

# Transition Voice

The Council for Exceptional Children Virginia Division  
on Career Development and Transition



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## Celebrating The Past ...Looking Forward to the Future

Lisa Holland, Supervisor of Special Education/ Coordinator of Transition,  
Montgomery Public Schools

This past school year, I finished my thirtieth year of service in the field of public education in Virginia. Yes, I have finally made it to that coveted milestone in my career; the time when I have a choice---retire or continue working. While pondering this dilemma, I began reflecting on my early years as a special education teacher and the changes that have occurred during the past three decades regarding transition issues for students with disabilities.

As a first year teacher, I only taught students with the label of specific learning disabilities. Although the classroom for students who were served under the label of emotionally disturbed was located next door to mine, the two groups were never allowed to interact in a classroom environment. Students with labels of mentally retarded were taught in a separate wing of the school and in classrooms according to their specific label (educable or trainable). My

“LD students” were “mainstreamed” in vocational classes and health and physical education classes, while students with other special education labels were not. Sadly, our “low incidence” students were often not allowed to attend the same schools as their siblings, neighbors and friends.

Today, the majority of Virginia’s public school students with disabilities are served in the general classroom within their home schools. During the 2011-2012 school year, 61.8 percent of students ages 6-21 with individualized education programs spent 80 percent or more of their day in the regular classroom. These students are learning next to their peers and being taught by content area teachers. They are learning how to be a part of their larger communities by being included in their school communities. In my district, all students are educated in their home schools through inclusive

practices, beginning when they enter preschool or kindergarten.

During my first three years of teaching, my classroom was located on the third floor of the high school. The only students who ever ventured to the third floor were those in special education and those naïve freshmen who were convinced by upper classmen this was the location of a pool . I have never forgotten the shame and humiliation my students felt by having their friends see them come to this floor or how my students would literally hide behind the door when anyone would come to classroom. In fact, many of my students would wait until after the tardy bell rang to come to my class. They often commented they would rather serve daily detention and be known as a “bad boy” than as a person with a disability. My students lacked knowledge about their own disabilities and their rights as people with disabilities.

Today, self-determination is a major focus in many of our schools. For the past seven years, the Virginia Department of Education has encouraged students to become self-advocates and lead self-directed lives through the I'm Determined project. Unlike years past when students were not even invited to their IEP meetings, many current students are participating in their meeting and practicing skills they will use in their daily lives after graduation. Additionally, the I'm Determined project sponsors an annual Youth and Parent Summit. At this event, individuals learn about themselves, how to educate others about disabilities and how to work for change on local, state and national levels.

It is truly humbling to watch the growth of students as they become self-directed. One parent in our district cried the first time she saw her child participate in his IEP meeting. Although this young man was nonverbal, the teacher assisted him in expressing his preferences, interests, strengths and needs through assistive technology and PowerPoints. His mom reported she was surprised, elated, proud and scared during the meeting when she first witnessed him using "his voice". She believed it was the first time others viewed him as being competent and his opinions as important. Throughout the years, her son has continued to advocate for himself, even addressing our school board committee to advocate for inclusive practices.

Thirty years ago, very few students with disabilities graduated from high school and continued their education at the college level. Like many others, my school did not encourage students to take a college preparatory academic curriculum. Consequently, students lacked both the academic skills (rigor and relevance) and confidence needed for postsecondary education. Students of this era generally entered the workforce as underemployed workers,

joined the military or applied for disability benefits through the federal government and never worked. I often think of these students and wonder how their lives may have been different if they had gone to college.

I clearly remember my chest filling with pride at the graduation ceremony of my first student who was accepted into a four- year college. After a laborious three years of Latin, "Mark" left our small town and went to Penn State. Four years later he graduated and has worked in a professional career ever since. He was the student who inspired me to challenge others to follow his lead.

