

## FIFTY NINE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES PARTICIPATE IN STATEWIDE LEADERSHIP FORUM

### NEWS RELEASE

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SACRAMENTO – Fifty nine extraordinary high school students from throughout California gathered today on the North Steps of the State Capitol as part of an innovative five-day forum designed to assist young people with disabilities to reach their full potential. Each student was selected to attend the Forum based on individual achievements and leadership qualities.

“This year’s Youth Leadership Forum is especially significant because it coincides with the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the implementation of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act,” said Patrick Henning, director of the state Employment Development Department (EDD).

“Every one of these students has unique talents and skills that they can use to reach their career goals and to benefit society. We are proud that this unique forum will assist these delegates in continuing their development as strong community leaders.”

The delegates began the morning with a group rally and photograph, followed by a meeting in the Governor’s Council Room with administration and state agency representatives. The students then received a guided tour of the Capitol and visited individual Legislator’s offices.

“The Youth Leadership Forum is an event that can be life changing for participants,” said Catherine Campisi, director of the state Department of Rehabilitation. “It seeks to give them a positive identity as a person with a disability and connects them with adult role models and resources to assist them in transitioning from high school to work and independent living.”

Celebrating its 15th anniversary, the annual Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) for Students with Disabilities is sponsored by the Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, in coordination with EDD and other state entities, including the Department of Rehabilitation, Department of Education, California Workforce Investment Board, California State Council on Developmental Disabilities, State Independent Living Council, Institute on Human Services at Sonoma State University, and California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, with financial support from Wells Fargo Foundation and Lockheed Martin Corporation.

California created the YLF concept in 1991 and was the first state to hold a YLF conference. Since then more than 33 states and Puerto Rico have followed California's lead. The primary purpose of the Forum is to prepare students with disabilities to reach their career goals, join the workforce, live independently, become involved in their communities, and continue their successes by learning from adults with disabilities who excel in their personal and professional lives.

So far during the Forum, student delegates have participated in leadership development programs, attended various sessions and panel discussions, attended demonstrations in the latest technology and assistive devices, interactively learned about each other's disabilities, and received presentations and advice from motivational speakers and mentors.