

RECRUITING & RETAINING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Va. Code § 22.1-214.4 (5.)





COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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The Honorable Ghazala Hashmi
Chair, Senate Education and Health
General Assembly Building, Rm 616
P. O. Box 396
Richmond, VA 23218

The Honorable Sam Rasoul
Chair, House Education
General Assembly Building, Rm 910
201 North 9th Street,
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Senator Hashmi and Delegate Rasoul:

Section [22.1-214.4\(5.\)](#) of the Code of Virginia requires the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to take specific steps to improve both the provision of special education and related services and the outcomes for students with disabilities. The law requires the VDOE to provide training, develop training modules, conduct reviews of individualized education programs (IEPs), and develop policies and procedures to improve the administration and oversight of special education in the Commonwealth.

The law also includes a focus on recruiting and retaining highly qualified special education teachers, aligning with the VDOE's priorities and initiatives and building upon the Virginia Board of Education's work to prioritize the development of policies that seek to improve long-standing teacher shortages across the Commonwealth. Importantly, this legislative mandate also aligns with the 2022 enacted [Executive Directive 3 - Addressing Teacher Shortages in Virginia Schools](#), which bolsters and strengthens the VDOE's ability to remove obstacles that prevent qualified individuals from filling teacher vacancies in critical shortage areas, such as special education. The VDOE's ongoing effort to empower school divisions to recruit, grow, and retain highly qualified teachers remains a top priority.

Among other requirements, House Bill 2299 and Senate Bill 1288 require the VDOE to develop and implement a plan for addressing teacher shortages in the area of special education. Specifically, § [22.1-214.4\(5.\)](#) requires the VDOE to take the following action:

5. Develop and maintain a statewide strategic plan for recruiting and retaining special education teachers. At a minimum, such plan shall (i) use data analyses to determine the specific staffing needs of each local school division on an ongoing basis; (ii) evaluate the potential effectiveness of strategies for addressing recruitment and retention challenges, including tuition assistance, differentiated pay for special education teachers, and the expansion of special education teacher mentorships; and (iii) estimate the costs of implementing each such strategy, including the extent to which federal funds could be used to support implementation. The Department shall, no later than November 1 of each year, update the Chairmen of the Senate Committee on Education and Health and the House Committee on Education on its progress in implementing such plan.

Key Data Points

Based on various [VDOE reports](#), including the data collection of the [Position and Exit \(PEC\)](#), the [Staffing and Vacancy Report](#), the Instructional Personnel Data Collection System, Board of Education Annual Reports, Educator Preparation Program (EPP) enrollment figures, the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) (NCES), and anecdotal evidence from educators and school leaders across the state, Virginia school divisions are successfully navigating a challenging landscape of localized educator shortages that predate the COVID-19 pandemic. For the 2022-2023 school year, NCES reported Virginia’s student-to-teacher ratio reached its lowest level in seventeen years, meaning class sizes are decreasing, and students are receiving greater attention in classrooms. More recent VDOE reporting confirms that from the school-year ended (SYE) 2022 – SYE 2024, 2,550 (+2.8%) more fully-licensed teachers were in Virginia’s public school classroom.

Special education staffing has long been the most challenging educator group to fully-staff. In SYE 2022, the special educator teacher vacancy rate was at 4.4%, compared to the 2.8% that was measured across remaining teaching positions. Despite these challenges, across the SYE 2022 – SYE 2024 period, 539 (+4.3%) more fully-licensed special education teachers were in Virginia’s classrooms. This gain in special education teachers provided lower class sizes across the commonwealth for especially vulnerable students. Additionally, there was significant growth in the paraprofessionals who work with students, youth, and their families to assist with instruction and other services, with 2,713 (+22%) more personnel supporting Virginia’s special education teachers throughout the period.

