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Date: June 9, 2009

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LIBBY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND YMCA SHINE SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT TALENTS

*YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago Community Schools Program Partnership Leads to
Successful Production of Hit Musical “The Wiz”*

CHICAGO – A partnership between Arthur A. Libby Elementary School and the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago’s Community Schools Program has led to a special opportunity for more than 100 students: the chance to put on a full-scale musical production. Students from Libby Elementary School worked with staff from the YMCA, which provided Libby with all production-related instructors and materials, to rehearse and perform the popular musical, “The Wiz.” The cast and crew recently held four performances of the show in Libby’s auditorium from May 28-30.

Since January, Libby students in the fifth through eighth grades have participated in classes with YMCA Community Schools staff in subject areas such as drama, dance, art and photography. After honing their crafts in the classroom, these students were given the opportunity to practice their skills onstage, to the delight of the entire community.

“This whole experience has been such a joy for me, personally, and for the program as a whole,” said Nicole York, YMCA Community Schools resource coordinator for Libby Elementary School. “Working with these fantastic students on a daily basis, you get to see the journey they take as they learn and grow, both as artists and as people.”

Libby’s production of “The Wiz” was a true collaboration from the start, as the school’s Fine Arts Department is made up entirely of teachers provided by the YMCA. Half of the students participating in the drama and choir classes were cast as actors and began rehearsing their scenes, songs and dance steps while the other half learned about stage production and lighting. At the same time, students from the art classes began creating what would become the show’s colorful and elaborate sets and props. During the run of the show, photography students had their cameras at-the-ready to snap pictures of the show, which were immediately posted on Libby’s website. And, in a bit of casting genius, students from Libby’s third-grade classes had their moment in the spotlight, as they played the roles of munchkins and poppies.

According to Kurt D. Jones, principal of Libby Elementary School, “Through this partnership with the YMCA, we’ve been able to offer our students opportunities that they otherwise may not get. And when you let children experience the arts, you open up a whole world of possibilities for them.”

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Demarlon Swanson, a seventh grade student at Libby who played the role of the Lion in the production, said, "I never thought I could get on stage and do what we just finished doing, but I am happy that I had the opportunity to be part of something different."

The YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago's Community Schools initiative is a collaborative partnership of individuals and organizations working to provide quality out-of-school programming focusing on positive child and youth development, while also meeting the community's academic, emotional, health and wellness needs. The YMCA currently provides Community Schools programming in 9 Chicago public elementary schools.

Through its 65 locations and more than 100 extension sites, the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago helps children learn and grow, teaches young people to lead, brings families closer, and encourages individual health and well-being. The fourth largest non-profit in Chicago and one of the largest human services organizations in the nation, YMCA programs impact hundreds of thousands of lives annually, helping to strengthen neighborhoods and respond to community needs across Chicagoland. To learn more, visit www.ymcachgo.org.

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