



Press Release

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Lynwood Unified Students to Travel to Rwanda to Perform at Arts Festival

Lynwood – Cesar Chavez Middle School eighth-graders Zion Bennett and Jose Laguna will get their first taste of performing in front of an international audience when they journey July 3-16 to Rwanda to showcase their acting and writing talents as a part of the District's Building Relationships and Inspiring Dialogue through Global Exchange (BRIDGE) Theatre Project.

The Lynwood students will perform a play written by Rwandan students at the annual Ubumuntu Arts Festival, while Rwandan students will perform "Great Minds Think Alike," an original Lynwood production co-written by Bennett about overcoming negative thoughts.

"I'm really excited to learn about the Rwandan culture and to ask them about their language," Bennett said. "This will be the first time I've traveled by plane so it's a whole new experience for me."

A year ago, a play written by Abbott Elementary students was performed by Rwandan students at the Ubumuntu Arts Festival to rave reviews. This year is the first time Lynwood students have been invited to join the festival, courtesy of the U.S. Embassy - Kigali. Bennett and Laguna were chosen from over 500 District students who participated in the program this year.

"Zion and Jose are two veterans of the BRIDGE program who have continually inspired others through their ideas and performance," BRIDGE Theatre Project cofounder Joe Quintero said. "They are great ambassadors of the program who will promote cultural awareness."

Bennett and Laguna will be joined on their travels by Quintero and cofounder Adam Kalesperis, as well as two teaching artists and two parent chaperones. The group will get the opportunity to tour the city of Kigali, where the festival is held, and interact with Rwandan students.

"Writing and acting have helped me express myself. I'm interested to ask the students about the effect that it's had on them," Laguna said. "I can't wait to get to the festival to experience everyone performing."

Through the BRIDGE Theatre Project, Lynwood Unified students in grades four through eight learn to write short plays, perform plays and study other cultures. The program provides workshops over eight weeks for about 500 District students each year.

"Giving our students the opportunity to express themselves artistically has improved self-confidence and helped them blossom," Lynwood Unified Superintendent Gudiel R. Crosthwaite said. "It's such an honor to have our District represented in Rwanda, and we wish Zion, Jose, and all of those traveling a safe and successful journey."

MORE

The Lynwood Unified School District is dedicated to offering students a world-class education to prepare them for success in college and career in the 21st century. Under its Achieving Greatness Initiative, the district is realigning all aspects of its organization to strengthen and expand instructional programs, enrichment and extracurricular activities, and support system for students and staff. For more information, visit www.lynwood.k12.ca.us.

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The District has partnered with the BRIDGE Theatre Project for four years, teaching students the basics of improvisation, character creation, vocal technique, writing conflict and dialogue, and how to collaborate with other writers and actors.

"Our partnership with the BRIDGE Theatre Project has helped us teach our students about the world through performing arts," LUSD Board of Education President Alfonso Morales said. "Our students have grown alongside the program and developed into exceptional storytellers."

The company is currently raising funds to cover a portion of this summer's expenses. For more information, and to donate, please visit www.gofundme.com/lynwoodinafrica.

PHOTOS:

ZION BENNETT and JOSE LAGUNA: Lynwood Unified eighth-graders Zion Bennett and Jose Laguna are traveling to Rwanda July 3-16 to showcase their acting and writing talents as a part of the District's Building Relationships and Inspiring Dialogue through Global Exchange (BRIDGE) Theatre Project.

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The mission of **Lynwood Unified School District**, the cultivator of innovative thinkers, is to ensure each student fearlessly achieves his or her highest academic and personal aspirations while contributing to the greater society through a unique system distinguished by:

★ People of great character who inspire and lead by example ★ The instilling of courage to be creative ★ The transformative