's measurable outcomes, such as successful recruitment efforts and student intent to enlist, underscore its tangible effects on the community. Many participants

also expressed interest in expanding the program next year. By advancing equity and opportunity, the "Próximos Pasos" event stands as a model worthy of recognition and celebration for its outstanding contributions to community empowerment and inclusivity.