

**Kaiser HEAL Youth, Taking Part in the Big Change  
April 27-29, 2014**

“We’re so lucky to be here; this is where all the big change happens” states Ontario freshman Keven Michel. Sacramento served as the backdrop for the annual Youth Advocate Network for Sustainable Communities (YANSC) Capitol Focus conference. Facilitated by the California Center for Civic Participation (CCCP), the 3-day convening brought together more than 40 students from across California to explore how state policy affects local change.

Participants honed their communication skills, developed a stronger understanding of the policy-making process, and prepared for meetings with legislative representatives. Six of the nine contingent groups represented Southern California Kaiser HEAL communities (Anaheim, Hollywood, Long Beach, Ontario, Riverside, Ventura, and Whittier).



Youth preparing their community profiles and legislative presentations.

CCCP invited several field experts to motivate and inspire participants throughout the convening. Keynote speaker Christopher Covington spoke in depth about his journey to becoming a community advocate. Beginning as an outspoken student from Long Beach, he now serves as a youth leader for the California Endowment’s President Youth Council and an advisory board member for the Born This Way Foundation.

When prompted for advice by students in the room, Covington encouraged them to stay informed about community initiatives, and to become an active part of the local landscape. Participants certainly took his advice to heart, vocalizing their opinions during a visit with Samantha Tran of Children Now. The youth shared their experiences on health care access and the newly introduced Common Core testing strategy.

In preparation for the local legislative meetings, youth from the different regional teams collaborated to identify issues affecting their respective communities. Almost instantly,



Youth meeting with Rory Kaufman, Consultant for Assemblymember Shirley Webber.

participants began to recognize similarities within their presentations, as well as unique challenges faced by their peers. The open exchange of ideas allowed the youth to connect over shared visions for healthy fundraising and after-school program initiatives. Elizabeth Aguirre from Riverside stated that “it was great to hear that other kids were working on the same things we are.”

Participants were also asked to examine several bills that directly affect student life, with issues ranging from the implementation of school-based health centers (SB 1055), establishing an adequate amount of time to eat during the school day (AB 2449), and ensuring safer school zones (SB 1151). Student were provided an opportunity to present their message with legislative officials at the State Capitol Building.

Rory Kaufman, Consultant for Assemblymember Shirley Webber, met with students supporting SB 1055. Kaufman advised the young constituents to “consider that your opposition has done just as much research and preparation that you have.” He thanked them for their support in the issues, and encouraged the group to contact local representatives to share their message.

Regional teams also had the opportunity to meet their community representatives to discuss local issues such as improved access to healthy food options, integration of more physical activity in school curriculum, and support of local farms and community gardens. Participants left the convening inspired to engage their peers in healthy food and physical activity strategies. All Kaiser HEAL youth are invited to participated in the Southern California regional trainings in July to continue building their leadership and implementation capacity.

For more information, visit [www.HealZones.org](http://www.HealZones.org) or contact Pia Bañez at 213-346-3213.