

NAACP Partners with LAUSD to Give Students a Day of Art

By Shannen Hill, Contributing Writer

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Black leaders in the arts and entertainment industry aim to inspire the future industry leaders. (Left-to-right) Rory Pullens, Executive Director of Arts and Education for LAUSD; International vocalist Kenny Lattimore; Renown Actress, and co-founder of Amazing Grace Conservatory, Wendy Raquel Robinson; Lula Washington, Artistic Director and Co-founder of LWDT; Ron Hassan, President of the NAACP Beverly Hills/ Hollywood Branch. (courtesy of Mesiyah McGinnis)

The Beverly Hills/Hollywood Branch of the NAACP partnered with the LAUSD Arts Education Branch to bring 450 students together for a creative arts festival at Dorsey High School on Friday, Nov. 18.

The event included celebrity guests Wendy Raquel Robinson, Kenny Latimore, Richard Lawson and more. There were also guests who are famous choreographers, make up artists and painters. Not only were Dorsey High students at the festival, but students from Jordan High School, Washington Preparatory High School, Crenshaw High School and Dymally High School were also chosen to be part of the daylong event.



***Students gather on stage with Rory Pullens after seeing their peers perform.
(Photo by E. Mesiyah McGinnis)***

"It's such a joy to see all of these young people involved in the performing arts and to be able to bring people who can support, help and encourage them to be successful," said Ron Hasson, president of Beverly Hills/Hollywood Branch of NAACP. "And we had 15 people on stage because we wanted to cover all of the arts, the dancing, the singing, the painting, the playwrights so that if they had questions or wanted to see who the masters were in those arts there was somebody there that they could talk to."

The day started off with a panel discussion where the students heard stories of success, the importance of continuously training and everything in between. Many of the artists also spoke on giving back to their communities and the impact of diversity in creative arts. The panelists touched on failure as well, letting the students know that road to success sometimes includes bumps.

"Failure is not final and just because you fail, that does not make you a failure," said Cornelius Smith Jr., who plays Marcus Walker on ABC's "Scandal." "Everyone on this stage has failed many times but failing is a part of learning to see what makes you better. It's an opportunity to go back and make it better."



***The Crenshaw Choir shows off their talents at NAACP/LAUSD extravaganza.
(Photo by E. Mesiyah McGinnis)***

After the panel discussion, students did a workshop with Actor and Acting Coach Richard Lawson where they discussed ways to make their dreams a reality. The students were given pamphlets to fill out with questions surrounding politics, personality and craft to see what it is that they really want and how they can achieve it.

"It was cool, it was different. You don't get this everyday at a lot of inner-city schools so it was really nice," said Perisha McLaughlin, a 10th grader Crenshaw High School. "It gives us the opportunity to come together and show our creativity and be free."

To end out the day, students from the high schools and afterschool programs performed. Everything from drumming, to singing and jazz graced the stage. The Crenshaw Choir started the evening out with "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and Washington Prep's CBG Arts showed their creativity through dance. There were also performances from Dorsey High School's marching band and Washington Prep's jazz band during the afterschool extravaganza that was open to the public.

"I thought it was really good and well put together," said Isaiah Williams, an 11th grader at Dorsey High School. "It was lively, friendly and family-oriented. It was a great opportunity to hang out with peers and be educated on our district."



Students grace the stage of Dorsey High with dance. (Photo by E. Mesiyah McGinnis)

While students were excited to see some of their favorite actors, including crowd favorite Jessie T. Usher of survivor's remorse, they were more excited to be able to spend the day with students who share their same passions.

"Sometimes young people from certain communities are forgotten about or left out and that sometimes happens to children of color," said Rory Pullens, the executive director of arts education for LAUSD. "We wanted to make sure that these students who have amazing talents, amazing abilities and incredible personalities had a chance to be showcased and to be lifted up for what they do. "

All of the students were also invited to the 26th Annual NAACP Theatre Awards this past Monday, Nov. 21. For more information about LAUSD arts, visit achieve.lausd.net/arts. For more information about this branch of the NAACP, visit www.beverlyhillshollywoodnaacp.org.