



**Immediate Release**  
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**COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAM INTRODUCES STUDENTS TO ART OF DANCE**  
*Local students' performance demonstrates impact of dance program to teachers and staff*

**Chapel Hill, NC** – North Carolina Arts in Action (NC-AIA), a community-based nonprofit founded in 2005, dedicates itself to transforming children's lives through the exposure of arts. More than twenty rising fifth- and sixth-grade elementary students from Rashkis Elementary demonstrated that today when they previewed their school's upcoming dance season titled *An African Village* at UNC-Chapel Hill's Memorial Hall for the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City School System's annual Back to School Convocation.

NC-AIA recognizes that the arts benefit students of all social and economic background and that exposure to the arts helps generate well-rounded children. The NC-AIA program launched at Rashkis Elementary in January 2006 where it began teaching the school's fourth-grade classes the art of dance and movement. NC-AIA provides in-school dance classes to elementary schools and is a local affiliate of the National Dance Institute (NDI) based in New York City. NDI is a nonprofit organization founded by former principal dancer of the New York City Ballet, Jacques d'Amboise.

"As the North Carolina Arts in Action program has evolved, we've seen children become more and more eager to participate," said Lisa Kang, executive director of NC-AIA. "The children from Rashkis Elementary that performed here today are a perfect example of what other schools can bring to their students. By using dance as a catalyst, North Carolina Arts in Action is working to ensure our children and the community become engaged with the arts."

The NC-AIA program is designed to teach children self-confidence, self-control, collaboration and even social tolerance. By providing an outlet to move and become active, NC-AIA is helping teachers and students build a bond that fosters innovation, a positive learning environment and increased student attendance as well as providing a great physical fitness workout.

"Witnessing these children take the stage and perform what they have learned was wonderful," said Dr. Neil Pedersen, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City School System's superintendent. "I was so impressed with the enthusiasm of the students and instructors. The quality of the performance was at the level of excellence that we aspire to achieve in all of our programs."

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Four of the students performing today in front of the 1,400 teachers and staff, Hannah Davis, Christine Park, Jecori Owens-Shuler and Joshua Lai, were recipients of a NC-AIA Summer Scholarship and recently returned from New York City where they participated in NDI's Irene Diamond Institute. The Institute is a rigorous month-long program combining a full schedule of classes in ballet, jazz, tap, ethnic dance, music and theater.

"I am happy and grateful that our students at Rashkis have the opportunity and experience of being part of North Carolina Arts in Action," said Deshera Mack, Rashkis Elementary School principal. "This program has enabled our teachers to learn more about their students and discover some of their hidden talents. Working with North Carolina Arts in Action has been an outstanding experience."

The NC-AIA program is designed to teach students the mechanics of dance and movement as well as provide a foundation to help them succeed in other areas. In order to make the most impact, NC-AIA works to engage students, teachers and entire school community in the program. Teachers take the class along with the students.

For the 2007-2008 school year, the program will be expanded to include Rashkis Elementary fifth graders and several other North Carolina schools yet to be announced.

### **About North Carolina Arts in Action**

The mission of North Carolina Arts in Action (NC-AIA) is to transform the lives of North Carolina children through dance. Using dance as a catalyst, NC-AIA seeks to engage children and their communities through participation in the arts. NC-AIA fosters a love of the arts, pride of achievement, social tolerance and belief in themselves that will carry over into all aspects of their lives. Additionally, it provides children with an opportunity for increased physical activity. In January 2006, NC-AIA launched its pilot program at the Mel and Zora Rashkis Elementary with 110 fourth graders participation.

### **About Rashkis Elementary School**

Mel and Zora Rashkis Elementary School opened for the 2003-2004 school year. The school boasts many accomplishments including 100 percent proficiency on the End-of-Grade 2006 reading test and one of two schools that received the Honor School of Excellence Award. Rashkis' principal, Deshera Mack, received the Principal of the Year for the CHCCS district and the Piedmont-Triad Principal Regional Winner.

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