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Contact:

Michele Strasz, Executive Director
School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan
Phone: 517.908.0847, ext. 229
Cell: 517.712.2014
mstrasz@scha-mi.org

Alicia Guevara, Media Relations Manager
Phone: 517.908.0847, ext. 232
Cell: 517.977.3380
aguevara@scha-mi.org

**200 Youth Attend Project Voice Leadership Conference
*Annual Youth Conference Building Health & Educational Leaders for Change***

Lansing, Michigan – Today, approximately 200 youth from across Michigan gathered at the Lansing Community College – West Campus to participate in the 2nd Annual Project Voice: A Dynamic Approach to Youth Empowerment. The youth conference was organized by the School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan (SCHA-MI), a nonprofit, membership organization representing school-based and school-linked health centers that provide health care services to medically underserved students in or near schools.

The 2nd Annual Project Voice: A Dynamic Approach to Youth Empowerment is an annual gathering of youth brought together by SCHA-MI to provide youth with cutting edge learning and leadership opportunities to become positive catalysts for change in their communities. Bridging the top health and educational issues are at the forefront of discussion, allowing youth to actively learn how to best communicate and advocate amidst personal challenges.

“Today was such an incredible, exciting, and important day for Michigan youth. To see them take leadership and share strategies with one another to improve their communities is an amazing experience,” said Michele Strasz, Executive Director for SCHA-MI. “It is critical to invest in our young people as they become our next generation of leaders and that is what Project Voice strives to accomplish.”

The day was filled with motivational speakers, like Patrick Perez, who led the youth through a mission and goal building exercise while showing off his “sick” breakdancing moves! “My mission is to connect to the youth at their level to empower them to create better futures by making better choices,” said Patrick Perez, who grew up in Austin, Texas and is the author of *Mad Skills* and founder of Patrick Perez International.

Also addressing the students was retired NFL Detroit Lions player, Luther Elliss. In his presentation of *Fuel Up to Play 60!*, which encourages physical fitness and nutrition in schools, Elliss challenged the youth to dream big and believe in themselves. Kicking off the workshop was Amy Schmidt, RD, from the United Dairy Industry of Michigan, who took everyone through a moving exercise, “Get Fit in the Mitt,” to show all of the places and

activities in Michigan to help them stay fit. *Fuel Up to Play 60!* is a joint effort of the United Dairy Industry and the NFL.

Unlike most youth conferences, Project Voice offers an opportunity for young people to develop their leadership and presentation skills by showcasing their community work to their peers. Lansing Eastern High School Senior, Anita Hernandez was one of three speakers in the *Youth As Advocates: The Power to Achieve Equal Health for All!*, where she discussed the high prevalence of teen pregnancy in the Latino community. "Self-health is pivotal to growing not only as an individual, but as a member of a greater community," said Hernandez. "Through my presentation I hope to have a positive influence on my peers and educate people on the issues."

Project Voice empowers and instills youth with a sense of community investment as the next generation of public health and education leaders. This year's youth leadership conference is sponsored in partnership by: Henry Ford Health System – Generation With Promise, Ingham Change Initiative, Michigan Department of Education, Capital Region Community Foundation, Molina Healthcare, Michigan Department of Community Health, and the United Dairy Industry of Michigan. Visit the event page for more information: <http://conta.cc/projectvoiceregistration>.

The School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan (SCHA-MI) is a non-profit organization supporting a network of over 100 school-based and school-linked health centers and health education programs across Michigan. The centers annually provide over 300,000 health encounters/services. The centers are located in communities where the majority of children lack access to consistent, primary health care and as a result are at-risk of chronic health conditions and school failure. Visit our website, www.scha-mi.org.

For more information about Michigan's school-based and school-linked health programs, please contact Michele Strasz at 517.908.0847, ext. 229 or mstrasz@scha-mi.org or Alicia Guevara at 517.977.3380 (cell) or aguevara@scha-mi.org.

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