Analyzing trends in unfilled positions can be helpful in understanding shortages, but it can distort the full picture of the educator landscape if not contextualized with recent legislative, policy, and operational changes. Since the SYE 2022, changes to SOQ staffing ratios for special education students increased the number of teachers required for Virginia’s high-need students. As a result, we have seen special education teacher vacancies increase from 654 to 784, despite gains in filled positions outlined above. This represents 6.10% of the special education teaching workforce, compared to 5.30% in SYE 2022. **Despite the slight increase in vacancies, for the first time in over 20 years special education was not the number one critical shortage area**

(Elementary Education K-6 had 1,314 vacancies).

Scott et al (2021) conducted research in special education teacher attrition and retention by focusing on special education teacher persistence, intrinsic motivators, and satisfaction with salary. **The study found that teacher persistence in special education is linked to a positive working/learning climate and receiving strong support from administrators.** Special education teacher persistence is not dependent on one factor, but the intersection of environmental and intrinsic factors. This increase in the number of teacher vacancies correlates with the downward trend in education preparation program (EPP) enrollment.

According to data made available through the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE)'s [Title II of the Higher Education Act's](#) website, enrollment in Virginia teacher preparation programs for all students has decreased from 13,511 students in the 2011-12 academic year to 8,777 in the 2019-2020 academic year (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). This mirrors national trends in other teacher preparation programs. The most recent USDOE report from 2023 shows the numbers of students enrolled in Virginia teacher preparation programs have begun to grow by almost 300 new students (9,069). The number of teacher preparation program completers also grew by 388 over the previous year.

Data presented in the Commonwealth of Virginia's Critical Teaching Shortage Endorsement Areas has consistently found special education leading the top ten critical shortage teaching endorsement areas for the state. The VDOE's [December 1 Special Education Child Count](#) collection is a "snapshot" of students receiving special education services on December 1 each year. Additionally, the VDOE provides data and reports, by region and/or by school division, on the number of teachers with a special education endorsement and the demographics of the students with disabilities they serve. Furthermore, the Recruitment Incentive for Public Education (RIPE), a new data source, provides a snapshot of vacancies reported in mid-August. This data is consistent with data collected from school divisions on critical shortage endorsement areas and presented in VDOE's [Education Workforce Data](#).

Virginia's Plan Progress

As reported last year, in December 2020, the General Assembly's Joint Legislative Audit Review Commission (JLARC) released its report, [K-12 Special Education in Virginia](#), which recommended that language be included in the Appropriation Act directing the VDOE to develop and maintain a statewide strategic plan for addressing the special education teacher shortage. In 2021, the VDOE responded with the creation of a comprehensive strategic recruitment and retention plan for special education educators—and an internal working group that included staff from several offices within the department including Educator Preparation and Special Populations. Staff from these departments continue to engage and support this important work. The VDOE consistently identifies strategies, activities, and approaches to build upon and strengthen the strategies outlined in VDOE's initial [strategic recruitment and retention plan](#) for special education; current activities are informed by emerging needs of Virginia's school divisions and national and regional trends in educator recruitment and retention practices.

Simultaneously, in 2021, Virginia partnered with the Center for Collaboration for Effective

Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR), a national organization funded by the USDOE’s Office of Special Education Programs. CEEDAR is dedicated to improving student outcomes by building the capacity of state personnel preparation programs (Virginia Technical Assistance, 2020). The purpose of the collaboration continues to be to work directly with school divisions to plan and implement evidence-based talent management strategies to address special education teacher shortages within localities. The objective of the VDOE’s work with CEEDAR is to support high-quality preparation for special educators, which will, in turn, increase student outcomes. Several members of VDOE’s core interagency team participate on the Virginia CEEDAR team. The Virginia CEEDAR team, in conjunction with other state agency technical assistance partners, institutions of higher education, allied professional organizations, and local school divisions are working to create data-driven, evidenced-based action plans to address retention and recruitment that begins with educator preparation programs. Team member participation and policy briefings on the topic from the [CEEDAR Center and the Center for Great Teacher and Leaders \(2020\)](#) affirms Virginia’s development and implementation of a comprehensive, systemic approach that includes long-term strategies across the career continuum to address the persistent shortages in special education.

