

“I’m Going to Disney World!” Teens Surprised Live on “Good Morning America” with Mentoring Trip to Disney Dreamers Academy

Teens from California, Texas, New Jersey and Virginia among 100 high school students selected from thousands across country to participate in coveted mentoring event at Disney in March

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. - Jan. 15, 2018 - Five high school students were surprised live on “Good Morning America” today with the announcement that they were selected to be part of the exclusive Disney Dreamers Academy with Steve Harvey and ESSENCE Magazine.

Mickey Mouse and Walt Disney World Resort executive Tracey D. Powell joined the “Good Morning America” hosts and the studio audience for the surprise moment. National TV personality Steve Harvey also congratulated the teens on their accomplishment with a video message.

Surprised live on-air were Ayanna Adams from Los Angeles, Christiana Okafor from Houston, Marquis Thomas from Virginia Beach, Va., Ava Marie Easter from Los Angeles and Sean Smith from Basking Ridge, N.J.

The students, who sported T-shirts featuring the program’s new logo during the surprise moment, are among 100 extraordinary youths from across the nation announced by Disney today to participate in its immersive, transformational four-day program, March 8-11, at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida.

The program, which is entering its 11th year with a new “Be100” campaign, highlights Walt Disney World Resort’s continued commitment to the next generation of teens by inspiring them at a critical time in their development to make a difference in their lives and to relentlessly pursue and realize their dreams.

“Each of these 100 girls and boys has proven themselves to be exceptional as students and as human beings, so it’s an honor to have them join us at Walt Disney World Resort,” said Tracey D. Powell, Walt Disney World Resort vice president of commercial management - resorts and Disney Dreamers Academy executive champion. “It is our hope that this potentially life-changing program will help create the next generation of great dreamers and achievers.”

Participating students, known as “Disney Dreamers,” embark on a journey throughout the Disney theme parks and behind the scenes, turning the vacation destination into a vibrant classroom for students to discover new careers, pursue their dreams and interact with Harvey and other motivational speakers and celebrities. Among the celebrities who have participated in the past are singers Patti LaBelle and Mary J.

Blige, NBA legend and business mogul Magic Johnson, gospel music star Yolanda Adams, NFL superstar Cam Newton, plus TV personalities such as "The Chew" co-host Carla Hall, "Good Morning America" co-anchor Michael Strahan and ABC correspondent T.J. Holmes.

Additionally, students participate in hands-on, immersive career-oriented workshops, ranging from animation to zoology. Each student is given important tools such as effective communication techniques, leadership skills and networking strategies.

"Inspiring our youth to dream big and chase those dreams is a personal mission," said Harvey. "Having a dream is one of the most important things in life. That is why engaging with these students is an annual highlight for me, and the 2018 Disney Dreamers Academy will be no exception."

Since 2008, Walt Disney World Resort has provided all-expenses-paid trips to more than 1,000 students, plus a parent or guardian, to participate in the annual Disney Dreamers Academy. The students are selected from thousands of applicants who answered a series of essay questions about their personal stories and dreams for the future.

"At ESSENCE, we are committed to impacting the leaders of tomorrow," said Michelle Ebanks, president of ESSENCE Communications. "Every year, we continue to be impressed by the exceptional students selected for Disney Dreamers Academy, and it is our privilege to play a role in encouraging them to achieve their goals."

For more information, visit DisneyDreamersAcademy.com. Regular updates about Disney Dreamers Academy are also available on social media at [Facebook/DisneyDreamersAcademy](https://www.facebook.com/DisneyDreamersAcademy) or [Twitter/DreamersAcademy](https://twitter.com/DreamersAcademy).

Here are more details about the five students surprised on "Good Morning America":

Ayanna Adams, 16 - Los Angeles - Adams's father was incarcerated when she was 6. Inspired by her mother's work ethic and commitment, Adams started working at 13 to help support her family. Despite juggling work and school, Adams currently holds a 3.2 GPA and dreams of going to college to earn a job that will allow her to take care of her mother.

Ava Marie Easter, 14 - Los Angeles - Easter is both an accomplished student and dancer. Despite her family experiencing homelessness in the past, Easter's spirit has always remained strong. She has earned acceptance to both the LA County High School for the Arts and Millennium Dance Complex to pursue her passion. She dreams of going to Julliard and studying biology at Columbia and Barnard.

Christiana Okafor, 16 - Houston - Okafor dreams of becoming a doctor, graduating as valedictorian and attending an Ivy League School. Currently, she has a 4.3 GPA and is involved in numerous extracurricular activities. She was recently nominated to represent her home state of Texas at the Congress of Future Medical Leaders. Inspired by speakers at the conference, she hopes to one day make breakthroughs to help those suffering from autoimmune diseases with no cure.

Marquis Thomas, 15 - Virginia Beach, Va. - Recognized as the Virginia Beach Youth of the Year for his work in the local Police Explorers program, Thomas dreams of working in law enforcement. He is inspired to fight crime after the uncle that served as a father figure to him was killed.

