



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

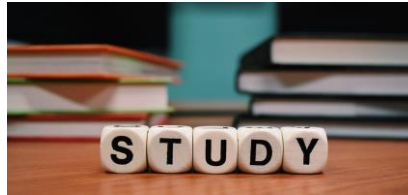
Commission on Youth



Transition Process for Students with Disabilities Regarding Records and Services at the Age of Majority

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September 21, 2022





- At its **April 19, 2022 meeting**, the **Virginia Commission on Youth** adopted the following study mandate:

The Virginia Commission on Youth shall convene an advisory group to review how youth with disabilities are being provided services in the schools, including mental health services, and how they can be better supported as they transition to adulthood. The 2022 study should look at ways that the Community Services Boards can work with the transitioning student and family and the local education agency.

- **An Advisory Group was formed.**

Transition Process Advisory Group Members



- The Arc of Virginia
- Community Services Boards
- The Office of Children's Services
- The Office of the Secretary of Education
- Partnership for People with Disabilities, VCU
- Special Education/Exceptional Education Professionals
- Virginia Association of Independent Specialized Education Facilities
- Virginia Council of Administrators of Special Education
- Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services
- Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services
- Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired
- Virginia Department of Education
- Youth and families with transition experience
- Commission on Youth members

Transition Process Advisory Group



- **Chaired by Delegate Emily Brewer; Vice Chaired by Senator Barbara Favola**
- **The Transition Advisory Group met:**
 - May 17, 2022
 - September 7, 2022
- **Advisory Group activities included:**
 - Overview from Delegate Rob Bell from previous legislation
 - Presentation from the Virginia Department of Education
 - Presentation from parent and PEATC, community member
 - Roundtable discussion of barriers and solutions
 - Presentation from a young adult with a disability and her mom
 - Reviewed and adopted draft recommendations to be presented to the Commission on Youth



- **Staff conducted interviews with the following:**
 - Parents of students with disabilities and students
 - Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services
 - Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services
 - VCU's Partnership for People with Disabilities
 - Virginia Council of Administrators of Special Education
 - Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired
 - Transition Tennessee
 - Virginia Department of Education
- **Site Visit**
 - Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center



- National Statistics on Special Education
- Special Education in Virginia - VDOE
- Prior Legislation
- VCOY Study Mandate & Advisory Group
- Current Virginia Services and Other Resources
- Transition Tennessee
- Parent Interviews - Needs for Families
- Best Practices
- Findings and Recommendations

National Statistics on Students Served Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)



- Of students between the ages of 14-21 who left school in 2019-2020 (428,000), **76% graduated with a regular diploma**, 13% dropped out, 10% earned an alternative certificate, 1% reached the maximum age of special education services, and less than one-half of 1% died.
- The percentage of students between ages 14-21 (for 2019-2020) who graduated with a regular high school diploma was **highest for white students at 79%** and **lowest for Black and Pacific Islander students at 72%**.
- **15% of Asian students and only 4% of American Indian/Alaska Native students received an alternative certificate.**
- **Drop-out rates were highest for American Indian/Alaska Native students at 20%**, while **Asian students had the lowest drop-out rate at 4%**.

National Statistics on Students Served Under the IDEA, Cont'd.



- Students ages 14-21 during the 2019 - 2020 school year differed in their outcomes depending upon disability type.
- 89% of students with speech and language impairments earned a regular diploma, while only **44% of the students with multiple disabilities earned a regular diploma.**
- 34% of students with intellectual disabilities and **33% of students with multiple disabilities received an alternative certificate,** while only 3% of students with speech or language impairments earned an alternative certificate.
- **Drop-out rates were highest for students with emotional disturbances (27%)** and lowest for students with deaf-blindness (3%).



Special Education in Virginia - Virginia Department of Education (DOE)



- **174,638 students have disabilities** in Virginia (~14% of all students in Virginia K-12).
- **95, 215 students have disabilities in grades 6-12.**
- Students with disabilities are protected under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA PL 101-476).
- Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are completed for each child with a documented disability.
- 504 documents are completed for students who need special accommodations but are not eligible for an IEP.
- VDOE provides guidance and resources to local school divisions.
- Transition planning in IEP meetings starts no later than age 14.
- JLARC recommended VDOE to develop and maintain a robust statewide plan to improve transition services, due December 1, 2022.

DOE Special Education - Individualized Education Program (IEP)



- Students with **diagnosed disabilities learn under the parameters of an IEP (Individualized Education Program)** document within the school system.
- An IEP spells out **learning goals, accommodations, progress, and tracks with the student** from the time of placement until receiving a high school diploma, or the maximum age for receiving special education services (ages 18-21). **Transition plans are included by age 14.**
- An **IEP is updated at least annually** with parents (up until age 18), case manager, invited teachers, invited counselors, and the student.
- **After the age of majority (18 years old in Virginia), the student may take sole responsibility for their IEP** and sign the plan at the meetings. Parents may opt to retain rights after age 18 if needed.
- Students may be present for IEP meetings at any age, but by age 14, students are required to be invited to IEP meetings.