In January 2022, a formal Advisory Committee for Recruitment and Retention was established and launched to provide feedback on plan goals and strategies, as well as determine metrics for plan evaluation. Additionally, a new Special Education and Student Service Recruitment and Retention Specialist was hired in May of 2022, to provide expertise in the Office of Special Populations on special education recruitment and retention. VDOE is also responsible for managing the Creating Capacity for Change and Continued Professional Growth grant from the USDOE (Award H325P210003), which assists the VDOE in its efforts to bolster special education teacher retention efforts through implementation of multi-tiered systems of supports. This five-year grant just concluded year three of implementation. Data indicate over 95% of special education teachers participating in the pilot group were retained across a two-year period.

Additionally, the VDOE is developing a comprehensive and coherent set of policies and practices that address the following goals:

- Goal #1: Reduce the barriers for qualified individuals to enter the profession as special education teachers.
- Goal #2: Attract and increase the number of candidates eligible to fill public school division’s hard to staff positions, specifically in special education, and retain them once employed; and
- Goal #3: Strengthen strategies to recruit and retain a diverse, highly qualified educator workforce of special educators.

These goals have been reviewed by the Recruitment and Retention Advisory Committee and align with Executive Directive 3 ([ED-3 Addressing Teacher Shortages in Virginia Schools](#)).

Strategies for Virginia's Plan

The VDOE continues to utilize resources from the USDOE's Office of Special Education Programs to support its efforts to focus on teacher recruitment and retention in the area of special education. For example, OSEP's [Attract, Prepare, and Retain Initiative](#) not only addresses critical shortages but also the causative factors that impact the professional pipeline of educators. VDOE has used resources produced as a part of this initiative to engage with the field, and in the identification and confirmation of leverage points within the system to support strategic change and inform recruitment and retention efforts. The VDOE has disseminated these resources and utilized these strategies not only in demonstration grant programs, but also in supporting conversations between local school divisions on creative and innovative programming to address critical shortage needs. From these and other studies, VDOE has utilized the following key strategies as part of the implementation of Executive Directive 3 and an overall strategic plan for recruitment and retention of the teacher workforce:

- grow-your-own initiatives, especially those that help paraprofessionals become licensed teachers;
- targeted incentives directed at teachers willing to teach in high need schools or subject areas, such as differentiated compensation;
- prioritize recruitment and higher education partnerships which provide tuition for aspiring special education teachers and other hard-to-fill areas;
- improved recruitment and hiring practices across divisions supported by technical assistance from the VDOE which address access and human resources practices;
- improved school-level support for teachers, including formal induction and mentoring programs;
- educated division leaders on universal teacher licensure to make it easier for special education teachers in good standing from other states to teach in Virginia;
- use of interactive technologies to meet professional development needs; and
- the ongoing use of data metrics to develop and deploy recruitment and retention work.

Below are the efforts currently being implemented in Virginia; each item includes a specific reference to the strategic plan goal that is supported. The strategies collectively provide a path to achieve the goals and preliminary annual metrics on impact collected by the VDOE in conjunction with local school divisions. They include the following:

- the removal of the VCLA as a requirement to earn a teaching license in Virginia (Goal 1);
- the addition of Special Education to the approved areas for the Career Switcher program (Goal 2,3);