Sean Smith, 14 - Basking Ridge, N.J. - An encounter with a real-life war hero inspired Smith to pursue a career in aviation. He attended an event where Tuskegee Airman Eugene Robinson was a speaker. After the event, Robinson gave Smith the uniform hat off his head and signed it. That moment led Smith to follow in the footsteps of the Tuskegee Airmen and he has been taking flight lessons since 6th grade and is a member

of his local aerospace club.

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The 100 students selected to participate in the 2018 Disney Dreamers Academy are:

MIDWEST

Mariah	Barnett	Aurora	IL
Tabitha	Willis	Country Club Hills	IL
Tamera	Trimuel	Harvey	IL
Jayvion	Rice	Riverdale	IL
Chloe	Russell	Indianapolis	IN
Derrick	Lotharp	Belleville	MI
John	Garrett	Beverly Hills	MI
Anna	Sun	Canton	MI
Joshua	Fields	Detroit	MI
Kyle	Mcbeth	Southfield	MI
Elena	Hirsch	West Bloomfield	MI
Boston	Meeker	Hudson	OH
Colston	Urban	Marietta	OH
Brooklynn	Gross	Sioux Falls	SD
Rahsaan	Roberson-Teague	Milwaukee	WI

NORTHEAST

Darius	Martin	Hamden	CT
Thomas	Cahill	Canton	MA
Matthew	Thompson	Canton	MA
Lillian	Carr	Clarksburg	MD
Nina	Crosby Walton	Frederick	MD
Ryan	Steed	Glenn Dale	MD
Maria	Gakdeng	Lanham	MD
Sean	Smith	Basking Ridge	NJ
Kathryn	Stevens	Hornell	NY
Maxwell	Haseman	Carlisle	PA
Angela	McKeown	Edwardsville	PA
Brijette	Brown	Philadelphia	PA
Aneesah	Robinson	Philadelphia	PA

SOUTHEAST

Skylar	Boone	Dothan	AL
Braxton	Hunt	Mobile	AL
Victoria	Hardy	Pike Road	AL
Destyni	Newson	Tuscaloosa	AL
Malachi	Hobbs	Cocoa	FL

Lebarron	Johnson	Jacksonville	FL
Andy	Rajkumar	Ocoee	FL
Eamilia	Barrington	Orlando	FL
Q Markis	Brooks	Port St Lucie	FL
Jackson	Stewart	Port St Lucie	FL
Madison	Smith	Riverview	FL
Giulietta	Schutte	St Petersburg	FL
Luis	Lageyre Rivas	Weston	FL
Sally	Campbell	Zephyrhills	FL
Sarah	Oburu	Acworth	GA
Celeste	Giddens	Atlanta	GA
Jazzmyne	Ashworth	Calhoun	GA
Jaterra	Hicks	Cartersville	GA
Joshua	Brown	Darien	GA
Joshua	Boyce	Hampton	GA
TaMya	Woodard	Lawrenceville	GA
Ariel	Dildy	Lithonia	GA
Ashton	Peoples	McDonough	GA
Deka	Bonner	Snellville	GA
Kelli	Crews	Stockbridge	GA
Lauren	Moyer	Stockbridge	GA
Kayla	Brown	Suwanee	GA
Chasidy	Moore	Valdosta	GA
DeLon	Henderson	Woodstock	GA
Jimmy	Shaw	Winnsboro	LA
Sarah	Hardy	Bentonia	MS
Jordan	Purvis	Durham	NC
Joshua	Hill	Greensboro	NC
Jessica	Dickerson	Huntersville	NC
RoethaKijafa	Hunter	Winterville	NC
Angel	Cooke	Camden	SC
Casey	Carter	Columbia	SC
John	Jeffery	Columbia	SC
Destiny	Gadson	Cross	SC
Mia	Williams	Florence	SC
Tyler	Parrott	Mount Pleasant	SC
Jhamar	Rivers-Bradley	Summerville	SC
Aaliyah	Sweat	Murfreesboro	TN
Wyatt	Carter	Chesterfield	VA
Stephanie	Brown	Manassas	VA

Kody	Frye	Manassas	VA
Isaiah	Wilson	Portsmouth	VA
Jordan	Anderson-Murray	Richmond	VA
Sarah	Schaefer	Stafford	VA
Marquis	Thomas	Virginia Beach	VA

WEST/SOUTHWEST

Hudson	Osborne	Hayward	CA
Nada	Dalati	La Verne	CA
KeiLana	Wall	Lodi	CA
Ayanna	Adams	Los Angeles	CA
Omarri	Beck	Los Angeles	CA
Ava Marie	Easter	Los Angeles	CA
Sheila	Milon	Los Angeles	CA
Jervaughn	Gaines	Murrieta	CA
Insun	Choi	Riverside	CA
Anh	Le	San Jose	CA
Madelyn	Necochea	Temecula	CA
PhuongUyen	Nguyen	Torrance	CA
Maia	Dua	West Sacramento	CA
Moyleang	Taing	Bridge City	TX
Ryan	Solis	El Paso	TX
Taylor	Hayes	Houston	TX
Christiana	Okafor	Houston	TX
Toi	Williams	Plano	TX
Julian	Hudspeth	San Antonio	TX
Luckaia	Strand	Cedar City	UT
Natasha	Rodriguez	Centralia	WA
Mikayla	Weary	Edmonds	WA

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