- Virginia law requires **transition planning for career and employment to start no later than the age of 14.**
- **One year prior to age 18** (the age of majority under Virginia law), **schools must inform students and families that educational records may no longer be shared with the parents/guardians once the student reaches age 18**, unless other documentation is provided.
- Some adult students are capable of making their own educational decisions once they reach the age of majority.
- Students with more severe disabilities may remain in public schools through 21 years of age to receive services, and may need someone else to make educational decisions.
- **Parents/guardians who need to participate in educational decisions of their students at age 18 and beyond must take action at least the year BEFORE the 18th birthday.**



- **Students who are not capable of making their own decisions at age 18 will need their parents/guardians to do one of the following about 1 year prior:**
 - request to be a **court-appointed guardian** to make educational decisions at guardianship hearings with a judge;
 - **declare the student legally incompetent or legally incapacitated** and the parent or other competent adult becomes the educational representative;
 - **certify that the adult student is unable to provide informed consent and identify an educational representative;** or
 - have the **adult student designate in writing a competent adult** to make educational decisions through a power of attorney, signed by the student in front of a Notary Public.





- After high school, students are no longer protected under the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). The individuals will be accommodated only by legal documentation of their disability and are then protected from discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- **Students should have a direct transition plan** for enrollment, employment, work-based learning opportunities, or enlistment by the age of majority, so that when the student graduates, all documentation can proceed to the next involved agency or group.
- **Parent involvement in this transition process is a direct indicator of student success.** Statistically, students with uninvolved parents have a lesser chance of success.
- For students with an IEP, **community engagement and transition planning** are also **direct indicators of student success.**



- **Students with disabilities face high levels of difficulty in job placement**, enrollment, and other life areas due to underpreparedness or unclear information.
- **Information is often confusing and overwhelming.** Even schools and highly educated parents are unsure in which direction they should point a student, or which path is best.
- **School systems and post secondary agencies are not always in communication**, creating what is often referred to as “the cliff” effect.
- **“The cliff” occurs when a student with a disability** is very well-provided for within high school, but exits the school system and **services are suddenly no longer available.**
- This can be because of **lack of transition planning, lack of parent involvement, or lack of comprehensive information.**



House Bill 2380 (Rob Bell, 2015 Virginia General Assembly Session)

- Proposed that school divisions designate staff to receive training about community services available for students with intellectual disability or emotional disturbance upon graduating from, aging out of, or leaving public education, and to provide this information to students and their parents/guardians.



- **The Bill required the community services boards and behavioral health authorities to provide information about available services and ensure that at least one employee or representative of these organizations participate in the meeting (a warm handoff) with the schools and students/parents to provide options when students graduate from, age out of, or leave public education.**
- **The Bill was NOT passed** and was left in House Appropriations.



Senate Bill 585 (Siobhan Dunnivant, 2020 General Assembly Session)

- Proposed that the **Department of Education prepare and update transitional materials** to include information **about powers of attorney and guardianship** for students ages 17.5-21 years of age and their parents during the student's annual IEP meeting.
- When a **petition for guardianship/conservatorship** is presented, a Guardian Ad Litem is appointed to review the IEP and include the results in the court report. **The Guardian Ad Litem must consider if a less restrictive option is available**, including an advance directive or durable power of attorney.
- The Bill encouraged the student to participate in all decisions as able, and **was approved by the House and Senate, and signed by the Governor.**



