

N E W S R E L E A S E

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**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.

(more)

“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 21<sup>st</sup> 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**

William Lane  
 Mary-Ja’Nelle Nichols  
 Samay Randeria  
 Tony Shen  
 Stephanie Wadsworth

**CITY**

Oakland  
 Oakland  
 Fremont  
 Fremont  
 Hayward

(more)

**CONTRA COSTA COUNTY**

**DELEGATE**

Ariel Ashe-Ramirez  
Devin Morrisey  
Alyssa Sih

**CITY**

Walnut Creek  
Danville  
San Ramon

**KERN COUNTY**

**DELEGATE**

Monica Flores

**CITY**

Bakersfield

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

**DELEGATE**

Marisol Aceves  
Shawn Beltran Therrian  
Henry Best  
Emily Bogner  
Scott Card  
Juan Lara  
Eseta Lavea  
Deanna Wang  
Casie Zwahlen

**CITY**

Paramount  
Lancaster  
Culver City  
Studio City  
Monrovia  
Whittier  
Hacienda Heights  
Cerritos  
Covina

**MADERA COUNTY**

**DELEGATE**

Troy Davis

**CITY**

Chowchilla

**ORANGE COUNTY**

**DELEGATE**

Tina Yeh

**CITY**

Irvine

**PLACER COUNTY**

**DELEGATE**

William Jeffries

**CITY**

Roseville

**RIVERSIDE COUNTY**

**DELEGATE**

Cody Allman  
Robin (RJ) Arnold  
Katie Estrella  
Amanda Velazquez

**CITY**

Riverside  
Hemet  
Norco  
Riverside

**SACRAMENTO COUNTY**

**DELEGATE**

Katherine Acree  
Amberlynn McLoed  
Scott Newman  
Rhett Tyson

**CITY**

Sacramento  
Elk Grove  
Sacramento  
Sacramento

**SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY**

**DELEGATE**

Nilson Avalos  
Joshua Castellanos  
Lucero (Lucy) Luna  
Dylan Robinson  
Dominique Yeboah

**CITY**

Colton  
Apple Valley  
Ontario  
Yucaipa  
Rialto

(more)

**SAN DIEGO COUNTY**

**DELEGATE**

Christopher Borunda  
CJ Bulatao  
Juan Carillo  
Matthew Daniel  
Rita Dean  
Haleigh Graham  
Eric Grzeskowiak  
Colleen Moen  
Jasmine 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**

FrankCarlo 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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