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KCPS Poets Slam Their Way to National Competition *Lincoln College Preparatory Academy team takes top place at annual poetry slam*

Kansas City, April 5, 2017: Lincoln College Preparatory Academy students have made it loud and clear that they are among the best poets in the nation.

A team of nine Lincoln Prep students and four coaches took first place in the annual Louder Than A Bomb Kansas City poetry slam competition on Saturday, April 1 in the Gem Theater. As a result, the team will now represent Kansas City Public Schools in the Brave New Voices poetry slam in July in San Francisco.

Lincoln Prep poetry team members include seniors Adrianna Schoonover, Erika Hall, Cicely Jones and Maiah Hambrick; juniors Aisha Arij and Danielle Foster; sophomores Marjai Neal and Lauren Taylor; and freshman India Walker. The team is coached by Lincoln Prep counselor and slam poet Erica Wright, slam poet Madison Parker, and English language arts teachers Beth Fowler and Joyce Nguyen Hernandez.

The team had a successful run through quarter- and semi-final competitions leading up to the Kansas City finals. Lincoln's student poets then out-performed squads from five other schools in Raytown, Mo. and Shawnee Mission and Lawrence, Kans.

The Louder Than A Bomb competition is based on a poetry slam event started in Chicago in 2001. Young poets are judged based on their recitations of original pieces performed alone, in pairs or as quartets.

The Kansas City finals win and invite to the national championships are an important validation for the Lincoln Prep students, according to Coach Wright.

"It has taught them to take chances and shown them the value in their art. It was a very tangible win, which they sometimes need to know that the power in their words is appreciated and heard," Wright said. "As an educator, it means that we are doing something right."

Coach Fowler agreed with Wright and added that the poetry slams are a valuable extension of classroom lessons.

"As educators, I think we like to believe we know what is happening with our students outside of the classroom, but to teach them how to use poetry as the vehicle to communicate their actual reality is unlike what we are able to truly do in the classroom," Fowler said. "These poetry slams provide a voice to our youth that we haven't always listened to in the past, and I believe it is the catalyst to spur great changes for the future."

For many poetry slam participants, the event is less about competing and more about connecting, according to Ms. Schoonover.

"Poetry has really empowered me and given me a voice and a space to share my thoughts and experiences with others," Schoonover said. "I've grown so much as an individual since I've started writing slam poetry. It has opened my eyes to so many new ideas and allowed me to meet other amazing poets."

Writers turn to poetry because it's the best way to describe intangible thoughts, feelings and experiences, according to Ms. Hall.

"To me poetry is more than just words. It is the embodiment of creativity and passion," she said. "My poetry allows me to express myself and emotions in a positive way. This is what makes poetry so important to me."

Ms. Neal reinforced the sense that poetry is a uniquely powerful form of expression for students like her.

"I write poetry to heal. It's the way I talk, it's the words I use, the pictures I draw out of my pain and joy," she said. "There's nothing that can fill that void but poetry."