



# Fontana Unified School District

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## NEWS RELEASE

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## Fontana Unified Elementary Robotics Students to Make Return Trip to International Competition

**FONTANA, CA** – The Randall Pepper Elementary School robotics program is gearing up for a return trip to Europe after a two-student team of third-graders, Keilani Aquino and Anthony Diaz-Flores, qualified for the World Robot Olympiad (WRO) Friendship Invitational Tournament 2023, to be held Sept. 21-24 in Odense, Denmark.

As members of Randall Pepper’s WRO Robotics Club, Aquino and Diaz-Flores honed their craft, learning to build and code robots during a half dozen club meetings held on Saturdays throughout the 2022-23 school year. The pair’s knowledge and teamwork paid off during the WRO U.S. Open, held on June 3 in Upland, an event featuring more than 100 teams in competition. The tournament was sponsored by the U.S. Engineering League, which partners with the District for a variety of STEM projects throughout the year.

“We are so proud of our Thunder Bots. It is an excellent example of what you can achieve if you are focused and put in the work,” Randall Pepper principal Theresa Gomez said. “Our robotics programs have been fully embraced by the Randall Pepper community; everyone is so excited for our kids. We are thrilled they will be representing Fontana at the international level.”

This is the second time that Randall Pepper robotics students have qualified for the tournament, first traveling to Aarhus, Denmark to participate in the tournament in 2019. A five-student Randall Pepper robotics team partnered with students from Germany and Nigeria and worked together to complete a robotics task and create a slogan, “3 Countries, 3 Teams, 1 Friendship.” WRO judges honored the team with the International Friendship Award.

Former Randall Pepper principal and current Executive Director of Elementary Schools Annette Beasley, looking to bolster the school’s science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM) curriculum, initiated the robotics program in 2019, and accompanied the first team of international robotics competitors to Denmark.

“That was our first year and our first team. It gives me goose bumps that a new team of students is going,” Beasley said. “I’m proud to watch the program grow. Our vision is to get our students involved beginning at the elementary school level to spark their curiosity, then they will be better prepared as they move to the higher grade levels and participate in our pathways and CTE programs.”

Both Aquino and Diaz-Flores have older siblings who participated in the Randall Pepper robotics program. Aquino tagged along with her sister to robotics meetings and tournaments in the hopes that one day she would also be able to join the program; now, she is headed to Europe to represent the

District and the U.S. Gomez, who doubles as robotics coach, said she is amazed at how well Randall Pepper students can adapt to and master the technology.

“I have learned so much from watching our students,” Gomez said. “As our kids work through their lessons, they are discovering a wide range of skills that fit perfectly into a collaborative team concept. Some discover they love engineering; others find they love being leaders. They are creating teams, building relationships and honing their problem-solving skills. It’s wonderful to see.”

The WRO Robotics Club, geared toward students in grades 2-3, is part of a robust STEAM curriculum at Randall Pepper. The school’s offerings include the SumoBot Club for students in grades 4-5, as well as STEAM-tastic Wednesdays, where teachers look to spark interest in STEAM through lessons in coding and earth science. Randall Pepper is also looking to expand on its art and dance curriculum.

“Congratulations to Randall Pepper Elementary School for receiving another opportunity to showcase their robotics program at the international level,” Superintendent Miki R. Inbody said. “I am so happy for Keilani and Anthony, who will not only represent Fontana Unified, but will also serve as ambassadors for the United States. I wish them all the best in their competition.”

**PHOTO CAPTION:**

**FUSD\_RANDALLPEPPER:** Randall Pepper Elementary School third graders Anthony Diaz-Flores and Keilani Aquino proudly display their Team USA jerseys for Principal Theresa Gomez as they prepare for the World Robot Olympiad Friendship Invitational Tournament, to be held Sept. 21-24 in Odense, Denmark. Diaz-Flores and Aquino are the second Randall Pepper robotics team to qualify for the international tournament since 2019.

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