



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

September 27, 2013

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Patricia I. Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: Disability History and Awareness Month

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

Guided by these beliefs, a group of young people with disabilities who are alumni of the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities' Youth Leadership Forum, 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.*

Youth with disabilities, 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 these Web sites: www.virginiasefadvocacy.org (under Our History); <http://www.vaboard.org/links.htm#7> (under Links and Resources); and www.imdetermined.org (under Online Modules).

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" and will assist schools with anti-bullying and harassment initiatives through education and awareness. Viewing the videos on the following Web sites will help you to begin discussions around bullying and harassment: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/prevention/bullying/> and http://www.imdetermined.org/youth/youth_summit/.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Marianne Moore, VDOE transition specialist, at Marianne.Moore@doe.virginia.gov or (804) 225- 2700; Dana Yarbrough, community support specialist, at Virginia Commonwealth University at dvyarbrough@vcu.edu or (804) 828-0352; or Teri Barker-Morgan, program manager, at the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities at Teri.Barker@vbpd.virginia.gov or (804) 786-9381.

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