



VSBA Excellence in Workforce Readiness Award

The VSBA would like to invite you to apply for the annual *Excellence in Workforce Readiness* award. This award seeks to recognize Virginia School Divisions who have achieved excellence in Workforce Readiness through an innovative program/project within your school community or in a regional collaboration with emphasis on:

- communication and collaboration with the business community;
- student engagement with the business community; or
- student entrepreneurial activities.

One submission per school division/region.

VSBA has included a Regional Category for program submissions to reflect the growing number of collaborations between school divisions in workforce readiness. The Regional Category is for any two or more school divisions currently working with Program Partners outside the school division in advancing excellence in Workforce Readiness through innovative programs/projects across school division boundaries. Individual school divisions submitting a Regional Category may submit an individual application of a program within the school division. The individual application must be independent and not part of the Regional Category.

The entry must be approved by the school board/boards at a school board meeting.

All entries must be submitted by the deadline of May 15, 2023. No entries will be accepted after 11:59 p.m. on May 15, 2023.

Please send applications and direct questions to, J.T. Kessler, Director of Legislative Services, at 800-446-8722, 434-295-8722 or e-mail jason@vsba.org.

Please provide a valid e-mail address when completing the entry form. This is how we will communicate with you about your entry.

All entries must be submitted electronically. Photos and links to videos may be submitted as long as the information is included in the electronic award packet.

All materials become the property of the Virginia School Boards Association and cannot be returned. The Virginia School Boards Association has the right to reprint/republish these materials at any time in any format and in any media.

Please Note: All fields are required unless specified as optional.

Participation in VSBA initiatives and observances is optional. School boards in Virginia have the discretion on whether to participate locally. Any related materials from the Association are shared as suggested ideas for implementation for any board that may choose to do so.



VSBA Excellence in Workforce Readiness Award Entry Form

Albemarle County Public Schools

School Division or School Divisions for Regional Submissions

Please select one:

- Under 5,000 student population
- 5,001- 10,000 student population
- 10,001+ student population
- Regional Application

Starr Hill Pathways

Name of Program/Initiative

UVA Equity Center

Program Partners (outside of the school division/divisions)

Daphne Keiser, Assistant Superintendent for School and Community Engagement, Albemarle County Public Schools

Contact Person and Title

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Katrina Callsen, Albemarle County School Board Chair

School Board Chair(s) Signature

Matthew S. Haas, Superintendent

Superintendent(s) Signature



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Program Description

(Please attach each answer on a separate piece of paper. Please use Arial 11pt. font when answering each question)

Bridging Institutions to Close Youth Opportunity Gaps is a partnership between the University of Virginia's Equity Center and Albemarle County Public Schools. Its goal is to ensure that members of the BIPOC Community (Black, Indigenous and People of Color), as well as all students from economically disadvantaged homes, recognize, develop and attain the highest level of their personal and professional potential. The program is distinguished by its use of hands-on career pathway exploration for middle school students through partnerships with community-based organizations, business leaders and UVA faculty.

The desired outcome is to build within these student demographic groups aspirations to enroll in college (often these students would be the first in their family to do so), to master the academic skills to meet admission criteria and to successfully complete the requirements for college acceptance. The implementation vehicle is the Equity Center's Starr Hill Pathways, a program that provides the social, technical and research infrastructure to redress educational inequities that persist in the Charlottesville-Albemarle region.

Middle school is a formative time in the life of a youth; it is a period when career interests and passions begin to take clarity and when awareness and confidence sharpen. Beginning in middle school, Starr Hill Pathways create a system of support for local youth from historically marginalized communities, leading to admission to the University of Virginia or the college or career choice that best meets a student's interests and needs. In addition to the Equity Center and Albemarle County Public Schools, this partnership calls on numerous community-based organizations to improve student outcomes and mitigate opportunity gaps, prepares local youth for post-secondary education, ensures they are thriving socially and emotionally, and provides access to a wide variety of enrichment opportunities and support networks. Ultimately, the program is designed to produce a model for university-community collaborations that benefit students nationwide.

