



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM ACROSS VIRGINIA BUILD SKILLS TO REDUCE BULLYING & PREJUDICE AT CONNECTIONS INSTITUTE

Richmond, VA – Nearly 60 high school students will spend a week exploring how to reduce bullying and prejudice at the Harold M. Marsh, Sr. Connections Institute. Sponsored by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, this program will prepare student participants to work toward creating more inclusive school environments. The Institute will take place from Monday, August 1 – Friday, August 5, 2016 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, as well as helping them to develop new skills that they can use to work for important causes and issues. Additionally, 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. When asked to describe Connections, a previous participant said, “The Connections program addresses serious issues such as racial privilege, ability status, religion, sexism, and so much more. It creates teen leaders that will stand up against prejudice and lead with inclusivity.”

Twelve Virginia high schools are sending delegations of students to the 2016 Connections Institute. Students attending are from: Bayside High School (Virginia Beach), Bethel High School (Hampton), Collegiate School (Henrico County), Hampton High School (Hampton), Kecoughtan High School (Hampton), North Cross School (Roanoke), Princess Anne High School (Virginia Beach), St. Catherine’s School (Richmond), St. Christopher’s School (Richmond), Steward School (Henrico County), Tallwood High School (Virginia Beach) 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 5 from 11:30am – 12:15pm. For programming, the preferred visiting times are Monday, August 1 from 7:30pm -- 10:00pm or on Thursday, August 4 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.