



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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November 1, 2026

The Honorable Barbara Favola
Chair, Senate Education and Health Committee
201 North 9th Street Richmond, VA
23218

The Honorable Sam Rasoul
Chair, House Education Committee
201 North 9th Street, Room 910
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Chair Favola and Chair Rasoul:

Section 22.1-214.4(5) of the *Code of Virginia* requires the Virginia Department of Education (the Department) 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 Department 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 focuses on recruiting and retaining highly qualified special education teachers, aligning with the Department'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. The Department's ongoing efforts to support school divisions to recruit, grow, and retain highly qualified teachers remains a top priority.

Among other requirements, Chapter 451 and Chapter 452 (2021 Acts of Assembly) require the Department to develop and implement a plan for addressing teacher shortages in special education. Specifically, § 22.1-214.4(5) requires the Department 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.

The enclosed report provides an annual update on the efforts and progress of the VDOE in implementing strategies to recruit and retain special education teachers. Should you require any additional information or have questions regarding this report, please contact Dr. Samantha Hollins, Deputy Superintendent of Special Education and Special Populations, at samantha.hollins@doe.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenna Conway', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jenna Conway
Superintendent of Public Instruction

JC/LMB/jmt

CC: The Honorable Jeffrey O. Smith, Virginia Secretary of Education

RECRUITING & RETAINING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Va. Code § 22.1-214.4 (5).



PREFACE

Section 22.1-214.4 of the Code of Virginia directs the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to develop and submit an annual report to the Governor and the General Assembly regarding the state of the educator workforce in the Commonwealth, including information related to educator recruitment, preparation, licensure, employment, retention, and identified workforce needs.

This report was prepared by VDOE staff with contributions from offices responsible for educator preparation and licensure, educator workforce, instruction, data and research, and the Special Populations program team. The Department also drew upon available state and federal data sources, including Virginia educator staffing and workforce collections, educator preparation program data, and other publicly available information.

VDOE acknowledges the contributions of Virginia’s local school divisions, educator preparation programs, educators, school and division leaders, and other partners whose data and ongoing engagement inform the Commonwealth’s understanding of educator workforce conditions.

The report summarizes available information regarding Virginia’s educator workforce and identifies both emerging trends and areas in which additional or improved data are needed to more fully understand educator supply, demand, preparation pathways, vacancies, retention, and workforce outcomes. These findings are intended to support continued efforts to strengthen Virginia’s educator workforce and ensure that schools have access to well-prepared educators to support student learning.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on various Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) reports, including data from the [Position and Exits Collection \(PEC\)](#), the [Staffing and Vacancy Report](#), [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 continue to address and mitigate localized educator shortages. Statewide VDOE data show a 35.9% decrease in teacher vacancies from 2023-24 to 2025-26 school year, improving from 3.9% to 2.54% vacancy rates during that period. Eighteen school divisions and all Governor's Schools reported zero teacher vacancies for the 2025-26 school year. This reduction coincides with several targeted strategies, including expanded pathways to licensure and financial investments in teacher preparation and retention, including teacher apprenticeship programs.

Recent data also provide positive indicators related to teacher retention. The [2025 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions](#) found that 90.6% of elementary and middle school teachers surveyed intended to continue teaching, and 82.5% planned to continue teaching at their current school, compared with 76.6% who reported an intention to remain at their current school in 2022. While these statewide indicators demonstrate progress, shortages remain concentrated in particular endorsement areas and communities, including Special Education.

Special Education PK-12 is the [top critical shortage teaching endorsement area](#) identified for 2026-27, followed by Elementary Education PreK-6, Secondary Science, Middle Education Grades 6-8, Career and Technical Education, Mathematics Grades 6-12, Secondary English, Secondary History and Social Science, World Language K-12, and Health and Physical Education. These rankings are based on an aggregation of staffing and shortage measures reported in the 2024-25 PEC, including unfilled positions and positions filled by licensed teachers teaching outside their area of preparation. All 131 school divisions reported data representing 101,392 full-time equivalent teachers as of October 1, 2024. Since the 2021-22 school year, changes to Standards of Quality (SOQ) staffing ratios for special education students have also increased the number of teachers required to serve Virginia's students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

