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“Free Minds” Celebrate Summer School

On Friday, August 3, community members will gather for the closing showcase of the Free Minds Collective at William Wirt Middle School (WWMS). The showcase will take place in the school’s Multipurpose Room from 1:30-4:00pm. The celebration is the culmination of four weeks of creative, experiential learning. The showcase will feature a performance or presentation from each workshop that represents the skills and knowledge they developed over the course of the Free Minds Collective.

The Free Minds Collective was developed by a diverse range of partners: William Wirt Middle School in Prince George’s County, the Engaged University at the University of Maryland, and the Maryland Multicultural Youth Centers. The program aimed to provide a range of unique learning opportunities to support WWMS’s own academic summer program. For four days each week for four weeks, over 80 WWMS students engaged in nine different enrichment workshops, including organic cooking and gardening, breakdancing, bike repair, capoeira (an Afro-Brazilian martial art), photography, drama, spoken word poetry, drumming, and mural painting. Once a week, staff and students went on all-day field trips to various recreational and historical sites in the region, including Patuxent River Park and Jug Ban.

The program’s success was in large part due to the diverse resources of its staff and the WWMS students. Each workshop was led by an intergenerational team comprised of a local educator or artist, an undergraduate from the University of Maryland, College Park, and a student from Parkdale High School. The Free Minds staff mirrored WWMS’ international, multicultural student body, whose families come from Prince George’s County, and countries in West Africa, East Africa, Central and South America, the Caribbean and many other places around the world.

The Free Minds Collective demonstrates the ways that dynamic community-university partnerships can strengthen and support local schools in Prince George’s County.