Current Virginia Services and Other Resources





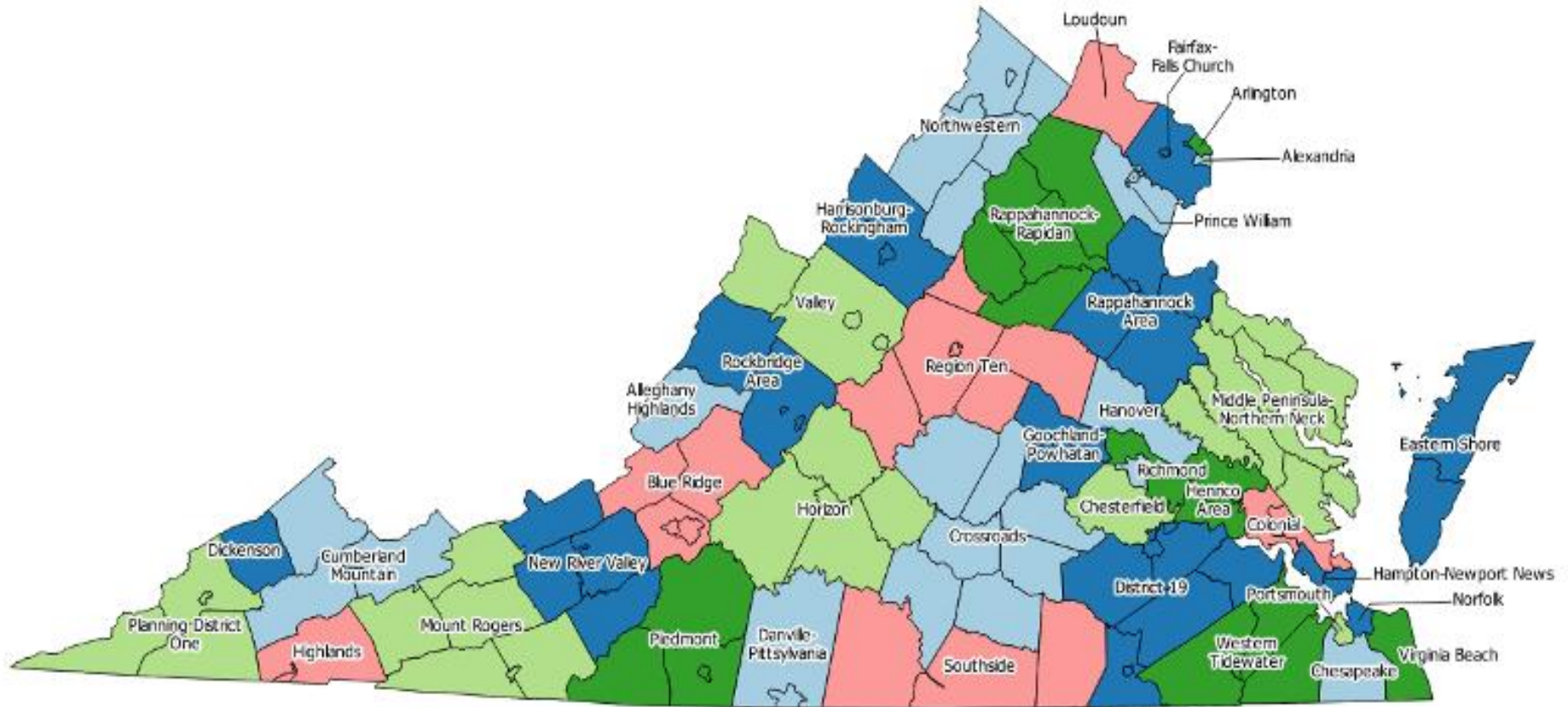
DBHDS provides the following for individuals with disabilities:

- Waiver Services
- Office of Integrated Health
- My Life, My Community - Transition to Adulthood
- Housing
- REACH Program for individuals with developmental disabilities who have crisis needs.
- Employment First Initiative
- Provider Development
- Department of Justice Settlement Agreement Consultation



- **“Community Services Boards” or CSBs are local points of entry for publicly funded services and programs for assistance with mental health, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and substance use disorders. The Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services oversees the licensing of the 39 CSBs and one Behavioral Health Authority (BHA) in the Commonwealth.**
- **CSBs provide case management and emergency services, and authorize waivers to ensure that an applicant seeking transition services is eligible. Rarely do they have dedicated Transition Coordinators.**
- **IEP documentation needs to be shared with CSBs well before a student needs services (typically needing services at ages 18-21). Determining the documentation that needs to be shared can be difficult.**

Local Community Services Boards (CSBs)





- **All DARS services focus on Vocational Rehabilitation and Career Counseling, through Pre-ETS (Pre-Employment Transition Services)**
- **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is made available to two groups of clients: those who are eligible (have an IEP), and those who are “potentially eligible” (PE).**
- **“PE” students are those who qualify for a 504 or may have a known disability but have not yet applied.**
- **Currently, DARS is servicing less than 12% of eligible students due to a large client base and limited staffing.**
- **15% of state’s VR Services Grant must be used for Pre-ETS services for students with disabilities (training, internship opportunities, work-based learning, etc.).**
- **DARS has the capability to service more students only with additional support staff, as the caseload is at a maximum now.**



DARS programs/services include the following:

- Assistive Technology
- Transition Guide with tips for students and parents
- **Project SEARCH** and **Customized Employment**
- Vocational Evaluation, Career Exploration, Guidance, Counseling
- Job Development, Shadowing, and Placement
- On-the-Job Training and Supported Employment (job coaching)
- **Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT)/**
Postsecondary Training and Education
- **Pre-Employment Readiness and Education Program (PREP)**
- Community Rehabilitation Case Management Services
- Brain Injury Services
- Independent Living and Personal Assistance Services





Project SEARCH - 1 school-year transition program for students with significant disabilities.

