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Virginia Career and Technical Student Organization Leaders Celebrate CTE Month and Learn the Ropes of Legislative Lobbying on Capitol Hill

State presidents representing Virginia's Career and Technical Education student organizations participated in the Virginia Association for Career and Technical Education (VACTE) Professional Leadership Seminar for Virginia Educators, CTE . . . Virginia's Success Story, January 15-16, 2009, in Richmond Virginia. While at the conference, students were given an opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of legislation concerning Career and Technical Education. The event was capped off by introductions of the students on the floors of the House of Delegates and Senate as well as a CTE Month Proclamation signing and meeting with Governor Timothy Kaine.

The conference began with a workshop conducted by John F. Ledgerwood and Dr. Brenda Long, VACTE Public Policy Liaisons, and Richard Pulley, a professional lobbyist. The students were presented with materials concerning the bills affecting Career and Technical Education being introduced to the Virginia legislators. The presenters coached the students on talking points of the bills and policy issues outlined in the VACTE Policies and Solutions for Virginia Career and Technical Education. Mr. Pulley discussed protocol when approaching legislators in person and through correspondence.

According to Joshua Cline, Phi Beta Lambda state president of Virginia FBLA-PBL, Inc., "The VACTE conference was a great experience for me. I was able to meet and network with my elected state officials. It was great to see the legislative process, from lobbying to a session of the House of Delegates, up close at a personal level."

Besides the opportunity to meet with legislators and discuss pertinent policy and new legislature, Delegate Matt Lohr, a former FFA national officer, conducted a session with the students on how to leverage their role as a state officer with networking strategies. Delegate Lohr also discussed the power of advocacy and the importance of making time for civic responsibilities.

The students concluded the conference with a meeting with Governor Kaine as he signed the Proclamation for Career and Technical Education Month. Aaron Van Allen, DECA state president stated, "It was great to see so many people involved in CTE, and to also see that the Governor of Virginia recognizes that CTE is a vital part of the educational system today."

Kirsten Sigloh, a Virginia CTSO Specialist, agreed that the conference was a success on many levels. "One of the most important roles a CTSO State Officer has is to represent the CTE Student organizations through CTE advocacy activities and civic responsibilities, including direct lobbying, presentations, and public awareness. [This conference] provided real opportunity to see the power of the voice and importance of influence. The student officers and their advisors left the conference with a better understanding of the process involved in maintaining their programs and a deeper appreciation for all those who work behind the scenes to expand and enrich the CTE programs."

The students were encouraged to continue their advocacy once they returned to their local communities through communication with voters and local policy makers. Virginia CTE state presidents are thinking globally and acting locally on behalf of Career and Technical Education.

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