# Superintendent’s Memo #224-19


**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education**

DATE: September 20, 2019

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: Disability History and Awareness Month (DHAM)

Youth with disabilities initiated a campaign in 2009, to have the General Assembly pass a resolution designating October as Disability History and Awareness Month (DHAM).  These same youth developed a vision statement for DHAM: Disability history education and awareness will promote positive attitudes in schools creating a culture of mutual respect, understanding, and equal opportunities for all.

Youth with disabilities, their parents, teachers, and staff members from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, the Virginia Commonwealth University Partnership for People with Disabilities, and the VDOE’s Training and Technical Assistance Centers (TTAC) continue to meet and develop a variety of resources that can be used to promote and highlight Disability History and Awareness Month in Virginia. These resources can be found at the following websites: [Center for Disability Leadership](http://www.virginiaselfadvocacy.org/) (under “Our History”); [Virginia Board for People with Disabilities](https://www.facebook.com/VABOARD); [A Life 4 Me](http://www.alife4me.com/); and [I'm Determined](https://www.imdetermined.org/quick-links/modules/).

Youth leaders reach out to the school community and offer mini-grants to fund local projects designed to expand inclusive practices. Teachers, schools, Parent Resource Centers, and others apply for these grants. The funded projects have ranged from painting a community mural to building inclusion kits for distribution to interested teachers and organizations, and having a schoolwide book club.

The Inclusion Project will continue to offer mini-grants for innovative ideas that promote DHAM and inclusive practices. Applications will be available in early fall 2019. Youth will also develop videos and printed materials to explain the Profile of a Virginia Graduate through student voices.

Nationally, employment of persons with disabilities is also highlighted in October. Virginia supports several programs that aid in career awareness and employment opportunities for youth with disabilities such as Project SEARCH, Start on Success, Customized and Supported Employment. The ACE-IT in College and the Mason Life Programs offer postsecondary education and employment opportunities. You can learn more about these programs by visiting their websites. The [Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services](https://www.vadars.org), the [Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired](https://www.vdbvi.org), [Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center](https://www.wwrc.net), and the [Department for Behavioral Health and Developmental Services](http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov) are leading initiatives that support Employment First. Visit the [Office of Disability Employment Policy](http://promotions.usa.gov/odep.html) website to view youth transition materials to include posters, employment guides, toolkits, checklists, and more. All materials are available at no cost and are available in English and Spanish.

To promote DHAM please visit these websites, have conversations with young people, their families, the Special Education Advisory Committee, [Parent Resource Centers](http://www.vaprcs.org), your school board members, and other organizations in the community. You can also plan activities that will promote the goals of this initiative. Implementing DHAM activities in schools promotes a *“culture of mutual respect, understanding, and equal opportunities for all.”* Perhaps a youth leader said it best: “inclusion empowers me… empower me and I will empower you back!”

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Marianne Moore, VDOE Transition Specialist, by telephone, at (804) 225-2700 or email at, [Marianne.Moore@doe.virginia.gov](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cnbh55929%5CDownloads%5CMarianne.Moore%40doe.virginia.gov); or Jack Brandt, Inclusion Project Coordinator at Virginia Commonwealth University, by telephone, at (804) 828-1365 or by email, at [jtbrandt@vcu.edu](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cnbh55929%5CDownloads%5Cjtbrandt%40vcu.edu).

JFL/MM