In 2011-2012, 34.0 percent of Virginia graduates with disabilities were enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school. 72.2 percent were enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program, competitively employed, or in some other employment within one year of leaving school. Increasingly, students with intellectual disabilities are entering college programs such as Virginia Commonwealth University (ACE-IT in College), Virginia Tech (On-Campus Transition Program), George Mason University (The Mason LIFE Program), J Sargeant Reynolds Community College (PAVE) and Radford University (On Campus Transition Partnership). Our Commonwealth has also experienced a significant increase in employment supports such as high school community- based instruction classes, in-school entrepreneurial businesses, Project SEARCH and programs focusing on customized employment approaches.

"Sam" is a young man who experiences autism. He graduated from high school this past June with a special diploma, but his parents reported his only opportunity to continue his education involved him being in his

same home school with peers much younger than he. Like many others in his family, Sam's dream was to be a Virginia Tech Hokie. In July, Sam's family made a tough decision to separate their family so Sam could have a college experience like his peers. Sam and his mother moved to our district while his father works and lives in another state. Within days of beginning at the On-Campus Transition Program, Sam's mom called me, filled with joy and gratitude. She reported that Sam was thrilled to be at Virginia Tech and claimed he had matured more during the short time they had been on a college campus than he had in all his years in high school. Sam is traveling independently on the Blacksburg Transit to and from campus, is actively participating in his college history class, spending time in the gym with peers and working in a part-time job on campus. He has a plan for his life. He wants to spend three years at Virginia Tech and then enter Project Search to help him with employment.

When Sam's mom called, I was reminded of how much more alike students are than different. Like others his age, Sam is in a college environment that promotes the transition from high school into adult life. Each day on campus, he and his peers learn more about themselves and others while making both mistakes and memories. Hopefully, he will learn from his mistakes and have wonderful memories that will last his lifetime.

While there are many days I wish I could turn back the hands of time and return to being twenty-something, I would not want to reverse the positive changes and advancements that have been made for students with disabilities. I am looking forward to all of the advancements of the next thirty years. I hope Virginia is a state that supports people in their communities rather than in large state training facilities. I long for the

days when people with disabilities are employed at a comparable rate as their non-disabled peers, with wages that allow them to live above the poverty level. I hope all students have the opportunity to be educated in environments and live in communities

with friends that celebrate their differences and unique abilities rather than focusing on their disabilities. I am optimistic that geography will no longer be the greatest determining factor if students will be educated with typically developing peers and be

provided with the opportunities to lead lives others would envy.

Lisa Holland is President of VaDCDT.

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## News and Changes from VDOE

By Marianne Moore

Middle/Secondary Transition Specialist, Virginia Department of Education

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You have probably heard people say things like, “The only thing we can count on is change.” There are plenty of songs about change too! Anyone remember the Bob Dylan song, *The Times They are a-Changin’*? Here are several changes initiated by the Virginia Department of Education that take place this school year:

### • Credit Accommodations

At the close of the 2012-13 school year Virginia made it easier for students with disabilities to earn a standard diploma. New credit accommodations now provide students with disabilities additional pathways to the standard diploma. Existing pathways are expanded and school divisions are provided more flexibility than they have had in the past. The standard diploma requirements **ARE NOT** different for students who use credit accommodations and those who do not.

Students with IEPs and 504 Plans must meet credit accommodation eligibility criteria and meet the specific criteria for the credit accommodation(s) they use. These decisions will be made and documented

by the IEP team or the 504 committee. There must be informed written consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority.

For more information on the new credit accommodations: [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/graduation/credit\\_accommodations.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/graduation/credit_accommodations.shtml)

Training modules will be produced later this fall and will be available at the above Web site. It is a good idea to visit this site often as new information on credit accommodations will appear there.

### • Beginning with first- time 9<sup>th</sup> graders in the 2013-14 school year, diploma options have changed, as have graduation requirements:

- a. The Modified Standard Diploma is rolled into the Standard Diploma and is no longer an option for students who are first- time 9<sup>th</sup> graders in the 2013-14 school year.
- b. These students must earn a board-approved career and technical education credential. More information can be found at this Web site: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/>

[career technical/path industry certification/](#)

- c. They must successfully complete one virtual course, which may be non-credit bearing. (The virtual course is also a requirement for the Advanced Studies Diploma.)