- providing tuition assistance to add endorsement areas (Goals 2, 3);
- offering licensure support for provisionally endorsed teachers (Goals 1, 2, 3);
- supporting with the comprehensive retention planning within an MTSS framework through the Personnel Development Grant: Creating Capacity for Change and Continued Professional Growth (Award H325P210003) (Goals 1, 2, 3);
- Implementing and continuing the [Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan Program](#) (Goal 1);
- the offer of differentiated salary structures or retention bonuses by school divisions (Goals 1, 2);
- collaborating with institutions of higher education and CEEDAR to focus on incorporation of High Leverage Practices (HLPs) into teacher preparatory programs (Goal 2, 3);
- the implementation of the CEEDAR Technical Assistance Grant to VDOE Special Populations (Goals 2, 3);
- the hiring of dedicated staff at the VDOE to include: a director of apprenticeships, a special education resource development coordinator, an information technology specialist, and an education data specialist (Goals 2);
- the expansion of the Journey into Teaching Program (Provisional) into other Superintendents' regions (Goals 2, 3);
- the launch of the [Marketing Campaign](#): Becomeateacher.virginia.gov webpage, and other state-level promotional materials (Goal 2);
- the maintenance of an online statewide recruitment system, which rolled-out in 2023 in connection with the marketing campaign (Goal 2).
- the continued payments for internships for aspiring teachers (Goals 1, 2);
- an ongoing collaboration with Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS) and Old Dominion University's Center for Implementation and Evaluation of Education Systems (CIEES) to develop evidence-based practice (EBP) modules for incorporation into teacher preparatory programs in Virginia (Goal 2, 3).

In addition to these strategies that are currently being implemented, VDOE is working with the Advisory Committee for Recruitment and Retention for future implementation of additional strategies that have been highlighted by national organizations or have been proven successful in other states. Examples of strategies under consideration include:

- Create a specialized pathway for Early Education Special Education Teachers (Goal 1);

- Professional Learning Community for Human Resources staff in school divisions (Goals 2, 3); and
- Expanded Mentorship Incentive and Training (Goals 2, 3).

New for the 2023-2024 school year but already impacting school divisions are two initiatives: the additional alternate pathway to earning full certification from iteach as well as the Grow Your Own- Teacher Apprenticeship grant.

The iteach system allows provisional licensed teachers to complete remaining teacher education courses asynchronously within a self-paced program at a much lower cost than traditional programs. This program was approved by the Virginia Board of Education in June of 2023 for more than twenty divisions under two conditions. First, they must maintain their accreditation through the Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP). Second, participating school divisions are required to have mentorship programs for new teachers.

Throughout the 2023-2024 school year new divisions were added to the program. The total number of divisions utilizing the iteach program in Virginia is now 75 divisions. As of August of 2024, 81 teachers have completed the program. There are 557 teachers hired in divisions and working in residency with their mentor teacher. Additionally, there are 844 current Virginia iteach enrollments working towards a provisional license. Specifically, to special education, there are 137 enrollees identified as special education teachers. There are 21 enrollees in the adapted curriculum pathway and 116 in the general curriculum area. To assure that this program provides high quality preparation for special education teachers, VDOE leadership and iteach have sought oversight from the Southeastern Cooperative Educational Programs (SECEP) to evaluate and recommend improvements in the program.

In November 2021, the U.S. Department of Labor approved K-12 teaching as an “apprenticable” occupation, qualifying teacher apprentice programs for funding through several federal workforce grants administered by the Virginia Department of Workforce Development and Advancement (Virginia Works). In October of 2023, Virginia completed the last steps in the process with Virginia Works to officially be registered as the sponsor for the Registered Teacher Apprenticeship program. One week later, VDOE released the request for proposals for the [Grow Your Own- Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program](#). The Grow Your Own (GYO) or apprenticeship programs are designed as partnerships between local school divisions and higher education teacher preparation programs. Unlike traditional college teacher preparation programs, these programs allow aspiring educators to get the best of both worlds with extended apprenticeships and high-quality coursework. In the past, an aspiring teacher would have to complete almost all their coursework prior to a 12-week clinical experience. The apprenticeship model blends these two elements together, providing aspiring educators practical extensions of coursework throughout their apprenticeship resulting in higher retention of theory and extensive opportunities to practice what they are learning. More importantly, the apprentices become part of the school community and are more likely to stay in teaching than traditionally prepared teachers.

