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Dance helps inspire youth

UR troupe to mentor pupils at 3 schools

[Gary McLendon](#)
Staff writer

Multicultural dance and a spirit of volunteering drew smiles from students and adults alike at School 19 on Tuesday.

University of Rochester students in Japanese, African and Indian costumes wowed more than 100 third- to sixth-graders as they performed traditional dances to kick off a new mentoring relationship.

"What inspired you all to do these cool dances?" asked 12-year-old sixth-grader Devynn Sumrell.

"I've been dancing all of my life," replied UR freshman Puja Sood, 17, about native Indian dancing she had performed.

"Our group is competitive, so we go to competitions and stuff. It's a great bonding thing because all of us love to dance."

The Indian dance impressed fifth-grader Jatayah Simmons, 10, as well.

"I liked those shirts they were wearing. You know those guys that had that gold on? That's what I liked.

"And I liked those girls that were dancing with that stuff on their heads (the African dancers). ... I liked all of them. I liked the music, too."

UR Dean of Students Jody Asbury combined the dance students with student volunteering efforts because "the university has something like 13 dance programs on campus. They're ethnically very diverse. We thought that was a way of getting them engaged."

The dance program symbolized the start of Project CARE (Coaches Are Role Models for Empowerment).

As part of the project, groups of UR students will be tutors and mentors at School 19 on Seward Street, as well as at Schools 2 and 14, for 1½ years.

They will work with elementary school students' literacy, social and developmental skills.

As for dancing, School 19 students, and possibly others, will be invited to spring dance performances at UR. And the dancers might return to the city school to perform.

"We're going to try to build an ongoing relationship," said Asbury.

School 19 Principal Anne Brown Scott is glad the university has stepped in to help. She would like to establish more community partnerships.

"U of R is right across the river from us, so we are hoping that affords the opportunity to go to the school and see what it's like. I believe that when children see things and experience things, it's a lot different than reading a book."

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[Back](#)



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