

# Henrico Schools' summer program fosters student passion – and job offers

*Liana Hardy*



*Students in the Henrico Schools Summer Building Trades Program work under the watchful eye of Henrico Schools CTE masonry instructor Steve Phelps. (Courtesy Chip Coker)*

In the middle of July, you will find most kids relaxing and enjoying the sun, sleeping in on a hot day and then cooling off at the pool with their friends. But at the Highland Springs Advanced Career

Education Center, about two dozen high-schoolers are suited up each weekday in their hard hats and work boots at 7 a.m., hauling around cement in wheelbarrows and inspecting electric wires.

For six weeks, these rising tenth and eleventh graders get to be electricians, carpenters, masons and technicians as a part of the [Summer Building Trades Program](#) put on by Henrico Schools' Workforce & Career Development program. And even with the 6 a.m. wake up, these students have chosen to be here (well, some – 15-year-old Dominique admitted that his mom had signed him up).

While it may seem like a challenge to motivate a bunch of 16-year-olds to work for six hours in the early morning, the Building Trades program has always kept a full roster. And although some students may realize the program isn't for them, others will "fall in love with it," according to Chip Coker, the CTE instructor who oversees the program.

"We have kids that come back for their second year. They're not getting anything, they're not getting credit. They do it just to learn and because they love it," Coker said. "And the hope is they'll latch on to one of these trades and want to do it, that's our job as CTE instructors is to try to build workforce for the community."

The program runs on a rotation basis, with students trying out each of the five trades: masonry, carpentry, electrical, heating/air conditioning and cabling/networking. But Coker said he pushes the kids to do more of what they like most.

For 14-year-old Roman, that is masonry. He has returned for his second summer with the program, meaning he won't get a high school credit for his work like he did last summer – he's just doing it because of how much he enjoys it. Coker called him the "star" of the masonry team and a leader who thrives in the trades environment.

Once Roman is a rising senior, he may be one of the students Coker decides to hire to be a crew leader for the other underclassmen in the program.

"Students teaching other students, that's the highest form of learning, when you can teach somebody else how to do it," said Willie Cline, a CTE instructor who teaches electrical.

"And they're gonna listen to them 10 times better than they are us anyway, especially me being a gray beard," Coker said. "With student leaders, the kids can relate to them. They're like, 'this guy's my age, if he can do it, I can do it.'"



*(Courtesy Chip Coker)*

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Henrico CTE created the Summer Building Trades program about a decade ago to introduce trades-related classes to students who wouldn't normally have exposure to them, according to CTE director Mac Beaton. The ACE Center program, which enrolls students in trades classes during the school year, has been around much longer, with the original center founded in 1974.

Students in the summer program and the school year classes often will work on projects for the county: students and contractors have combined to build 20 new houses since 1989, according to Coker, along with the new [Regency Adult Education Center](#), set to open Aug. 21.

This summer, the students have accomplished several feats: they rebuilt the sign for Springer

Preschool Academy, worked on new charging stations for the Highland Springs ACE Center, and constructed the foundation for a new house.

Nate, 17, said he enjoys the work a lot and has been very proud of what he has built. He plans to go into the trades after high school and become an electrician.

“The teachers are really fun, and I like doing stuff for the school. It saves money with us doing it, and we learn,” Nate said.

For many students like Nate, work in the trades doesn’t stop with the end of summer. The Building Trades program has led students to sign up for classes at one of the ACE Centers for their junior and senior years. When they graduate high school, ACE students receive a [certification](#) in a specialized skill, and often will enroll in trades schools, start their apprenticeship, or be employed by contractors.

Jakob, 16, said he always loved fixing things and working with electricity, but decided to join the summer program once he set his sights on being an electrician after high school.

“My uncle is a master electrician, so during the summer I’m usually at my grandparents’ and we’re fixing the house a lot,” Jakob said. “I’ve always really known how to wire something and things like that. But my mom told me that I could turn that into a career, and ever since then I was just interested in that.”

Cline works at a night apprenticeship school and has seen a lot of his former students come through his apprenticeship program, graduate and then go on to become general electricians. He also has helped them get employed by contractors.

