



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: Sparking Interest in Fire Prevention Careers
Program Category: Community & Economic Development

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Program Overview

Part of the mission of Henrico County Public Schools is to prepare students to be successful contributing citizens in the future. We want all students to graduate enrolled, enlisted/or employed. With that commitment in mind, the Department of Workforce and Career Development partnered with the Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association — or AFSA — to design ways students could be exposed to the various careers in the fire prevention industry. When it comes to fire prevention, most students do not realize that saving lives and protecting property from fire damage has numerous lucrative career pathways that do not involve being firefighters. Whether it was participating in the interactive career fair, designing plans for sprinkler head placement, or working side by side with AFSA members installing the sprinkler system on a commercial job site, HCPS Career and Technical Education students had their interest in the fire prevention industry ignited.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Henrico County Public Schools focuses on preparing students for future success in postsecondary education and the world of work by recognizing the importance of every student being enrolled, enlisted or employed. Career exploration and work-based learning experiences play a vital part in this preparation as they help to clarify which “e” a student chooses. Our challenge is to find local business partners that can offer meaningful hands-on experiences, especially in commercial construction. While talking with our business partners from the Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association, we learned that a growing shortage of skilled fire protection technicians is having a significant impact on the industry and building projects. This shortage of technicians is due to several factors, including an aging workforce and a decrease in young people pursuing careers in the fire protection industry. Many young people are not aware of the opportunities that exist in this field and may not see it as a viable career option.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

There are several reasons why sparking interest in fire prevention careers is deserving of this honor. First, think local collaboration, a win-win for both the school division and the business partner. Students worked side-by-side with chapter members on a commercial job site — not just watching but learning by doing with experts in the industry. Students saw firsthand how they had the potential to save lives and minimize damage in the event of a fire. All the while, members of the association were able to build relationships with these skilled students and choose students to interview and hopefully hire.

The Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association Career Fair provided the opportunity for hundreds of students and their teachers to become exposed to an industry that most knew little about, thus opening possibilities to prosperous careers that have meaning and purpose. Chapter members were introduced to a new and untapped resource. They were able to not only plant career seeds, but to interview potential employees. By attracting more young people to the industry, we can ensure the future of fire safety is looking brighter in Henrico.

How Program Was Carried Out

Our philosophy is that business partnerships should be built on a handshake, not a handout. That is the approach the HCPS Department of Workforce and Career Development models when it comes to developing partnerships with businesses. As we worked with the Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association, we listened to their needs, shared information about our career and technical education programs and developed a plan of action that was mutually beneficial to both students and the fire prevention industry. Our goals were to:

1. Educate students about successful careers in the fire prevention industry dispelling the perception that the industry is outdated or unexciting.

2. Offer hands-on learning experiences to high school students with similar skill sets that can be used in the field, allowing members to build relationships with skilled students, share what they do in the field, choose students to interview and hopefully hire them.

Working together, we were able to host an interactive career fair for high school students, set up an informational “storefront” display for adult learners, engage career and technical students in work-based learning experiences through the conversion of 49,000 square feet of a local shopping mall into HCPS’ Adult Education Center at Regency.

Members of the association hosted a full-day workshop for students from both the career and technical education architecture and design course, and the CAD and 3D animation program. These students had OSHA-10 certifications, CAD training or other certifications that made them a match for entry-level hiring in the industry. During the workshop, students learned the basics of fire safety, how to field check existing fire sprinkler heads and how to place fire sprinkler zones onto CAD drawings. After students completed the exercise, their drawings were examined and evaluated by several contractor members of the association. The members enjoyed the camaraderie of working with the students, as well as getting away from their daily grind. Further, they developed relationships with potential employees as they shared their knowledge. The design collaboration between the chapter members and Henrico students was a smashing success, with the fire sprinkler permit being issued with no comments in less than a week.

After chapter members surveyed the fire sprinkler system with our students, vendor members from Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association immediately stepped up to provide all the materials, tools and safety gear for the Adult Education Center at Regency project. The contractor members followed suit and donated their instruction and installation time for the project as well. With materials and installation labor set, it was time now to offer work-based learning experiences to students. The ACE Center students from our electricity and cabling

program, as well as computer systems technology, worked side by side with contractor members in the layout of fire sprinkler heads, cutting the ceiling tiles, adjusting the fire sprinkler heads in the tiles and installing the escutcheon plates. It was a unique experience for our students.

Several students showed an interest in the field and members of the association stepped in to give more specialized training. Students were able to install fire sprinkler heads using the latest flexible connections that were easy to install after just 30 minutes of training. The Victaulic Corporation donated all 215 connections and fire sprinkler heads needed to complete the project, along with T-shirts for the high school students. This turned out to be a sound investment for the association, as one of the students was hired before the week was out.

Once ready for classes, the Adult Education Center at Regency began to serve as a wonderful community space to host events such as the Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association Career Fair. In April 2023, 12 companies set up interactive displays and passed out swag as nearly 200 Henrico students from nine high schools took part in the day. They were able to answer questions about careers, salary potential job growth in the industry. Many young people are not aware of the opportunities that exist in fire prevention and may not see it as a viable career option. Through the career fair, we were able to expose students to careers they may never know of, planting career seeds for future employee capacity. A bonus to the day was that several seniors were interviewed on the spot and offers were made for employment upon graduation.

One of the things that made the association's career fair so distinctive was its number of hands-on immersive displays. Students were able to try out their design skills at AutoCAD and Revit stations, to touch or test working fire alarm panels, tools and other items related to the fire prevention industry. There was even a portable fire extinguisher simulator and two virtual reality

experiences, allowing students to view the benefits of home fire sprinklers in 3D using their cell phones. Students got to see firsthand how careers in fire prevention can save lives and minimize damage.