In a registered apprenticeship, an aspiring teacher spends an extended time in the classroom with a master teacher using an apprentice model. The apprenticeship provides 2,000-3,000 hours of

on-the-job training with a master teacher in a school-based setting. At the same time, the apprentice receives at least 288 hours of coursework to complete a bachelor's degree and licensure requirements. Moreover, as an apprentice, the aspiring educator works as a classroom assistant getting paid at least \$14/hour. Apprenticeship programs produce educators that are well prepared without the financial barriers associated with traditional preparation since individuals are paid during their preparation and have the advantage of using federal workforce funds to cover a portion of program costs. This low-to-no cost approach is the fastest growing apprenticeship occupation in the Commonwealth.

Twenty-eight school divisions in partnership with ten educator preparation programs received funding to implement a registered teacher apprenticeship in the 2023-2024 school year. This initial investment led to the registration of 50 teacher apprentices with plans to grow the program in subsequent years. Most school divisions implementing the program will focus their initial efforts on training teacher apprentices with endorsements in special education and elementary education. For the first year of implementation about half (or 32 of 65 teacher apprenticeships) of the new apprenticeships were in special education areas with two thirds in elementary education.

In partnership with Virginia Works, the VDOE was awarded \$6 million in competitive funding from the U.S. Department of Labor through the State Apprenticeship Expansion Funding (SAEF) opportunity in [July 2024 which was announced via a press release](#). This grant funding will allow the VDOE to expand teacher apprenticeships to an additional 80 school divisions with 170 teacher apprentices projected. The emphasis of the next class of apprentices will focus on reaching 50% of all apprentices coming from special education endorsements. It also establishes the Virginia Registered Apprenticeship in Teaching Technical Center in collaboration with the National Center for Grow Your Own (NCGYO), a national expert on registered teacher apprenticeships, and expands dual enrollment and pre-apprenticeship opportunities through the creation or expansion of Teachers for Tomorrow programs. The grant supports the creation of registered principal apprenticeship programs to develop and retain strong leaders. Lastly, the funding will open K-12 teacher aide/paraprofessional apprenticeship programs to develop a paid stepping-stone for individuals working on pursuing their associate degree.

Legislation focused on a critical needs area was House Bill 269 Provisional (Career Switcher) licensure for special education candidates. House Bill 269 allows for divisions to hire special education teachers who have completed 60% of the special education endorsement requirements as part of Level 1 Career Switcher program preparation. Such career switchers must meet remaining requirements as part of Level II and III preparation. To assist local superintendents with filling vacancies House Bill 632 established universal licensure by reciprocity for teachers holding valid out-of-state licenses with full credentials and at least three years of teaching experience in non-virtual classroom settings. These legislative changes along with the VDOE teacher pipeline efforts are making progress to address the critical shortages experienced in struggling school divisions.

Efforts of the Office of Special Populations

In collaboration with other VDOE departments and offices, allied professional organizations, and technical assistance partners, the VDOE's Special Populations department is continually

prioritizing funding to develop and expand statewide teacher induction options grounded in research to improve professional practice. Currently, four academies are designed to improve leading effective teaching and learning in our schools:

- **Journey into Teaching Academy (JITA):** Beginning fall 2024, the VDOE will facilitate its seventh cohort of the JITA, a yearlong professional development initiative for teachers entering their third year of teaching during the 2024-2025 school year as a provisionally licensed special education teacher. JITA is designed as a program to provide teacher support beyond mentorship to enhance the retention, as well as the overall performance of provisionally licensed special education teachers as they journey through the teaching, learning, and licensure processes. In collaboration with VDOE and regional Training and Technical Assistance Centers (TTAC) staff, teachers selected for JITA will have opportunities to gain knowledge and skills in such areas as content knowledge, pedagogical strategies, collaboration/co-teaching strategies, and special education processes and procedures as the teachers enter their third year of teaching. These experiences will help them to excel in their positions as teachers of students with disabilities. Teachers will also be given the opportunity to participate in other VDOE-sponsored summer academies and additional seminars and workshops as preparation for the teacher licensure assessment. Prior to the current school year, the Academy served approximately 125 participants in Superintendents Regions 1-5, and 7-8. Approximately \$60,000 has been allocated annually (Goals 1, 2) to support JITA activities.
- **Northampton County Public Schools JITA:** Beginning in the 2023-2024 school year, JITA was further expanded to incorporate targeted support to provisionally licensed teachers and graduation support in a division with geographical challenges to minimize preparation and retention gaps. In collaboration with VDOE staff, provisionally licensed special education teachers in Northampton County will gain knowledge and skills in pedagogy, content, inclusive practices, and special education processes/procedures. In addition to the teaching staff, school counselors and administrators will engage in strategies to monitor and improve graduation outcomes for students with disabilities. This project will continue for teachers during the 2024-2025 school year. The VDOE allocated \$20,000 during the current school year for teacher assessments and coursework to become fully licensed.
- **Special Education Teacher Support Academy:** The VDOE's Region 5 Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC) at James Madison University (JMU), in partnership with the JMU's College of Education and Content Teaching Academy, is sponsoring for the fourth year a Special Education Teacher Support Academy (SETSA). The SETSA is a yearlong opportunity that focuses on building the capacity and efficacy of early-career special education teachers by improving teacher effectiveness and reducing teacher attrition in K-12 classrooms. SETSA is designed for early-career (beginning year through year 3) special education teachers and experienced special educators interested in being trained as instructional coaches. SETSA provides learning opportunities in professional knowledge, learning environment, instructional planning, instructional delivery, and assessment for and of learning. The program provides learning opportunities in instructional coaching for educators identified as coaches; participants are taught practical strategies and tools around topics that include disability awareness, inclusive

practices, Individual Education Program (IEP) development, student & parent involvement, specially designed instruction, differentiation, universal design for learning and classroom management. All topics are couched in the Council for Exceptional Children's High Leverage Practices. Over the past four years, the Academy served 228 teachers and 115 instructional coaches in all Superintendent's Regions. The VDOE allocated one time grant funding of \$659,080 during a four-year period to support this project.

- **Towards Student Success: Special Educators – Provisional to Full Licensure:** The VDOE's Regions 2 and 3 Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC) at The College of William & Mary (WM) is hosting a year-long project to support provisionally licensed special educators and special educators who are working toward licensure, but whose provisional licenses may have expired (Goals 1, 2, and 3). WM TTAC will support these educators in acquiring skills to support students to improve achievement outcomes for students with disabilities. Provisionally licensed special educators and those seeking licensure as special educators will benefit from information on a variety of topics to hone their skills and practice. Eighteen participants will convene monthly through March 2025. Approximately \$13,500 has been allocated for this initiative.

Additional initiatives prioritizing early career teacher support, including paraeducators, are offered across the Commonwealth annually in partnership with the Council for Exceptional Children and the Virginia Council of Exceptional Children. During the 2023-2024 school year, over 1,000 first- and second-year special education teachers and 500 paraeducators were offered a complimentary one-year professional membership, access to four live professional development sessions, including on-demand and archived resources. Continuing with these efforts to strengthen educator effectiveness, the VDOE allocated funding for the 2024-2025 school year (Goals 1, 2, and 3).

The VDOE's Department of Special Populations will continue to build, promote, and advance practices within these academies to respond to the needs of critical educator shortages and effectiveness in special education instruction to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Therefore, continuing to provide aspiring and provisionally licensed educators affordable access to coursework has also remained a priority. To further support this important work, the VDOE offered the following seven-week, intensive training opportunity through Radford University:

- To increase the pool of eligible applicants for open special education teaching positions across the Commonwealth of Virginia, the **VDOE partnered with Radford University to deliver a compressed, seven-week asynchronous online course for 50 individuals in summer 2023 and 2024.** The VDOE requires teachers hired as provisionally licensed special educators to complete coursework in 1) the competencies of foundations for the education of students with disabilities; and 2) the understanding and application of the legal aspects and regulatory requirements associated with identification, education, and evaluation of students with disabilities. This course, provided through the VDOE partnership, fulfilled this requirement for special educators. Over the past three years, the VDOE allocated \$151,108 for this project (Goal 2) to help ensure these educators are moving toward full certification.