- Started in Chicago; replicated in Virginia
- Business-led with 3 internships in a host business
- Main goal: **Integrated competitive employment**
- 19 active Project SEARCH programs in Virginia
- 1100+ Students since 2008 start
- Key Partners:
 - Host Business
 - School District
 - Vocational Rehabilitation
 - Supported Employment Agency

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) Cont'd. - Regional Offices and WWRC



Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center

Field Offices

Skyline District – John Jackson

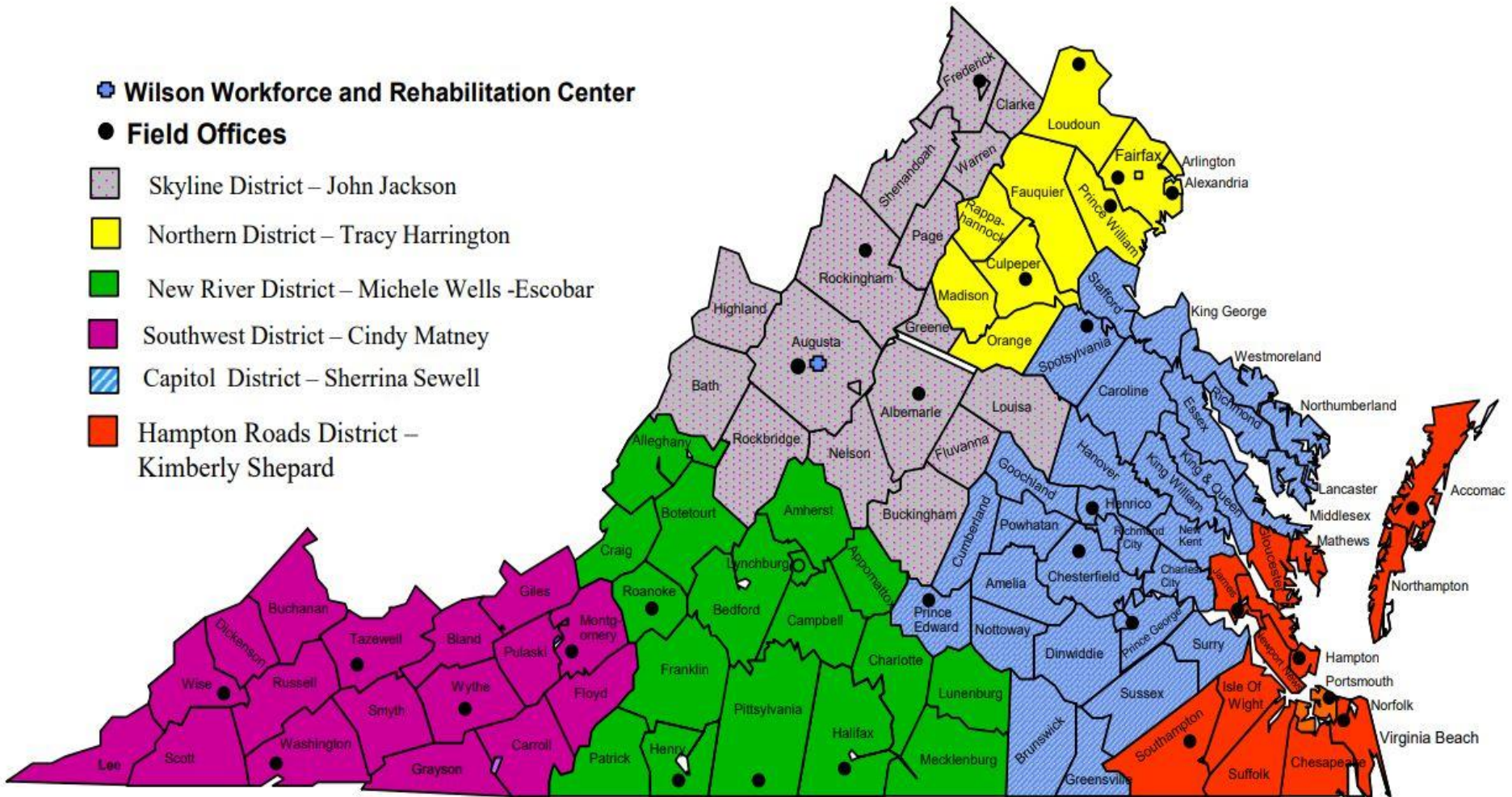
Northern District – Tracy Harrington

New River District – Michele Wells -Escobar

Southwest District – Cindy Matney

Capitol District – Sherrina Sewell

Hampton Roads District –
Kimberly Shepard





- The **Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC)** is a **subservice of DARS' Division of Rehabilitative Services** and is a **residential or day program** for students ages 18-25 with disabilities who are pursuing vocational goals.
- The WWRC provides students with **6-10 day assessments, independent living training, supervised housing (if needed) and job training** in Business and Information Technology, Manufacturing and Production, and Services and Trades.
- Students **must apply** to be accepted and will **receive a degree certification** upon completion of their program (typically 1-3 semesters, depending on the program of study).
- Students have access to **vocational evaluation and training, assistive computer technology**, behavioral health services, medical rehabilitation, life skills evaluation and training, and many more services.



