



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA  
Department of Education

**DATE:** October 6, 2017  
**TO:** Division Superintendents  
**FROM:** Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction  
**SUBJECT: Disability History and Awareness Month**

Over 13 years ago, a group of youth with disabilities initiated a resolution that was passed by the 2009 General Assembly designating October as Disability History and Awareness Month (DHAM). Their vision statement was developed 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, and the Virginia Commonwealth University Partnership for People with Disabilities continue to develop 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 websites:

[Center for Disability Leadership](#) (under "Our History"); [Virginia Board for People with Disabilities](#); and [I'm Determined](#) (Search "Module One"). Last year The Inclusion Project materials were added to Virginia's growing list of materials that can be used to promote DHAM. The Inclusion Project is also found at the Center for Disability Leadership (also under "Our History").

Students with disabilities explain inclusion in several ways. One youth explained inclusion as increasing "understanding of a person as a person, not as a person with a disability. Disability is secondary, that's only a part of me, that's not all of who I am." Another student hopes that inclusion will help people understand that "disability isn't a bad thing, it is what makes me unique" and another said "inclusion empowers me... empower me and I will empower you back!"

This year the Partnership for People with Disabilities and the VDOE led a group of youth as they updated the website [A life 4 Me](#). The site now includes a variety of videos and tips for students and parents navigating transition to high school and beyond.

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. Additionally, 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, and Parent Resource Centers in your school division, 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; 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.

SRS/MM

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