However, Virginia has expanded pathways into the teaching profession, including pathways designed to increase access to preparation in critical shortage areas such as special education. Since its approval as a statewide alternative route in 2023, iteach has provided an additional pathway through which individuals may complete preparation requirements in special education while teaching under a provisional license. In its first year, 137 special education teacher candidates were enrolled in the iteach pipeline. More broadly, Virginia has expanded registered teacher apprenticeships and teacher residency programs and added new educator preparation program options intended to respond to high-demand workforce needs. These investments have increased the number and types of pathways available to prospective educators, although available statewide data do not yet allow the Department to determine the extent to which these expanded pathways have increased the overall supply or retention of fully licensed special education teachers.

Statewide indicators demonstrate meaningful progress in strengthening Virginia’s educator workforce, yet special education continues to present the most significant and persistent staffing challenges. In recognition of these pressures, VDOE is advancing targeted strategies to improve recruitment and retention in special education positions, including expanding and varying pathways into the profession, strengthening professional learning and induction supports, and building division-level capacity to meet regulatory and instructional demands. While these initiatives represent important steps toward stabilizing the special education workforce, sustained policy attention and continued resource investment are necessary to ensure that divisions can fully meet the needs of students with disabilities and maintain a robust pipeline of well-prepared, highly qualified special educators.

VIRGINIA’S PLAN PROGRESS TO DATE

As reported in previous years, in December 2020, the [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 Department to develop and maintain a statewide strategic plan for addressing the special education teacher shortage. In 2021, the Department 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 Workforce and Special Populations. Staff from these teams continue to engage in and support this important work. The Department regularly identifies strategies, activities, and approaches to build upon and strengthen the strategies outlined in the Department’s initial strategic recruitment and retention plan for special education; current activities are informed by emerging needs of Virginia’s school divisions and effective national and regional trends in educator recruitment and retention practices. and approaches to build upon and strengthen the strategies outlined in the Department’s initial strategic recruitment and retention plan for special education; current activities are informed by emerging needs of Virginia’s school divisions and effective national and regional trends in educator recruitment and retention practices.

Scott et al. (2021) conducted national research on 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 and learning climate, as well as receiving strong support from administrators. Special education teacher persistence is not dependent on a single factor, but rather on the intersection of environmental and intrinsic factors. A 2024 white paper addressing national special education teacher shortages reported that, while the number of students identified as requiring specially designed instruction through special education is increasing, fewer people are choosing to enter special education (Bettini & Gilmour, 2024). These ongoing workforce challenges coincide with longer-term declines in enrollment in traditional educator preparation programs (EPPs).

According to data made available through the U.S. Department of Education’s Title II of the Higher Education Act reporting system, enrollment in Virginia teacher preparation programs has declined over the longer term, from 13,511 students in 2011-12 to 8,856 students in 2023-24. In 2011-2012, Virginia teacher preparation programs reported 3,829 program completers while in 2023-2024, 2,744 completers were reported. While enrollment has remained relatively stable in recent years following earlier declines, the number of individuals completing educator preparation programs remains below enrollment levels, underscoring the importance of monitoring both the traditional educator preparation pipeline and alternative pathways into the profession.

In 2021, Virginia partnered with the [Center for Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform](#) (CEEDAR), a national organization funded by the U.S. Department of Education’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 and with regional educator preparation programs (EPPs) to address special education teacher shortages within localities. The objective of the Department's work with CEEDAR is to support high-quality preparation for special education professionals, which will, in turn, increase student outcomes. Several members of the Department's core interagency team participate in the Virginia CEEDAR State Leadership Team (SLT).

The Virginia CEEDAR team, in conjunction with other state agency technical assistance partners, institutions of higher education (IHE), allied professional organizations, and local school divisions, is working to create data-driven, evidence-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) affirm 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. The Department is also responsible for managing the Creating Capacity for Change and Continued Professional Growth grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Award H325P210003), which assists the Department's efforts to bolster special education teacher retention through the implementation of multi-tiered systems of support. This five-year grant just concluded year four of implementation. Data indicates that over 95% of special education teachers participating in the pilot group were retained across a two-year period.

Additionally, the Department 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 highly qualified educator workforce of special educators.

