

Virginia School-University Partnership

Report on Student Leadership Conference

2014-2015

The twenty-fourth VSUP Annual Student Leadership Conference, which was held on Thursday, November 13, 2014, was attended by 386 students and faculty members from 41 different high schools from around the state of Virginia. Participants responded very positively to the conference Keynote Address and Training, which were provided by The Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC), as well as enthusiastically embracing the opportunity to share their thoughts with other students from around the state and learn about ideas that they could take back to improve their own schools.

The 2014 VSUP Student Leadership Conference continued to build on the work done during previous years with Rachel's Challenge, with a goal of helping all participants develop strategies for creating more supportive and effective learning environments as well as gain the skills necessary to bring about change as leaders of their school communities.

The conference began with a Keynote Address entitled "Break the Cycle: Be the Change" which established the theme of the 2014 Student Leadership Conference. During this Keynote, which was delivered by a team of presenters from VCIC, participants learned about the sources and consequences of prejudice, while being given skills to recognize intolerance and challenge the ways that it showed up in their schools.

After the opening Keynote Address, students and their faculty advisors took part in an "Inclusion Training" session in which VCIC trainers helped them explore how they could implement in their school communities what they had learned in the Keynote Address. During the rest of the day, students also participated in small group discussions on topics of concern at their high schools. These small group discussions were co-facilitated by seniors from participating high schools and adults from the community, all of whom had volunteered for this role and received training as facilitators from VCIC before the conference.

During the conference, Faculty Advisors participated in an "Educator Support" session which provided the information and resources necessary for them to support their students as they brought the program message back to their schools and communities.

Overall, the hope is that all participants in the 2014 VSUP Student Leadership Conference left the day's program with increased empathy, heightened awareness, and enhanced skills for leadership roles in their increasingly diverse schools and communities.