



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

DATE: September 21, 2018

TO: Division Superintendents

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

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

In 2009, the General Assembly passed a resolution, initiated by a group of youth with disabilities, designating October as Disability History and Awareness Month (DHAM). They also 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 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](#) (under "Our History"); [Virginia Board for People with Disabilities](#); [A Life 4 Me](#); and [I'm Determined](#).

Last year, Inclusion Project youth leaders reached out to the community, offering small grants to fund projects that expanded inclusive practices. Teachers, schools, Parent Resource Centers, and others applied; six grants were awarded. The funded projects ranged from painting a community mural to building inclusion kits for distribution to interested teachers and organizations, and hosting inclusion days at schools. In addition, the Inclusion Project youth leaders worked with Virginia is for Siblings to produce a video for National Siblings Day. This video can be found at the [Vimeo website](#).

A youth leader made the statement, "inclusion empowers me...empower me and I will empower you back!" So, this year the Inclusion Project will continue to offer grants for innovative ideas that promote DHAM and inclusive practices. In addition, youth will develop videos and print materials to explain to young people what the Profile of a Virginia Graduate means.

Nationally, employment of persons with disabilities is also highlighted in October. Virginia supports several programs that support career awareness and employment opportunities for youth

with disabilities through Project SEARCH, Start on Success, Customized Employment, and ACE-IT in College. You can learn more about these programs by visiting the [Center on Transition Innovations](#) website. The [Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services](#), the [Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired](#), [Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center](#), and the [Department for Behavioral Health and Developmental Services](#) are leading initiatives that support Employment First. Visit the [Office of Disability Employment Policy](#) website to view youth transition materials to include posters, employment guides, toolkits, checklists, and more. All materials are available at no cost and come in English and Spanish.

Visit these websites, have conversations with young people, their families, the Special Education Advisory Committee, Parent Resource Centers, your school board members, and in the community. 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.”*

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; or Jack Brandt, Inclusion Project Coordinator at Virginia Commonwealth University, by telephone (804) 828-1365 or by email jtbrandt@vcu.edu.

JFL/MM