

VaSCL Annual Student Leadership Conference

2020-2021 Overview

For thirty years, The Virginia School Consortium for Learning (formerly known as VSUP, the Virginia School University Partnership) has sponsored an Annual Student Leadership Conference. This very popular conference, which was attended last year by more than 400 students and faculty members from 59 different high schools from around the state of Virginia, is provided at NO CHARGE to all high schools which are members of VaSCL.

All VaSCL high schools are encouraged to select a team of student leaders to participate in this year's Student Leadership Conference, which will be held as a Virtual event, via Zoom, from 9:00 am – 2:30 pm, on Friday, March 19, 2021, and which is absolutely FREE to all participants from VaSCL high schools, as a benefit of membership in VaSCL.

The theme of the 2020-2021 VaSCL Student Leadership Conference is "Cultivating Just & Joyful Schools," and VaSCL is pleased to be working with several different keynote presenters who will help students realize the important role that they can play in creating schools which are more inclusive and nurturing. Kaleb Rashad and Tina Schuster, from the Love and Justice Center, as well as Dee Lanier, a Google Certified Innovator and creator of Solve in Time, will engage students in thoughtful consideration of the issue of justice, which, in all its various aspects - racial, cultural, economic, generational, social, and ecological – has become such a crucial concern in our world today. Students will be encouraged to examine their own culture (who they are, what they believe, how they can work together, and how they can care for each other) and to explore how they can help create a learning environment in which all students believe that they have been given a fair chance to be successful, and feel respected and supported. The goal of the Student Leadership Conference is to empower students, making them realize that their voices matter, and that they, as ordinary people, are capable of doing extraordinary work, which can make a real, positive difference in the world. The hope is that the keynote presentations will stimulate dialogue about the issues that matter most to students – both today and in the future – a conversation that will continue not only throughout the day, but when students return to their homes, schools, and communities at the end of the Student Leadership Conference.

During the Student Leadership Conference, all students will be assigned to a Breakout Discussion Group, with twenty other students from different high schools, which will meet numerous times throughout the day to give students a chance to respond to what they are experiencing and to engage in various activities which allow them to investigate for themselves the conference themes. These Breakout Discussion Groups will be led by Seniors who have volunteered to take on this role and participated in a training session before the conference is held, which will help prepare them to serve as facilitators. Although one adult will be assigned to monitor each Breakout Group (as a way of ensuring safety in a virtual environment), the goal is for the Breakout Discussion Groups to be entirely student-driven, giving all students the chance to listen to, learn from, motivate, and inspire each other as they explore the questions and problems that are important to them. The goal for the Breakout sessions is to help students grow as leaders by giving them the opportunity to share their experiences and collaborate with other students in coming up with creative, new approaches to issues faced by their schools and communities.

This year, taking advantage of the virtual format, we will be including Creative Expression Presentations as well as Share Fair Presentations, both of which will celebrate student accomplishments, during the Student Leadership Conference. Schools which have chosen to do so will create and submit a short video recording, which either shares the artistic talents and creations of students or provides information on innovative programs or projects at their schools. The goal of both the Creative Expression Presentations and the Share Fair Presentations will be to highlight students' interests and passions, as well as to enable students to learn from their peers about ways in which schools can help spark curiosity and inquiry in order to prepare students to face the challenges of the future.

Throughout the conference, the focus will be on how students can be empowered not only to take ownership of their own education but also to help create in their schools a joyful and just environment which makes all students want to come to school, want to learn, and want to make the world a better place. The hope is that this year's conference will engage all participants and motivate students to be bold and imaginative leaders who are committed to rising up, speaking up, and taking actions that will improve themselves, their schools, their communities, and the world.