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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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MSDE’s Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) Awarded \$9.9 Million in Federal Disability Innovation Funds (DIF) – Pathways to Partnerships

Funding will improve career opportunities and transition services for children and youth with disabilities

BALTIMORE (September 22, 2023) – Today, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) announced that it has received a \$9.9 million federal Pathways to Partnerships grant to launch the Maryland Pathways to Partnership Initiative (MPPI). Maryland’s new grant is one of 20 recently announced by the U.S. Department of Education’s Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The nearly \$199 million in funding for Pathways to Partnerships, part of the Disability Innovation Fund program, is the largest discretionary grant that the RSA has ever administered.

MPPI aims to enhance transition services for children and youth with disabilities, with a focus on career development and competitive integrated employment to support a seamless transition to life after high school. Funding will help improve service coordination, resource sharing, and data exchange between partnering local education agencies and amongst youth and workforce training, college and career pathways, and special education services. MPPI will provide information on pre-employment transition services and vocational rehabilitation services offered by MSDE’s Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS).

“The State Board of Education is delighted to celebrate MSDE’s award of a Disability Innovation Fund Grant. Improving resources and services to our most vulnerable population of students in Maryland is a priority of the State Board and we are very pleased that this grant will enable MSDE and its partners to provide transition services and employment opportunities to enhance the well-being of our students,” says Maryland State Board of Education President Clarence C. Crawford.

“This \$9.9 million grant from the federal Pathways to Partnerships program is much more than just funding; it’s an investment in the limitless potential of our children and youth with disabilities,” said State Superintendent Mohammed Choudhury. “Through the Maryland Pathways to Partnership Initiative, we are setting a new standard for holistic career development and competitive integrated employment. Our

Strategic Plan and the Blueprint serve as guiding lights, steering us toward an educational landscape where every single student, regardless of their challenges, can navigate a seamless transition to life after high school. This grant amplifies our unwavering commitment to bring equity and opportunity to the most vulnerable among us. We will stop at nothing to deliver on the promise of empowering these students with the skills and resources they need for lifelong success."

The grant supports collaborative partnerships between state vocational rehabilitation agencies, state and local educational agencies, and federally funded centers for independent living. MSDE's DORS will be partnering with MSDE's Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services (DEI/SES), the Maryland Department of Disabilities, four local education agencies, The Parents' Place of Maryland, the University of Maryland's Center for Transition and Career Innovation (CTCI), and Centers for Independent Living to receive training and resources to deliver enhanced career counseling, identify career pathways, and facilitate work-based learning experiences.

"The Maryland Department of Disabilities is looking forward to partnering with MSDE and other state agencies and community organizations, to enhance our approach to transition to ensure all students are career and college ready," said Secretary Carol A. Beatty. "We know students, with and without disabilities, achieve the best outcomes when service systems are working together."

Dr. Cheryl Dyson, Superintendent of Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS), expressed that, "FCPS is thrilled to participate in this innovative grant that will afford our students an opportunity to earn a living through targeted skill development. This grant will increase student efficacy through inclusive capacity building and employment that will last a lifetime. We are excited to collaborate with MSDE and other agencies in this initiative."

Dr. Christy Stuart, Director for the Center for Transition and Career Innovation at the University of Maryland College Park, shared that, "The Center for Transition and Career Innovation at the University of Maryland is pleased to support the Maryland State Department of Education and other State partners on this important work to collaborate and coordinate services across our Maryland State agencies and partners. The Pathways to Partnership grant award from the Rehabilitation Services Administration will effectively and efficiently support our efforts to implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future resulting in improved outcomes for students with disabilities."

Rene Averitt, Executive Director for The Parents' Place of Maryland, also voiced enthusiasm for the grant and shared that, "The Parents' Place of Maryland is extremely excited to collaborate with our partners at MSDE, DORS, Centers for Independent Living, and local schools about this opportunity for our youth with disabilities and families to improve employment options for them."

Grant funding will extend services for students and their families through providing opportunities to receive training, mentorship, and skill development. More on the federal Disability Innovation Funds – Pathways to Partnerships program can be found here: <https://rsa.ed.gov/about/programs/disability-innovation-fund-pathways-to-partnerships>.

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