“Once they learn these skills, we help them get jobs too once they graduate from our programs,” Cline said. “A student comes in, they work hard, and we’ll tell them upfront, ‘hey, you guys are working for a career into this.’ Because once they graduate and the contractor calls me and says, ‘I need 10 students’ or ‘I need 10 labor workers,’ we’re taking the best 10 and we’re sending them that way.”

But a lot of students don’t start out the program with a set career path or a ton of background knowledge in the trades. Steve Phelps, a CTE instructor who teaches masonry, said that the students will grow tremendously over the six-week program – not only in trade skills, but also in leadership and confidence.

“Some kids come here and they don’t even know what a screwdriver is,” Phelps said. “But they’re smart kids, sometimes you can let them just figure stuff out by themselves.”

The program also provides a place of stability for many of the students, where they can do meaningful activities and work with a purpose, according to Coker. For students who may have turbulent or unpredictable home lives, it is especially grounding.

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“Teenagers in today’s day, it’s all about instant gratification,” Coker said. “If they’re not being stimulated, that’s when disciplinary issues start to arise. And we’ve had zero, not one.”



*(Courtesy Chip Coker)*

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Even after the program ends, Cline said he and the other CTE instructors will continue to advocate for students, especially as they start looking for employment.

“We’ve become their agents,” Cline said. “When contractors ask, ‘how much do you think I should pay this guy?’ I say, ‘well, it needs to be between \$15 and \$18 [an hour]. That’s what they’re worth. Don’t offer them \$12, because that’s a slap in my face. We’ve put a lot of time into these kids.’”

When asked what his favorite part of Building Trades was, Dominique said, “Nailgun.” He eventually added, “Maybe carpentry.” And he also said that although his mom initially signed him up, he had grown to enjoy the program: “It’s cool, I like it. There might be some things that you

don't like, but there's definitely going to be some things that you do like."

The hardest part is the early wake up, according to Nate, who said he has to wake up at 5:30 a.m. every day to catch the bus to the ACE Center.

"But it's worth it. I'm learning stuff that people pay for."

Another important skill he has learned: the "job site walk." Jakob has especially mastered the purposeful, fast-paced stride of "the walk," according to Coker: "That's the guy you want to walk like, cause he won't have to do a thing all day long, but his boss is thinking he's busy cause he's got 'the walk.'"

Cline hopes that the program will give students more pride in honing their trade skills and help them realize how dedicated they can become to the field.

"I tell them, 'show what you're learning in the school while everyone else is taking summer off and relaxing,'" Cline said. "So when they're doing electrical work, I tell them to take a little time lapse video, put it on their social media account and showcase what your skills are, and that way, you're showing the world pretty much that 'I can do other things too.'"

Coker also wants the program to illustrate to uncertain highschoolers that there is an alternative path to college lined up for them after graduation.

"You got so many people telling them, 'you gotta go to college, you gotta go to college,'" Coker said. "And we have these kids saying, 'hey we can do something else.' It builds strength in numbers. Now they don't feel so isolated."

