Why Heart of Dance?

Students learn so much more than dance steps.
They learn Respect, Elegance and Teamwork.
That’s how Dancing Classrooms changes young lives.


Heart of Dance co-founders Andrea Mirenda and Ember Reichgott Junge have experienced this for themselves and others. That’s why they co-founded the Minnesota nonprofit Heart of Dance: to bring the physical, emotional and social benefits of ballroom dance to those who might not know them.

Inspired by the award-winning documentary Mad Hot Ballroom, they chose Dancing Classrooms as their first program bringing ballroom dance to fifth-graders. Minnesota is the 30th site of this proven global 20+ year social and emotional learning program.

New York-trained Teaching Artists teach students Merengue, Tango, Rumba, Foxtrot, Waltz and Swing during their 10-week in-school residency. They help classroom teachers coordinate the dances with other subjects, such as social studies, math, English and art. They help students discover all they can be.

Think you can dance like a fifth grader?
"I felt like a proud papa. You could see the respect from afar."

Principal Kirk Morris, Benjamin E. Mays IB World School, St. Paul

2015-16 Surveys show strong results for Dancing Classrooms from Twin Cities parents and educators:

81% of parents saw increased self-esteem in their child.

“My child has become more confident at school and at home.”

9 of 10 teachers reported improved student relationships.

“This is the most fun and rewarding opportunity in my 16 years of teaching.”

70% of parents noted improved relationships with their child.

“He’d show me the dances he learned. We danced together... He loves coming home and showing me his moves.”

2 of 3 parents reported increased academic performance in their child.

“Made her feel more confident in other subjects.”

“She just wanted to be BETTER.”

88% of parents would recommend Dancing Classrooms.

“All kids should get this!”
Thank you to our donors!

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We thank our many donors who gave to benefit events for Heart of Dance!

To the Heart of Dance Community

We could not have done this without you. The launch during school year 2015-16 of Dancing Classrooms, our first program, exceeded all expectations. Over 650 fifth-graders in 28 classrooms in 12 Twin Cities schools experienced the benefits of ballroom dance.

“I can do this!” shouted one girl with tears in her eyes to her principal, overcoming her initial disruptive resistance. She elegantly represented her school at the semester-end Colors of the Rainbow Team Match (CORTM). “He was less shy and seemed to come out of his shell,” another parent told us. A paraprofessional reported her students worked together better in the classroom in other ways.

All of this was possible because of you. We are grateful to our funders large and small, to our amazing partners and volunteers in the ballroom dance community and beyond, and to our educators who took a chance to journey with us.

With your help, Heart of Dance doubled in size for school year 2016-17. We start this fall semester with 26 classrooms in 10 schools, with expectations to exceed that number for spring semester.

Do you want to bring Heart of Dance to a school you love? Do you want to volunteer as a Classroom Assistant, or audition to be a Teaching Artist? We especially encourage candidates of color or multilingual speakers to apply. Or perhaps you want to become a Classroom Sponsor? With champions like you, Heart of Dance and Dancing Classrooms can grow in the Twin Cities and expand to Greater Minnesota.

Thank you for helping to transform young lives one step at a time.

Dennis Yelkin
Heart of Dance Board Chair

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Ember Reichgott Junge 612-750-1262
Heart of Dance Co-Founders
Heart of Dance brings the physical, emotional and social benefits of ballroom dance to youth, seniors, veterans and individuals living with mental, emotional or physical illness or challenges.

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This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.