

## News from the Field: Collaborative Programming Yields Impact

This spring, students from five Chicago public schools participated in a unique program that allowed them to learn dances from all over the world and then perform them with peers from other schools. The result was a truly transformative experience.

The program is the result of a collaboration between the [YMCA of Metro Chicago's Community Schools Initiative](#), [Dancing with Class](#), and [Chicago Public Schools](#). Dancing with Class is the youth education and outreach division of May I Have This Dance, Inc. a ballroom studio in the Chicago area. Through its partnership with Dancing with Class, the YMCA is able to offer a consistent quality of programming in a format that engages students and parents and fosters community spirit and pride.

"The Dancing with Class program provides an incredible educational opportunity," says Antwon Mallory, program manager for the YMCA Community Schools Initiative. "Students are personally enriched by exploring unfamiliar styles of dance, increase their self-esteem by learning new dance techniques, and are empowered to interact with one another in a respectful and positive manner—a life skill that manifests in how they treat others at home, at school, and in the community."

In addition to Dancing with Class, the YMCA Community Schools Initiative offers other events to bring together students and families from different schools and backgrounds for a fun and rewarding experience. Two such examples include their annual Scholastic Bowl and Family Ice Skating Event. "Not only do students participate in engaging programs at their individual schools, but the larger culminating events provide students with the opportunity to recognize that they are an essential part of a much bigger picture," says Eric Werge, program director of the YMCA Community Schools Initiative. "This is a concept that is critical for those of us doing this work to keep in mind as well."

Mallory notes that there is a great deal of logistical coordination involved in implementing programs across multiple afterschool sites. "We accomplish this by having a goal- and detail-oriented management team, dynamic on-site managers to oversee program implementation at schools, and productive partnerships with passionate folks from awesome programs like Dancing with Class," he says.

Dancing with Class director Margot Toppen agrees that being goal and detail oriented are keys to success for multi-site programs. "Having a specifically defined outcome ensures that all sites are working toward a common goal," she says. "If you set the bar at an appropriately high level, quality and outstanding performance will follow."

Judging from the energy and smiles on the faces of the more than 100 students who performed in the YMCA Community Schools Initiative Spring Dance-Off, the strategy is yielding a noticeable impact. "The culminating event is an inspiring opportunity for students to showcase what they've learned while further developing interpersonal skills by engaging with peers from different schools and of different ethnicities," Mallory says. "This program is a shining example of how working collaboratively across sites maximizes benefits for children."

For more information visit the [YMCA Community Schools Initiative](#) and [Dancing with Class](#) websites.

