Alexandria City Public Schools Vision, Integrity & Passion (VIP) Awards Program

Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) launched the VIP Awards Program in October 2021 as a way to recognize colleagues for making a difference in the school division. Throughout the year, ACPS highlights a certain category among our employees as a way to honor those who stand out for their dedication and achievement. Please view the VIP Award flyer here.

Research

Leading up to the implementation of the VIP Awards Program in ACPS, Acting Chief of Human Resources Dr. Melanie Kay-Wyatt researched various initiatives that build employee morale within an organization. Dr. Kay-Wyatt found that understanding what employee’s value and creating regular methods of acknowledging their dedication to the organization leads to higher morale between colleagues as well as higher employee retention rates. The previous award program only recognized the principal of the year, teacher of the year and one support employee of the year. We found that staff did not feel valued and there was no opportunity to recognize all levels of staff and recognize the ways in which they support the school division. The Human Resources team approached the Office of Communications to develop a new program that would recognize all categories of employees using the moniker Vision, Integrity & Passion (VIP) which ties to the superintendent’s consistent use of this phrase to relate to the ACPS team. It was fitting to utilize these them as these awards are presented personally by the superintendent and chief of HR at their work site.

Planning

The Office of Communications then devised a communications plan to promote the awards, create the VIP certificates, schedule and prepare for the in-person announcements and share the news in our weekly newsletter and social media platforms. So far, staff members in the following departments have been recognized for an ACPS VIP Award:
**October:** Transportation, Nutrition Services and Building Engineers: This includes transportation staff, maintenance/building engineers, custodial staff and nutrition services employees. Nominations due Oct. 22! Winners announced the week of Nov. 1, 2021.

**December:** Licensed Specialists: This includes psychologists, diagnosticians, therapists, social workers, counselors, nurses, athletic trainers and technology integrations specialists. Nominations due Dec. 15. Winners announced the first week of January 2022.

**February:** Support Staff: This includes Central Office support, as well as building-level support staff, including administrative assistants, instructional assistants, ACPS monitors, and school security officers. Nominations due Feb. 15, 2022. Winners announced the week of Feb. 28, 2022.

**April:** Leadership: This includes all Central Office and building-level administrators. Nominations due April 8, 2022. Winners announced the week of April 25, 2022.

**Implementation**

Nominations are submitted by any group or individual employed within the school division. Each employee or group may only nominate one individual per cycle. Employees may submit a nomination for a VIP Award through this Google Form for each cycle, which is every other month.

ACPS was proud to announce the first recipients of the VIP Award for employees who stand out for their Vision, Integrity and Passion. The winners were selected from the October nomination category focusing on Transportation, Nutrition Services and Building Engineers. Dr. Melanie Kay-Wyatt congratulated Abel Hernandez, custodian leader at Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy (LCTA) and Mike Knight, custodian at Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School (FTD).

Mr. Hernandez was nominated by Acting Principal of LCTA Linda Ricks, who noted how he goes above and beyond his duties as a custodian on a daily basis. He has worked within ACPS for nearly nine years. “Mr. Hernandez is devoted, passionate and cares about doing his job with excellence,” said Ricks. “He is professional, courteous, efficient and communicates clearly with others.”

FTD Music Teacher Jacob Bennett nominated Mr. Knight, calling him an “incredible custodian” and complimenting him for his attention to detail. “Even before the pandemic, he has always gone above and beyond to ensure that our school is clean and operational,” said Bennett. “He truly cares about the work that he does.” Mr. Knight has worked within ACPS for seven years.

Staff members were encouraged through email to nominate their peers for the next category, Licensed Specialists by Dec. 15. This group included ACPS psychologists, diagnosticians, nurses, therapists, counselors, social workers, athletic trainers and technology integration specialists.

All VIP Award winners had their photo taken and an article was written about them in ACPS Express and ACPS Insider, the school division’s newsletters to stakeholders and staff. The winners are also celebrated on the division’s social media accounts, which helps families and staff engage in the program and get to know the ACPS community better.

**Evaluation**
Award winners are identified and publicly acknowledged by the school division. Award recipients receive an ACPS gift bag and newly crafted VIP certificate as a token of appreciation for their hard work. All staff members who were nominated by their colleagues and received awards showed their appreciation for the acknowledgement and support the program by nominated others for upcoming categories. ACPS plans to continue the VIP Awards Program and reach every department. Overall, the VIP Awards Program has impacted school culture by creating a space where all staff, students and families are appreciated for the work they do in the division. Awards are given out during the school day so students witness faculty and staff being recognized for their work and can join in the celebration. The awards have assisted in creating a culture of respect, passion, and integrity. Ultimately, it helps students feel safe and valued which positively impacts student achievement.

Photos:
Congratulations to our VIP Awards recipients @AlexCityTitans @BarrettElem @PHSchoolACPS for their vision, integrity & passion! #ACPSVIPAwards @DrHutchings