

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—Marion Junior-Senior High School Students Attend the 38th Annual Students Leading Students (SLS) State Conference at Shanty Creek Resort Bellaire, Michigan

March 14-16, 2025

The 38th Annual Students Leading Students (SLS) State Conference was an unforgettable experience for Marion students, immersing them in a weekend of leadership, creativity, and personal growth. This year's theme, *"Eyes Wide Open,"* encouraged attendees to embrace awareness, open-mindedness, and the power of leadership in making a difference.

Door Decorations: A Creative Expression of Awareness

One of the standout traditions of the conference was the door decoration contest, where teams designed their hotel room doors to reflect the conference theme. The Marion chapter brought their vision to life reminding everyone to always be a friend and keep your Eyes Wide Open to help stand up to bullying.

Workshops: Expanding Perspectives

This conference is packed with engaging workshops that provided knowledge, challenged students to think critically, and develop new skills. Some of the most impactful sessions included:

"Magic of Hope" presented by Anthony Grupido, which focused on maintaining optimism and resilience in leadership roles. Both a magician and public speaker, Anthony shared many insights with students like the importance of setting your personal boundaries: *"YOU set boundaries to protect the success of your FUTURE!"*

"Navigating the Dumpster Fires of Life!" by Michelle Turner, an SLS alumna, offers strategies to handle challenges effectively. A veteran SLS Adviser offered tips from real-life experiences such as *"We can't blame others when our choice leads to outcomes we don't like."*

"Lego Your Ego" led by SAB member, A'nyiah Daniels, from Clarenceville High School, encouraged participants to remember that communication, collaboration, and cooperation are vital components of being a strong student leader. Students were challenged to experience this with a lego and story-writing task. A'nyiah reminds us that as leaders, *"You can be a HOG or a LOG. Which will you be?"*

"Do You Need to Look Good to Feel Good?" by second-year Marion hometown SAB member and fan favorite, Marvin Mills. Participants engaged in various activities to show that you don't need to dress like others to fit in and how important it is to NOT judge people based on how they look. Together, students pulled back the lens on how *"social norms can be good to a fault."*

SAB members A'nyiah Daniels and Marvin Mills, dazzled the audience with their musical talents on the clarinet and tuba, respectively. They honored the Authors of SLS, the SLS Advisers, with *"Pomp and Circumstance"* at the Adviser and Awards dinner Saturday night. A'nyiah also played a lovely clarinet solo for the SLS Advisers. Additionally, Marvin played a tuba solo during the conference Memorial, honoring those we have lost too soon and will never forget.

“Transition Tales” with SLS Conference photographer, Edelyn Westwood. This workshop is a HUGE hit every year with real talk about the importance of being an Ally and how to be a better advocate for yourself and those around you. *“You are NEVER alone.”*

“Dress to Impress” led by SAB member Mayah Randolph, representing Brighton High School, sharing advice about how to be your best self during an interview from head to toe. With the help of her mannequin, Prevention Pete, students learned about making the all-important best first impression at interviews through a series of interactive activities that address being punctual, appropriate dress (and where to find them cheap), eye contact, and appropriate word choice in a business setting.

“Personal and School Safety 101” with Sergeant Kendall Kretzschmer, providing insights into maintaining a safe educational and personal environment. Sergeant K reviewed the importance of taking crisis drills seriously, online safety and NOT oversharing your personal information, the dangers of teen drug, alcohol, tobacco, and vape use, safe and distraction-free driving, and always driving sober. Sergeant K’s big tip for online safety is to *“Review your list of online followers/friends/etc. regularly. Ask yourself, ‘do you really know them?’ If the answer is ‘no’, then delete them from your list.”*

Marion students left these sessions with a fresh perspective, valuable tools, and information to bring back to MHS.

Action Plans: Turning Awareness into Action

A major focus of the conference was developing action plans—strategies that students can implement in their schools to create positive change. During their school team meetings, the Marion chapter identified key issues impacting their peers and brainstormed solutions. Their action plan included:

- ❖ Standing Up to Bullying/Not Being a Bystander— ensuring students feel seen and supported, coping and peer resistance skills for victims of bullying, education and awareness of possible underlying issues for acting like a bully, providing resources and where to get help
- ❖ Peer Mentorship Program—Connecting high school students with students in grades 3rd-8th to educate about being a bully and a bystander, foster positive leadership and guidance
- ❖ Safe Space Open Talk Circles—loseley-based Conflict Resolution small group peer-to-peer talking circles to clear the air and restore relationships
- ❖ Community Partnerships- embracing *“It Takes A Village”* to support and partner with Marion students to eradicate bullying so that MPS are more safe, supportive, and friendly environments for everyone

The Marion chapter left the conference inspired, rejuvenated, motivated, and ready to put their plans into action, ensuring that their *Eyes Wide Open* approach begins to shift school climate, improve relationships, and make a lasting impact.

Looking Ahead:

The 38th Annual SLS State Conference was more than just a weekend event—it was a catalyst for change. Marion students returned home empowered, validated, and committed to fostering a positive culture of leadership, awareness, and action in their school and community. Unanimously, all Marion students agreed that *“We are DEFINITELY coming back next year!”*

With *Eyes Wide Open*, they’re ready to lead the way!