Radford Teaching Preparation Project: Hearing Impairments PreK-12: The purpose of this program is to provide training for full-time undergraduate and graduate students seeking an endorsement in Hearing Impairments in PreK-12. In addition, educators currently working under provisional licensure-serving students with Hearing Impairments and persons seeking an add-on endorsement in this area will be served through part-time studies. Specifically, classes for professional development for teachers, speech language pathologists, early interventionist, interpreters, and other service providers are offered through coursework and summer institutes. The Hearing Impairment/PreK-12 Preparation and Professional Development Program Web site may be accessed at the following link: <https://www.radford.edu/content/grad/home/academics/graduate-programs/education/special-education/deaf.html>. During the 23-24 academic year, the Radford Teacher Prep Hearing Impairment project has served 1 IHE; 89 cases of course enrollment. The VDOE allocated continuing grant funding of \$180,000 during this year (Goals 1, 2).

- Additionally, the **VDOE’s Teacher Education and Special Populations departments provide federal grant funding for teacher recruitment in specific special education teaching endorsement areas.** Virginia is unique in that we have several consortiums and specialty programs that provide coursework and financial support towards endorsements in the area of special education. A sample of projects listed below demonstrate the extensive support in this area, including relevant strategic plan goal alignment.
- **Virginia Consortium for Teacher Preparation in Special Education Adapted Curriculum: Supporting Students with Severe Disabilities and Autism:** The following institutions are part of a consortium that offers an endorsement in Adapted Curriculum K-12: George Mason University, James Madison University, Old Dominion University, Radford University, and Virginia Commonwealth University. Utilizing distance education and a shared program of study and coursework, participating universities provide initial licensure in special education, adapted curriculum and add-on endorsement programs, and continuing education courses to enable teachers to meet the state required competencies for highly qualified teachers of students with severe disabilities. (Additional information may be accessed at the [Virginia Consortium for Teacher Preparation in Special Education Adapted Curriculum](#) website.) During the 23-24 academic year, the Consortium has served 6 IHEs; 403 cases of course enrollment. The VDOE allocated continuing grant funding of \$563,677 this period for tuition (Goal 2).
- **Virginia Consortium for Teacher Preparation in Visual Impairment (VI Consortium):** The VI Consortium is comprised of five universities in Virginia that are working together to develop and implement a statewide program to meet the initial and continuing education needs for teachers of students with visual impairments in Virginia. Utilizing distance education and a shared program of study and coursework, participating universities provide coursework toward licensure with an endorsement in visual impairment, and continuing education courses to enable teachers to meet the state required competencies for highly qualified teachers of students with visual impairments. Additional information may be accessed at the [Virginia Consortium for Teacher](#)

[Preparation in Vision Impairment](#) website. During the 23-24 academic year, the VI Consortium has served 3 IHEs; 204 cases of course enrollment. The VDOE allocated continuing grant funding of \$338,404 during this period for tuition (Goals 1, 2).

Federal programs have provided funding for the majority of the initiatives highlighted in this report. Federal funding will be utilized to underwrite the cost of new and expanded strategies through 2024. Any additional funding requests to the General Assembly will be based on a determination of the successful outcomes of program components.

As a part of the continued implementation of Executive Directive 3 and the strategic plan, the VDOE will have an increased ability to support school divisions in the effective recruitment and retention of special education staff by:

- Using state-level data to identify gaps and strengths in human capital resources;
- Reducing barriers for qualified individuals to enter the profession as special education teachers;
- Increasing the pipeline of licensed candidates to fill existing school division special education positions;
- Expanding and improving practices in human capital management for divisions;
- Strengthening strategies and resources to recruit and retain a diverse, highly qualified teaching workforce for the state; and
- Operationalizing metrics for evaluation of the strategic plan and yearly progress.

If you require additional information, please contact Mr. Robert Gilstrap, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Educator Preparation at (804) 750-8190 or rob.gilstrap@doe.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lisa Coons
State Superintendent of Public Instruction