



## NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO GAIN AWARENESS OF DIVERSITY AND PREJUDICE AT CONNECTIONS INSTITUTE**

Williamsburg, VA – Nearly 60 students representing high schools across Virginia will participate in the Harold M. Marsh, Sr. Connections Institute, sponsored by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities. The program takes place from Sunday, August 14 – Thursday, August 18, 2011 at 4-H Educational center in Jamestown.

The Connections Institute brings high school students together to discuss topics including prejudice, race, gender, ability status, socioeconomic status, religious bias, sexual orientation, conflict resolution, body image, and self-esteem. While at Connections, participants gain valuable leadership skills involving group dynamics, conflict management, intergroup relations, communication, and advocacy. Students develop Action Plans in order to bring about a change in their school cultures. They return from the programs as empowered and skilled agents of change and unity, having adopted a goal to reduce violence and prejudice.

“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 develop safe learning environments based on principles of inclusion and respect.”

Student participants unanimously agree that the program provides the skills to help one to work for causes and issues. Over 93% of past participants report that they have the skills needed to confront racist, sexist, religiously biased, and homophobic comments. One student commented, “I felt that this was a great experience for me. It was exactly what I needed to turn my life around. I realize the wrongs that are committed to people I know and in order to help change this society, I must first change myself.”

Twelve Virginia high schools and one youth organization are sending delegations of students to the 2011 Connections Institute. Students attending are from: Atlee High School (Hanover County), Bayside High School (Virginia Beach), Bethel High School (Hampton), Cox High School (Virginia Beach), Landstown High School (Virginia Beach), Princess Anne High School (Virginia Beach), St. Catherine’s School (Richmond), St. Christopher’s School (Richmond), St. Gertrude High School (Richmond), Steward School (Richmond), Thomas Jefferson High School (Richmond), and Trinity Episcopal School (Richmond)

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*The Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities conducts programs that promote understanding and respect on ALL issues of diversity, for ALL age groups, ALL across Virginia For more information, call the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities at (804) 515-7950 or visit [www.inclusiveva.org](http://www.inclusiveva.org).*