The Department continues to utilize resources from the USDOE's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) 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* materials not only addresses critical shortages but also the causative factors that impact the professional pipeline of educators. The Department has utilized these support resources generated to engage with the field, identifying and confirming leverage points within the system to support work such as cross-state collaborative planning focused on recruitment and retention efforts. The Department 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. As a state education agency the VDOE uses state levers such as funding and prioritization to deploy the following strategies as part of the implementation of 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 that 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 Department which addresses 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 ongoing efforts being implemented in Virginia; The strategies collectively provide a path to achieve the goals and preliminary annual metrics on impact collected by the Department in conjunction with local school divisions. They include the following:

- The addition of Special Education to the approved areas for the Career Switcher program
- Providing funding assistance for iTeach program fees
- Offering tuition and licensure assessment support for provisionally endorsed teachers
- 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)
- Continued implementation of the Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan Program;
- The offer of differentiated salary structures or retention bonuses by school divisions;
- Collaborating with IHEs and CEEDAR to focus on the incorporation of High Leverage Practices (HLPs) into teacher preparatory programs;
- The implementation of the CEEDAR Technical Assistance Grant to the Department of Special Populations;
- The expansion of the Journey into Teaching Program (Provisional) into other Superintendents' regions; and
- 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

In order to attract and retain special education teachers to the profession, the Virginia Board of Education approved the iteach program as an alternate pathway to earning full certification in July 2023. The iteach program allows provisionally licensed teachers to complete remaining professional studies requirements asynchronously within a self-paced program. While one of the benefits of this program is the lower cost to participants, the other benefit is that all individuals participating in the iteach program must be mentored by an experienced and fully licensed teacher. In addition to the VDOE staff review, the iteach program was reviewed and approved by the Southeastern Cooperative Educational Programs (SECEP). Under their direction, iteach enhanced parts of the curricula related to special education. This gives provisionally licensed teachers support throughout their first year of teaching and integrates them into the school community. The program has expanded from 20 school divisions in the 2023-2024 school year to 104 school divisions, which is 79% of the public schools within the Commonwealth during the 2025-2026 school year. In addition, 7 regional or private schools have also chosen to partner with iteach. During the 2025-2026 school year, over 1000 teachers received a provisional iteach license. Approximately one-fourth of those teachers are pursuing endorsements in special education.

In addition to providing flexible licensure pathways, the VDOE also expanded programs under the Grow Your Own initiative. These programs are educator workforce development programs that are designed to be a partnership between the local school division and the educator preparation program. The Registered Teacher Apprenticeship program blends extended supervised clinical experience with practical coursework all while the apprentice is employed full-time by the school division earning a wage. The Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program is designed to help individuals from the local community earn their bachelor's degree and teacher licensure and removes some of the financial burden associated with becoming an educator. One-third or 40 of the teacher apprentices are pursuing a special education endorsement area. In the 2025-2026 school year, 755 unfilled teaching positions were identified as being in special education according to the [Teacher and School Staffing Vacancy Dashboard](#).

In December 2024, the VDOE officially registered K-12 Principal as an “apprenticeable” occupation with the Department of Workforce Development and Advancement (Virginia Works). This program allows aspiring principals to take coursework and work under the supervision of a mentor for 2 years in order to earn the Administration and Supervision K-12 endorsement. One key aspect of the program is the focus on high-quality clinical experience alongside Special Education leaders at the school division level to ensure that apprentices are “Day 1” ready to assume a school leader position when they complete the program including a foundational knowledge base in special education. An [Institute of Education Sciences \(IES\)](#) study published in 2023 revealed a disconnect between special educators and principals: exiting special educators reported that stronger administrative support might have encouraged them to stay, while principals often did not fully understand the wide scope of special educators’ responsibilities and felt unprepared to give them the support needed for retention. Providing principals with targeted professional development and technical assistance can equip them with the knowledge and resources necessary to effectively support and retain special education staff. The VDOE has registered 33 principal apprentices since 2024 with the U.S. Department of Labor. They are scheduled to finish their program and earn their Administration and Supervision endorsement by June 2027.

