



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **U.S., Japan Students Go From Virtual to Reality at KAC's Washington, D.C. Summit**

*Twelve high school students will meet in Washington to promote mutual understanding  
and to strengthen people-to-people ties between U.S. and Japan*

**WASHINGTON, D.C., July 25, 2017** – Today, Kizuna Across Cultures (KAC), a Washington, DC-based educational non-profit organization announced the launch of its Global Classmates Summit to take place in Washington, D.C on July 28 – August 5. The Summit will bring together 12 high school students from the United States and Japan who will be meeting each other in person for the first time after spending six months this past school year communicating electronically to learn about each other's culture, language, policies and lifestyle.

KAC is the leading provider of virtual exchange for young people between the United States and Japan and since launching its virtual language and cultural exchange program "[Global Classmates](#)" in 2012, KAC has connected nearly 5,000 high school students in the United States and Japan, [making a powerful impact on the students and their future](#). Nearly 90% of students agree that the program enhanced their desire to participate in further international opportunities, including study abroad. Over 90% of students have also reported that participation increased their understanding of each other's cultures and their confidence in communicating in a foreign language.

Based on these remarkable results – and to mark five successful years of the Global Classmates program – KAC embarked on an ambitious plan to transform these virtual exchanges into a week-long in-person Summit with advanced collaboration goals.

The Summit will feature twelve high school students who were selected from a pool of nearly 1,350 participants, based on their outstanding performance in the Global Classmates 2016-17 program.

Ayako Smethurst, President and Co-founder of KAC stated, "The young leaders selected as participants for the Summit will serve as an example and inspiration on how friendship with

peers abroad can lead to positive impacts on the relationship between their nations and the broader international community.” In addition, the Summit aims to counter the [declining interest of Japanese students studying abroad in the United States](#), which has fallen from its peak of 47,000 students in 1997 to 19,060 in 2016. A recent article also noted that [Japanese students are growing anxious about studying in the United States under the current U.S. political environment](#).

Ambassador James P. Zumwalt, CEO of Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA, who is a key sponsor of the Global Classmates Summit said, “Sasakawa USA is delighted to support this program as an investment for future U.S.-Japan relations. We hope the students will be inspired to maintain their relationships and contribute to U.S.-Japan relations in their future endeavors.”

The students from the U.S. come from the following towns and states:

Landstown High School, Virginia Beach City, Virginia  
Scott County High School, Georgetown City, Kentucky  
Stuyvesant High School, New York City, New York  
Wylie E. Groves High School, Beverly Hills Village, Michigan

The students from Japan come from the following cities and prefectures:

Ishinomaki High School, Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture  
Inagakuen High School, Kitaadachi Gun, Saitama Prefecture  
Murasakino High School, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

Summit participants will live under the same roof for nine days, engaging in various activities ranging from teambuilding exercises to meeting leaders and experts on U.S.-Japan relations. At the end of the Summit, participants will present what they have learned and make proposals that tackle the theme, “How can we strengthen future people-to-people ties in U.S.-Japan Relations?”

After the Summit, participants are expected to share their experience and what they learned with their peers at school, as well as with the more than 1,600 high school students participating in the Global Classmates 2017-18 program. The Global Classmates Summit 2017 is funded by grants from Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA, the U.S. Embassy, Tokyo, and the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership.

For more information about Global Classmates Summit, please visit:

<http://kacultures.org/english/gc-summit>

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### **About Kizuna Across Cultures**

Kizuna Across Cultures (KAC) is a Washington, DC-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization established by a few Japanese individuals and former Japan Exchange Teaching (JET) program participants who were inspired by the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. KAC utilizes a cutting-edge approach at a grass roots level to provide a vast number of young people with the international experience to foster qualities and abilities essential for global citizenship. Since 2012, KAC has run its virtual language and cultural exchange program, *Global*

*Classmates*, connecting American students studying Japanese and Japanese students studying English.

**About Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA**

Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA is an independent American, non-profit, non-partisan, institution devoted to research, analysis, and better understanding of the U.S.-Japan relationship. Through research and education programs, Sasakawa USA facilitates people-to-people exchange and dialogue between American and Japanese policymakers, influential citizens, and the broader public.

