

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](#).

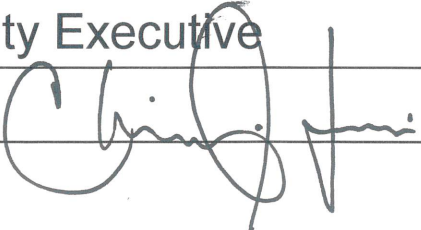
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Prince William
Program Title: Firefighter Cadet Program
Program Category: Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher J. Shorter
Title: County Executive
Signature: 

Prince William County Firefighter Cadet Program

Executive Summary

In 2019 Prince William County Department of Fire & Rescue (DFR) entered into an agreement with Prince William County Schools (PWCS) to launch the Firefighter Cadet program for eleventh and twelfth grade high school students. The program was fully funded for the Fiscal Year 2020 budget by the Prince William County Board of Supervisors and provides the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) Firefighter 1, CPR, and Hazardous Materials Operations certifications.

The inaugural class coincided with the COVID pandemic which resulted in schedule changes and outright cancellation of in-person classes. Because of the restrictions, and the length in which they were in place, the Cadet program did not get off to a good start. Over the course of the next two school years, as restrictions were lifted, DFR support for the program was minimal as Public Safety was reeling from the effects of the pandemic on staffing levels throughout County fire stations. In January of 2023 the DFR made staffing changes at the Public Safety Training Center (PSTC) and the Cadet program began to gain traction.

To date, we just graduated sixteen Cadets with the class of 2024, three of whom have been offered full-time employment with the DFR and are currently attending our career Recruit school. The class of 2025 is slated to begin on August 12, 2024, with twenty students and we are happy to announce they will be receiving VDFP Firefighter II. PWCS and DFR are actively working towards making this a two-year program offering Emergency Medical Technician – National Registry (EMT-NR) as early as the class of 2026.

Prince William County Firefighter Cadet Program

Description

The Firefighter Cadet program was started in 2020 as a co-sponsored program between Prince William County Schools (PWCS) and the Department of Fire & Rescue (DFR). PWCS finances the initial mandatory medical physical costs for the students, while the DFR finances the personal protective equipment, uniforms, and salaries associated with the instructor cadre. In its' infancy, the world was struck with the COVID pandemic, and the program was never able to get off the ground.

In subsequent years that followed, the program struggled to maintain structure due to DFR staffing limitations and COVID restrictions that remained in place for well over a year. When the restrictions were lifted, unfortunately, the program never gained the traction it needed to survive. Enrollment was low and the program was relatively unheard of from both the DFR and PWCS students alike.

In June of 2023, Lt. Donelan was assigned to Basic Training as the manager of the Cadet program. Through discussion, Lt. Donelan was provided vision, expectations, and support, to bring the Cadet program to the next level. Her first decision came when she requested the assignment of Technician II Todd Laws who would provide technical expertise as a subject matter expert (SME) and deliver the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) Firefighter I curriculum to the students.

Together, both Lt. Donelan and Technician II Laws began to work on building a schedule for the upcoming class of 2024 that was slated to begin in August of 2023. While work was underway

on the schedule, Lt. Donelan began to address some of the concerns that were identified early on that contributed to the lack of success with the program.

Lt. Donelan worked closely with Katie Hodgson, IB & Specialty Programs Coordinator at Unity Reed High School (URHS), the Cadet program's home school, and Keith Cassedy, the assigned teacher liaison for the class. Through the course of several meetings, phone calls, and messages, relationships were forged which resulted in clear lines of communication and a working relationship that is now flourishing.

Now that a foundation was set and communication established, initial problems that were identified from the previous school year such as student transportation, classroom space, and scheduling conflicts, were discussed. Lt. Donelan went to work and provided PWCS with innovative solutions that not only solved the identified issues, but they also provided a framework for the program. A framework that afforded DFR instructors the resources needed for effective delivery of curriculum.

The first items needing attention were classroom space and scheduling conflicts. The Public Safety Training Center (PSTC) is home to Police, Fire, and EMS Basic training as well as continued education. Due to the limited capacity of classroom space at the PSTC, Lt. Donelan discussed options for moving didactic training for the Cadets to URHS while maintaining the practical training at the PSTC. PWCS not only accommodated DFR's request for classroom space, but they also provided an entire overflow building and allowed Lt. Donelan and her team to fully outfit and display fire department memorabilia to enhance the learning environment for the Cadets. The class of 2024 was now slated to receive their didactic training at URHS and their practical training at the PSTC.

Next on the agenda was the transportation of students. Originally PWC transportation was responsible for transporting sixteen students from multiple different home schools to the PSTC. This resulted in several days where curriculum delivery was delayed due to buses arriving late or not arriving at all. Lt. Donelan recommended that she and Technician II Laws transport the students to and from URHS and the PSTC in DFR vans. By taking over the transportation of the students, this kept the daily activities on a tight timeline to ensure our instructors had adequate practical training time with the students.

During the 1st semester of the 2023-2024 school year, a review of the transportation plan was performed and Lt. Donelan made a recommendation to add one additional instructor to her cadre. The addition of Technician II Chris Saxon allowed for the staffing of two transport vans for the students, as well as an instructor to remain at the PSTC to set up practical training for the day and coordinate adjunct instructors who were assisting.

Beyond addressing identified issues from previous years, thanks to the efforts of Lt. Donelan, Technician II Laws, and Technician II Saxon, the graduating class of 2024 was the first Cadet class to receive a Fire Department graduation ceremony with fire apparatus on display and bagpipes leading the class into the venue. The ceremony was well attended by County and PWCS dignitaries, elected officials, and Fire Department administration. To say the class of 2024 was night and day from previous years is an understatement.

Although one chapter has closed, Lt. Donelan has already started work for the class of 2025. Due to the success and advertisement of the class of 2024's achievements, PWCS more than doubled their applicants for the class of 2025 (47 from 17 the previous year). Lt. Donelan and Technician II Laws attended several job fairs hosted by PWCS throughout the school year, implemented a mandatory "parent/guardian orientation" where pertinent curriculum information is shared, and

hosted an open house at the PSTC for PWCS guidance counselors to provide education on the curriculum and physical requirements of this program.

Changes that will be added to the Cadet program for the 2024-2025 school year include the delivery of VDFP Firefighter II. Additionally, Lt. Donelan has provided PWCS with a plan to implement a second year into the Cadet program allowing for the delivery of Emergency Medical Technician National Registry (EMT-NR). When this plan goes into effect, PWCS will have Cadets graduating with Firefighter II, Hazardous Materials Operations, and EMT-NR, making students eligible to immediately enter the workforce upon graduation in Prince William County.

Lt. Donelan has taken this program beyond expectations and continues to push the envelope in every aspect to ensure we are providing the very best for our students. She has effectively rebuilt a relationship with PWCS where there is equal respect and open lines of communication. Lt. Donelan has embodied the “provide solutions for the problems identified rather than point to the problems” mentality. Because of her tenacity and motivation for this program, Prince William County has the best Firefighter Cadet program in the region, if not the entire Commonwealth.