As we saw the success of bringing awareness to careers in fire prevention, the association and our department collaborated on how to use the beautiful space at the Adult Education Center at Regency to promote career pathways using the “storefront” model approach and share this knowledge with adult learners. The Adult Education Center at Regency not only functions as a school but also is a source of advertising workforce opportunities. Storefront displays like the one sponsored by the Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association help to build agency and encourage adult students to become lifelong learners by providing opportunities for their continual growth.

Financing and Staffing

Members of the Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association donated their labor as well as all materials, including 215 sprinkler heads, at a cost of \$65,000 for the work-based learning experiences at the Adult Education Center at Regency. For the career fair, contractor members of the association donated all promotional items, including communication flyers and posters. There were minimal costs incurred by HCPS as the career fair and hands-on learning all occurred at the Adult Education Center at Regency during school hours. HCPS covered the transportation of students from the participating nine high schools and the three ACE Centers as needed. The Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association provided all materials in their storefront display at the Adult Education Center at Regency.

Program Results

Our partnership with the Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association is a successful ongoing venture that continues to spark interest in careers in the fire prevention industry through work-based learning experiences, career exploration, “storefront” advertising media productions. They understand the vital role career preparation plays in building their employee pipeline. The mutually beneficial relationship has led to enlightening career and technical high school students about the many career opportunities offered by Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association chapter members and already is reaping rewards by hiring several well-qualified graduates from Henrico.

Through our work-based learning experiences, more than 600 students in HCPS' career and technical education programs are now aware of the many lucrative career pathways in fire prevention and the industry's role in saving lives. Students worked first-hand with the association's contractor members as they learned about potential careers. The contractor members were able to build rapport and encourage students who impressed them to join their business. Many of these students showed interest right away and applied for entry-level positions. Over the last two years, contractor members have hired eight HCPS career and technical education students.

Through their Career Fair last April, the Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association shared industry-related information and engaging activities to an additional 200 high school students about entry level careers from apprentice field installers, trainee service techs, welders and junior AutoCAD designers. They also spoke of the potential job growth while promoting the virtues of a career that saves lives and protects their local community. Four high school seniors were interviewed on the spot, with one accepting the position. Throughout the partnership, the association has demonstrated an understanding of the vital role career exploration plays in building future employee capacity.

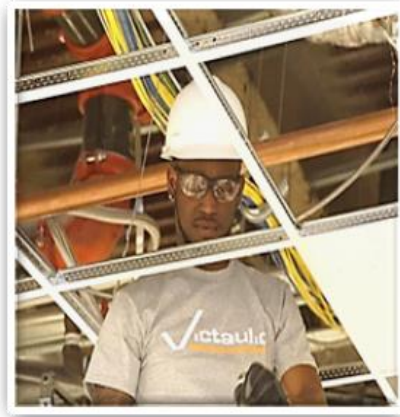
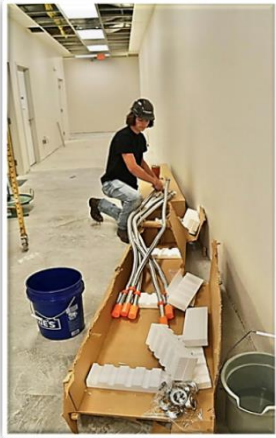
The Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association continues to build its future employee capacity among our adult learners as well. The Adult Education Center at Regency not only functions as a school where adult education instruction takes place; it also serves as an advertisement for workforce opportunities. Adult learners as well as community members who come to the shopping mall, see the association's "storefront" space as a source of information advertising career information, job postings, etc.

This partnership has become a model for how school divisions and private businesses can partner together to solve our nation's workforce challenges. This year, our director, Mac Beaton, administrator of workforce development, has been invited to the association's headquarters in Dallas to present a best practices workshop at their Mid-Year Chapter Leadership Conference to leaders across the fire prevention industry. In 2023, the Henrico County School Board honored the Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association by naming them to the 2023 Virginia School Boards Association Business Honor Roll, showing appreciation for their ongoing support in preparing Henrico students to be life-ready.

Brief Summary

The HCPS Department of Workforce and Career Development partnered with the Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association to design ways students could be exposed to the various careers in the fire prevention industry. Whether it was participating in the interactive career fair, designing plans for sprinkler head placement, or working side by side with AFSA members installing the sprinkler system on a commercial job site, students had their interest in the fire prevention industry ignited.

**Sparking Interest into Fire Prevention Careers
Supplemental Material**







The Virginia Chapter AFSA Adult Education at Regency Store Front



The School Board of Henrico County named **The Virginia Chapter of the American Fire Sprinkler Association**, to the 2023 Virginia School Boards Association Business Honor Roll, showing appreciation for their ongoing support in preparing students to be Life Ready.
Additional Media:

1. Developing your Workforce - Sprinkler Age Magazine, October 17, 2022

<https://www.sprinklerage.com/developing-your-workforce/>

2. AFSA Video featuring Students: <https://youtu.be/2XhypksllIE>

3. Henrico career and technical Now Podcast: Jason Gill and Jeff Lewis talk about their career paths, working with students at the Adult Education Center the career fair they hosted with our students.
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/30SqELdpgyM5Fh8lt3UhTv?si=m2ZYYM-pSI2Qr598tnNoHw>

4. Henrico career and technical Now Podcast: Featuring Bob Beckwith, Cavalier Fire Protection, discusses the demand for young people with career and technical experience and opportunities with Cavalier.
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/77XPuyOSRj2DmdWDRBGKTu?si=GL-eoecRRf-3BuOLKj9vYQ>