Vocational Services include:



- Vocational Evaluation
- Occupational Skills/Vocational Training (OST)
- Pre-employment Readiness and Education Program (PREP)
- Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT)
- Educational Support Services (ESS)
- Assistive Rehabilitation Technology (ART)



- The Virginia Department of Education (DOE) **determines learning standards for every subject area.** Students must take a Standards of Learning (SOL) test for each grade annually. SOL tests in grades 3-12 are used for federal and state accountability.
- **Students with disabilities must pass the SOL tests to be given a standard diploma.** Every student should be given equal opportunity to participate in the SOL tests per subject.
- Student **eligibility and testing accommodations for SOL tests** depend directly on the services a student receives, and the diploma type they are seeking.
- **DOE determines requirements of educators regarding records that must be maintained/shared and services available in schools.**
- Funds two disability support programs through VCU: **Center on Transition Innovations** and **Partnership for People with Disabilities.**





- **Identify and locate children who may have a disability** (physically, cognitively, emotionally or a combination); **assess their abilities and needs.**
- **Help determine the least restrictive environment for each student with a disability.**
- **Develop and administer the Individualized Education Program (IEP)** to determine goals for each student and strategies to meet those goals; **hold IEP team meetings with student and parents/guardians at least annually; monitor IEP progress and make changes.**
- **Make accommodations for students with a 504 plan.**

Local Schools - Role in Special Education

Cont'd.



- **Begin Transition Planning early** (elementary and middle school), but **required to have a Transition Plan (IEP) in place by age 14.**
- **Inform parents/guardians of transition options and age of majority restrictions in writing** by the student's **age of 17 or earlier.**
- **Educate parents/guardians** on postsecondary resource and service options for their child.
- **Encourage students** with disabilities to earn a high school diploma.
- **For students with disabilities** who may not be able to earn a high school diploma, **teach them up until age 22.**



- Mission: **“Provide information, resources, demonstration and research on pathways to employment** that support youth with disabilities to gain access to **integrated, competitive employment** to the fullest extent possible.”
- VCU-CTI provides **evidence-based resources** and information along with **emerging practices in the field**. The results of research studies and demonstration projects conducted in Virginia help shape the ongoing work of CTI.
- Provides a **resource website, FREE online courses** for Virginia’s middle and high school special educators, **fact sheets on transition** topics, **webcasts** from state and national experts in the field, **emerging and evidence-based practices, Facebook page** with the latest news about transition, **employment resources, and informational videos**.
- **Start on Success (SOS) Program - highly structured school-to-work program**; increases readiness for college and career success for HS students with disabilities.



- Virginia's only **University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities' Education, Research and Service (UCEDD)**.
- Provides technical assistance, research, research dissemination for the higher education setting, support for professionals, provides Training and Technical Assistance Centers.
- PPD's Partners:
 - disAbility Law Center
 - US Administration on Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD Admin.)
 - Virginia Board for People with Disabilities
- Supports people from **birth through aging**.
- Exists **on soft money**, competing for grants.
- **95% of employees are VCU faculty and staff**.
- Landscape Analysis shows a **lack of connectivity between resources**.
- Parents are the "glue" and must be involved in the planning, invested and prepared.



- A professional organization for those who serve students with disabilities that promotes professional leadership through support and instructional best practices, as well as local, state and national trends to improve the quality and delivery of special education services in Virginia's public schools.
- See a **need for Transition Coordinators at each high school (funding)**, a need for local and state resources to be shared with professionals and parents , and a one-stop website.
- **Project SEARCH** modeled a great partnership among **DARS**, the **school**, and the **hospital** to transition students to competitive employment (regulated services, but under-resourced).
- **Need universal/consistent resources and opportunities** for all school divisions.
- **Need a Standards of Quality position (teacher or transition coordinator)** for Special Education to allow county the 80% of funds to pay for the position.



- **“Sister” agency to DARS and provides services starting at birth.**
- Currently, there are **2200 students with 3.5 education coordinators** to serve them.
- The **needs of the deaf and blind are highly unique** and often these students are unable to obtain services due to the **lack of specialized services available.**
- The delay to find assistance for students who are blind may be long, and **parents will pull their children from programs before appropriate service providers can be found.**
- Need better interagency coordination for individuals who are blind, vision impaired and deafblind (to be able to use “I’m Determined”, “Child Find”, Career and Technical Education, etc.).



