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**AS PROM APPROACHES, PEERS TALK EDUCATION NOT PRESSURE;
HUNDREDS OF TEENS GATHER AT CONFERENCE**

*Governor's Highway Safety Bureau (GHSB) Sponsors Second Annual
Massachusetts SADD Youth Conference*

BOSTON (April 9, 2005) – The tuxes are on order, the dresses picked out. As many teens prepare for prom, some prepare for after the prom – the ride home, the rest of the year, the rest of their lives. More than 400 youth and advisors from 50 Massachusetts high schools will gather for a day of team building, networking, sharing, interactive workshops, and leadership development at Massachusetts SADD's second annual youth leadership conference April 9 at the Sturbridge Host Hotel and Conference Center. The conference, "**Empowered: Living for Today, Leading for Tomorrow**" will feature internationally recognized lecturer Jean Kilbourne, Ed.D., as keynote speaker and offer a wide range of workshops on topics such as underage drinking, other drug use, impaired driving, traffic safety, media and youth voice, peer leadership, and group facilitation.

With prom and graduation season quickly approaching, the Massachusetts State Conference comes at a particularly relevant time. Automobile crashes are the leading cause of death for teens. Approximately 36 percent of traffic deaths of 15- to 20-year-olds are alcohol-related. The potential for young people to be involved in a crash caused by alcohol and other drugs increases in the warm weather, especially during times when proms and graduations are celebrated. Attending the conference is another great opportunity for students to assist in SADD's commitment to tap the energy and enthusiasm of young people to promote positive decision-making and healthy lifestyles.

Part of a statewide youth prevention program targeting new strategies to promote healthy decision-making in schools and communities, this conference is made possible through funding by the Massachusetts Governor's Highway Safety Bureau (GHSB), a program of the Executive Office of Public Safety (EOPS). "We're funding this conference and a host of other services for local schools because we care about young people, and we know the best way to support youth is to empower them to educate each other," said Jenny Barron, Program Coordinator for the

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Governor's Highway Safety Bureau. "We are proud of this partnership with Massachusetts SADD. Last year the participants came away inspired, and we are confident they will again."

"Teens face many challenges, and it's important to provide them with the tools to make healthy choices," said Julie Cushing, Youth Coordinator for Massachusetts SADD. "We're excited by the range of workshops this year. Today's program offers students and advisors four key components: the opportunity to build strong leadership skills, create action plans for their schools and communities, acquire innovative ideas to enhance their SADD chapters and youth programs, and develop quality programming that truly empowers youth in their local communities," Cushing said.

SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) is committed to empowering young people to lead education and prevention initiatives in their schools and communities. Founded as Students Against Driving Drunk in 1981 in Wayland, Massachusetts, SADD has developed significant experience working with young people on issues of substance abuse and impaired driving. In 1997, based on feedback from students, SADD enhanced its mission and changed its name to Students Against Destructive Decisions to include many relevant and pressing issues that affect today's teen, such as violence, depression, suicide, underage drinking, and substance use. SADD's approach involves empowering young people to deliver education and prevention messages to their peers through school- and communitywide activities and campaigns responsive to the needs of their particular community. Studies have shown that students in schools with an established SADD chapter are more aware of and informed about the risks of underage drinking and impaired driving. Students in schools with a SADD chapter are also more likely to hold attitudes reflecting positive reasons not to use alcohol.

SADD joined forces with the GHSB in FY 2003 to develop a statewide youth prevention program targeting underage drinking, impaired driving, safety belt use, and healthy decision-making. The success of the first full year of the Office of Youth Coordinator is evidenced by the increased funding the program received in FY 2004.

The GHSB funds Cushing's position as the Massachusetts Youth Coordinator located at the SADD National headquarters in Marlborough. Local schools benefit from a wide range of services, including a high school grant program in which 100 high schools were awarded \$1,000 each in grant funds to create programming that encourages traffic safety and discourages underage drinking, other drug use, and impaired driving. In her role, Cushing provides schools with SADD chapter development and support, awareness-raising activities, support of a student leadership group, safety campaigns, newsletters, and other youth-focused activities.

Massachusetts SADD is establishing a respected presence on the high school scene and is a central location able to link students, teachers, government and law enforcement officials, and other community resources committed to this critical work. "With further time and attention, this central location can become a reliable hub for both the input of information and the output from the students," said Penny Wells, President and Executive Director of SADD National. Among the awareness-raising activities, scores of Massachusetts high schools are participating in a campaign titled "***Think About It ... Prom & Graduation Season.***" The campaign is a result of the partnership between SADD and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The campaign provides exciting ways for SADD chapter members to increase

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dialogue among school administrators, teachers, and students to create a safer, more positive environment in schools and the community.

The conference is a reflection of the vision, hard work and dedication of the conference planning committee. The committee consists of a Student Advisory Board whose members demonstrate outstanding academic achievement and community involvement from various Massachusetts high schools. The members are Gabrielle Blonder from Swampscott High School, Angela Cole and Kayse Eichelberger from King Philip Regional High School in Wrentham, Amy Couto from Dighton-Rehoboth High School, Jacqui Derochea from Silver Lake Regional High School in Kingston, Liz Morgan from Hopkinton High School, Colin Treseler from Belmont Hill School, and Niyati Vakil and Craig Wilcox from Bishop Feehan High School in Attleboro.

For more information about any of the programs mentioned, please contact Julie Cushing, the Massachusetts Youth Coordinator, toll-free at 877-SADD-INC (877-723-3462), extension 230 or by e-mail at jcushing@sadd.org or Deborah Burke Henderson, Senior Executive Assistant, SADD National, at extension 231 or by e-mail at dbhenderson@sadd.org. For more information about SADD, visit www.sadd.org.

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