

For Immediate Release: August 26, 2010

Contact: Charles B. Pyle, Director of Communications, (804) 371-2420
Julie C. Grimes, Communications Manager, (804) 225-2775

Virginia Department of Education & Virginia Commonwealth University Announce New Autism Center Partnership

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) recently announced the establishment of the Center of Excellence for Autism Spectrum Disorders. A collaborative venture of VDOE and VCU's Schools of Education and Medicine, the center will serve as a focal point for research, professional development and technical assistance in implementing research-based effective practices and comprehensive services for students with autism. The center is funded through a start-up grant from VDOE.

"I am excited to be partnering with VCU in this important initiative," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright. "The work of the center is to provide tools to help schools prepare students with autism to learn, live and work independently in communities of their choice. Together VDOE and VCU are laying a foundation for significant improvements in the outcomes of students with autism."

One of the center's first projects will be to assist VDOE in working with selected school divisions to expand their capacity to provide high-quality programming for students with autism. Participating school divisions will have access to board-certified behavior analysts who will provide technical assistance and training for teachers and paraprofessionals who work with students with autism.

The center will be developing a consortium of institutes of higher education that will provide coursework leading to board certification in behavioral analysis and opportunities to prepare teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals and related service providers to more effectively work with students with autism.

"Applied Behavioral Analysis has been demonstrated repeatedly to be one of the most powerful forms of helping students with autism and other disorders on the autism spectrum, significantly improving their behavior and educational outcomes." said Dr. Paul Wehman, center director and professor of physical medicine.

Wehman, along with Drs. John Kregel, Carol Schall and Dawn Hendricks, will work with VDOE and other state agencies to improve the long-term supports and services required for the growing population of Virginians with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

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