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ALERT

TOP STORY

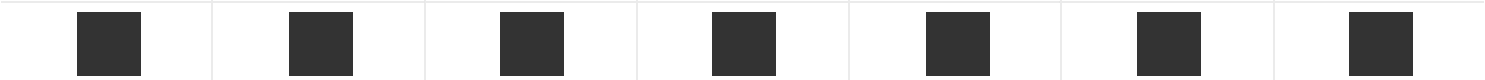
FALA GRAD SPOTLIGHT

FALA graduate spotlight: Aneeka Bippus boasts experiences during high school

ABIGAIL KESSLER Sun Staff Reporter
May 18, 2025



Aneeka Bippus is graduating from Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy this month and plans to study environmental science at NAU.
Hattie Loper, Arizona Daily Sun



Aneeka Bippus will be graduating this week from a school she says has given her opportunities she wouldn't have found elsewhere.

In addition to trying out different types of arts in her classes at Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy (FALA), Bippus said she's gained leadership experience through her extracurricular activities. She said she's going to miss her time at the high school, especially the people.

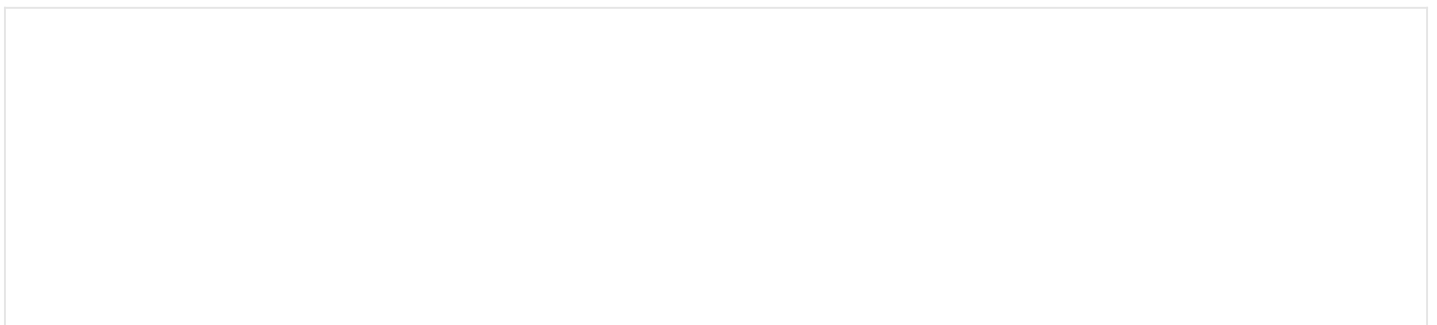
"I definitely wouldn't be here without all the opportunities and people around me," she said. "I've been privileged to have a lot of incredible people in my life."

Bippus was part of her school's first sixth grade class in the 2018-19 academic year. The Class of 2025 is FALA's first to be together since it added middle school.

"FALA has a lot of opportunities, and I think part of that is because it's such a small school that there's a chance for everyone to get involved if they want to get involved," she said, mentioning clubs, leadership-building activities, school events and the variety of art classes offered.

She cited an art class she has taken that included units where students created stained glass and batik fabric (which Bippus said was her favorite), and the dance classes that teach styles ranging from modern to jazz to hip-hop.

FALA's dance classes performed in a showcase the evening of May 10, and Bippus performed as part of the Contemporary Dance Practices and West African Drum and Dance classes. She took dance classes her freshman year and didn't resume until this year. The break was to focus on academics, but Bippus said she came back to dance because it was an opportunity she wasn't sure she'd have again.





Gallery: FALA presents its spring dance show

She also mentioned teachers' genuine care about their work and students as one of FALA's strengths, saying there were "a lot more" excellent teachers than just the ones she named.

Some teachers she said had been especially impactful were math and environmental science teacher Nina Porter and science teacher Audrey Baird -- "their classes were my favorite classes I've ever taken because they were hard, but you learned so much," Bippus said.

English teacher Alex Casady and social studies teacher Kehaulani Nallira were also standouts, for their kind and engaging approach to their subjects.

Bippus has been in multiple leadership roles in school clubs throughout high school and is an ex officio member on FALA's governing board, attending meetings and sending her notes to the student body.

She is now the president of the Environmental Coalition after first joining in sixth grade. She's also the secretary of National Honor Society, on the school's Climate Action Plan committee and has been a peer tutor for math, science and social studies since ninth grade.

Outside of school, she has been diving since age 8 with the Northern Arizona Divers, coached by Nikki Kelsey.

The Environmental Coalition is her favorite. The group participates in city Earth Day events, on-campus efforts and takes an annual trip to the Arizona Capitol to meet with legislators.

Each senior at FALA completes a capstone project of their choosing, largely during project-based learning time in the last quarter of the school year.

For this, Bippus created a podcast on student leadership, interviewing other students at the school about their experiences in leadership roles.

"I thought it was really nice to talk about expectations and boundaries and getting burned out and how you deal with that, and learning to set boundaries and keep boundaries or dealing with unreasonable requests or expectations," she said.



Aneeka Bippus, Sydney Marchand, Alina Skrocki and Kirsten Clark of the Northern Arizona Divers club pose for a photo in this 2022 file photo. They participated in the AAU Diving National Championship from July 16 to 23 in San Antonio.

Northern Arizona Divers, courtesy



Students and staff at Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy have created a semimonthly social justice symposium during a semester in 2021 in order to introduce students to topics that have been prevalent nationwide. Pictured from left to right are, Minz Weibezaho, James Marquess, Alena Rescigno, Nichole Hamberger, Aneeka Bippus and Keetra Bippus.

Jake Bacon, Arizona Daily Sun file

After graduating, Bippus plans to study environmental science at Northern Arizona University, saying she wants to stay in familiar surroundings for a while longer.

Her interest in caring for the environment -- which she has already been pursuing through extracurricular activities and classes -- began even younger, with a magazine subscription to Ranger Rick gifted from her grandparents.

“I learned a lot about cool animals that way and I knew there were a lot of endangered animals, and I didn’t understand why no one seemed to care,” she said. “That was, I guess, my entryway into caring more about the environment. And then the human aspect of it, when I learned more about the impact of climate change and the intersectionality.”

Abigail Kessler has been a reporter for the Daily Sun since 2021, covering education, health, science and more. Reach her at AKessler@azdailysun.com.

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