- An additional change for the 2013-14 school year is the implementation of **Academic and Career Plans** for all students beginning in middle school. These plans must be completed as the student transitions into high school. Plans are updated as goals and activities change.

Change happens all around us, all the time. We need to be tuned in to information streams that provide accurate and timely material. The weekly Superintendent’s Memos and good professional listservs keep us updated and knowledgeable. Being a member of a professional organization like DCDT is another terrific way to stay current.

Marianne Moore is Past President of VaDCDT.

Mark your calendars and plan to join DCDT members and colleagues from across the country for the event of a decade. Last time this conference was in Virginia was in 2003 and is still talked about today as being a premiere event. It is a time to meet and network with those who have made transition what it is today. REGISTER NOW!

## The 17th DCDT International Conference Leaders for Life: No Limits, No Boundaries November 14-16, 2013

At the Williamsburg Lodge in Historic  
Williamsburg Virginia



**Pre-Conference, November 13, 2013**

Customized Employment and Transition:  
Is Employment for All Youth? | Youth and Parent Involvement in Self-Determination

PRE- and POST-CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES  
Take a walk back in time and enjoy a taste of Colonial Williamsburg:  
History, Fine Food, Beverages, and Colonial Shops.

For more information go to [www.dcdt.org](http://www.dcdt.org)

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## Youth of the Year: Rachael Fiel

Each year, VADCDT presents a Youth of the Year Award. Highly eligible nominees demonstrate a high level of self-determination; significant success in the transition process and are experienced as leaders and role models for other youth.

Erica Rachael Fiel was named VADCDT Youth of the Year at this summer's I'm Determined Youth and Parent Summit, held at James Madison University. After graduating from King's Fork High School and The Prudent Center for Industry and Technology in Suffolk, Virginia, Rachel majored in American Sign Language at Tidewater Community College. She is currently continuing her study of sign language at Gardner-Webb University.

For the past five years, Rachael has served as a delegate, staff leader, and alumna staff for the Virginia Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) for People with Disabilities. In 2012, Rachael used her skills and experience to work in a leadership capacity with the North Carolina YLF. She has been a youth leader with Virginia's I'm Determined project since 2009 and a mentor with the NOEL (self-advocacy) program since 2012. Rachael edited The Riot, an e-newsletter for self-advocates, from 2010-2012.

Rachel's strengths include her ability to relate to others, her creativity and her ability to present herself in a professional manner. Her interests include American Sign Language and the Bible. Upon nomination, Rachel commented, "I am a person first, but my disability is what makes me ME."

In addition to Rachel, the VADCDT received five other outstanding nominations for Youth of the Year Award. Nominees included: Allison Pinson (student at Yorktown High School), Matthew Shapiro (student at Virginia Commonwealth University), Nichelle Stewart (student at Woodson High School), Alexis Smith (student at Halifax County High School) and Cameron Wilmer (student at Longwood University).



## NEW MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

### Linda Powell

Covington High School in Covington, Virginia has been my school home for 25 years. I have enjoyed the small system, which has allowed knowing the student population and their faces rather than just seeing names on an enrollment.

When I began with Covington, my supervisor was very interested in learning how our division could do a better job with transition; so began my interest with the Virginia Transition Forum. I attended my first Forum in the spring of 1990 (I believe). From that overwhelming, yet exciting, experience I began working with a local joint Transition Council and sharing my new ideas. The Forum allowed many additional contacts to other groups with whom I continue to enjoy working. I have become a part of the planning committee after being a participant at the Forum for a number of years. It has been my pleasure to participate with such wonderful and knowledgeable folks. I consider my efforts in planning future forums a small payback for the wealth of knowledge I have gained over the many years as a participant.

I continue to work with my students at Covington High School in transition. There are many of them with as many ideas to research for their futures and how they can reach their goals.

