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### **Piscataway's Project HealthLinks Wins *School Leader Award***

PISCATAWAY, NJ – Project HealthLinks, the Piscataway School District initiative designed to introduce minority middle schools students to careers in the field of medicine, has been selected as a winner of the *25<sup>th</sup> Annual School Leader Award*, sponsored by the NJ Schools Boards Association. The award recognizes unique and innovative district programs.

Take thirty Piscataway middle school “interns” to Liberty Science Center to watch a live stream of a neurosurgery procedure. Invite them to meet and interview a heart transplant recipient. Then provide them with opportunities to speak with biomedical engineers at NJIT who assist people with physical disabilities, organ transplants and strokes.

These are just a few of the “Project HealthLinks” organized field experiences created by the district in conjunction with a community group known as Raritan Valley Links. The 10-year partnership has resulted in a multitude of activities providing student access to professional role models. Participants have observed a kidney transplant, followed by a discussion with the surgeon, and attended a session on world hunger at the United Nations.

The HealthLinks “interns” participate in field trips, explore health care policy issues, career challenges and rewards, all designed to foster an understanding of educational requirements for careers in health care professions. The Raritan Valley volunteers, mostly retired minority health care professionals, organize the excursions with the goal of increasing minority representation in health care occupations.

At the conclusion of the year-long program, students host a district-wide youth conference for parents, schools officials, and adult Links volunteers, offering keynote speeches that highlight how the internship has had a profound influence on their consideration of future career choices. Parents comment that students are more motivated following the HealthLinks experience.

The award was accepted by representatives of the Piscataway Board of Education, district staff, and the Raritan Valley Links in a NJ School Boards Association ceremony at the Trenton War Memorial on May 14<sup>th</sup>.

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