



NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Jonathan Zur
Office: 804-515-7950
jzur@inclusiveva.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM ACROSS THE STATE GAIN AWARENESS OF DIVERSITY AND PREJUDICE AT CONNECTIONS INSTITUTE

Richmond, VA – As another school year begins, nearly 60 high school students will spend a week exploring how to reduce bullying and prejudice at the Harold M. Marsh, Sr. Connections Institute, now entering its third decade. Sponsored by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, this program will prepare student delegates to work toward creating more inclusive school environments, and will be held Monday, August 3 – Friday, August 7, 2015 at the W. E. Skelton 4-H Educational Conference Center in Wirtz, VA.

“Through the Connections Institute, students are able to better demonstrate understanding and appreciation for their classmates and neighbors who are from the variety of racial, religious, and ethnic groups that make up Virginia,” says Jonathan Zur, President & CEO of the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities. “This program meets a significant need across our Commonwealth, particularly as schools make a renewed effort to reduce bullying and develop safe and supportive learning environments.”

Student participants said that the program gave them a greater awareness of how others may experience prejudice in their daily lives. Additionally, 96% of last year’s participants said that Connections gave them new skills to stand up for causes that they believe in. (That same percentage also reported that the program increased their ability to recognize a stereotypical comment or prejudiced action.) One student commented, “[Connections] was an AMAZING experience! I learned so much and feel so EMPOWERED.”

Eleven Virginia high schools and one community group are sending delegations of students to the 2015 Connections Institute. Students attending are from: Atlee High School (Hanover County), Bayside High School (Virginia Beach), Bethel High School (Hampton), Collegiate School (Henrico County), Green Run High School (Virginia Beach), Landstown High School (Virginia Beach), Ocean Lakes High School (Virginia Beach), Richmond Police Department’s Young Adult Police Commission (Richmond), St. Catherine’s School (Richmond), St. Christopher’s School (Richmond), Steward School (Henrico County), and Warhill High School (Williamsburg-James City County). Funding support for the program is generously provided by the R.E.B. Foundation.

Interview Opportunities: Members of the press are invited to visit the Connections Institute during portions of the program. Most parents/guardians have granted permission to photograph and interview students. For interviews, the preferred visiting time is Friday, August 7 from 11:30am – 12:15pm. *For programming, the preferred visiting times are Monday, August 3 from 7:30pm -- 10:00pm or on Thursday, August 6 from 7:00pm – 9:30pm. Other times can be arranged.*

###

The Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities works with schools, businesses, and communities to achieve success by addressing prejudices, in all forms, in order to improve academic achievement, increase workplace productivity, and enhance local trust. Through workshops, retreats, and customized programs that raise knowledge, motivation, and skills, VCIC develops leaders who work together to achieve success throughout the Commonwealth.