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## **Cocalico High School Group Receives National Accolade**

*Pennsylvania SADD Chapter Honored for Promoting Safe  
and Healthy Decision-Making Among Teens*

**Marlborough, Mass.** – The Cocalico High School SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) chapter in Denver, Pennsylvania, has been chosen to receive the 2009 SADD National Activity of the Year award for its efforts to raise suicide and depression awareness among youth. The SADD students were innovative and interested in reaching other communities as they took a positive approach to the issue of depression.

“The Aavidum Initiative has gotten students to really think about and discuss suicide and depression, and it has had a positive impact on the community,” said Joe Vulopas, the SADD advisor. “Created entirely by a group of motivated teens, the word ‘Aavidum’ and its messages are both powerful and positive.”

Cocalico SADD students began their project by creating a word: *Aavidum*. Created from the Latin root *vid*, meaning *to see*, students used the expression “Aavidum!” to tell friends they were “looking out for them.” The word also helped chapter members openly discuss depression with their peers. Among other activities, they developed an interactive assembly for their school that began with the story of someone who completed suicide and they also included skits, poems, speeches, videos, and music. Students prepared t-shirts, fake tattoos, PSAs, a website, a Facebook page, and signs for the event. After the success of the assembly, Cocalico SADD then took this message to more than 1,200 students at the nearby Hempfield High School. The event garnered media attention throughout Lancaster County, and now students want to take the word to the national

level by offering their assembly to schools across the country. They even hope to one day see Aavidum in the dictionary.

“The creativity and dedication of these SADD students is truly inspiring,” said SADD Executive Director Penny Wells. “The Aavidum Initiative encourages a simple, student-to-student support message about depression and suicide during a powerful presentation. Cocalico SADD deserves to be recognized for tireless efforts promoting SADD’s message and empowering their friends to make safe, healthy decisions.”

The Cocalico High School SADD chapter will be formally honored at an awards banquet at the SADD National Conference in Washington, D.C., this July. The chapter will receive a \$500 cash prize. Two additional SADD chapters are also deserving of recognition for their hard work and dedication throughout the past year. Conrad Weiser High School in Robesonia, Pennsylvania, was chosen as the second-place winner and will receive a \$250 cash prize. Denham Springs High School in Denham Springs, Louisiana, placed third and will receive \$100.

SADD, the nation’s leading peer-to-peer youth education, prevention, and activism organization, is committed to empowering young people to lead initiatives in their schools and communities. Founded in 1981, today SADD has thousands of chapters in middle schools, high schools, and colleges. SADD highlights prevention of many destructive behaviors and attitudes that are harmful to young people, including underage drinking, other drug use, risky and impaired driving, and teen violence and suicide. More information about SADD can be found at **sadd.org**.

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