

## Michigan youths empowered with leadership skills



Written by

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12:59 AM, May. 17, 2011|

DELTA TWP. - Demetrius Hayes was one of the more than 200 teenagers from around the state who learned leadership skills Monday during the second annual Project Voice: A Dynamic Approach to Youth Empowerment conference.

But Hayes was the only student who also attended the first conference and could speak about how the experience helped him advise other teens about their health care options.

"This is a **great** opportunity. It advanced my knowledge, especially with diversity and the lack of health benefits people have," said Hayes, 18, a senior at Romulus High School.

Conference organizers hope other **students** glean the benefits Hayes did, especially since high school students led the workshop portion of this year's conference - a change from the last youth empowerment conference in 2009.

This year also drew more than 200 students to Lansing Community College's West Campus, double the attendance from the first conference, said Michele Strasz, executive director of the School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan, which organizes the conference.

"A lot of these students are from youth advisory councils," she said. "Obviously we hope they take home the skills they learned to share with their friends and peers."

Retired Detroit Lions defensive tackle Luther Elliss spoke at one session about a nutrition/physical activity program Fuel Up to Play 60.

"For you guys to have success in your life you have to take control of your life," said Elliss, 38, who helped hand out prizes, including a signed football jersey, to students who competed in in-session activities.

Lansing Eastern High School senior Anita Hernandez said she signed up as a student

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presenter to help change how students

look at health.

"Empowering youth is really our only opportunity to change the way things are now," said Hernandez, 18. "I'm talking about teen pregnancy and ways to reduce that because in my high school, it's not an uncommon thing to see."