When I am not wearing an educational “hat”, I wear one of a business owner. Along with three family members, I own an event planning and catering company. We began as a food concession at the WV State Fair, and expanded to small community events and helping friends with fun things. TLP Catering and Event Planning is now a large “small business” serving 22,000 guests in 2012. In conjunction with the

catering, we opened a restaurant in 2012, located on a private golf course. The venue is beautiful and we offer a variety of lunches, dinner buffets and Sunday brunch to the public.

In addition to that, I have a great family. Last fall my husband, Jeff, left a 25 year career in agricultural lending and has completed an LPN program. He is now working on licensure on that level with sights on an RN degree, possibly as a flight nurse. My three daughters are currently in Lewisburg, two with successful careers and the third looking for the right career path. Please add a 16 month old granddaughter, Alice, to the mix. Life is good.

VADCDT has a reputation of energetic and innovative members and ideas. I need that level of energy and creativity to achieve my goals of doing great things for my students. I attempt to incorporate the suggestions, gathered from meetings and the professional publication of the group, into my work with students.

As a member of VADCDT, I plan to be involved by offering my knowledge of small school divisions and the opportunities of transition we provide. I also want to offer energy and support to the group in activities that evolve. The group presents itself as a family and I thank you for the support I have received.

Linda Powell is Head of the Special Education Department at Covington High School.



## EveryBody: An Online Artifact History of Disability in America

### A NEW Resource for Disability Awareness

People with disabilities have been present throughout American history, but rarely appear in textbooks or shared public memories. The Smithsonian's National Museum of American

History has launched an online exhibit called “EveryBody: An Artifact History of Disability in America” that explore themes and events related to the history of people with disabilities in the U.S.

This online exhibition is a first-of-its-kind image compilation that provides access to objects and stories related to the history of disability that have been collected at the museum for more than 50 years.

The information is presented in English & Spanish, and the website is designed to be accessible to all users. Disability posters may be downloaded and printed from the site.

<http://everybody.si/edu>



If you are not already a member, consider joining the largest state organization of the CEC Division on Career Development and Transition! Contact Membership Chair Kim Bledsoe [kbledsoe@culpeperschools.org](mailto:kbledsoe@culpeperschools.org) for more information.

## Virginia DCDT Executive Board 2012-2014

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## FREE Online Courses

The Virginia Department of Education is supporting FREE online courses through the VCU Regional Rehabilitation and Training Center for two people from each school division. Courses are typically 4-6 lessons. Special Education Directors, school administrators, or supervisors may submit the registration to Renee Bullano of the RRTC, [rbullano@vcu.edu](mailto:rbullano@vcu.edu). Do not submit the registration through the RRTC website, or you will be charged for the course. The request should be received at least one week prior to the start of the course.

The following are upcoming topics and start dates:

**Into Adulthood: Transition to Work for Individuals with Autism** October 14, 2013

**Supported Employment for Individuals**

**with Traumatic Brain Injury** October 14, 2013

**Customized Supported Self-Employment** November 18, 2013

# FUTURE QUEST 2013 | All are Invited

Future Quest is a free college and career event for middle school and high school students, their families, and professionals who support them. It is organized by the Northern

Virginia Transition Coalition. One of the largest events of its kind in Virginia, Future Quest features more than 70 sessions and exhibits related to successful life after high school. All

interested individuals from throughout Virginia are invited to attend. Future Quest is free, but you must register to attend. For more information <http://futurequest.gmu.edu>

# FUTURE QUEST

## COLLEGE AND CAREER FORUM

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2013**

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**JOHNSON CENTER**

**8:30a.m. - 2:40p.m.**

**Resource Fair 8:00 - 2:00p.m.**

**FREE**

## YOU CAN LEARN ABOUT:

- Options After High School
- Career Planning
- Career/Technical Schools
- Employment Strategies
- College Application Process
- Supports and Resources in College

**For more information and to register:**

**<http://futurequest.gmu.edu>**



