



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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December 1, 2025

The Honorable Ghazala F. Hashmi  
Chair, Senate Education and Health Committee  
201 North 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Room 6161  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable Sam Rasoul  
Chair, House Education Committee  
201 North 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Room 910  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Chair Hashmi and Chair Rasoul:

As required by Va. Code § 22.1-214.4, the Virginia Department of Education submits the attached statewide plan for improving (i) its ongoing oversight of local practices related to transition planning and services and (ii) its technical assistance and guidance provided for post-secondary transition planning and services.

If you have any questions or require additional information relative to this report, please do not hesitate to contact the Deputy Superintendent of Special Education and Specialized Populations, Dr. Samantha Marsh Hollins, at [Samantha.Hollins@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Samantha.Hollins@doe.virginia.gov), or (804) 750-8738.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Anne Gullickson".

Emily Anne Gullickson, M.Ed. J.D.  
Superintendent of Public Instruction

EAG/SMH

c: The Honorable Aimee Rogstad Guidera  
Virginia Secretary of Education

# STATEWIDE PLAN TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION OF SECONDARY TRANSITION PLANNING AND SERVICES

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Va. Code § 22.1-214.4

December 1, 2025



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## LEGISLATIVE DIRECTIVE

This report has been prepared and submitted to fulfill the requirements of Va. Code § 22.1-214.4, which requires the Virginia Department of Education to develop and maintain a robust statewide plan for improving (i) its ongoing oversight of local practices related to transition planning and services and (ii) its technical assistance and guidance provided for post-secondary transition planning and services. At a minimum, such a plan shall articulate how the Virginia Department of Education will reliably and comprehensively assess, on an ongoing basis, the compliance and quality of transition plans and services for children with disabilities, and communicate findings to local school division staff and local school boards.

The Virginia Department of Education shall, no later than December 1 of each year, update the Chairs of the Senate Committee on Education and Health and the House Committee on Education on its progress in implementing such plan.

### Improvement Plan Update

Over the past year, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and its collaborative partners, including the state parent training and information center and other state agencies as detailed below have implemented a plan to ensure effective local implementation of secondary transition planning and services. This work, alongside developments from the implementation of Chapter 502 passed during the 2024 General Assembly Session, has focused on improving supports to the field to enhance transition outcomes for students with disabilities. The VDOE has updated policy and strengthened implementation supports for educators to meaningfully increase the number of students with disabilities who graduate with a standard high school diploma. Chapter 502 (2024 Acts of Assembly) also provided VDOE with funding for the Parent Educational and Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) to provide training and technical assistance to parents across the Commonwealth and professional development for educators and administrators focused on implementing successful transition planning resourced by sub-grants from the state education agency, such as the Content Teaching Academies.

Progress has been attained on the following strategies to improve transition planning and services in Virginia:

#### *Training and Technical Assistance: Building Field Capacity to Improve Transition*

- From October 2024 through August 2025, VDOE and its partner agencies provided 78 professional learning opportunities and development resources to build awareness of and knowledge about transition planning and services to a variety of stakeholders and organizations. This work was undertaken in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) as well as with the support of the Virginia Commonwealth University's Center on Transition Innovations (CTI), and VDOE's Training and Technical Assistance Centers (TTACs). Examples of these professional learning opportunities are not limited to training specific to:
  - Pathways to increase graduation outcomes utilizing credit accommodations, including special permission credit accommodations, for students with disabilities working towards a Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma. The target audience

for these professional learning events included families, general and special educators, various advisory boards, state education, school-based, and central administration leaders.

Compliance with Indicator 13, development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that document data-driven and comprehensive present levels of academic and functional performance, appropriate goals and measures leading secondary transition planning supportive to employment, education, and independent living.

