News Item, 15/03/2010, Gütersloh: Wanted: School projects highlighting integration and equality

Bertelsmann Stiftung competition welcomes new celebrity supporters

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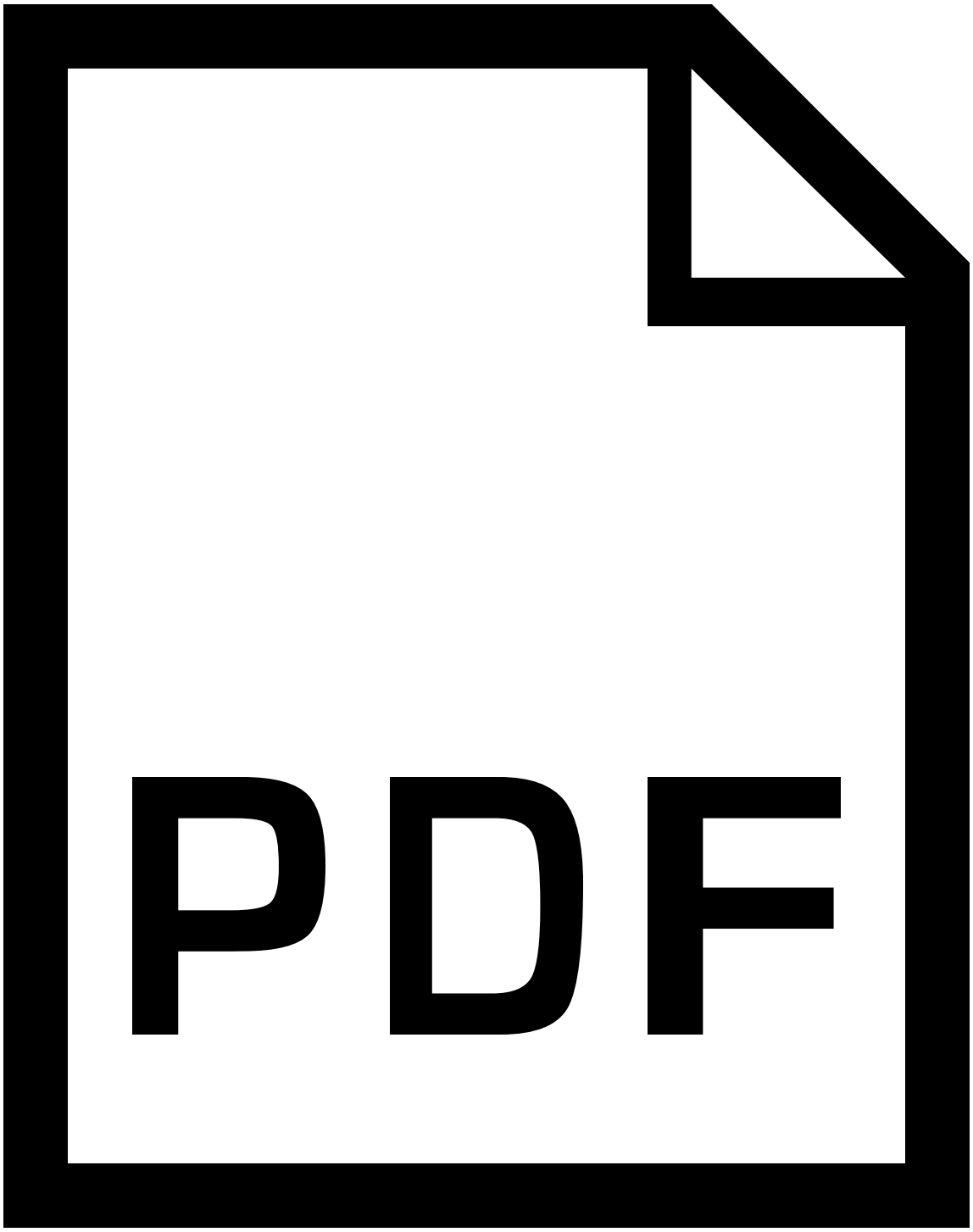

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The starting gun has sounded for the second “Alle Kids sind VIPs” (Fairness Through Integration) competition as, once again, the Bertelsmann Stiftung calls on students in Germany between the ages of 10 and 17 to submit ideas on how to promote integration at school. The winners will get the opportunity to spend time with a number of celebrities, including national soccer champ Mario Gomez, comedian Bülent Ceylan and singer Jenniffer Kae, who are donating their time to support the competition. New celebrity supporters this year include the band Culcha Candela and actor Tayfun Baydar. The deadline for submissions is June 1, 2010.

The competition
What do children of differing nationalities have to offer society? How can they learn from each other and together as a group? What do they have in common and what distinguishes them from each other? The Bertelsmann Stiftung’s “Alle Kids sind VIPs” (Fairness Through Integration) competition is designed to help provide answers to those and other questions relating to social integration in schools. For the second time, the foundation is calling upon students in Germany between the ages of 10 and 17 to submit their ideas for ways of increasing social cohesion during their everyday school activities. Students wanting to participate can register online at allekidssindvips.de (see sidebar at right).

