

NJ Spotlight News

Young dancers grow their skills at AileyCamp

By: Joanna Gaggis

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Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hmtYPRncqk&t=82s> (4:38)

Resilience is the theme of this summer's AileyCamp. Named after Alvin Ailey, the renowned dancer and founder of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the camp has 10 locations around the country including one at Newark Arts High School. This summer, the Newark camp — which is free — is hosting 88 participants, who range in age from 11 to 14 years old.

“Where can you go and send your child to have a quality experience, six weeks, 8:30 to 3:30? They go on field trips, they get all their attire, their dance wear, breakfast and lunch daily,” said Nasha Thomas, national director of AileyCamp. “And then there’s the dancing, which covers a range of genres and styles that these dancers may not otherwise have access to, from West African dance to ballet, jazz and modern dance. The students are selected to be part of the program, not based on their proficiency in dance, rather on their willingness to learn and grow, which is what this camp is really all about.”

“We’re looking for campers who have an interest in the art form, but we offer a lot more than just dance,” said Sherece Hill, co-director of AileyCamp Newark. “There’s a creative communication which is an art class. And they do learn all the different techniques, but throughout it all, it’s just about bonding and social interaction. It’s just six weeks of self discovery. Our curriculum is very enriching. We have a plethora of classes that teach our children resilience. They learn hygiene, conflict resolution, how to manage peer pressure. They’re given a lot of tools to be full citizens of today’s society.”

“AileyCamp has taught me so much, not just about dance, but over the years I’ve learned how to be confident in myself, how to be resilient, how to grow and how to show my emotions. ... starting AileyCamp, I used to be shy and now I’m able to express myself, not just with movement but with other people around me in my surroundings,” said Camila Leon-Gonzalez, a fourth-year camper.

The program is possible because of funders and through a partnership with Newark Public Schools, which provides the school space. The program will end with a final performance on Aug. 6 in front of family and friends at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center.