- **Community Colleges may not discriminate** against applicants/students with disabilities; however, colleges are not required to provide the same type of support as was provided in public K-12 schools.
- **Students are no longer protected under the IDEA** but are protected under the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** and **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act**.
- Colleges typically have **disability counselors**, and **reasonable accommodations must be made for students** with disabilities upon request.
- Some colleges have programs that cater to students with developmental disabilities, such as **ILEAP** at Mountain Gateway Community College and **PAVE** at Reynolds Community College.



- **Mountain Gateway Community College (MGCC) - Inclusive Learning Enabled Action Program (ILEAP)** for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
 - Comprehensive Transition Postsecondary Program
 - Combines independent living skills with occupational experience
 - ILEAP students earn up to 27 credit hours with general population students
 - Helps ILEAP students transition to paid employment



Service Area(s): Alleghany County, Bath County, Botetourt County, Buena Vista City, Covington City, Lexington City, Rockbridge County



- **Reynolds Community College - Program for Adults in Vocational Education (PAVE)**
 - 2-year vocational training program
 - Serves students with intellectual, physical and learning disabilities and mental health disorders
 - Industry certifications are offered in Food Services, Health Care and Child Care
 - Enriches academic abilities with customized curriculum and all-encompassing support
 - Provides unpaid internships after completion of professional and social skills training

Service Area(s): City of Richmond, and Counties of Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, Louisa, and Powhatan





Additional Research



- **“Transition Tennessee”** is Tennessee’s website for helping students with disabilities transition to competitive employment and independence.
- **State contracts with Vanderbilt University** to develop, maintain, update, and host this site (12-14 staff, \$2M per 5 years).
- **Provides transition resources** for students and families, as well as professionals.
- **Began in 2015** as “TennesseeWorks.”
- Started with the educator side; it took **about 1 year to get up and running**. Now includes the student side.
- **Marketed this tool through word-of-mouth, presentations, in-person trainings across the state**, and NTACTION; created partnerships with school districts to spread the word. Currently have 10K users (professionals, students, family members).
- Includes **online courses, assessment tools and curricula databases, Pre-Employment and Training Services sequencing guide, recorded virtual trainings, and resource listings**.



- There is often a **communication gap** since parents are not familiar with disability nomenclature used by professionals. This includes **confusion about the IEP process and transition options**, as well as **why** transition recommendations are being made.
- **Parents don't know enough about the transition process or what resources are available** so don't know what questions to ask the case worker or counselor.
- During the case worker calls or intake calls, **case workers should ask questions specific to the services available** so that parents can respond with challenges they have. Instead of asking, "Is there anything else I can assist you with?" ask:
 - How is your child doing with daily living and communication skills?
 - What interests does your child have, and can we channel these into employment down the road (e.g., he's nonverbal but loves to sort items)?
 - What functional skills are successful/still challenging for your child (communication, mobility, behavior, social skills, daily living, etc.)?
 - Have you thought about an occupational or employment evaluation?

Best Practices - Adapted from National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) and George Lucas Educational Foundation



- **Develop a rigorous and relevant job exploration curriculum; expose students to a variety of career pathways in high school.**
- **Start transition planning early**– middle school, if not elementary school (required by age 14 years old in Virginia).
- **Find out student’s interests and abilities; align with courses.**
- **Inform parents/guardians about age of majority** and no longer being able to share education records without written authority.
- **Provide summary of performance before the end of high school** that includes academic achievement; functional performance; supports needed; education, career and vocational goals; and next steps.
- **Have all state and local resources/services listed in one place** to ease the search by families and professionals.
- **Educate parents/guardians about being proactive** and contacting local resources and services **for postsecondary continuing care.**



- **Support state and local agencies that serve students with disabilities** with letters of support and funding, if possible.
- **Convene relevant representatives from state agencies/others to discuss and develop collaborative agreements** to identify resources and reduce duplication of services, or expand to meet needs.
- **Take full advantage of technology and vocational exploration services (internships)** to assist students in finding their passion for future employment and career options.
- **Teach professionals how to ask better questions and to relay information in layman's terms** for parents.
- **Connect students to real-life learning opportunities.**
- **Provide support groups or mentors** for parents/guardians.
- **Provide dedicated transition assistance and counseling** for each student with a disability.
- **Take advantage of all federal funding** to develop a top-notch, standard transition program that can be replicated in each school or community.



Transition Process for Students with Disabilities

Findings and Recommendations



Finding 1: Many families are not aware that once a student with a disability turns 18 years old, that student’s special education service records may not be shared with the parents and will not be transferred to a local Community Services Board for continued services. The 18 year old student is the only one who can legally gain access to these records, unless an agreement designates another person to have access. Continuing after a student transitions, and in order to build on previous progress made, future service providers often need to access relevant parts of the whole record to continue to meet the needs of the adult with different abilities.