- Building family awareness of transition planning and services. Community-supported events or resources were provided via ACE-IT in College open house, the Inclusion Project's Connect for Success, and Fast Facts for Families publications.
- Strengthening vocational rehabilitation programs and support from DARS, such as pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) focused on preparation for adult life, and work-based learning (WBL) initiatives, connecting classroom learning to real-world job experiences, developed and supported by CTI.
- VDOE staff provided 26 credit accommodation training sessions for parents and division staff at the local, regional, and state levels to clarify and improve the process for using credit accommodations to support students with disabilities to earn a standard diploma, which has reached over 1,500 parents and educators across the Commonwealth. Many more training sessions will be scheduled between now and the end of the calendar year, reaching countless more parents and educators across the Commonwealth.
- Five professional learning and development resources were curated to expand secondary transition practices to the elementary level for action planning across early grade levels, understanding teaching and learning, and exercising effective decision making, which impacts critical decision points. They are as follows:
  1. *CTI Online Course: Early Transition Planning Strategies for PreK-5*
  2. *Virginia CEC Conference Presentation: CTI Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) Presentation: Postsecondary Transition Begins in Kindergarten*
  3. *Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) Conference Presentation: Mission Accomplished: Transition in Early Childhood*
  4. *Content Teaching Academy (CTA): Transition Begins in Elementary*
  5. *Virginia Association of Education of Young Children (AEYC) Conference Presentation: Everyone Can Play: Supporting ALL Students Through Self-Determination*
- In partnership with CTI, VDOE launched its first Statewide Transition Leaders Academy cohort. From August 2024 through May 2025, this initiative was designed to enhance special education leadership and the implementation of secondary transition by providing comprehensive workshops, seminars, observations, field experiences, and technical

assistance. The aim of these activities and the comprehensive plan is to prepare and retain leaders to improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities across Virginia, facilitating successful transitions to higher education, trade/technical training, career/work, and community life.

- The 2023-2024 Cohort I provided specialized training to 31 participants representing 30 divisions across the eight Superintendent Regions.

**Cohort I Participants by Region**

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Number of Participants	4	3	4	4	5	6	1	4

Across 15 areas of Transition Services Competency, the average growth of competency measures were 25%. The most notable areas of improvement included adapting individual transition plans with a 24% increase, adjusting transition services with a 27% increase, helping students make informed decisions showing a 21% increase, and creating welcoming environments demonstrating a 16% increase. These results highlight meaningful progress in the capacity to design, deliver, and individualize transition services that better support student success.

- VDOE continues to receive consultation and technical assistance from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT-C), funded by the United States Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs. Additionally, on January 20-21, 2025, the VDOE, DARS, and CTI, in collaboration with NTACT-C, provided professional learning and development on Pre-ETS and IEP development for 17 state vocational rehabilitation counselors and 30 transition leader academy participants. On May 6-8, 2025, the VDOE and DARS, in collaboration with NTACT-C, also partnered to present at the Capacity Building Institute, an annual convening and learning event for 45 educators, three agencies, and other stakeholders involved in transition for youth with disabilities. On July 9-10, 2025, this professional learning model was replicated in Virginia, hosting 15 school division personnel and 15 vocational counselors to build capacity, strengthen, and enhance skills in secondary transition planning and services.
- On February 19 (22 participants; 9 divisions), July 29-30 (36 participants; 15 divisions), and August 4-5 (37 participants, 17 divisions) 2025, the VDOE provided professional learning to school divisions from regions 1, 8, 2, and 3, focused on addressing the overuse of the Applied Studies Diploma. Training included instructional strategies to support students in successfully earning a Standard Diploma. Participants were special and general education leaders who, with the support of four TTAC partners, reviewed their school division’s graduation trend data and secondary transition planning processes to identify areas for growth. They also received support in updating policies and procedures to ensure all staff responsible for transition support have clearly documented processes.

