Ambition trumps disability for these future leaders
Students gather for 21st Annual Youth Leadership Forum

SACRAMENTO – Fifty-nine California high school students with disabilities gathered on the steps of the State Capitol today to show lawmakers they have the talent, drive and desire to become tomorrow’s leaders and policy makers.

The rally was part of the five-day Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) for Students with Disabilities held annually in Sacramento and designed to help the students, known as delegates, recognize and reach their full potential.

This year’s YLF, held July 23 – 27 at California State University, Sacramento, marks the 21st anniversary of this forum that began with a handful of delegates in 1992. Delegates come from all over the state and are selected based on achievements and leadership skills they’ve displayed in their local communities.

“Achievement, drive and leadership are the engines that power success,” said Pam Harris, Director of the state Employment Development Department (EDD). “And this year’s YLF delegates exemplify this desire to lead by example. Many have overcome hardships and bested adversity, and here they emerge as winners. We’ll continue to watch with pride as they reshape this world with their passion, pride and principles.”

During the Forum, delegates meet with YLF alumni to talk about personal and professional choices that lead to success. They attend leadership training, watch demonstrations of the latest technology, learn about each other’s disabilities, discuss issues facing the disability community, and obtain advice from motivational speakers and mentors.

California created the YLF concept in 1991 and was the first state to hold a YLF conference. Since then, the YLF model of helping prepare students with disabilities reach their career goals, join the workforce, live independently and become involved in their communities, has been replicated in 33 states and U.S. territories. To date, the California YLF boasts more than 1,000 alumni.

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“This leadership forum’s impact on these youths with disabilities lasts more than just the short time they are here in Sacramento,” said Tony Sauer, Director of the Department of Rehabilitation. “The skills and knowledge learned will last throughout their lifetime. Many of the former delegates have become aides to legislators, doctors, disability advocates, lawyers, state executives, business entrepreneurs, and have become top executives running community-based organizations.”

Paul K. Miller, chair of the California Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, echoed that YLF is an investment in our future. “When we envisioned this unique leadership program for high school students with disabilities more than twenty years ago, we believed it would work,” said Miller, who also chairs Friends of Californians with Disabilities, Inc. “By celebrating the 21st anniversary event today, we’re thrilled that it has succeeded beyond our modest expectations and become a national model youth leadership program. Youth are our future, and encouraging students with disabilities to develop leadership skills has resulted in an important cohort of emerging leaders with disabilities.”

The annual YLF is coordinated by a partnership of California state agencies, including EDD; the Department of Rehabilitation; the Department of Education; the California Workforce Investment Board; the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation; the State Council on Developmental Disabilities; the Department of Developmental Services; the Department of Mental Health; the State Independent Living Council; California Services for Technical Assistance and Training/Napa County Office of Education; California Health Incentives Improvement Project; and the UC Davis Mind Institute. Private donors include the Wells Fargo Foundation; IBM Corporation; Intel; Lockheed Martin; Sutter Health; Pacific Bell; Molina Health Care; the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers; and Friends of Californians with Disabilities, Inc.

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DELEGATES ATTENDING:

ALAMEDA COUNTY
DELEGATE CITY
William Lane Oakland
Mary-Ja’Nelle Nichols Oakland
Samay Randeria Fremont
Tony Shen Fremont
Stephanie Wadsworth Hayward

(more)
CONTRA COSTA COUNTY
DELEGATE
Ariel Ashe-Ramirez
Devin Morrisey
Alyssa Sih
KERN COUNTY
DELEGATE
Monica Flores
LOS ANGELES COUNTY
DELEGATE
Marisol Aceves
Shawn Beltran Therrian
Henry Best
Emily Bogner
Scott Card
Juan Lara
Eseta Lavea
Deanna Wang
Casie Zwahlen
MADERA COUNTY
DELEGATE
Troy Davis
ORANGE COUNTY
DELEGATE
Tina Yeh
PLACER COUNTY
DELEGATE
William Jeffries
RIVERSIDE COUNTY
DELEGATE
Cody Allman
Robin (RJ) Arnold
Katie Estrella
Amanda Velazquez
SACRAMENTO COUNTY
DELEGATE
Katherine Acree
Amberlynn McLoed
Scott Newman
Rhett Tyson
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
DELEGATE
Nilson Avalos
Joshua Castellanos
Lucero (Lucy) Luna
Dylan Robinson
Dominique Yeboah

CITY
Walnut Creek
Danville
San Ramon
Bakersfield
Paramount
Lancaster
Culver City
Studio City
Monrovia
Whittier
Hacienda Heights
Cerritos
Covina
Chowchilla
Irvine
Roseville
Riverside
Hemet
Norco
Riverside
Sacramento
Elk Grove
Sacramento
Sacramento
Colton
Apple Valley
Ontario
Yucaipa
Rialto

(more)
SAN DIEGO COUNTY
DELEGATE
Christopher Borunda
CJ Bulatao
Juan Carillo
Matthew Daniel
Rita Dean
Haleigh Graham
Eric Grzeskowski
Colleen Moen
Jassmine Salas
Jordan Welsh
CITY
La Mesa
San Diego
San Diego
Escondido
Valley Center
Oceanside
Spring Valley
San Diego
La Mesa
San Diego

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY
DELEGATE
Frank Carlo Mills
Brandon Vierra
CITY
Lodi
Tracy

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY
DELEGATE
Katherine Miller
CITY
San Luis Obispo

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
DELEGATE
Jeffrey Mintz
CITY
Los Olivos

SANTA CLARA COUNTY
DELEGATE
Priyanka Nookala
CITY
Saratoga

SHASTA COUNTY
DELEGATE
Connor O'Leary
CITY
Redding

SONOMA COUNTY
DELEGATE
Shannon Ferguson
CITY
Petaluma

SUTTER COUNTY
DELEGATE
Nicholas Handlos
CITY
Yuba City

TULARE COUNTY
DELEGATE
Kendall Collins
CITY
Porterville

VENTURA COUNTY
DELEGATE
Brittany Anderson
Aashni Kamra
Brian Liu
Frances Nye
Nadia Rizk
CITY
Moorpark
Moorpark
Oxnard
Ventura
Moorpark

YOLO COUNTY
DELEGATE
Christopher Nakamura
CITY
Woodland

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