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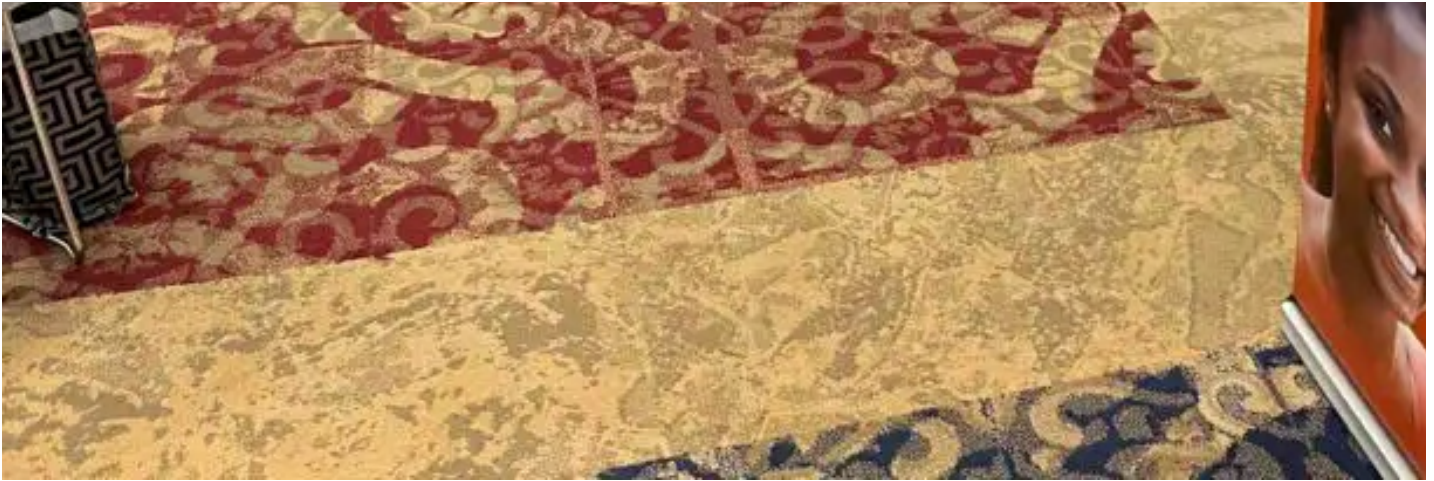
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# **Racist incidents have become ‘normalized’ at one Henrico County high school, some students say**

*Liana Hardy*







*Students have a discussion Nov. 30 during Diversity Dialogue Day at the University of Richmond, an event sponsored by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities. (Liana Hardy/Henrico Citizen)*

\* \* \*

*“Oh, you’re taking AP Bio? I didn’t think you’d be the fit for it.”*

*“How are you going to fit all of your hair into a swim cap?”*

These are some of the comments that Deep Run High School students Emma and Kelly (not their actual names) say they hear from their white peers and teachers on a regular basis. As Black students at a predominantly white school, Emma and Kelly said that microaggressions, racist comments, and even slurs have become normalized in their school environment.

“Every year that I’ve gone to high school the last three years, there’s not one year where I haven’t – there’s not even one month at my school where I haven’t encountered some type of racially motivated aggression,” Emma, a student at Deep Run, said. “Even if it’s small things like walking into the restroom and seeing racial slurs towards Black people on the stalls. That’s heartbreaking.”

“It’s become so normal to the point where the kids that are racist or homophobic in general, they do it so often because they know that there won’t be any consequences,” said Kelly, another Deep Run student. “Our school doesn’t take it seriously.”

Kelly and Emma, along with several other students from Deep Run, attended a conference Nov. 30 at the University of Richmond for Richmond-area high-schoolers hosted by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities: “Diversity Dialogue Day.” While meeting with students from different schools and counties, Kelly and Emma encountered minority students who had dealt with similar experiences.

Jasmine (not her actual name), a student at Huguenot High School in Richmond, had never heard about Deep Run before meeting Kelly and Emma. But their stories were all too familiar to her as a fellow female Black student.

“We get hit with a lot of stereotypes. It’s just melted into the school system,” Jasmine said. “I think a lot of us don’t understand that everyday we get hit with a certain sort of prejudice. We get hit with microaggressions because of how we look, how we dress, how we act, all of it.”

Facilitators of the “Diversity Dialogue Day” wanted the conference to act as a safe space for students to discuss these issues of prejudice, stereotyping, racism, privilege, and how they impact their school communities, VCIC facilitator Sheena Lyle said. But another goal is for students to bring these conversations back to their own schools and continue to push for more dialogue surrounding diversity and inclusion.

For Emma, that is her goal as well, although she feels it may be difficult to convince students and staff at Deep Run to talk about uncomfortable issues.

“That’s my mission coming here, is to take away things that we’ve learned outside of school and bring it in to touch the outer community,” she said. “There’s not many conversations, and it’s a PWI [predominantly white institution] school for the majority, so I hope if we’re successful and we actually do it the right way, we should be able to bring it back to our school and continue it.”



