

Team Match Transformation

BY SYDNEY SCHOEBERLE, HEART OF DANCE

THE FEELING IN THE ROOM AT THE Colors of the Rainbow Team Match is always electric. Surrounded by hundreds of screaming parents, teachers, and friends, students get the chance to show off all they've accomplished over the course of the semester—in both dance steps and attitude.

For most, middle school comes with a fair share of new emotions and general awkwardness. But students across Minnesota are, surprisingly enough, learning to cope with these pressures through the power of partner dance.

José had always been a soft-spoken student. As an eighth grader at Achieve Language Academy, he reacted like most students initially do to the idea of ballroom dance—laughing it off and avoiding it at all costs.

But, like most students, José slowly but surely embraced the program, and the values of respect, elegance, and

teamwork that he learned along the way.

“He was reserved and quiet at first,” said José’s teacher, Emily Vondriska, about his demeanor leading up to the program. During Dancing Classrooms, “he began to participate more in the classroom and turn assignments in more readily.”

José took to the stage at the annual Colors of the Rainbow Team Match on Sunday, May 19th, to strut his stuff in the Tango. On the day of the Team Match, José was eager to dress up and showcase all he had learned.

“Obviously, he was very excited,” said Vondriska. “I did not recognize him when he entered. His hair was cut and neatly combed, and he was



Photos by CJ Hurst



wearing a fancy, button-down shirt, complete with a tie and tie clip!”

“The biggest change for me was my self-confidence,” said José. “I think better of myself, and that’s the most important thing I learned.”

The local nonprofit Heart of Dance brings the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of partner dance to fifth and eighth graders like José, in schools across Minnesota through the global program, Dancing Classrooms. Dancing Classrooms is a ten-week, in-school residency that teaches partner dance, and crucial life skills like confidence, cultural awareness, and conflict

resolution. In classrooms of fifth and eighth graders, Dancing Classrooms engages students with these concepts at an age proven to make the greatest impact.

The Spring 2019 Colors of the Rainbow Team Match brought together all the schools that participated in the residency this semester. The goal? To show students from all participating schools that they are part of a larger dancing family, and unite the diverse communities participating in Dancing Classrooms each semester.

Hundreds came out to the InterContinental St. Paul Riverfront

Hotel to cheer on their favorite fifth and eighth grade teams from 18 Twin Cities and Rochester schools. From teamwork in the Tango, to respect in the Rumba, it was easy to see how students learned so much more than dance steps over just ten short weeks.

After the competition, José proudly showed off his second-place medal from the eighth-grade round, but he was more excited about the connections he made along the way.

“My favorite part of dance class was how we all just kind of circled up and everybody came together respectfully,” said José.

You have an opportunity to help students just like José! Heart of Dance is always seeking energized Teaching Artists and volunteers. Professional Ballroom Dancers and high-level amateurs are also welcome to visit our classrooms and demonstrate their skills as Classroom Dance Buddies. If you want to bring this experience to a child or school you love, Heart of Dance is recruiting classrooms for the 2019-2020 academic year. Visit www.heartofdancemn.org to learn more about these opportunities. **E**

