



News Release

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VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CELEBRATE COMPLETION OF NATIONAL CAREER PROGRAM

(RICHMOND, Va.) — Nearly 190 high school students in Virginia with intellectual and developmental disabilities participated in a national career program during the school year to gain skills and work experience through internships in health care or business. Participants, their families and hosts will celebrate their efforts this spring at 20 sites across Virginia.

Project SEARCH offers hands-on training to students with disabilities during senior year. The program, funded by the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, began in Virginia in 2008 and is coordinated by DARS, the Virginia Department of Education, and several local hospitals and public school systems. Since then, more than 900 students have participated at host sites across the Commonwealth.

“For many students, this is their first work experience, and we know early work experiences increase the likelihood of success in employment after high school,” said DARS Commissioner Kathryn Hayfield. “It’s wonderful to see the students excel in a program that is going to prepare them for jobs in the competitive workforce.”

Twenty businesses hosted Project SEARCH programs in Virginia during the 2017-18 school year. As programs conclude, students celebrate with family and colleagues at ceremonies from each site to mark their accomplishments. Students participate in Project SEARCH with the goal of having a job by the end of the year, and some are offered jobs before completing the program.

With about \$800,000 in funding this year from DARS, job coaches worked with the students throughout the year, teaching them the responsibilities and duties of the workplace. DARS counselors also worked with teachers from the students’ local schools and staff from the host sites who helped the participating students from the initial program interview to its completion.

Below is a list of this year's host sites and the scheduled dates for the upcoming completion ceremonies:

- Carilion New River Valley Medical Center, Christiansburg – May 15
- Augusta Health, Fishersville – May 22
- Clinch Valley Medical Center, Richlands – May 24
- Centra Lynchburg Hospital – May 31
- Chesapeake Regional Medical Center – June 1
- Winchester Medical Center – June 1
- Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital – June 4
- Sentara CarePlex Hospital, Hampton – June 5
- Sentara Norfolk General Hospital – June 5
- Inova Alexandria Hospital – June 5
- Bon Secours St. Francis Medical Center, Midlothian – June 5
- Novant Health Prince William Medical Center, Manassas – June 6
- VCU Medical Center, Richmond – June 6
- Fort Eustis, Newport News – June 7
- Bon Secours Memorial Regional Medical Center, Mechanicsville – June 7
- Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital, Richmond – June 8
- Bon Secours Maryview Medical Center, Portsmouth – June 8
- National Conference Center, Leesburg – June 11
- Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center – June 14
- Mary Washington Health Care, Fredericksburg – June 14

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The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, in collaboration with community partners, provides and advocates for resources and services to improve the employment, quality of life, security, and independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families. For more information, visit www.vadars.org or follow DARS on Facebook at www.facebook.com/vadars or Twitter at @vadars.