Among its distinguishing features is a grassroots curriculum developed in collaboration with community partners; the presence of racial, ethnic and linguistic mirrors in staff and community partners; the strength of family connections; and the use of hands-on, personalized career pathway exploration. This program was launched in the summer of 2022, with 85 students participating in a three-week intensive summer program on UVA grounds to assist them with the preparation and self-awareness skills to confidently make an informed decision about their college and career readiness.

A vital program component is the use of research-based strategies and interventions for application in public school classrooms, extracurricular activities and professional development that examines inequities in education and the closing of opportunity and achievement gaps.

In its mission statement, the division commits that, "Working together as a team, we will end the predictive value of race, class, gender and special capacities for our children's success through high-quality teaching and learning and learning for all."

In addition, this program keeps with the school division's pledge to "seek to build relationships with families and communities to ensure every student succeeds. We will know every student."



1. What were the processes employed, the strategies used, and the desired outcomes of this program/project for the school/division? (500 words or less)

Through a sustained research-practice partnership with Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS), Charlottesville City Schools, and community-based organizations, the Equity Center at the University of Virginia launched the Starr Hill Pathways program in 2022 to actively highlight community voices in the design of a youth college and career readiness program. Research has revealed the gaps specific for students of color, first-generation college students and students from low-income households in fostering self-efficacy, developing outcome expectations and embracing a sense of personal agency all believed to be necessary for college and career success. Thus, the program aims to reach this population of students while in middle school to offer them career exploration, internships, college planning resources, mentoring, academic tutoring and national and global experiences.

Starr Hill Pathways is no-cost, long-term and yearlong and includes a three-week long summer camp followed by academic year tutoring and enrichment on days off from school (e.g., Teacher Workdays). The program also focuses on sustained relationships and connections with students and families and racial, ethnic and linguistic mirrors for the students in the counselors and community partners engaged in the program.

The desired short-term goals for the program have been building a deeper connection with the minoritized communities in Albemarle County, strengthening school engagement from students enrolled in Starr Hill Pathways, and continuing partnerships with the Equity Center, UVA and other community partners. Other goals have included sustaining these partnerships with grant-funding. The W.T. Grant Foundation Institutional Challenge grant was awarded to ACPS and the Equity Center in Spring 2022 to support continuation of the research-practice partnership around Starr Hill Pathways.

The primary long-term outcome of the program is to increase college-going self-efficacy whereby students feel they can be successful in college despite barriers that have traditionally held them back. The long-term goals include supporting students until graduation to help foster leadership skills and the capability of sustaining self-efficacy for attending college; outcome expectancies for success and retention in college; and a sense of personal agency whereby students can develop independence and confidence for life post-graduation.

The innovative research-practice partnership between university-school-community helps ensure that student and caregiver needs are centered throughout the program. As ACPS continues to build its capacity to use research evidence, the Equity Center will leverage university resources to help ensure that best practices in community-engaged scholarship are maintained, providing a model for future programs within ACPS and expansions to UVA partnerships with other community organizations and school districts.

Finally, the program is evaluated internally by the Equity Center and the research agenda is focused on the long-term study of Starr Hill Pathways and how it supports BIPOC youth and youth from low-wealth communities in their access to college and career supports and enrichment. For the school division, the partnership offers support to ACPS in developing an infrastructure for using research evidence to implement research-based strategies in classrooms and extracurricular programming and to develop professional development opportunities that support teachers in implementing this research in their day-to-day curriculum.



2. In what specific ways does the program/project help to prepare students to be workforce ready? (500 words or less)

Expanding on a 2021 pilot partnership which was initially formed in partnership with Albemarle County Public Schools, Starr Hill Pathways grew to include students from Charlottesville City Schools as well, and the program invited its first cohort of 97 students to UVA's campus in summer 2022. The students in the program were rising 7th and 8th graders, 87% were students of color and 41% were bi/multilingual.

During the summer program, these students met on UVA's grounds daily for three weeks as they participated in career and post-secondary education experiences in classes called "pathways," which they followed for the duration of the 3-weeks. Each "pathway" was taught by local community partners and covered college and career-related topics in STEM, creative arts, architecture, culinary arts, environmental science, education, civic engagement, multimedia and medical sciences. Students learned about specific career opportunities in their "pathway," e.g., "how to become a cardiologist," as well as engaging in academic learning and creative thinking with projects such as building rockets, labeling the parts of the brain and designing and painting a mural. Outside of the pathway class time, students were also involved in attending presentations by university faculty, interacting with student athletes and touring both on-campus facilities and off-campus sites.