Celebrity supporters

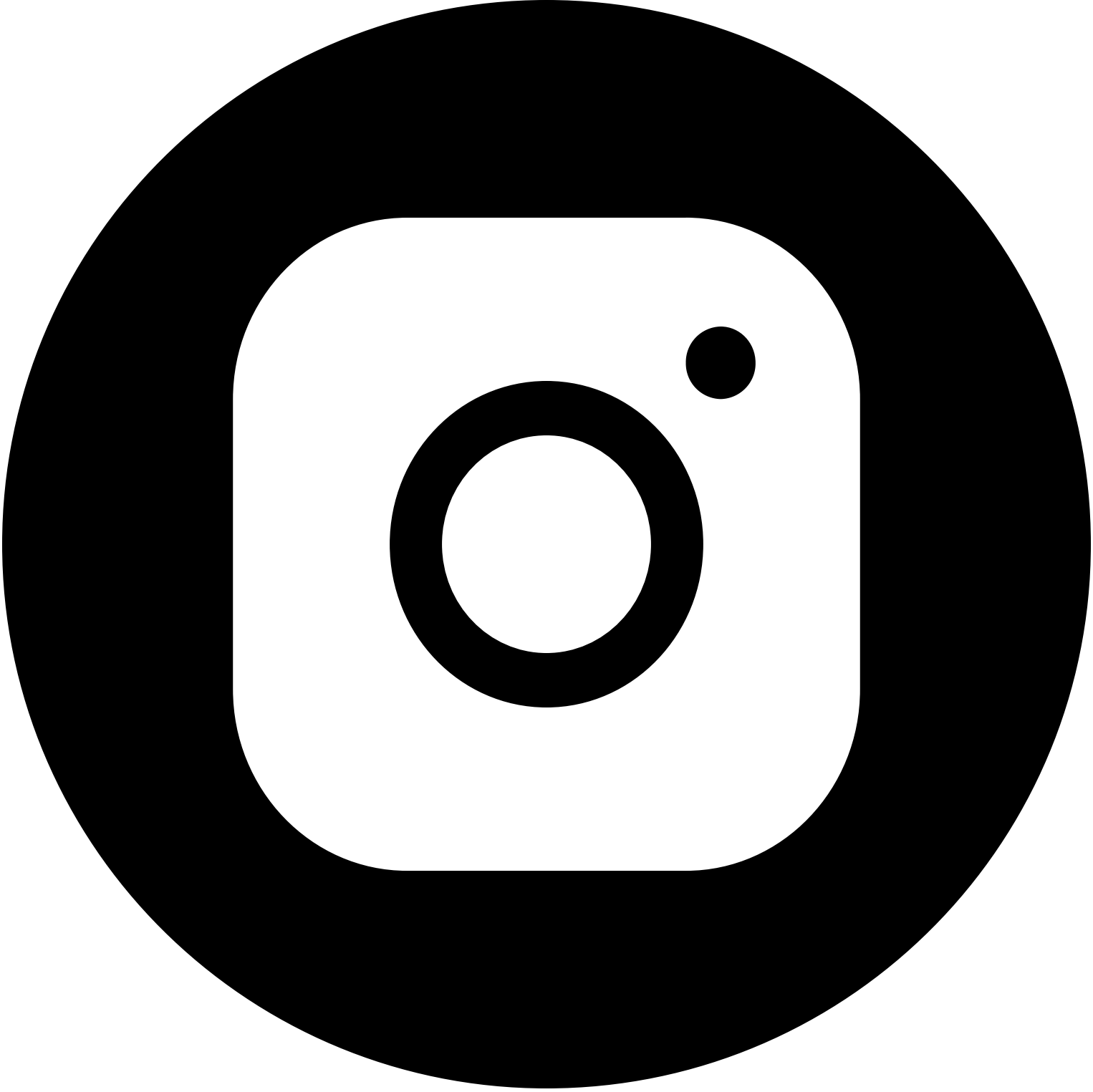
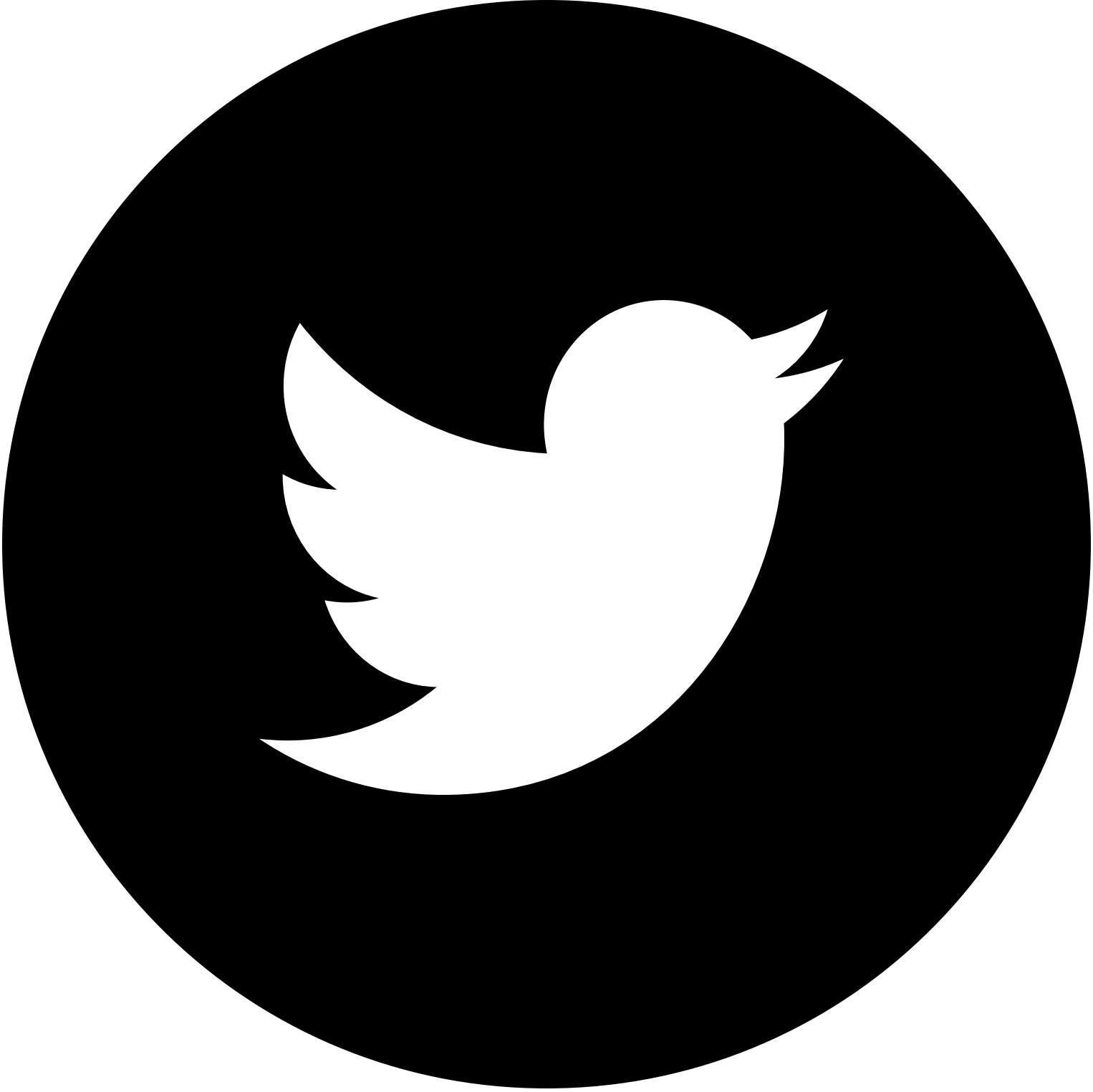
“On the soccer field, performance is what counts -- not cultural background. The same thing should apply in school,” says professional soccer player Mario Gomez. All children are “very important people,” regardless of which country they or their parents come from, a sentiment that Gomez and the competition’s other celebrity supporters share. All of the high-profile supporters have diverse cultural and ethnic roots and have succeeded in Germany in their chosen field, making them perfect role models for other children wanting to integrate into German society.