*Deep Run High School (Citizen file photo)*

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Deep Run High School has a [student population](#) of mostly white students (55.1%) and Asian students (27.2%), with a small percentage of Black students (7.7%). The school serves the [Glen Allen](#) region of Henrico County, which is majority white (59%) and has a minority of Black residents (25%).

The school has had its fair share of racially motivated incidents in recent years, according to Emma. Racial slurs written on the [bathroom stalls](#) is a common occurrence at Deep Run, Emma said, as well as students making racially insensitive comments or jokes.

“It’s just become normalized. It’s not out of the ordinary, it’s not foreign at my school,” she said. “There’s no reason why I feel and many other students at my school feel like, ‘Oh yeah, the n-word written on the bathroom in permanent marker is normal.’ We just go, ‘okay,’ just go about our day.”

Not only some students, but some staff members as well have made racist comments to Emma, she

said. When telling a teacher about her goal to join the swim team, Emma said the teacher dismissed her and questioned how she would fit her hair into a swim cap.

Teachers at Kelly's middle school, she said, repeatedly used the n-word when reading and discussing books that included it, despite Black students saying they were uncomfortable.

"You have these teachers that use the, 'I have to say it for educational purposes' excuse," she said. "They try to make you feel bad for feeling offended or for feeling hurt. When you get mad, the teachers and the other kids will say, 'Why are you offended? It was a normal thing to say back then.'"

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Brian Fellows, who has been Deep Run's principal since 2019, said that school administration tries to promote constant conversations about prejudice, inclusivity, and diversity within the school community.



"We're always having conversations about trying to figure out ways to make sure that all of our students feel welcome," he said. "We want everybody to feel a sense of pride in going to school here or working here. We want everybody to feel safe."

When it comes to specific racial incidents in which the perpetrators are students – such as racist comments made or racist graffiti written in the building – Fellows said that Deep Run administrators often will investigate the situation, then deliver an appropriate consequence to the student at fault based upon Henrico Schools' Code of Student Conduct.

"We listen, we make sure the students are okay – because in those types of situations, students are hurt," Fellows said. "If it was something that was verbal, we try to figure out who did it and what was said. And if it's some graffiti that has happened, obviously anytime graffiti goes up, it comes down immediately."

Fellows said that in cases in which teachers make racist or insensitive comments, the administration addresses the incident either through a conversation or disciplinary action.

"If a student or group of students feel a particular way about a situation and they share it with us then we certainly address it," Fellows said. "And addressing it could come in a variety of forms, It could be a conversation, it could be a meeting, it could be a disciplinary consequence."

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Kelly and Emma said that it wasn't just these incidents that upset them, but the way the school administration responded. About a year ago, a white student wrote a racial slur on a note card and took a picture of it, Kelly and Emma said, and the picture was sent around to students at Deep Run and other schools in Henrico.

When the administrators emailed parents about the incident, they said the image was Photoshopped. Many students believed that the perpetrator ended up not facing suspension, Kelly said.

Emma said that she wished the school administration had addressed the student body first.

"You're protecting the aggressor and you're ignoring a community – address us," Emma said. "I think the first thing that the school should have done was reach out to the students to address us because we're the oppressed. You can send an email to our parents, but we're 14 to 18, we have our own feelings and mindsets. I was hurt by that."

Fellows said that after administration investigated the incident, they concluded that the photo was Photoshopped. While he said he could not speak about what punishments were given in that specific incident, he said that Deep Run administration always tries to provide appropriate consequences in these cases.

"The picture was taken several years earlier and was not taken here at school or during school hours, so there are some limits to what the school can and can't do, depending on the situation," Fellows said. "But to the extent that we are able, using the Code of Student Conduct, students face consequences – and rightfully so."

After the incident, Deep Run administration reached out to parents, the student body, and the school community, Fellows said. However, Fellows said that administration is not always able to provide students and parents with communication or updates after every situation.

"In that particular situation, we communicated back with the student body and the community," he said. "We're not able to do that in every situation, but where we can, we do follow up."

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Deep Run has launched efforts in the past few years to bring students and staff members together to have open dialogue on issues of prejudice, Fellows said. Deep Run's Parent-Teacher-Student Organization and several student groups teamed together to start an "uncomfortable conversations" series where students share their experiences about race and identity in videos that are sent out to the community.

