



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

September 18, 2015

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, 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.

A group of young people with disabilities, 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, family members, 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 have developed a variety of resources that can be used to promote and highlight DHAM in Virginia during October. These resources can be found at the following Web sites; www.virginiasefadvocacy.org (under Disability Awareness) and http://www.indetermined.org/quick_links/modules. New resources are being developed by youth to promote awareness through youth engagement via the Inclusion Project, samples of activities are attached to this Memorandum. Additionally, youth have made two public service announcements promoting inclusion. They are available at the following link <https://vimeo.com/channels/inclusionproject/100866962>.

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 in transition materials to include posters, employment guides, toolkits, checklists and more. Materials are at no cost and also come in Spanish.

I encourage you to visit these Web sites, have conversations with young people, their families, the Special Education Advisory Committee, and the Parent Resource Center in your school division, and the community. I further encourage you to plan activities that will promote the goals of this initiative. Implementing DHAM and Inclusion Project 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.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Marianne Moore, VDOE transition specialist, Office of Special Education Program Improvement at Marianne.Moore@doe.virginia.gov, telephone (804) 225-2700 or Jack Brandt, policy specialist, Virginia Commonwealth University at brandt@vcu.edu, telephone (804) 828-1365.

SRS/MM

Attachment:

- A. [Samples of activities](#) (PDF)