“Our name is also our message, since we want to show kids in Germany’s schools how hot cultural diversity can be,” says the lead performer of Culcha Candela. “That’s important, because we’re not just ‘showcase foreigners,’ we’re Germany’s next generation.” The group’s seven musicians come from Colombia, Korea, Uganda, Poland and Germany and have used their diverse backgrounds to drive their success. They rap and sing in German, English, Spanish and Patois. Currently they are on tour, performing their hits “Hamma,” “Schöne neue Welt” and “Monsta.” www.youtube.com/user/AllekidssindVIPs

In 2010, actor Tayfun Baydar is also supporting the competition. The former taxi driver knows the importance of equal educational opportunity. “Many of my friends never finished school and don’t have proper jobs today,” he says. It was his father and brother Volkan who convinced him to take things in hand and set some goals for himself. He went back and finished his education and eventually entered an acting school. Today he’s a cast member of the RTL series “Gute Zeiten, Schlechte Zeiten.” “For me, it’s now an advantage being Turkish,” he says. “I get offered interesting roles, and I can use my intercultural abilities when playing a part.”

No racism, better education, less poverty and more equality -- those are the goals the competition’s celebrity supporters want to help achieve. In addition to Baydar, Gomez, Ceylan, Kae and the Culcha Candela singers, this year’s supporters include TV host Daniel Aminati, the breakdance group Flying Steps and actress Susan Sideropoulos.

Background

Germany’s schools do not provide young people from immigrant families with equal educational opportunity, something documented by a survey recently carried out by the Bertelsmann Stiftung. According to the survey, 45 percent of 16 to 24-year-olds say that students from immigrant families do not have the same opportunities available to them that German students do. In addition, 39 percent of young immigrants say that the lack of equal opportunity is due to students’ poor command of the German language. The Bertelsmann Stiftung is actively engaged in projects to increase equal opportunity in Germany’s educational system.

Photos, videos and background information on the competition’s celebrity supporters is available at allekidssindvips.de (see sidebar on right).