A few years ago, Deep Run students also pushed for the PTSO to create a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee, which Fellows said is the first PTSO DEI committee in Henrico. The committee partnered with VCIC to offer training sessions to 20-30 students each month that focus on the role of bystanders when it comes to prejudice. Student groups also have teamed together to provide some professional learning sessions to Deep Run faculty.

"Just really getting all the groups together – the students, the teachers, the school staff, the parents – and just having conversations and saying, 'What's going well? What can we do better?' and then

putting plans in place to try to make it better,” Fellows said.

But racist behavior also extends to other schools in Henrico. Perhaps the most prominent example in recent years was a [2017 incident](#) documented by an explicit video posted to social media, in which white football players at Short Pump Middle School – a school that feeds into Deep Run – stimulated sexual acts on top of Black players who were lying down in the locker room. The video was posted with the caption, “We gonna (expletive) the black outta these African children from Uganda.”

Rather than receive an immediate apology and acknowledgement of the situation from administration, many Short Pump parents [reported](#) that they learned about the incident from the news media. Short Pump’s principal sent an email to the school’s families the following afternoon that called the video “appalling, disturbing and inexcusable” and encouraged “each family to have conversations with their children about embracing diversity.”

Short Pump football players also were forced to forfeit the rest of the season, provoking frustration among some players and their families.

Black students across the county saw the video and were outraged by the lack of response from the school’s administration and Henrico Schools leaders, Kelly and Emma said. The effects still resonate with the students today, they said.

“They just cared about their image, like they barely addressed it,” Kelly said.

“I understand that of course parents should know what’s happening but it would have been better if you could have sent an email to the student body about it,” Emma said. “Like, ‘Hey, we recognize the issue. We’re sorry. And this is what we’re going in the meantime to ensure this doesn’t happen again and that it’s not something that’s a habit, it’s not normalized.’”

Two weeks after the video was released, [more than 20 parents](#), teachers, and students addressed the Henrico School Board at a meeting about other racist incidents at Henrico Schools that went unpunished, saying that the video was not an isolated incident.

In the weeks following the incident, Henrico Schools [announced the creation](#) of a new job role in division leadership that would address diversity-related issues – the HCPS Chief Equity, Diversity and Opportunity Officer – and eventually hired Monica Manns to fill the position.

HCPS also issued new requirements for staff to participate in cultural sensitivity training each year and later created the “Equity Ambassador” program, which gives several students at each high school the opportunity to meet with HCPS leadership and implement events at their school that promote equity and inclusion.



*Students attendees listen to a presenter during Diversity Dialogue Day Nov. 30 at the University of Richmond, an event sponsored by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities. (Liana Hardy/Henrico Citizen)*

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At the end of the conference last month, Emma, Kelly, and other Deep Run students sat in a circle with one of the school's counselors, Jodi Beland, who had come along with them for the day. Beland listened as students shared their experiences with racism and their frustrations with the school environment and administration.

One student recounted a time when she first arrived at Deep Run in which another student began making racially insensitive comments to her and repeatedly bullying her. When her father told school administrators, they said the incident would be investigated. But only a little while after, the



bullying resumed.

“That kid literally came up to me and started doing the same thing he was doing before,” the student said. “And he said, ‘What are you going to do? Tell so-and-so again?’”

Kelly said that Deep Run administrators fail to hold students and teachers accountable when they become aware of racist behavior.

“You can’t really do anything about it because even if you do report it, the admin will brush it off as like, ‘It’s just kids being kids. Oh, it’s a joke,’” she said.

After listening to the students, Beland told them that dialogue about racism and prejudice at Deep Run would need to continue back at school, including with administrators and staff.

“The way that we’re going to be able to make change is by having those courageous conversations,” she said. “Creating a safe space for them to learn.”

Fellows said that he does not believe that incidents of racism and prejudice occur frequently at Deep Run, but said that administration may not be aware of incidents that were not reported. He encouraged students to flag down any teacher or administrator they see if they need to report an issue and encouraged parents to send an email or call the school.

