



SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

## SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Gail Pinsker  
310.450.8338, ext. 70230  
[gpinsker@smmusd.org](mailto:gpinsker@smmusd.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
Dec. 15, 2022

### Malibu Students Participate in School-Wide Botswana Day Event

*“We don’t want our land wasted. We want things to be organic. We need to change our rules for living so that things are better and that we live in a way that uses the earth conservatively. Not every city can be perfect and it doesn’t have to be.” Noel, fourth grade*

Webster and Malibu Elementary Schools have been rethinking the way teachers collaborate and approach project-based learning (PBL) through an initiative called the Botswana School Project over the last two years. PBL is a teaching pedagogy in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world dialogue and personally meaningful projects that expand their curiosity about themselves and the world beyond the classroom.



Pat Cairns, a former Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD) teacher and administrator in Malibu, co-founded the Botswana School Project (BSP), a nonprofit, in 2010. A partnership was formed between schools in Botswana and Malibu that fosters collaboration, creativity, and inquiry-based learning. Through numerous learning exchanges, Malibu students have had the opportunity to expand their creativity and cultural engagement with young people, animals, and the world beyond Malibu. For example, this year, students in both

countries made educational and cultural connections through live streaming led by Country Director and lead facilitator Brooks Kamanakao, representative for the Botswana School project.

Kamanakao has extraordinary knowledge in the world of naturalism and loves his home village in Botswana, Africa. While Kamanakao has visited Malibu four times in the last 10 years, speaking to Malibu students about his home country, animals, conservation and ecology, this year’s project-based learning expanded to a school-wide initiative (transitional kindergarten-fifth grade) with multiple teachers and classrooms in Malibu and Botswana.



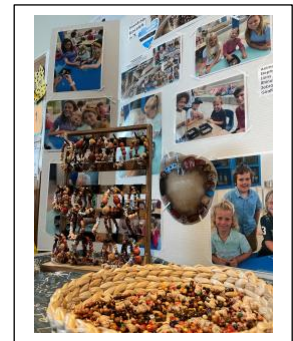
Parents were invited to a school-wide assembly in early December celebrating their children’s work using STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) and talking with



teachers and Kamanakao about the impact of this project-based learning experience. The event illuminated how excited students were to participate in this project and the ways they engaged learning collaboratively within their school and in Botswana (or beyond). One student asked “what is the best renewable energy source Botswana could use?” (Dax, fourth grade). They came up with multiple sources, analyzed them, and then moved to solutions that would be sustainable. Initial questions came from the STEAM program written by teachers Wendy Berman Baker and Sheryl Murdock. One fourth grader told SMMUSD Superintendent Ben Drati, “I like learning this way because you get to study things whatever way you want. I learned the mechanics of how turbines work. We talked about what cities in the future might be like in our country. In our teams, we built future cities for Botswana, while still respecting animal life” (Moral, fourth grade).

Projects involved in-depth discussions around land, animals, people, and water and focused on skills like reading and writing. Some examples include: second and third grade student’s investigation of the Malibu Lagoon after learning about the Okavango Delta wetlands. Another project, by fifth graders, explored the art of folktales through creative string art work visualized in constellations in both hemispheres and how some constellations overlap the hemispheres. They created night-sky canvases while using math to map the distance.

This global exchange is inspiring and transcends the ways that teachers teach and collaborate across grade level and subject area. This focus and commitment to teachers illustrates the importance of knowledge sharing and creative process through global awareness. Through an interactive learning process, students get to imagine while learning real-world skills that help them open their lens of curiosity to ask questions, think creatively, and always have fun.



Kamanakao completed a two week visit with the students on December 8, and will continue to collaborate and share with teachers his knowledge around conservation, ecology, and ways to cultivate these practices within the learning environment so that this work continues to evolve. This year, every class at Webster Elementary participated as well as three classes from Malibu Elementary and one class at Malibu Middle School.

“We are thrilled to have provided such an enjoyable and invaluable educational experience for our students. We aim to keep our students, fellow teachers, and our Malibu schools’ administration motivated and interested in new ways of learning through projects like this. We are excited to continue sharing with parents and the greater community all of the wonderful things that are happening in our schools. We believe it’s important for our young people, our school systems, and our community to get involved and learn from other communities, around the world, like Botswana and the Motopi School students,” said Dee Dee Cooper, Webster Elementary kindergarten / first grade teacher, who oversees the project at all Malibu schools. The [Boys & Girls Club of Malibu](#) sponsors this project through a generous grant.

Boys & Girls Club of Malibu Media Contact:  
Gemma Stewart – Rocket Launch PR  
(562) 544-5797  
[gstewart@rocketlaunchagency.com](mailto:gstewart@rocketlaunchagency.com)



###