



## Press Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **After Just One Year of Training, Whittier High Ballerina Qualifies for Prestigious International Competition**

15-year-old will compete for scholarship to leading dance academy

**WHITTIER** – It takes some professional ballerinas a lifetime to gain recognition for their technical wizardry and skill, artistic musicality and grace, and unrivaled passion for their dance. For Whittier High School student Madeline Czekaj, it has taken just one year.

In January, Czekaj, 15, competed against more than 180 dancers to tie third place in the San Diego Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP) classical senior division, qualifying her for the YAGP finals in New York City April 22-29 and the opportunity to win a scholarship to one of the world's 30 leading dance academies.

Despite having only one year of formal ballet training, Czekaj is now among the group of 486 soloists and 789 ensembles from 36 countries to make it to the YAGP finals, one of the most prestigious ballet competitions.

"This is like the Olympics for ballet," Czekaj said. "I love ballet because I can express my feelings through my body instead of by speaking. Through this competition, I can hopefully get noticed by a professional ballet school so I can turn that love into a career."

Her achievements don't stop at ballet. At Whittier High, Czekaj is enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) European history and honors English and geometry and carries a 3.8 GPA.

"I really admire my high school for allowing me to pursue my passion and complete projects ahead of time if I have a competition coming up," Czekaj said. "Being able to include school work into my hectic ballet schedule is very important to me."

Czekaj's has already received summer scholarship opportunities from professional ballet schools in Boston, Houston and San Francisco. That number could jump after her New York competition, where scouts from the world's most prestigious ballet programs will be in attendance in search of fresh talent.

"Madeline sets such a great example for her peers," Whittier High School Principal Lori Eshilian said. "For her to rise to the top that quickly in a program that is so demanding speaks volumes about her. She exhibits the kind of perseverance all students can strive for."

Czekaj got her first glimpse of ballet at age 10, when her older sister briefly took up the art form. Due to financial circumstances, Czekaj didn't enroll into a formal program until she was 14, taking one-hour

classes for the first few weeks. The flourishing ballerina has now worked up to practicing four to five hours a day, six days a week with coaches Sarma Lapenieks Rosenberg and Lawrence Rosenberg at the Anaheim Ballet School.

“After one year of formal training, I’m amazed to see how far Madeline’s come and how patient she has been just waiting for her chance to shine,” said her mother, Sylvia Flores. “Some of these girls started practicing when they were 3 or 4 years old and had to push themselves so hard to get to where they are now. I am just so overwhelmed and happy for her and can’t wait to see what opportunities the future has in store for her.”

Czekaj hopes to transform her passion for ballet into a career.

“We want all our students to pursue their dreams,” Whittier Union High School District Superintendent Sandra Thorstenson said. “Madeline is chasing her dream and maintaining extraordinary grades at the same time. Her ability to sustain this excellence inside and outside the classroom is something we hope other students can learn from as they explore their own futures.”

#### **PHOTO CAPTION:**

**WHSBALLERINA:** Whittier High School sophomore Madeline Czekaj placed third in the San Diego Youth America Grand Prix classical senior division out of more than 180 dancers. Now, she is headed to the New York City finals to compete for ballet scholarship opportunities. *(Photo credit: Chloe Hemsley)*

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Whittier Union High School District works to achieve and maintain excellence in providing a comprehensive education for all students.*

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