

March 17, 2014

Y Community School Students Dance the Night Away

On Thursday, February 20, more than 100 students from YMCA Community Schools performed the merengue, swing, waltz, tango and salsa in the *Dancing with Class* competition in front of 400 friends, parents and school staff at the Chicago Cultural Center.

“*Dancing with Class* takes students out of their comfort zones and helps develop their character and leadership and relationship skills, while providing the opportunity to expand their horizons through dance,” said Eric Werge, executive director of the YMCA Community Schools Initiative. The students began lessons in November with instructors from May I Have This Dance, one of Chicago’s leading ballroom dance studios.

Margot Toppen, director of Dancing with Class, added “We are thrilled to partner with the YMCA Community Schools Initiative. We believe that giving students the chance to try something new and build social skills provides benefits and lessons that last a lifetime.”

Nine YMCA Community Schools participated in a fantastic city-wide dance off at two separate events and took home the following awards:

Event 1
Best Overall Technique: Libby Elementary
Best Merengue: Whistler Elementary

Event 2
Best Overall Ballroom Dance Team: McKay Elementary
Best Overall Presentation: Hampton Elementary
Best Overall Technique: McKay Elementary
Best Merengue: Claremont Academy
Best Waltz: Pasteur Elementary
Best Swing: Christopher Elementary
Best Tango: Nightingale Elementary
Best Salsa: Morrill Elementary

One of the highlights of the evening was the performance by Christopher Elementary students Fernando Torres and Alexis Winkelman, the first student ever to participate *Dancing with Class* in a wheel chair. “Alexis’ performance had a wonderful impact on all of us. These two young dancers reminded us all that dancing really is for everyone!” said Toppen.



After the event Alexis said, “Before this program, most people thought I only went home and watched TV, and I couldn’t do anything. My favorite part was getting out and showing my true self.” Fernando added, “It was the best day ever; it was my first experience performing anything in front of a lot of people.”

Chad Wentz, YMCA Community Schools site coordinator at Christopher Elementary, stated, “The night was such an amazing accomplishment for all the students. They had an absolute blast and are begging do it again next year.”

“Let’s face it, learning the tango may not be a priority for your typical grade school student,” says Werge. “And yet, this program becomes more popular every year because the kids love it, and they are so proud of what they accomplish. We look forward to continuing this partnership for years to come.”

<http://www.ymcachicago.org/blog/entry/y-community-school-students-dance-the-night-away/>