### *Policy Development: Building Pathways to Support High Expectations*

- On May 20, 2025, VDOE, along with six individual stakeholders, convened with the [Virginia Board for People with Disabilities](#) to explore innovative ways to address key findings and recommendations regarding the assessment of Pre-ETS, as well as assessment barriers to competitive integrated employment.
- As part of the action plan focused on accountability and preparation for the implementation of the School Performance and Support Framework, VDOE convened a work group of 21 members on March 28, April 4, April 11, and April 25, 2025, to engage in action planning specific to transition programs and support for students with disabilities. Focal points for this work group were expanding opportunities for career exploration, preparation, and planning leading to employment, enlistment, and enrollment experiences, thereby preparing students with disabilities for sustainable pathways following high school graduation. Additional work sessions were held on June 2 and July 8, 2025 to gather input on the inclusion of rigorous and attainable employment opportunities and measures to support the participation of students with disabilities in the 3E Readiness Framework.
- Between February 2025 and August 2025, VDOE held eight meetings of a work group convened in collaboration with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia of 23 members to study the quality and consistency of individualized transition programs developed and implemented across the Commonwealth, and assist in the facilitation and provision of services and accommodations for students with disabilities enrolled in higher education programs.
- To remain compliant with legislation from the 2023 General Assembly Session, written communication is provided annually for school divisions to ensure that each high school in the Commonwealth publicly identifies on its official website the faculty member responsible for special education transition planning and coordination. VDOE collects and maintains this data by September 30 of each school year including for the 2025-2026 school year.
- In response to legislation from the 2025 General Assembly Session, VDOE will develop a model written notification outlining students' rights and obligations related to dual enrollment courses, ensuring that these rights and obligations are appropriately provided for students with disabilities. During the 2025-2026 school year, VDOE is providing professional development about dual enrollment opportunities for students with disabilities.

### *Increasing Self-Determination: Empowering Youth with Skills for Success*

- After 19 years as a state-directed project, VDOE, in collaboration with James Madison University, launched the I'm Determined (IMD) Center. This statewide resource will provide high-quality professional learning and technical assistance for specially designed instruction, models, and practice-based learning using research-based, evidence-based, effective, and/or promising practices for children/youth and families designed to build capacity in schools, school divisions, and the greater community. Much of the self-

determination work is grounded in research around three psychological needs, Competence, Autonomy, and Relatedness (CAR). When a person experiences CAR, greater development of opportunities to experience high levels of self-determination and well-being. The I'm Determined Elements (choice making, decision making, problem solving, self-regulation, self-advocacy, goal setting and attainment, internal locus of control, self-efficacy, self-awareness) add skills, abilities, and beliefs that can be practiced and generalized to enhance learning, leadership, collaboration, and innovation.

- In June 2025, the IMD Center and Partnership for People with Disabilities hosted its annual Youth and Family Summit, bringing together youth with disabilities and their families from across the Commonwealth to inform on components of self-determination behaviors while problem-solving, networking, maximizing simulations and experiences relevant for youth and young adults with disabilities. For nearly two decades, the IMD Summit has supported over 3,000 transition-age students with disabilities and their families from every superintendent's region across Virginia. The IMD Youth Leaders, who lead the youth segment of the summit, have achieved remarkable milestones over the past 19 years. Alumni of the IMD Youth Leader program have gone on to become college graduates, holders of advanced degrees, teachers in both general and special education, business owners, advocates, skilled tradespeople, sales professionals, homeowners, engineers, and actors—and along the way, they have celebrated other personal achievements.

During this reporting year, three school division *echo events* were implemented, and 39 professional learning and development resources were provided internationally, statewide, and regionally. These sessions honed strategies to promote and measure the self-determination elements, with emphasis on integrating specially designed instruction and the high-leverage practices for students with disabilities (collaboration, data-driven planning, instruction in behavior and academics, and intensification/intervention as needed).

