# Superintendent’s Memo #255-20

  
**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA   
Department of Education**

DATE: October 2, 2020

TO: Division Superintendents

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

## SUBJECT: Disability History and Awareness Month

Through the action of a committed group of youth with disabilities, Virginia has recognized October as Disability History and Awareness Month (DHAM) and the Youth Credo: *Disability history education and awareness will promote positive attitudes in schools creating a culture of mutual respect, understanding, and equal opportunities for all.*

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 (VCU), the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC), and the VDOE’s Training and Technical Assistance Centers (TTAC), continue to develop a variety of resources that can be used to promote and highlight DHAM in Virginia. These resources can be found at the following websites: [Center for Disability Leadership](https://web.partnership.vcu.edu/InclusionProject/); [Virginia Board for People with Disabilities](https://www.vaboard.org/) (Training Programs); [A Life 4 Me](http://www.alife4me.com/); [I'm Determined](http://www.imdetermined.org/) and also look for [History of Disability](https://www.imdetermined.org/quick-links/modules/module-one/); and [PEATC Youth Advisory Board](https://www.peatc.org/peatc.cgim?template=pye).

Youth leaders working with the Inclusion Project at VCU offer small grants to fund local projects designed to expand inclusive practices. Teachers, schools, Parent Resource Centers, and individual students, supported by teachers and schools can apply for these grants. The VDOE has contributed funds to support projects that have ranged from painting a community mural to building inclusion kits for distribution to interested teachers and organizations, and holding a schoolwide book club and movie night. The 2020-2021 mini grant application materials will be distributed in late October. In addition to the grants, the youth leaders have developed a series of fact sheets entitled, “Navigating Through Life,” which will also be released this fall.

Employment of people with disabilities is also highlighted in October. The Commonwealth of Virginia and the agencies within state government support an environment of inclusivity for all employees. [Executive Order 1](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/eo-1-equal-opportunity.pdf), Equal Opportunity (2018), and [Executive Order 47](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/EO-47-Expanding-Opportunities-for-Virginians-with-Disabilities.pdf), Expanding Opportunities for Virginians with Disabilities (2020), provide commitments to foster a culture of inclusion, diversity, and mutual respect and to increase and support the employment of individuals with disabilities in state government.

The VDOE supports several programs that support career awareness and employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. You can learn more about these programs by visiting the [Center on Transition Innovations](http://www.centerontransition.org/), [ACE IT in College](https://aceitincollege.org/), and [Mason LIFE](https://masonlife.gmu.edu/) 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/developmental-services) 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. All materials are available at no cost and come in English and Spanish. This year [Vocational Rehabilitation](https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/rehab/vr100/index.html#:~:text=Celebrating%20a%20Century%20of%20Success,students%20and%20adults%20with%20disabilities!) celebrates a century of serving people with disabilities as they seek employment.

The VDOE encourages conversations between young people, their families, Special Education Advisory Committees, Parent Resource Centers, local school division leaders, and throughout communities about the importance and value of inclusive practices and planning activities that will promote the goals of this initiative.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Marianne Moore, VDOE Transition Specialist, by telephone (804) 225-2700 or email at [Marianne.Moore@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Marianne.Moore@doe.virginia.gov); or Jack Brandt, VCU Inclusion Project Coordinator, by telephone (804) 828-1365 or by email [brandtj@vcu.edu](mailto:brandtj@vcu.edu).

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