

## Fontana Unified School District

9680 Citrus Avenue • P.O. Box 5090 • Fontana, CA 92334-5090 • (909) 357-7600

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*Contact* Oliver Wong Ah Sun, Ed.D.  
*Telephone* (909) 357-7600 ext. 29106  
*Email* [Olivier.WongAhSun@fUSD.net](mailto:Olivier.WongAhSun@fUSD.net)  
*Website* <http://www.fUSD.net/>

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### KAISER STUDENT WINS FIRST PLACE IN AUGUST WILSON REGIONAL FINALS

FONTANA, CA – On February 29, Kaiser High School students Angel Nieves and Damaris Vizvett competed in the regional finals of the 2016 August Wilson Monologue Competition. Twelve finalists from Southern California high schools came to the competition with varying levels of acting experience, including students from performing arts schools. However, it was Damaris Vizvett of Fontana who won first place in the prestigious competition and who will advance to the national finals in New York.

"This is absolutely fantastic!" said Superintendent Dr. Leslie Boozer. "We are so incredibly proud of Ms. Johnson and her amazing students. We wish Damaris the very best as she embarks on her exciting journey to NYC."

"In the beginning, there were 146 students from 45 Southern California high schools," said Wendi Johnson, Drama Teacher at Kaiser High School. Five Kaiser students competed in the semifinals held in December. Angel and Damaris were among the twelve students who moved on to the final competition at the Mark Taper Forum.

In preparation for the regional finals, the students received 16 hours of master class training. Using monologues from August Wilson's "Century Cycle," a 10 play dramatization of the African-American experience in the 20th century, the training sessions gave the students the opportunity to get into the heads of their characters and refine their performances in anticipation of the regional monologue competition. For Damaris, that meant getting into the head of Vera from Wilson's "Seven Guitars."

"Theatre saved me," said Damaris. "Words cannot express how much this art form means to me. Kaiser's High School Theatre Department helped me realize my passion for acting. I don't think I could ever live without it. Without the support and wise words of my coach, Wendi Johnson, I would never have dared to do what I am doing now. Winning the August Wilson Monologue Competition has been an amazing experience, but there is still so much work to be done. While the praise and recognition fade the thing that remains constant is my passion and love for acting. This is only the beginning and I can't wait to see how far it will take me."

Ms. Johnson agrees. "Theatre inspires students to reach beyond their own expectations. Their love of the art, discipline to and deep study of the craft of theatre develop elevated self-concept and potential for success. Theatre education teaches far more than just performance, cooperation, collaboration,

creativity, responsibility, striving to succeed among other academic achievements is all part of what it takes to be a theatre artist.”

The top two performing students, Damaris and second place winner Samuel Christian, will move forward to the ninth annual August Wilson Monologue Contest national finals. They each won a \$500 cash prize and will receive an all-expenses paid trip to New York City for the finals on May 2, at the August Wilson Theatre on Broadway.

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Left to right: Aryana Williams (alternate), Samuel Christian (2<sup>nd</sup> place winner), Damaris Vizvett (1<sup>st</sup> place winner), and Leslie Johnson (Director of Education and Community Partnerships, Center Theatre Group).