



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Lisa Coons, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Public Instruction

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 2120
RICHMOND, VA 23218-2120

Office: (804) 225-2057
Fax: (804) 371-2099

March 15, 2024

Ms. Valerie Williams
Director, Office of Special Education Programs
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Service
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue S.W.
Washington DC 20202-2800

Dear Ms. Williams:

Thank you for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs' (OSEP's) detailed and thorough monitoring reviews conducted in May 2019 and in September 2023. Both reviews provided critical opportunities for the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to receive and incorporate OSEP's feedback to improve the processes and procedures by which VDOE serves students with disabilities.

We appreciate OSEP's acknowledgement of the improvements VDOE has made to address the issues raised in your June 2020 monitoring report, reflected in the closeout letter provided. Providing the best quality education program for our students with disabilities is a critical priority for the Department, and the ongoing work and collaboration with OSEP will support the continued program improvements that will best serve Virginia's children.

The March 13th OSEP letter provided a clear plan to address specific regulatory and procedural improvements and attached you will find our preliminary plan to address the components highlighted in the monitoring report. This plan serves as an informal summary of next steps for Virginia that will be implemented expeditiously. State special education staff will follow up with OSEP staff regarding specific actions including required assurances and actions.

As part of the new VDOE leadership team's focus on special education, the Department engaged two leading national experts to conduct comprehensive, external evaluations of Virginia's special education programs. Working closely with an appointed Special Education Work Group, comprised of parents, educators, and support organizations, the Department has developed a strategic plan for implementing the recommendations of those external program evaluations, in addition to issues identified by OSEP.

This workgroup, in conjunction with additional feedback from the State Special Education Advisory Committee with which OSEP met for your monitoring report, brings together over 40 members and stakeholders across public and private education, local school division staff and leadership, special education teachers, career and technical education teachers, transition and vocational rehabilitation staff, related service providers, parents and family members of students with disabilities, military connected families, local and national PTA representatives, members of Virginia's developmental disabilities network, disability advocacy organizations, the state parent and information training center, other state agencies that serve individuals with disabilities, youth services and foster care youth team members, and self-advocates. We have been pleased that these participants have embraced this opportunity to create a Roadmap for Special Education in the Commonwealth, and we look forward to the results of their work being implemented later this year.

Again, thank you for working with VDOE to recommend changes to help improve our service to children with disabilities. We are committed to ensuring all children in Virginia receive high-quality instruction, with strong systems of parent and family engagement, prioritized monitoring and support, as well as an emphasis on postsecondary pathways for all learners. We appreciate your working with us on our continued improvement efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Coons', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lisa Coons

LC/tr