

Putting on their dancing shoes

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CHAPEL HILL -- Spending part of their school year taking lessons every week from a former principal dancer with the New York City Ballet just wasn't enough. So four Rashkis Elementary students -- who were part of a pilot dance instruction program at their school -- are spending a month this summer in New York City, at the National Dance Institute's summer program. There, they are undertaking an intense six-hour-a-day class, exploring the city and continuing what they learned during the school year with dancer Jacque d'Amboise, founder of the institute.

"We've been having a really good time," said 10-year-old Khalid Williams.
"It's nice to be able to learn some new things, but it's also a lot of hard work."

D'Amboise taught dance lessons to 110 fourth-graders at Rashkis throughout the spring, through a program funded by the North Carolina Arts in Action foundation. The foundation hopes to extend the program to every school in the state within the decade.

The National Dance Institute chose students from Rashkis' program and similar ones throughout the country to attend the summer school. About 100 dancers, who are now in New York, will learn ballet, jazz, tap, ethnic dance, music and choreography. Some have only danced in their school programs.

Others, such as Rashkis' Hannah Davis and Emily Kupec, have been dancing for years. But Davis said even though she already has had ballet and jazz lessons in Chapel Hill, she's learning about tap and African dance while in New York.

"I think tap is fun," Hannah, 10, said. "And I am learning how to play the drums, which my dad has always wanted me to do."

While in the city, the students are staying in an apartment on the Upper East Side, from which they can see much of New York, including the 59th Street and George Washington bridges. They've visited Central Park several times and are planning trips to the Bronx Zoo, a Yankees game and a Broadway show.

"This trip is more than just dance," said Lisa Kang, executive director of the Arts in Action foundation. "It's life, city life."

For Khalid, the trip means a return home. He was born in New Jersey and spent a lot of time in the city when he was younger. Khalid said he has enjoyed visiting New York again and especially likes the lessons.

"It can be free, and it doesn't have to be direct and strict," he said.
"African dance really wakes you up and get you energized."

Miles Addison was a little worried about the trip at first. He wasn't so sure he'd enjoy the plane ride and didn't think all the dance lessons would be fun.

"I thought I'd be probably be nervous and it might be boring," said Miles, 10. "But after three days, I got used to it. It's been fun."

And Emily, 10, said the six hours of dance a day isn't as exhausting as she thought it would be.

"Some days, yeah, I'm tired," she said. "Some days I'm still really hyper."