

NEWS

## ACCLAIMED CHOREOGRAPHER RETURNS TO LYNN FOR ANTI-BULLYING DANCE WORKSHOP

BY ELYSE CARMOSINO | January 19, 2020

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*Internationally recognized artistic director Jimmy Locust teaches a master class in preparation for the Harmony Nation Anti-Bullying Workshop on Saturday at St. Mary's High School. (Spenser R. Hasak)*

LYNN — Internationally acclaimed choreographer Jimmy Locust — who has worked with the likes of Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson, and Eddie Murphy — returned to Lynn for the third consecutive year last Friday and Saturday to help students combat peer conflict through his anti-bullying dance workshop, Harmony Nation.

This year, however, Locust isn't the only one doing the teaching.

As of this January, Lynn is now the first and only Massachusetts city to serve as one of Harmony Nation's satellite locations.

The designation means local appointed ambassadors can teach the program's anti-hate curriculum, which includes choreographed dance classes and student-led skits, to kids at Lynn schools.

"We want people to speak up and be aware of (the bullying that) happens," said Classical High School alumnus Edwin Pagan, one of three young adults selected to lead the new program and who also helped teach Saturday's master class at St. Mary High School's dance studio.

Former Salem State Vice President of Diversity and longtime friend of Locust, Lisa McBride, said she made a promise to Lynn's mayor two years ago that she would bring Locust's program back to the city.

McBride, originally from Missouri, said she said she saw something special in Lynn's tight-knit community and resolved to make Harmony Nation a permanent part of Lynn schools — both public and private.

"I'm committed to Lynn," she said. "(There's) a rich community here."

Like McBride, Locust also noted a unique sense of local community as his reason for choosing Lynn as his Massachusetts location, and added that the unwavering support of the city's teachers and educational leaders struck him as a primary reason his program has made such an impact on Lynn students.

"I see a lot of people who love where they live, they love their support system here," he said.

"We're all at the table figuring out what happens next, and I see a change in the kids. They feel safe, because they see their leaders commune together. They think 'if they can do it, we can do it.'"

He added: "It's just amazing."

Sixteen-year-old Lynn Classical student Janelly Matos said Saturday's class taught gave her the confidence to stand up for herself and also brought her closer to her peers.

"He had us open up to him," she said. "It was really amazing getting to know one another."