June 11, 2010

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Patricia I. Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: Virginia Disability History and Awareness Month

The 2009 General Assembly passed Senate Joint Resolution 321 designating October as Disability History and Awareness Month in Virginia. This action was prompted by a group of young Virginians with disabilities who are alumni of the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), an initiative to develop leadership skills among youth with disabilities, sponsored by the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities.

Students with disabilities often encounter challenges when joining in school and community activities that students without disabilities do not face. Increasing public knowledge, awareness and understanding of disabilities will help to ensure full participation of students with disabilities into the life of their schools and communities. Helping to make others aware of the contributions that people with disabilities have made and are currently making nationally and in Virginia promotes inclusive communities.

Youth with disabilities, along with parents, teachers, staff from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, and the Partnership for People with Disabilities have continued to add to the bank of resources developed in 2009. All schools can readily find information, activities, and materials to promote and highlight Disability History and Awareness Month in Virginia. These resources may be found under the disability awareness tab at the following Web site: www.virginiaselfadvocacy.org

Youth with disabilities who participated in gathering information and materials for the resource bank developed the following Disability History and Awareness Month vision statement:

Disability history education and awareness will promote positive attitudes in schools creating a culture of mutual respect, understanding and equal opportunities for all.
I encourage you to visit this Web site, have conversations with young people with disabilities and their families, Special Education Advisory Committees, and Parent Resource Centers in your school division and to plan activities that will promote the goals of this initiative.

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 Yarborough, director, Center for Self-Advocacy Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University at dvyarbrough@vcu.edu or (804) 828-0352; or Teri Barker-Morgan, program manager, The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities at Teri.Barker@vbpd.virginia.gov or (804) 786-9381.

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