“Personally, I don’t think it’s happening frequently, based on information that I know,” he said. “However, we don’t know everything. And so it’s dependent upon folks to share what’s happening in order for us to address it.”

While conference facilitators start the day by focusing on broader concepts and scenarios – such as discussing “debate versus dialogue” or exploring different biases – facilitators want students to connect these ideas to their own school communities, Lyle said. At the end of the conference, students meet back up with their school groups and discuss what more can be done at their schools to address inclusivity.

“[Beland] was there, she was listening and thinking, ‘How can we make this school more inclusive? How can your voice be heard? How do we get this up to the principal or the administrators?’” Lyle said. “And in some venues I’ve been to, they actually do a plan and VCIC will follow up.”

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Jasmine said that the discussions she had at the conference should be had by all youth, including those younger than high school.

“As a Black woman, I’ve learned that recently in these new times, it’s really good that we start to bring together community, and that we need diversity,” she said. “And I think that learning about dialogue and the difference between dialogue and debating and how we can bring together a conversation that’s inclusive to all people and not just what we’re used to, it’s really impactful.”

In addition to “Diversity Dialogue Day,” VCIC hosts another annual conference for middle-schoolers, “Prejudice Awareness Summit,” that Henrico and Richmond schools have attended.

Emma emphasized that the way people talk about issues of prejudice and diversity is just as important as the need to talk about them. She wants to inspire other students at Deep Run to speak up, actively listen, and engage in more respectful conversations about race.

“Being able to communicate to another person, but then also understand what they’re saying too, and to internalize it – that’s something that I would want people in my school, being a predominantly white school, I would want them to kind of see that we’re not trying to be the aggressor,” she said. “We’re not trying to argue against each other. But we have a problem, let’s work together.”

After facing racial incidents and microaggressions during all of her three years at Deep Run, Emma said that the school environment needs a fundamental change so that she and other minority students can attend school feeling safe and included.

“It’s become too normalized and it’s gotten to the point where there’s something that needs to change,” she said. “There needs to be something that’s ensuring that no student at Deep Run is going to face adversity while trying to get their education and feel unwanted or discriminated against.”

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***Liana Hardy is the Citizen’s Report for America Corps member and education reporter. [Her position is dependent upon reader support; make a tax-deductible contribution to the Citizen through RFA here.](#)***

# ‘I have been run over by the freight train’

*Liana Hardy*



*Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin held a “Parents Matter” town hall-style event at Crestview Elementary School in Henrico Aug. 8, 2023, at which he was joined by Henrico Senator Siobhan Dunnavant (pictured next to him). (Liana Hardy/Henrico Citizen)*

Henrico parents at Gov. Glenn Youngkin’s “Parents Matter” conversation in Henrico Tuesday raised concerns about rampant social media use and the need for more technology restrictions in schools.

Youngkin discussed topics such as social media, bullying, parent involvement in school counseling and curricula, and school choice with Henrico parents at Crestview Elementary. The event was the third “Parents Matter” town hall he has hosted, following similar conversations in Roanoke and Prince William County.

The conversation centered around increasing parental involvement in all decisions made involving their children in schools, with Youngkin emphasizing the “rights and responsibilities” of parents to be in the know about all aspects of their children’s lives.

State Senator Siobhan Dunnivant of Henrico, who also helped lead the conversation, said that Virginia must restore the “parent-teacher authority unit.”

“The social agenda in schools kind of excludes parents from conversations and has derailed a lot of the academic conversation,” Dunnivant said. “Our kids, we know this, they need structure, they need guidance, they need accountability.”

For many Henrico parents, the primary concern in the county is how the schools can regulate technology use and educate students on the dangers of social and digital media.

“It’s the Instagram, it’s the TikTok, it’s the Snapchat,” a Henrico parent with two teenage sons in Henrico schools said. “I feel like anyone can come in at any time and as much as we try to protect our children, it’s really hard and you feel incredibly vulnerable, just kind of throwing them out into the world.”