During the 2022-23 school year, Starr Hill Pathways students returned to UVA's campus on Teacher Workdays where they continued a community-partner led curriculum of pathways that included: environmental science, astronomy, kinesiology, nursing, anesthesiology, game design, cybersecurity and manufacturing. Students also engaged in tutoring both in person and virtually to help them maintain academic success needed for college and career aspirations. Finally, the program aims to support the whole child through continuous family communication and social events, such as holiday lunches, to sustain relationships with the students.

Workplace readiness skills and skills needed for high-skill, high-wage jobs were addressed throughout this program in two ways. First, the program offers students exposure to career opportunities, which is particularly important for middle school aged students who may not know what pathways exist. Second, the pathways curriculum is offered by community partners who are currently employed or actively involved in the workplace or career being shared with the students. Thus, students are gaining real-life job training experiences, such as experiencing medical simulations or learning how to use video editing equipment, and they are asking questions and engaging with personnel working with various job roles in the industry, such as arborists, physiologists and nurses.



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3. How was your school board, community, business and industry, and/or other entities engaged in this program/project? (500 words or less)
 - a. Detail the engagement of the school board and how the school board collaborated on the program
 - b. Detail the engagement and collaboration of external entities including the community and business and industry

The UVA Equity Center has knit together resources from throughout the greater Charlottesville-Albemarle region to build Starr Hill Pathways. Since its creation in 2019, the UVA Center for the Redress of Inequity through Community-Engaged Scholarship (aka, the Equity Center) has committed to community-engaged scholarship, ensuring that our partners co-create programming and research agendas. Guided by an ethos of mutual benefit and authentic partnership, the Equity Center envisions universities that serve local communities by bringing rich research resources to bear on the work of redressing poverty and racial inequality, and also equipping students to lead in building a just society.

In summer 2021, Albemarle County Public Schools helped lift this program off the ground in partnering with the Equity Center to offer a pilot program with Burley Middle School students. The model program was designed around student choice and agency to align with Albemarle County Public Schools' career academy plans and the Virginia Department of Education career clusters, and the vision that "all learners believe in their power to embrace learning, to excel, and own their own future." After a successful summer, the inaugural cohort of Starr Hill Pathways students arrived at the University of Virginia campus in summer 2022.

Drawing on the missions of both the Equity Center and Albemarle County Public Schools, the Starr Hill Pathways program intentionally works with community partners to build the pathway curriculum to actively knit resources through the community. Past and current community partners have included: 100 Black Men of Central Virginia, African American Teaching Fellows, Black Women of Central Virginia, Conscious Capitalist Group, Culinary Concepts AB, Fundamental Factory, H.E.R. Sports, Monticello High School, Health and Medical Sciences Academy, Light House Studios at Vinegar Hill Theater, Piedmont Virginia Community College, Public Engagement in Governance, Looking, Listening, and Learning Laboratory, Prolyfyck Run Crew, Project Pipeline, The STEMpreneur, Tree Williams, UVA Brain Camp, Wartime Fitness, Wildrock, and Wright Counseling Group. The program has also partnered with the following UVA departments: Architecture, Anesthesiology, Astronomy, Engineering, Kinesiology, and Nursing.

Finally, the Starr Hill Pathways project aligns with the Albemarle County Public Schools' Strategic Plan, specifically Goal 3: *Equitable, Transformative Resources*. Objective three of this goal specifies that "ACPS will provide resources in an equitable manner that transform learning experiences and opportunities for all students." The Equity Center has secured institutional buy-in from ACPS superintendent, Dr. Matthew Haas, in support of this work, and has support of middle and high school administration throughout the district. Additionally, the Equity Center's core leadership has deep ties to ACPS administration. The Equity Center's Executive Director, Dr. Ben Allen, is a former ACPS employee – a teacher and elementary school Associate Principal, who has facilitated the partnership based on trusted relationships. Other Equity Center staff working on SHP - Lucy Montalvo, Sherica Jones-Lewis, Traci Brooks, Lauren Price, Karla Reyes, and Nina Schoonover are former ACPS staff, teachers, and administrators able to leverage relations to build trust and coordinate program objectives.



