



#279-21

**Commonwealth of Virginia
Virginia Department of Education
Superintendent's Memo #279-21**

DATE: October 1, 2021
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: **Disability History and Awareness Month**

Over a decade ago, a committed group of youth with disabilities requested that Virginia officially recognize October as **Disability History and Awareness Month (DHAM)**. The youth also developed a credo: *“Disability history education and awareness will promote positive attitudes in schools creating a culture of mutual respect, understanding, and equal opportunities for all.”*

With the recognition of injustices people with disabilities, of all races and ethnicities, have experienced, and the challenges of COVID-19 and its variants still present, the work has intensified as youth with disabilities, their parents, teachers, and staff members from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Partnership for People with Disabilities, Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC), VDOE's Training and Technical Assistance Centers (TTAC), and the many Parent Resource Centers (PRC) continue to collaborate and 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: [Inclusion Project](#), [Virginia Board for People with Disabilities \(Training\)](#), [A Life 4 Me](#), [I'm Determined](#), [History of Disability](#), and [PEATC Youth Advisory Board](#).

Youth leaders working with the Inclusion Project offer small grants to fund local projects designed to expand inclusive practices. Teachers, schools, PRCs, and individual students, who are supported by practitioners and schools, have applied for these grants. Funded projects have ranged from painting a community mural to building inclusion kits for distribution, and holding a schoolwide book club and movie night. In addition to community grants, Virginia's young leaders have developed a series of fact sheets entitled, "Navigating Through Life," and now these fact sheets have developed into graphic posters. The posters were distributed to 132-school divisions across the Commonwealth in August.

Employment of people with disabilities is also highlighted in October. Virginia supports several programs that emphasize career awareness and employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. You can learn more about these programs by visiting the [Center on Transition Innovations](#), [ACE IT in College](#), and the [Mason LIFE](#) webpages. The [Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services](#), [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](#) to view youth transition materials. All materials are available at no cost and are available in English and Spanish. The [Department for Blind and Vision Impaired](#) (DBVI) supports individuals with vision disabilities, and this year marks the 100 anniversary of service by "celebrating our past and empowering our future."

The VDOE encourages communities to have conversations with their school and neighborhood partners, local and/or state Special Education Advisory Committee, and PRCs about the importance and value of inclusive practices. Many of the resources shared above can be used to plan activities that will promote the goals of this initiative.

For more information

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

JFL/MM/tc