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CONTACT: Valerie Martinez

Juliette Funes

(909) 445-1001

South Whittier Hosts Chinese Exchange Students for First-Ever Winter Camp

SOUTH WHITTIER – The South Whittier School District recently hosted five students from the Beijing School of Music as part of its first-ever Student Exchange Winter Camp Educational Experience at Graves Middle School.

The weeklong exchange program kicked off Jan. 23 at GMS, where Chinese students met their American counterparts and embarked on a journey in which they learned about the American educational system, practiced English skills, made new friends and ate Mexican cuisine from a local South Whittier restaurant.

The program concluded Jan. 27 with a goodbye ceremony.

“Graves Middle School is a campus where our students enjoy learning together and from one another,” said GMS Principal Dr. Matt Fraijo. “I’m so glad that our students had the opportunity to get to know their peers from across the globe, exchange ideas and concepts and gain a deeper respect for another culture. It’s been a wonderful experience for our campus and District to host such a great group of kids.”

Accompanied by Chinese instructors, the students were fully integrated into a typical instructional day at GMS, attending academic and physical education classes, eating lunch, participating in before- and after-school programs, and engaging with teachers and the rest of the student body.

Each student was paired with a GMS student, who acted as a mentor and buddy throughout the process.

“It was honestly an honor to be able to be a part of the experience for the students who came to visit us and be with us,” GMS student Selena Guerra said. “On the very first day, it was all exciting, yet a bit intimidating. Then throughout the week, we got to know each other and I learned a lot.”

The program has been several years in the making, with District officials working to coordinate the exchange in partnership with the Take Note Institute, a Whittier-based Coaching and Leadership consulting agency that focuses on biliteracy and teaching parents to support and connect to their child’s learning through workshops and other parent engaging opportunities.

“This has been a long time in the making, and I’m so excited that the program was able to come to fruition,” said Francisco Meza, director of school and community relations and program compliance. “We’ve worked very hard to ensure that our GMS students get as much out of this experience as our visiting Chinese students and that the experience exposes each group to the variety of cultures within our local and global

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communities.” Meza said he hopes that the partnership will allow for GMS students to visit the Beijing School of Music in the future.

During the closing ceremony, the Chinese students had the opportunity to break a piñata, play games, exchange parting gifts and gave brief synopsis’ of their time at the school.

“I think this is a wonderful school,” said Jake Wang. “I won’t forget this wonderful place.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

020817_SWSD_EXCHANGE1: South Whittier School District officials, Graves Middle School administrators and GMS students welcome five Chinese exchange students for the District’s first-ever student exchange winter camp program on Jan. 23. The students spent the week at GMS, learning from their American counterparts and learning about the American educational system.

020817_SWSD_EXCHANGE2: Graves Middle School students welcome five Chinese exchange students for South Whittier School District’s first-ever student exchange winter camp program on Jan. 23. The students spent the week at GMS, learning from their American counterparts and learning about the American educational system.

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