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4. Explain how the division met desired outcomes of the program/project? (500 words or less)

Over the final three days of the program, pathway evaluation surveys were collected from 31 students, 11 counselors, and 11 community partners about their experiences in the program. Questions on the surveys included Likert scale measures, multiple choice questions, and open-ended responses. The surveys were offered to students in multiple languages to ensure equity of access. Survey scales were also used to collect baseline data measuring students' self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and sense of personal agency through participation in Starr Hill Pathways. 47 students participated in the pre-tests and 43 participated in the post-tests. Focus groups were conducted during the final week of the program using a semi-structured protocol. There were 12 focus groups completed with 2-6 students in each group, and a total of 32 students participated. Questions asked about their time in Starr Hill Pathways to provide further contextualization of their experiences in the summer program. These focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed to capture accurate dialogue.

100% of program activities were achieved throughout the duration of Starr Hill Pathways three-week summer program. This included the community partner-led pathway curricula, on-site and off-site tours and field trips, UVA athletic tours, unstructured free time, and three meals served daily at the on-grounds dining hall. Using a 5-point Likert scale, evaluators rated the level of students' engagement as a 4.61 on average, indicating a high level of active engagement. Open-response data from the walkthroughs showed that 83% of pathway activities involved students engaging in interactive and hands-on activities (i.e., non-lectures). Furthermore, 61% of observed activities involved students "doing something" with the information presented to them, 18% involved students "creating new information," and 23% involved students involved in both doing and creating. In their final evaluation surveys, a four-point Likert scale measured how community partners were feeling after participation in the program. Community partners highly rated feeling more prepared and organized (3.4), safe and supported (3.8), and feeling fulfilled (3.8). Findings from the qualitative data showed that community partners felt like the program had "great coordination," and that Starr Hill Pathways staff was "helpful and responsive throughout the process."

In the 2022 cohort, there was a wide array of racial and ethnic identification with 87% of students identifying as part of the global majority. This is an increase from the 2021 cohort where 82% of students identified as students of color.⁴ Of this group, 41% of students were multilingual/bilingual students who spoke the following languages other than English: Spanish, Dari, Portuguese, Arabic, Chinese, Malayalam, Telugu, German, and Russian.

Data from the walk-through observations and pathway evaluations showed that the community partners and counselors felt there was a supportive network provided to the students. Using a four-point Likert scale, evaluators rated the counselors' reported data on the safe learning environment as 3.9 on average, and community partners reported a score of 3.8 on feeling safe and supported by staff. Findings from the focus group data showed that students felt safe and supported.



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5. Why does this program/project deserve recognition? (500 words or less)

Opportunity and achievement gaps long have challenged the mission of public education, undermined community support and confidence in its efficacy, discouraged the best and brightest from being valued contributors and severely limited the lifestyles of large groups of citizens and communities. These gaps have undermined the potential of the free market system and of a democratic society itself.

This program promises a solution that has evaded communities for many years. It demonstrates that people are not consigned to limits because of their life experiences, their culture or ethnicity, their countries of origin, their sex or gender. It operates under the belief that all people can learn at high levels and all are capable and entitled to achieve at the highest level of their passions and interests.

The program values and demonstrates the power of university-public school-business- community partnerships grounded in the joint interests all have in the success of those they serve, employ and benefit from.

The program is structured to easily be replicated in any part of the country. It does require substantial infrastructure or other financial commitments either in its establishment or in its operation. Due to its reliance on research-based data and practices, its risk is relatively non-existent. Given the stake that all partners value, including participant families, it has within its objectives, something for everyone.

It's unique distinctions easily are scalable and include its facilitation of data sharing between a university and a K-12 public school system, its use of interventions designed specifically to redress historic disparities in youth outcomes, its embrace of programming created by community partner organizations that creates community wealth and the advantages of research outcomes being directly communicated to the school division, thereby fostering continuous improvement.



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Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

I certify that this nomination is being made with approval of the school board/boards through an official vote at a school board meeting.

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Submitted by:

Christine Thompson, School Board Clerk

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