



Fontana Unified School District

Every Student Successful, Engaging Schools, Empowered Communities

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 13, 2023

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Fontana Unified Elementary School Students Prepare for Professional Theater Debut in ‘School of Rock’

FONTANA, CA – The bright lights of the theater are beckoning for 20 Fontana Unified elementary school students looking to sing and dance their way into the hearts of their classmates and community, as they prepare for their stage debut as cast members in “School of Rock,” a musical adaptation of the 2003 box office smash, to be held March 17 to 19 at the storied California Theater in San Bernardino.

Canyon Crest and Dorothy Grant elementary school students have been rehearsing for weeks with A.B. Miller High School multimedia design and drama teacher Joseph Henson, who is serving as producer and director of the play. The students are being choreographed and coached by professionals and will perform alongside professional actors.

In an exclusive arrangement, more than 1,200 of the District’s elementary school students will be able to see the show, made possible through a partnership between the career technical education (CTE) and visual and performing arts (VAPA) departments, which will pay for tickets and transportation to the event.

“This is a really great opportunity for our youngest students to discover the joy of theater and work as actors in a professional show,” Henson said. “The goal is to get the students interested in pursuing a CTE drama pathway by giving them their first live theater experience, and also to have their classmates see them perform with the intent of getting them interested as well.”

Canyon Crest fifth-grader Airiel Aceves and fourth-grader Morris Giddens are among the cast members of “School of Rock.” Aceves plays Violet, one of two backup performers in the School of Rock band. Giddens plays James, who serves as the band’s security guard during their rehearsals. Aceves and Giddens both sing and dance in the play, and both auditioned for their roles singing Christmas songs.

“I was in a Christmas play about four years ago, and it was really fun and it inspired me to try out for ‘School of Rock,’” Aceves said. “It feels amazing to be in the cast and I feel very lucky that I was able to get in. Every time I walk through the doors I feel like I’m in my happy place again.”

For Aceves, the biggest challenges during rehearsals have been timing her moves around her fellow cast members and learning to hit all the high notes. For Giddens, the biggest challenge has been learning his lines. Giddens said he is confident he will be ready to go on opening night, as acting is in his blood.

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“I really like acting because my whole family does it. My cousin, my sister and my brothers have all been in plays, so I wanted to try it out,” Giddens said. “We have a great choreographer. She teaches us all these really cool dances. It’s something confusing, but you get the hang of it. I like working with Mr. Henson. He has also come up with some pretty cool moves.”

Henson has an impressive resume that reflects more than 30 years as a theater and movie producer, director and graphic artist. Henson has staged more than 500 theater productions, both locally and across the United States.

The “School of Rock” production is part of a Districtwide effort to introduce elementary and middle school students to the performing arts and inspire them to pursue CTE pathways in the arts when they enter high school. Working with tutors from Cal State University San Bernardino, Henson provides afterschool theater instruction at nearly two dozen Fontana Unified elementary schools.

Public performances of “School of Rock” are as scheduled: Friday, March 17 at 8 p.m., Saturday, March 18 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m., and Sunday, March 19 at 2 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at www.ticketmaster.com. The California Theater is located at 562 W. 4th St., San Bernardino.

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

FUSD_SCHOOLOFROCK1: Students from Canyon Crest and Dorothy Grant elementary schools will receive their professional stage debut as part of the cast of “School of Rock: The Musical,” to be staged at the California Theater in San Bernardino from March 17 to 19. Two exclusive early morning performances have been scheduled on March 16 and March 17 to enable more than 1,200 of the District’s elementary school students to see the show.

FUSD_SCHOOLOFROCK2: A.B. Miller High School multimedia design and drama teacher Joseph Henson poses with cast members of “School of Rock: The Musical,” to be staged at the California Theater in San Bernardino from March 17 to 19. The show is made possible through a partnership between the District’s career technical education and visual and performing arts departments. Henson has more than 30 years-experience as a professional stage and movie producer.