



Some measure of parent and community involvement has always been a cornerstone of public schools. However, that involvement has usually been directed and guided by the schools and, for the most part, has focused on fundraising initiatives, volunteering, and supporting school activities. We now understand that families and the broader community also must be included in decision making and school governance. We also realize that the learning that occurs within the family and community contributes to school success, and so we need to give greater recognition and support to these collaborative efforts (NEA, 2011).

Get **Ready** to develop community partnerships

Students, families, schools, and communities are all strengthened when all parties work together for a common goal or vision. Results may include improvement in program quality, efficient use of resources, access to more learning opportunities and/or personnel, students staying in school longer and/or achieving more, and increased parental satisfaction with schools. The following information highlights three efforts underway in Virginia to develop and enhance school – community partnerships.

Parent Resource Centers – The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) recognizes that parents play an important role in the education of their children, especially parents of children who are identified as having disabilities. The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEA 2004) and the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* require that parents and school personnel work together to provide children with appropriate educational services. Therefore, the VDOE acknowledges the impact that a well-established special education Parent Resource Center (PRC) can have on insuring that parents are informed of their rights and responsibilities related to the special education processes outlined in the law and regulations and have a direct impact on increasing outcomes for students with disabilities (VDOE, 2018).

Virginia Tiered System of Supports – The Virginia Department of Education founded the Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports Research and Implementation Center (VTSS-RIC) at the Virginia Commonwealth University Center for School-Community Collaboration. In collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education’s Training and Technical Assistance Centers, VTSS-RIC provides professional learning and on-site coaching to identified school divisions. Through the collaboration of families, schools, and communities, VTSS establishes the supports needed for schools to be effective learning environments for all students. This multi-tiered, evidence-based approach improves learner, classroom, school, division, and state

outcomes by aligning academics, behavior, and social-emotional wellness into a single decision-making framework. Based on the implementation logic in which data, practices, and systems are integrated, VTSS partners with school divisions to identify appropriate supports based on need, fit, and culture (VDOE, 2018). Once a division enters into a VTSS partnership they receive support and services on the following five essential elements of implementation of which Community Partnerships is one of them:

- Data Informed Decision Making
- Evidence-Based Practices
- Family, School, and Community Partnerships
- Monitoring Student Progress
- Evaluation (VTSS-RIC, 2018)

Transition Planning – Planning for transition provides a structure for youth to live, work, and plan in the community as independently as possible (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Taking advantage of formal and informal community connection such as friends, the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), social services, community colleges, and community-based work are just a few of the connections in the community that could aid in the transition of a youth from school to post-school activities. These connections should be made as early as 14 years of age and be included in the student transition plan. The US Department of Education’s Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services has created *A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities*. This resource links related legislation to good transition services and the process for community partners working together to move youth from school to post-school activities.

Set the process in motion:

The VDOE has provided funding to establish and maintain PRCs. As these sub-grant award funds are available only by application to the VDOE and are extremely limited, they are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis (VDOE, 2018). Approximately 46 of the 134 school divisions in Virginia have a PRC. To see if a PRC is in your school division, visit this site [here](#).

In addition to Virginia state funds, the implementation of VTSS is funded through grants provided by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs and U.S. Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (both U.S. ED), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. School division leaders who are interested in their division becoming a participating division or who want to learn more about VTSS should contact Associate Director of Student Services at the VDOE and VTSS Lead, Maribel Saimre, [contact us!](#)

If you have transition-aged youth, set the process in motion by connecting with the community through looking for community-based work or volunteer opportunities. Connecting with DARS will also connect youth with a network of community rehabilitation providers and additional transition service options. The Center on Transition Innovations has created a guide to help aid in networking with businesses to develop work-based learning experiences. [Visit DARS online](#) and the Center on Transition Innovations, [A Guide to Networking with Businesses](#).

To Find Out More, Go To:

[The Center on Response to Intervention at American Institutes of Research-](#) provides support for states, districts, and schools implementing MTSS/RTI.

[The Global Family Research Project-](#) an independent, entrepreneurial nonprofit organization that supports all families and communities in helping children find success in and out of school

[Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support](#) -is the technical assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs which supports schools, divisions, and states in building systems capacity for implementing a multi-tiered approach to social, emotional, and behavior support.

[The Power of Family School Community Partnerships: A Training Resource Manual-](#) is a product developed by the National Education Association (NEA) that contains excerpts from current research and theory, as well as examples of field-tested practice, and includes strategies for involving families, schools, and communities in building partnerships

[The Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities](#) - is a product developed by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services of the U. S. Department of Education to assist students and youth with disabilities to achieve their post-school and career goals [Virginia Family Special Education Connection](#) is a Web site dedicated to providing comprehensive information on special education issues, practices, and services to Virginia families who have children with disabilities.

[Virginia Parent Resource Centers](#) – are committed to developing positive relationships between parents and school. PRCs assist parents with questions and planning, as well as provide resources and training sessions

[Virginia Tiered System of Supports](#) –is a data-driven decision making framework for establishing the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports needed for a school to be an effective learning environment for all students

References

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This news brief is a collaborative effort of the Virginia Department of Education Training and Technical Assistance Centers at George Mason University and James Madison University. This issue was prepared by the staff of the VDOE TTAC at James Madison University. For questions about content, please contact [Amber Knighting](#), [Amanda Randall](#), or [Cheryl Henderson](#), or call 540.568.6746.