The Virginia Department of Education has detailed guidance document on working with students during transition, “Transfer of Rights for Students with Disabilities Upon Reaching the Age of Majority in Virginia.” The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services does not currently have such guidance.



Recommendation 1:

Require that the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, in coordination with the Department of Education, develop and disseminate best practice standards to Community Services Boards (CSBs) and local education agencies about how to work with local education agencies, students, and families through the transition process. Additionally, best practices should include information about what special education, service, or accommodation records to transfer at the age of majority and/or high school completion. The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services shall use existing Department of Education Guidance in developing best practices.



Finding 2: Information on the transition process and opportunities available for students with disabilities for their families and professionals alike is overwhelming and confusing. There are similar services available from different organizations with slight variations in delivery and practice. Families and students may not be able to find the information they need to make a fully informed decision to meet the future needs of the adult student. Early on in the planning process, (late middle school or early high school) more awareness is needed by classroom teachers, counselors, and special education teachers on the work-world need for a specific type of diploma for various colleges and careers, and/or knowledge of the state and local resources available beyond high school, in order to relay this information to students and families.



Recommendation 2:

Introduce a budget amendment directing the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services to work with the Department of Education, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC), Virginia Commonwealth University's Partnership for People with Disabilities, and Center on Transition Innovations (CTI) to ensure that online resources are readily available and disseminated to all individuals of transition age and their families. This includes utilization and promotion of PEATC's online training course, Transition University (TU) conducted in coordination with VDOE and PEATC's online transition guide and resource documents on its website.



Recommendation 2 Cont'd.

DARS, DOE, DBHDS, PEATC, Partnership for People with Disabilities, and CTI shall explore whether these online resources should be expanded to ensure full coverage of resources for students with disabilities on transition services beyond high school, including, transfer requirements, provider and service options, diploma requirements for future career or educational goals, and other helpful information. Assess whether PEATC's online resources, including Transition University and PEATC's transition webpage should serve as the central hub or a separate website should be developed with the goal of ensuring access to families and promotion of resources and information by DARS and DBHDS without duplicating existing efforts. Review transition resources on other organizational websites including, but not limited to, Partnership for People with Disabilities.



Recommendation 3:

Request that the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services work with the Virginia Commonwealth University's Partnership for People with Disabilities, and the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC), to develop and disseminate virtual training on transition resources and services for teachers in each high school or school district.



Finding 3: Students with disabilities are often unintentionally excluded from participating in vocational rehabilitation (VR) or internship programs because of the lack of knowledge about needed adjustments or accommodations, or the high degree of liability for a particular job. This is a potential barrier to employment. Virtual reality software would allow students with disabilities to explore a wider variety of career options. The Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA) policies regarding the use of virtual reality technology do not allow for its use in the vocational rehabilitation setting.

Currently, the Virginia Department of Education uses state funds to provide virtual job shadowing and AZTEC software, for industry credentialing. These funds are used specifically for students with autism.



Recommendation 4:

Request the Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA) work with agencies that provide services and workplace opportunities to students with disabilities, to identify solutions to barriers in using virtual reality software and other relevant transition content applications for students with disabilities.



Finding 4: Local businesses with internship programs are hesitant to work with students with disabilities. Employers are not knowledgeable about how to accommodate or manage these young students who may have different strengths and challenges. Additionally, employers are not aware of local resources or available tools that would help a transitioning student to be successful in the job. Programs such as Project Search and Start on Success have an 80% employment success rate, and they should be used as role models for schools that do not have internship programs for students with disabilities.

Recommendation 5:

Request that the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) continue to develop internship opportunities for students with disabilities. DARS should work in collaboration with other state agencies and local governments including, but not



Recommendation 5 Cont'd.- limited to, the Virginia Departments of Labor and Industry, Education (Career and Technical Education, as well as Special Education), the Blind and Vision Impaired, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, as well as the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, local chambers of commerce, businesses and other relevant organizations to provide internship opportunities for students with disabilities. These opportunities will ensure that each student with a disability has a blueprint for their career and job placement after high school. DARS shall continue to educate internship provider businesses about different types of accommodations that can be accessed for various disabilities. DARS shall take advantage of established programs and increase statewide school participation in programs such as Project Search and other post high school programs.



Recommendation 6: Request that the Secretary of Education, in coordination with the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, Secretary of Labor, and Secretary of Commerce and Trade, investigate the feasibility of developing a comprehensive program to reduce unemployment among adults with disabilities by assisting and supporting businesses to attract, hire, train, and retain adults with disabilities.