“She’s fully immersed in Snapchat constantly, TikTok constantly, and the conversation is too far gone, because it’s ingrained into her everyday, her every minute, it’s constant,” another Henrico parent said about her 20-year-old daughter. “So I feel that I have been run over by the freight train already and it’s not something that I know how to back up, quite frankly.”

Excessive and dangerous use of social media is a clear problem among teenagers in Virginia, according to Youngkin, who said that 20% of Virginia children have reported being engaged in social media 24/7.

“Think about that. Kids are sleeping with their phones on,” Youngkin said. “The vast majority of Virginia kids say that they are deeply engaged with social media nearly all the time. This is a phenomenon that we have to be fully aware of.”

Along with parental regulation, Youngkin suggested implementing more school-wide or community-wide resources for parents to educate each other on technology and social media.

“How can we collectively, not state government, but collectively get on a program where parents can find resources?” he said. “Where they can find access to state-of-the-art education on what is happening in the world of social media.”

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Parents also spoke about the issue of bullying in Henrico, particularly online bullying. Eleina Espigh, a parent and candidate for the Henrico School Board from the Three Chopt District, said she wants middle and high schools to reinforce lessons about acceptable use of technology regularly.

“Cyberbullying, social bullying is the number one issue for students, teachers and parents in Henrico County,” Espigh said. “I’ve talked to my own children about technology use in school and whether there are rules in the school system about acceptable use of technology, but they’re not really taught.

My own son was just telling me, ‘the only thing I learned about was what you taught me at home.’”

Youngkin and other parents emphasized the need for more school communication to parents about what’s happening with their child, especially when it comes to bullying or inappropriate content.

One Henrico parent, Laura Burke, said that two of her children were introduced to pornography in a middle school.

“You can put every single parameter in place to protect your children, and then they go to school,” she said.

Burke, who said that her children came to her after the incident, encouraged parents to establish an open dialogue with their children.

“I’m gonna say one word: communication. Communication with your children is really important,” she said.

Tuckahoe District School Board member Marcie Shea was among the attendees of Tuesday’s event.

Parents at the event applauded a [Virginia law](#) signed this past year by Youngkin, which requires schools to notify parents about a bullying incident involving their child within 24 hours. Youngkin said he was outraged by the death of a 13-year-old boy who committed suicide after being bullied, with his parents never being informed of the harassment.

“I remember standing with his father, and his dad said, ‘I don’t know if we could have done something, but the fact that we didn’t know and have a chance to do something is unforgivable,’” Youngkin said.

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Several parents also criticized reading materials found in Henrico schools or libraries that they deemed sexually explicit or developmentally inappropriate. One great-grandfather from Henrico said he was horrified by books brought to him from a Henrico elementary school library meant for children ages three and older.

“These books were the most shocking, disturbing, pieces of garbage I’ve ever seen, that glorified the epidemic going on in our country today of gender dysphoria and gender confusion,” he said.

Youngkin highlighted the Virginia Department of Education’s new [model policies](#) on transgender students, which require schools to share information with parents about their child’s gender identity. The Henrico School Board intends to conduct what officials called a [“thorough review”](#) to determine whether to implement any of the policies, which have been harshly criticized by members of the LGBTQ+ community, Democrats and many educators, including the Virginia Education Association but supported by many conservative groups.

Youngkin also cited a [state law](#) he signed last year, introduced by Dunnivant, that obliges schools to notify parents about sexually explicit content in their children’s curricula and gives parents the opportunity to choose alternative materials.

Dunnivant said that parents should have the ultimate decision on what content their children are exposed to in school.

“We’re talking about the legislation protections for explicit content – you need to know what your kids are hearing,” she said. “I will not hear anymore that an educator that’s taken a class on age appropriate education for a child knows more than I do about what is appropriate for my child to learn.”

As he continues his “Parents Matter” events, Youngkin said he hopes to “empower” parents to become further involved in pushing for their rights in their school systems.

“Out of this comes a basic competency discussion around, do parents know what is going on in their children’s lives?” he said. “One of the things that I go to work every morning focused on is about empowering parents to be at the head of the table with every decision that’s being made with regards to their child – every single decision.”

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