- To further support Indicator 14 improvement efforts, the IMD Center coordinated its third Educator Summit on June 10-12, 2025, for 21 educators who are currently implementing self-determination practices to strengthen their knowledge and develop resources for all educators in Virginia. Educators learned strategies to help students communicate their interests, strengths, and needs, promoting autonomy and agency in navigating college, vocational training, and competitive employment settings. Educators learned multi-modal communication strategies (AAC, visual supports, partner-assisted scanning) to enable students to express preferences and goals, supporting successful transition to postsecondary education, training, or employment. Educators learned to adapt instructional materials and classroom routines using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to provide equitable access for students with diverse communication and physical needs and considered collaborative strategies with families and plan for partnerships with interdisciplinary teams to integrate communication supports into transition planning, ensuring students can actively engage in decisions about higher education, employment, and independent living.



The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction is a multi-phase approach that has been piloted by select divisions in Superintendent's Region 4 to support pre- and post-assessment progress monitoring for skill development with the IMD elements.

#### *Technology: Innovation to Support Educators and Students*

- VDOE partnered with its seven regional TTACs and the Virginia Assistive Technology Network to increase the proficiency among stakeholders in the use of assistive technology, accessibility tools, and platform extensions. During this reporting period, strategic planning efforts ensured integration of accessibility training into more than 275 professional learning and development opportunities. Such training increased awareness of educational technology that could support the divisions' comprehensive plan. This included programs that offer platform features such as audio-to-text transcription, font customization, background accessibility options, and computer adaptations, making online learning accessible across various disability categories. Essential planning and messaging to ensure team considerations and implementation of assistive technology for student utilization and access to classroom instruction were paramount.
  - The Partnership for People with Disabilities increased its reach on community mapping awareness, an engagement approach to sharing community resources directly on a digital map. To continue with real-time outreach, development, and use, professional learning and development opportunities were provided to school division personnel participating in leadership academies and state-directed work-based learning projects. Development of this work continues with educators who provide transition planning and services. Community mapping training was delivered to regions 1 and 8 on the following dates: March 27, April 23, September 4, and September 22, 2025. Approximately 120 teachers and support staff attended these sessions.

#### *Resources and Supports: Strategic Resource Allocation to the Field*

- From October 2024 through August 2025, the VDOE, in partnership with other stakeholders on 177 opportunities, developed and/or disseminated a variety of resources available to students, educators, families, and the community that address a wide range of topics regarding transition planning and services including writing effective transition plans; considering all areas of transition for all students in transition planning; transition assessment; specially designed instruction for transition services; youth voice; engagement in Pre-ETS; and establishing community-based instruction and work-based learning (WBL) opportunities, postschool completion planning, and community resources.
- From October 2024 through August 2025, the VDOE provided training and technical assistance, including coaching, to support school divisions in building practices around data, including the implementation of a school division transition self-assessment, the development of a data system, collecting data to monitor progress, and analyzing data to make informed decisions from the individual student to the school division level.

