

## Life Lessons From Heart of Dance

BY EMBER REICHGOTT JUNGE, CO-PRESIDENT, HEART OF DANCE



Photos by Jeff Achen, courtesy of The Saint Paul Foundation.

SAM, A FIFTH GRADER AT WINDOM Dual Immersion School in Minneapolis, was excited when he was selected to dance with his school team in the May 7 Dancing Classrooms all-school Colors of the Rainbow Team Match, hosted by the nonprofit Heart of Dance. But his friend, Luis, was really “bummed out” when he didn’t make it. “I thought he should have made it,” said Sam. “So I offered to give up my spot for him. I thought well, I’m going to be happy dancing, but I’m also going to be

happy seeing him dance, so it’s like a win-win.”

So Luis joined the team and came to the elegant ballroom ready to dance for Windom. He learned that another team, from Learning for Leadership Charter School in Minneapolis, was short a few gentlemen. So he and another Windom teammate also volunteered to dance a few dances with the ladies of Learning for Leadership, though they had never met.

The ballroom was filled with parents and families cheering on the ten Twin Cities schools fifth-grade teams as they danced the merengue, tango, rumba, waltz, foxtrot, swing and heel-toe polka. Professional ballroom dance judges Amy Anderson, Nathan Daniels, Donna Edelstein, and Shinya McHenry judged dancers not only on dance steps, but on their display of Respect, Elegance and Teamwork—the fundamentals of Dancing Classrooms. As judges scores were tallied, every school team received a trophy and every fifth grader a medal.

Luis jumped for joy when Windom placed second in the Team Match, proudly holding the trophy with his teammates. He texted the news to Sam. “I thought, WOW!” Sam told a luncheon audience two days later. “Out of ten schools that’s pretty good. I helped them, even though I gave up my spot. Maybe he did better than I would have done.”

And then the first place team was called—Learning for Leadership Charter School! Luis and his Windom teammate were invited to join them for the first place team photo. Said Sam, “I found out that my friend was one of



Photos by C.J. Hurst.



two Windom gentlemen to dance with the Orange Team and help them win first place. It was pretty amazing that they did that. I had a bunch of happy feelings all at once.”

Add to this story that the first place team members were 90% Somali, and you have a complete picture of how Dancing Classrooms develops gender and multicultural respect among fifth graders.

Two days later, both teams performed together before 215+ people at the “Dancing with Heart” luncheon for

Heart of Dance, celebrating two years of Dancing Classrooms. Sam shared his story, concluding, “and now I get to come here and dance with my team after all.”

The pictures tell the rest of the story. If you want to bring Heart of Dance to a student or school you love, volunteer as a Classroom Assistant, sponsor a classroom, or audition to be a Teaching Artist, contact Emberrj@heartofdancemn.org or go to [www.heartofdancemn.org](http://www.heartofdancemn.org). **E**



Photos by C.J. Hurst.



Judges Shinya McHenry, Donna Edelstein, Nathan Daniels, and Amy Anderson.