

The Enterprise

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Local student musicians honored

By Ben Thompson
ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

The Boston-based youth campaign Project STEP was recently awarded the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award by First Lady Michelle Obama.

Local Project STEP students Taylor Payne, of Abington, and Ameerah Manigat, of Brockton, were represented at the White House by the program's executive director Mary Jaffee and Dorchester student Ajani Boyd.

Project STEP, or String Training and Education Program, is a year-round classical music training program for black and Latino students from around the greater Boston area. Founded in 1982, the project is designed to increase diversity in the classical music profession and grant motivated participants from elementary to high school the long-term musical instruction they wouldn't otherwise get. Project STEP also partners with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which provides the participants' families with tickets and the chil-



Taylor Payne



Ameerah Manigat

dren with space to work and perform in.

Each one of Project STEP's 44 students receive weekly private lessons from Boston-area conservatory and orchestra teachers. Its success comes not only from the education it provides, but from the long-term benefits of rigorous training and practice. Since it was founded over 30 years ago, 100 percent of its students graduated high school and moved on to universities or conservatories. Sixty percent of Project STEP's graduates are now pro-

fessionally involved in music.

"Studying classical music teaches Project STEP students about discipline, commitment, analysis and attention to detail," said Jaffee. "They become astute citizens of the world. More than anything, it teaches them the joy and satisfaction that comes from hard work and achievement."

Jaffee's 2014 program was one of 12 selected to receive the award out of 50 finalists from a nation-wide pool of over 350 nominees. It is the highest honor for out-of-school arts pro-

grams in the nation.

"I am extremely proud to see Project STEP receive the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award," said Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh. "By targeting and serving populations that have been typically under-represented in classical music, Project STEP is evening the playing field, changing lives, and showcasing the great talent of our children. I am thrilled to see them recognized on a national level and offer my sincerest congratulations and wishes for continued success."

In addition to the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, Project STEP will receive a \$10,000 grant and a year of support from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities in Washington.

For more information about Project STEP, visit project-step.org.

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