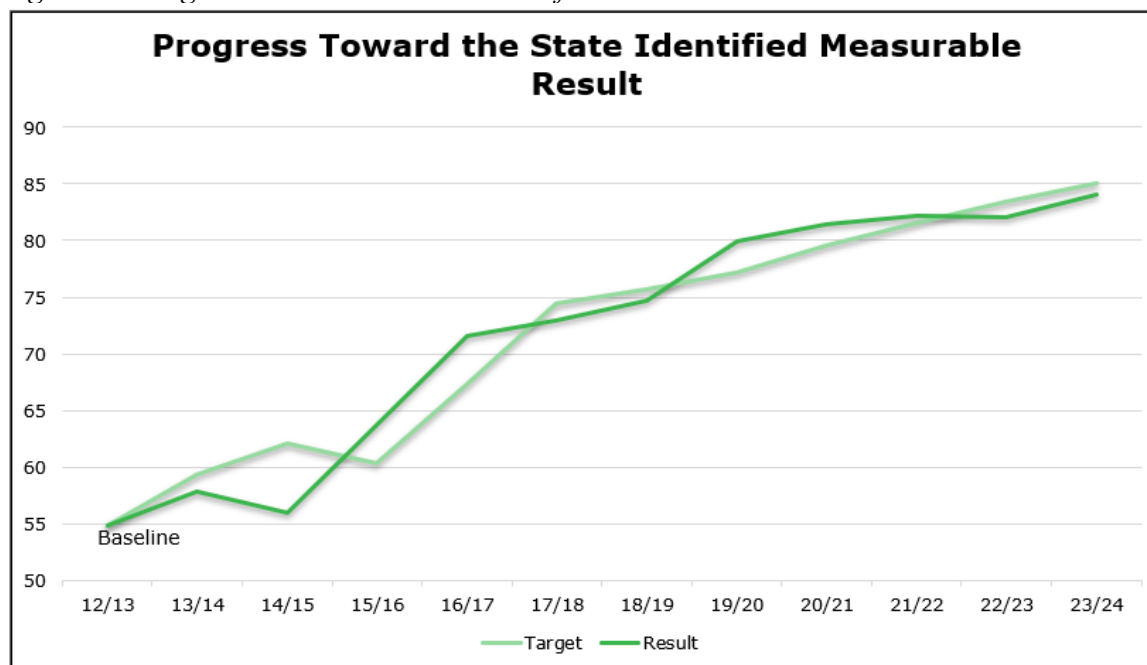
- From October 2024 through August 2025, the VDOE partnered with its regional TTACs and the Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS) to ensure alignment and integration with the school division's Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) framework. The Implementation Science Academy, a five-part professional learning and development series, was implemented to align school division action plans with existing VTSS coaching for effective service delivery.
- On October 15, November 7, and December 4, 2024, VDOE provided professional learning and development about the use of the Applied Studies Curriculum Map to support school divisions in aligning curriculum, evidence-based practices, and community-based instruction in the areas of employment, education, training, and independent living for students working toward an Applied Studies Diploma. This training was further expanded to help educators identify strengths and weaknesses, close academic and skills gaps, and support students transitioning from other options to a Standard Diploma. A total of 263 administrators and teachers participated across the three sessions.
- From October 2024 through August 2025, VDOE provided 16 professional learning sessions targeting the understanding of the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* as it applies to competitive integrated employment to ensure the understanding, interpretation, and impact on Indicator 14 data and increase post-school employment outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

The VDOE Department of Special Education and Specialized Populations will continue to build, promote, and advance practices to improve effective teaching, student learning, and achievement by expanding transition planning and services starting as early as the elementary level. With the successful closure of Virginia's monitoring by the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs in December 2024, VDOE continues to prioritize specially designed instruction and high-leverage practices in transition. These strategies will ensure students' access to graduation pathways and activities that assist youth in gaining employment, post-secondary education, training, and independence within the community, and in continuous improvement of secondary education indicators (graduation, dropout, IEP requirements, and post-school outcomes).

The positive impact of continuous improvement efforts at the statewide and regional levels has led to coordinated efforts to support teacher effectiveness, which has contributed to rising graduation rates toward Standard Diploma attainment for students with disabilities over the last decade, compared to their peers. Virginia set a graduation target of 85.06% in its State Identified Measurable Result (SIMR) (Indicator 17), while 84.03% of exiting students with high-incidence disabilities (Specific Learning Disability, Intellectual Disability, Emotional Disability, and Other Health Impairment) earned a Standard Diploma. This data demonstrates a continued upward trend. Refer to Figure A, Progress Toward the SIMR. This data is collected from school divisions and made available to the public in the Annual Performance Report.

*Figure A: Progress Toward the State Identified Measurable Result*



Furthermore, these aligned efforts will continue in concert with developments related to Chapter 502, passed during the 2024 General Assembly session, which emphasized enhanced

professional learning and development for administrators, general and special education teachers, and school counselors to support programmatic improvement in special education services.