



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STUDENTS FROM ACROSS THE STATE GAIN AWARENESS OF DIVERSITY & PREJUDICE AT CONNECTIONS INSTITUTE

Richmond, VA – In preparation for the 2017-2018 school year, nearly 60 high school students will spend a week at the Harold M. Marsh, Sr. Connections Institute exploring how to reduce bullying and prejudice. Sponsored by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, this program will prepare student delegates to work toward creating more inclusive school environments. Connections will take place from July 31 – August 4, 2017 at the W. E. Skelton 4-H Educational Conference Center.

“Through the Connections Institute, students are able to better demonstrate understanding and appreciation for their classmates and neighbors,” 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.”

For 24 years, Connections Institute participants have said that the program gave them a greater awareness of how others may experience prejudice in their daily lives, and also helped them develop new skills that they can use to work for important causes and issues. 98% of last years’ participants said that Connections gave them a better awareness of the hurt and pain some people feel as a result of stereotypical jokes, comments, and actions.

Twelve schools and community groups are sending delegations of high school students to the 2017 Connections Institute. Students representing the following schools and districts will be in attendance: Atlee High School (Mechanicsville), Bayside High School (Virginia Beach), Collegiate School (Henrico County), F. W. Cox High School (Virginia Beach), St. Catherine’s School (Richmond), St. Christopher’s School (Richmond), Roanoke County Public Schools (Roanoke), Steward School (Henrico County), Tallwood High School (Virginia Beach) and Warhill High School (Williamsburg-James City County). In addition, two Richmond-area organizations are sending delegations: Side By Side and the Department of Justice Services. 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 4 from 11:30am – 12:15pm. For programming, the preferred visiting times are Monday, August 31 from 7:30pm -- 10:00pm or Thursday, August 3 from 7:15pm – 9:45pm. Other times can be arranged.

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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.