



**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA  
Department of Education**

September 2, 2016

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

**SUBJECT: Disability History and Awareness Month**

A group of young people with disabilities, alumni of the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities' Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), initiated a resolution that was passed by the 2009 General Assembly designating October as Disability History and Awareness Month (DHAM). A vision statement was developed by this group 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.*

Public awareness, knowledge, and understanding of disabilities promote full participation by students with disabilities into school and community activities. Increased knowledge of individual contributions by people with disabilities advances inclusive communities.

Youth with disabilities, their parents, teachers, and staff from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, and the Virginia Commonwealth University Partnership for People with Disabilities have developed a variety of resources that can be used to promote and highlight Disability History and Awareness Month in Virginia during October. These resources can be found at the following Web sites:

[Center for Disability Leadership](#) (under Our History); [Virginia Board for People with Disabilities](#) (under Helpful Links); and [I'm Determined](#) (under Online Modules). New resources developed by youth to promote disability and diversity awareness - the Inclusion Project - will be available this fall.

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 ProjectSEARCH, Start on Success, Customized Employment, and ACE-IT in College. You can learn more about these programs by visiting the [Center on Transition Innovations](#) Web site. Additionally, visit the [Office of Disability Employment Policy](#) Web site to view youth transition materials to include posters, employment guides, toolkits, checklists and more. Materials are available at no cost and also come in Spanish.

I encourage you to visit these Web sites and have conversations with young people, their families, the Special Education Advisory Committee, and Parent Resource Centers in your school division and the community. I further encourage you to 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; telephone (804) 225- 2700; [Dana Yarbrough](#), community support specialist, at Virginia Commonwealth University; telephone (804) 828-0352; [Jack Brandt](#), inclusion project coordinator at Virginia Commonwealth University; telephone (804) 828-1365, or [Benjamin Jarvela](#), Communications Director at the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities; telephone (804) 786-1146.

SRS/mm

