

Bay Area students gain enrichment through academic study in China

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OAKLAND -- Thirteen African-American students from the Bay Area will get the opportunity to experience a new culture this summer and share it with their communities through a two-week academic study in China.

The Think China 2013 program, sponsored by the China-United States Exchange Foundation, a nonprofit organization in China, is focused on fostering relationships between China and the United States. The youth group, which will fly to China on Saturday, is made up of seven girls and six boys. Although some of the students attend different high schools, most have grown up in the Oakland area and share a passion for community service.

Bryce Bell, a student at Berkeley High School, has been involved with the East Oakland Youth Development Center since he was 6 years old. He currently serves as a youth leader and he has never flown outside of the U.S.

Although he is nervous about the flight, Bell said he is excited about the opportunity to share his experience with the youth he teaches through the summer cultural enrichment programs run through EOYDC, the lead organizer of the China trip.

"Especially for the little kids that I watch over, this means a lot," Bell said. "I will definitely bring back the experience of what it's like being out of the country, what they can strive for, and things they wouldn't be able to understand without someone having gone through it to tell them."

Regina Jackson, lead chaperon and the president and CEO of EOYDC, said the goal of the program is to have students understand and appreciate a new culture and open youth up to possible opportunities outside of the state when they graduate.

The two-week program will include six hours daily of study, tours of the Fudan and Beijing universities, meetings with civic leaders, cultural immersion tours and business and industry tours. When the trip is over, students will share the experience with their respective school districts, churches and local officials through town hall meetings, reports and presentations.

Jackson said more often than not, a lot of youth in the area have never been outside of their ZIP code, which prevents them from stepping outside of their comfort zone.

"Exposure and opportunity are key to success, particularly for young people," Jackson said. "They don't even know that they don't know, and when you begin to crack that shell, oftentimes it creates a thirst for more knowledge. And the opportunity to share knowledge through a wonderful experience like this, it's infectious."

Rischa and Ronald Johnson, parents of Rahni Johnson, a participant in the program, said sharing this experience will have a major impact within the Oakland community, which they said has a bad reputation and isn't known as much for positive things coming out of the area.

"Other kids will see that they can do it too," Rischa Johnson said. "I think it's a win-win for the community, for the kids and for China."

Some students agreed this trip will provide others with a better perspective of Oakland and the community itself.

"I think it's amazing because we can show that Oakland is not just this violent place and just so bad," said Jordan Williams, a student at Arroyo High School in San Leandro. "There's people who don't understand because all they hear about is the bad things, the violence and the drugs. It'll be good to show them a different part of Oakland."