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FOUR STUDENTS FROM THE IDAHO STATE SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND TO ATTEND INAUGURATION

(BOISE) – Four students and two staff members from the Idaho State School for the Deaf and Blind will attend the inauguration of Donald Trump and take part in the Presidential Inauguration Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C., this week.

As part of the Champions for Change contest sponsored by Envision and Discovery Education, the state school was one of three schools in the nation selected to send six students and staff on an all-expense-paid trip to the inauguration and leadership summit.

“This is huge for a variety of reasons,” said Brian Darcy, the director of the Idaho Bureau of Educational Services for the Deaf and Blind (IBESDB). “For all schools in Idaho, we value what students can learn in the classroom, but when we can tie that to real-life experiences, the value of the learning increases exponentially.”

In particular, he noted, “Students who are deaf or blind really depend on experiences that tie into ‘real world learning’, even more than their hearing/sighted counterparts do.”

The leadership summit being held in conjunction with the presidential inauguration will allow them to network with other students from around the country on solutions to 21st Century problems. Speakers at the program will include Colin Powell, Spike Lee and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai.

“Many of these students attend the ISDB (Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind) not only for the specialized instruction, but to be able to participate in leadership activities, like student government, athletics and various competitions that they would not get in another educational setting,” Darcy said.

“This type of opportunity is rare for any school. Additionally, it will give first-hand experience to those four (who will be) going to witness an event in U.S. history that has only happened 44 other times,” Darcy said, referencing the inauguration of a new president. Trump will become the nation’s 45th president when he is sworn in this Friday, Jan. 20.

Darcy noted that the IBESDB “is charged by the State of Idaho for providing supplemental educational services for our population of over 2,000 students and families across the state, including providing direct instruction when identified.” Students who attend the state school in Gooding come from communities and school districts across the state. “So, really, we share our pride in these students going, with those districts who have shared their students with us.”

The three schools from around the country were selected by Envision and Discovery Education based on an on-line voting contest run by those companies. The state school utilizes Discovery Education's digital science textbooks in its high school and middle school curriculum.

The students themselves were selected by the state school's principal and vice principal based on submissions sent to them by the students indicating how they would benefit by going.

Darcy expressed his confidence that the students will be able to fully participate in the programs. "Discovery Ed has been fantastic to jump on the wagon for finding out the accommodations that will be needed, one of which is funding an additional adult for guiding purposes. To our understanding, they will be the only students there (at the leadership summit) who are deaf or blind.

"They will give unique perspectives on a variety of levels. I would argue that they are a good representation of the State of Idaho's growing student population," he said.

The four students who will be attending the inauguration and leaderships summit are:

- Wasim Hussni – a junior in high school, he began at the state school in the third grade when his parents moved to Twin Falls. As an immigrant, he had to learn both a new language and a new braille code when he came to the United States. For the leadership summit, Hussni was assigned to collaborate with a team of other students in the Delegation for Change group, addressing the topic of "Imagining Peace: Conflict and Compromise in a Global Age.
- Enrique Lopez – A senior, he began at the school in fourth grade when his family moved to Wendell. Darcy described him as a student who is "a strong braille reader and writer and is active in any discussions in classes. This trip will be his first time on an airplane and he is excited about that." Lopez also was assigned to the "Imagining Peace" group.
- Karlee Robinson – She has attended the ISDB since the 7th grade, when she began learning sign language, and is active in student government, sports and cheerleading. "She sets high goals for herself and 'goes for it'," Darcy said. She will participate in the Delegation for Change group addressing the topic of "Curing the Future: Healthcare, Disease and the World of Tomorrow."
- Zak Jones – He began learning sign language after joining the state school in the eighth grade. Darcy said that "he has strong skills in the area of art – he is always seen sketching something," adding that Jones "is a thoughtful and quiet young man who is frequently looking for ways to help others." Jones also will participate in "Curing the Future" group.

ISDB Principal Gretchen Spooner and government teacher Tim Ledington will be leading the students to the inauguration and student leadership summit.

Spooner has worked at the school since 1998. The mother of a deaf child, her interest in providing a language-rich environment and to understand the unique nuances of deaf education drove her to learn more and eventually get her master's degree in deaf education. Her daughter, who is an alumnus of the state school, has just earned her doctorate degree from the University of Michigan.

Ledington teaches government in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing classroom at the ISDB. An instructor there since 2013, he is deaf himself. As a student, Ledington was served through the IESDB/ISDB outreach programs and served as deaf mentor over the years at various camps and work readiness workshops.

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