During the 2026 General Assembly sessions, several pieces of legislation were passed to address the educator shortage. Chapter 97 (HB 253) enters the Commonwealth into the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact in order to facilitate the mobility of teachers across the member states. This will allow eligible teachers to obtain an equivalent license to teach in Virginia. Chapter 849/850 (HB1437/SB785) requires each school division to report the number and type of teacher, other instructional personnel and support staff position exits in the school division annually in a disaggregated manner including demographic data and reason for exit. VDOE's existing Positions and Exits Collection (PEC) already captures these data elements for teachers and will be expanded to collect similar information for other instructional personnel and support staff positions. The expanded data collection will help provide a better understanding of why special educators and other school personnel are leaving the field and what supports are needed to ensure retention and success at the school level. This expanded data collection will be enacted during the 2026-2027 school year with a disaggregated report expected during the summer of 2027.

Finally, Chapter 891 (SB450) directs the Department of Education to convene a stakeholder work group to conduct a comprehensive review of the alternative licensure pathways available to public school teachers in the Commonwealth and make recommendations on improving the quality, efficacy and outcomes of such alternative licensure pathways. The findings of the work group can support recruitment and retention efforts for special educators by identifying the pathways most commonly used to obtain licensure, determining which pathways yield the highest retention rates, and highlighting those that are associated with the greatest teacher effectiveness.

Efforts of the Department Focused on Special Education and Specialized Populations

The Department, in collaboration with allied professional organizations and technical assistance partners, prioritized funding to develop and expand statewide teacher induction options grounded in research to improve professional practice.

Currently, four academy based models are funded and supported by the department designed to improve leading effective teaching and learning in schools. These efforts that draw teacher and paraprofessional participants from local school divisions work to support early career educators in the profession, develop skills to become effective practitioners, complete license requirements and view special education as a sustainable career choice.

- Journey into Teaching Academy (JITA), statewide: The Department is currently facilitating its eighth cohort of the Journey into Teaching Academy (JITA), a yearlong professional development program designed for provisionally licensed special education teachers entering their third year during the 2026-2027 school year. JITA serves as an induction program that goes beyond traditional mentorship to support the retention and overall effectiveness of these teachers as they navigate teaching, learning, and licensure requirements.

In partnership with the Department and regional Training and Technical Assistance Centers (TTAC), JITA participants gain valuable knowledge and skills in areas such as

content mastery, pedagogical strategies, collaboration and co-teaching methods, and special education processes and procedures. These experiences are intended to help teachers excel in their roles working with students with disabilities. Additionally, teachers have the opportunity to participate in the Department-sponsored summer academies, as well as supplementary seminars and workshops focused on preparing for the teacher licensure assessment. Before the current school year, the Academy served approximately 140 participants across Superintendents' Regions 1-5 and 7-8. Over the last eight years, the Department has provided one-time grant funding of approximately \$394,000 (aligned with Goals 1 and 2) to support this initiative.

- JITA, Northampton County Public Schools: During the 2024–2025 school year, the JITA continued to reduce teacher preparation and retention gaps in Northampton County Public Schools. In collaboration with Department staff, teachers developed knowledge and skills in pedagogy, content, inclusive education practices, special education processes and procedures, with a particular focus on multisensory reading. During the 2025-2026 school year, teachers participating in this initiative continued to receive specialized training, instructional coaching, and technical assistance in reading approaches from state funded partner, William and Mary TTAC in order to become fully licensed. Over the course of the two school years 18 teachers were impacted by this project.
- Special Education Teacher Support Academy, statewide: The Department's Region 5 TTAC at James Madison University (JMU), in collaboration with JMU's College of Education and Content Teaching Academy, sponsored the Special Education Teacher Support Academy (SETSA) for the fifth consecutive year. SETSA is a three to four-day professional development program designed to build the capacity and efficacy of early-career special education teachers (from their first through seventh year) and to reduce teacher attrition in K-12 classrooms. The Academy also welcomes experienced special educators who serve as mentors, supporting and learning alongside newer teachers.

SETSA offers targeted learning opportunities in professional knowledge, learning environments, instructional planning and delivery, and assessment. Participants gain skills in evidence-based strategies to design and implement instruction and supports tailored to students' unique needs. Key topics include high-leverage practices, specially designed instruction, co-teaching, math and literacy instruction, IEP development, collaboration with families and professionals, creating positive learning environments, transition planning, and fostering student self-determination.