Finding 5: Funding is needed to assist with the transition of students with disabilities to their highest level of independent living. Schools do not have enough transition coordinators to assist students who are moving out of the school system to find needed services for independent living.

Transition Coordinators work closely with state agencies, service providers, and case managers to bridge the gap for students and families between the high level of services provided to students in secondary school and the services available after aging out of high school. This gap is often referred to as “the cliff.”



Recommendation 7: Introduce a budget amendment to fund a transition coordinator grant program to be administered through the Virginia Department of Education. These coordinators shall be employed by local school divisions and work with other community partners (local Community Services Boards and other agencies) to assist students with disabilities and their families in preparing for future service needs and employment opportunities. School districts shall apply to the Department of Education to receive state grant funding for a coordinator position.



Recommendation 8:

Require that all public high schools identify the person responsible for transition planning and coordination at each school. Make such identification of the person responsible for transition planning available to the public.

Recommendation 9:

Support the Virginia Department of Education in their use of IDEA funding to develop a state special education transition management position to oversee transition coordinator issues and funding across the state.



Finding 6: The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities serves as the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Council for Virginia and works to help people with developmental disabilities meet their service needs for independence in a respectful and dignified manner. The Virginia Commonwealth University's Partnership for People with Disabilities offers education, health, early childhood, and community living training programs for both providers and people with disabilities themselves. The disAbility Law Center works with individuals in the community to address abuse, neglect, and discrimination of people with disabilities by providing legal services with grant funds. These DD council organizations do not have the staff to directly manage the transition process but are aligned with assisting in this effort and have the



Finding 6 Cont'd. - expertise to provide guidance for professionals, as well as student and family education and awareness. These organizations serve a strategic role in assisting students with disabilities, their families and professionals to help with the transition from high school to independent living and self-sufficiency. Grant funds are used to support their services.

Recommendation 10:

Request that the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth write letters of endorsement for Virginia Commonwealth University's Partnership for People with Disabilities, the disAbility Law Center, the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, and the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services. The letters will show support for these organizations towards their goal of obtaining grant funding to assist with the advocacy for, and the transition of, students with disabilities to adulthood and independent living.



Finding 7: Services provided by a given organization are not necessarily known across agencies and providers. There is a strong need for better collaboration of services to assist transitioning students with disabilities to adulthood. This lack of organization encourages duplication, poor communication with families, and unused services and benefits for individuals. The Virginia Intercommunity Transition Council, under the Virginia Department of Education, convenes many of the organizations with the goal of promoting successful transition outcomes for youth by providing leadership and innovation in employment, education, and community support systems. The role of this organization could be more widely felt.

In addition, in 2020, the Joint Legislative and Audit Commission (JLARC) recommended that the Virginia Department of Education



Finding 7 Cont'd. - develop a robust statewide plan for improving transition planning for students with disabilities. JLARC's report raised this as an issue of oversight that the Department could address. The Department of Education is currently developing a statewide plan and will provide its report by December 1, 2022.

Recommendation 11: Introduce a language only budget amendment directing the Virginia Department of Education to have the Virginia Intercommunity Transition Council meet at least biannually to help implement its statewide plan for oversight of local practices related to transition planning and services.

The objective of this council shall include streamlining and collaboration, developing a better transition communication



Recommendation 11 Cont'd.

network in the Commonwealth, educating all members about what Virginia and local organizations provide for students transitioning to adulthood, identifying any gaps or overlap in services for potential streamlining and problem-solving, and developing an improved transition infrastructure for students with different abilities.

This council shall include, but not be limited to, the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired, Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Department of Social Services, Virginia Community College System, and Virginia Commonwealth University's Partnership for People with Disabilities.



Additional Finding: The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities published a number of recommendations in their *2022 Assessment of Access to Information for People with Disabilities and their Family Members*. A couple of their recommendations addressed school-to-adult transition.

Request that the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth write a letter of support to the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities for the following recommendations, as amended below in **bold**:

Recommendation: Virginia Department of Education (DOE) **and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services**, along with the local school divisions, should work with CSBs/BHA within the school division's catchment area to designate a staff to act



Additional Recommendation Cont'd. - as a lead for school-to-adult life transition and work with the school division's Transition Coordinator to ensure that accurate and timely information is distributed to families. CSBs/BHA should utilize existing school-to-adult life transition resources such as PEATC's Transition University for CSB staff training and development.

Recommendation: The CSBs/BHA, through their member organization, Virginia Associations of Community Services Boards (VACSB), should consider operating a Community of Practice for School-to-Adult Transition, to foster learning and identify some of the exemplary practices taking place in several CSBs.



Public Comment

Written public comment must be
received by 5:00 p.m.
on October 14, 2022.

Submission instructions are available
online (<http://vcoy.virginia.gov>)