



For Immediate Release

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Students with Disabilities Develop Guide for Schools to Promote Awareness and Inclusiveness

RICHMOND, Va. — Students with the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities' Youth Leadership Forum and the Virginia Department of Education's I'm Determined Project have published "A Guide to Planning an Inclusion Project" to help school communities raise awareness about disabilities and the importance of building inclusive school communities.

The guidebook includes sample activities and resources for use by elementary, middle and high schools to promote disability awareness and inclusiveness. For example:

- In a suggested elementary activity, students use tablets, an app and resources from the American Dyslexia Association to experience what learning mathematics is like for students with dyscalculia.
- In a suggested middle school activity, a team of students creates an obstacle course to raise awareness about the daily challenges faced by students who depend on wheelchairs, walkers and other devices for mobility.
- In a suggested high school activity, students learn about the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act through drama and role playing.

"This is a great resource schools can use to remove barriers and create learning environments where all students feel valued and supported," Superintendent of Public Instruction Steven R. Staples said. "It was created by students for students."

Development of the guidebook began four years ago, when the student leaders asked VDOE special education staff what could be done to raise awareness about students with disabilities. The department staff challenged the students to develop a proposal and provided a grant to support their efforts.

With assistance from the Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University, the students launched what they dubbed "The Inclusion Project" and began researching hands-on activities that schools could use during Disability History Awareness Month in October and throughout the year to promote and maintain awareness and inclusiveness.

"We were glad to support the student leaders who developed the guide and toolkit to increase disability awareness in schools and communities across Virginia," said Jack Brandt, a disability policy specialist with the VCU Partnership for People with Disabilities.

The guidebook provides resources and templates schools can use to plan and carry out their own Inclusion Project events. The sample activities in the guide were successfully piloted during 2015-2016 by schools in Northumberland County and Radford.

[A Guide to Planning an Inclusion Project](#) is available on the VDOE website and copies are being sent to division special education directors.