Teachers leave the academy equipped with practical resources and access to ongoing regional TTAC support throughout the year. Over five years, SETSA has served 310 early-career and 77 veteran teachers across all Superintendent's Regions. Over the last five years, the Department provided one-time grant funding of \$807,224 to support this initiative.

- Towards Student Success: Special Educators – Provisional to Full Licensure, Superintendent's Regions 2 and 3: The Department's TTAC at the College of William & Mary, serving Superintendent Regions 2 and 3, hosted a year-long initiative to support provisionally licensed special educators, including those whose provisional licenses have

expired. Participants, educators working toward full licensure, engaged in ongoing professional learning and development opportunities aimed at enhancing their pedagogical effectiveness. Topics included disability awareness, specially designed instruction, explicit instructional techniques, High-Leverage Practices, curriculum and assessment frameworks, multi-sensory learning strategies, strategy instruction, transition planning, and behavior intervention and support, among others. A key component of the program was preparation for licensure assessments. Twenty-three participants met monthly from June 2025 through May 2026. Approximately \$11,500 was allocated to support 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, Virginia Council of Exceptional Children, and Norfolk State University. Pending available grant funding, the Department will expand these efforts to strengthen educator effectiveness during the 2026-2027 school year (Goals 1, 2, and 3).

The Department will continue to build, promote, and advance practices within these academies to address critical educator shortages and effectiveness in special education instruction to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The Department will continue to provide induction opportunities for aspiring and provisionally licensed educators affordable access to coursework has also remained a priority. To further support this important work, the Department offered intensive training opportunities through coursework with Radford University and Virginia Commonwealth University:

To increase the pool of eligible applicants for open special education teaching positions across the Commonwealth, the Department partnered with Radford University to deliver two compressed, seven-week asynchronous online courses for 47 individuals in summer 2026; and one five-week asynchronous online course for 20 individuals in fall 2026. The Department 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 partnership, fulfilled this requirement for special educators. Over the past four years, the Department allocated \$377,342 for this project (Goal 2) to help ensure these educators are moving toward full certification.

The Department also partnered with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) through its collaboration with VCU TTAC to provide grant funding for coursework aimed at increasing the pool of eligible candidates for provisional licensure and strengthening the special education workforce. During the 2026 academic year, 11 individuals completed one of three required special education courses aligned with licensure requirements. The Department allocated a one-time grant of \$306,000 over the last two years to support this initiative.

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 interventionists, 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 the link.

During the 25-26 academic year, the Radford Teacher Prep Hearing Impairment project served one IHE; 46 teacher candidates supported. The Department allocated continuing grant funding of \$153,000 during this year (Goals 1, 2).

- Additionally, the Department provides federal grant funding to support teacher recruitment in targeted special education endorsement areas. Virginia is unique in offering multiple consortiums and specialized programs that provide both coursework and financial assistance toward earning special education endorsements. The sample of projects listed below illustrates the extensive support available in this area and highlights how these efforts align with relevant strategic plan goals.
- 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, Norfolk State 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 2025-26 academic year, the Consortium has served six IHEs; 129 teacher candidates were supported. The Department allocated continuing grant funding of \$507,891.15 this period for tuition (Goal 2).
- Virginia Consortium for Teacher Preparation in Visual Impairment (VI Consortium): The VI Consortium is comprised of three 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 2025-26 academic year, the VI Consortium served three IHEs; 62 teacher candidates were supported. The Department allocated continuing grant funding of \$304,191.20 during this period for tuition (Goals 1, 2).

Federal programs have provided funding for the majority of the initiatives highlighted in this report. Any additional funding requests to the General Assembly will be based on a

determination of the successful outcomes of program components. The Department 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;
- Establishing the Special Education Early Childhood Add-On endorsement.
- Adding microcredential opportunities for upskilling General Education teachers in special education best practices;
- Expanding the Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan Program to provide financial aid during student teaching.
- Exploring mentoring practices through CEEDAR research.
- 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 highly qualified teaching workforce for the state; and
- Operationalizing metrics for evaluation of the strategic plan and yearly progress.