

## Golden Apple winner 'makes you want to dance'



Teacher Brooke Tippet Thompson (center) is applauded by CPS Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason-Watkins (left) and Dom Belmonte, President of the Golden Apple Foundation, at a press conference after receiving the Golden Apple award Tuesday morning. (Rich Hein/Sun-Times)

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BY [FRAN SPIELMAN](#) City Hall Reporter

Leave it to Chicago's music teacher extraordinaire Brooke Thompson.

On the day she won the Oscar for teaching — the Golden Apple Award — Thompson was worried about how the shows at Peirce School of International Studies, 1423 W. Bryn Mawr, would go on without her during her semester-long paid sabbatical.

"I will not be gone. I can't even imagine," said Thompson, a 41-year-old former opera singer.

"We do a spring concert and a dance concert two weeks later. Then, the 5th-grade musical, the 7th-grade renaissance program and graduation. I can't even imagine how that's gonna go" on without her.

On Tuesday, Thompson was preparing her 7th and 8th graders for the dance concert when Mayor Daley walked in with a basket full of apples, one of them golden.

Daley said he could see from the look in the students' eyes how much they love and appreciate Thompson. She stands out from the crowd by using music as an instrument to teach language arts, math and science. She teaches kids how to think — not what to think.

“Every child has music within them. ...Not every child is going to be able to sing. Not every child is going to be able to play an instrument or dance like these dancers here. But every child has it within them to create something musical. ...Just trying to tap into whatever they can bring,” said Thompson, who credited her “big mouth” for her success.

“I use a lot of...folk music because it naturally is a part of our language — the rhythm of the spoken word and the rhythm of language in folk songs is often similar. So, it helps to build literacy skills. In my room, we do music. We do science. We do social studies. We do history. We do art. We do everything. And they have to problem-solve daily. That's how we reach the kids. We challenge 'em.”

And what advice would she offer to her fellow teachers?

“Learn about the brain. Learn about how the brain learns. We're not always teaching to the way the brain learns and you have to. If a kid comes in and they're not socialized or stabilized — if they've had a bad morning — you've had all these chemicals released in the brain. There is no way to get to learning until that is stabilized. Music is a wonderful way to do that — to stabilize a child,” she said.

Paddy O'Reilly, a 1990 Golden Apple Winner, conducted the day-long classroom observation that culminated in Thompson's award.

O'Reilly said it was a day filled with fun, laughter and humor, followed by testimonials from a standing-room-only crowd of students and parents who lined up to sing Thompson's praises.

“She looks into the eyes of the children and asks the question, ‘Who are you?’ Children express themselves. They talk to her. They laugh. They're happy. One of the parents said she didn't even recognize the talent in her son. Brooke Thompson brought it out. Now, he has an interview for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra,” O'Reilly said.

“When they were doing dance steps. The gender in the classroom was not equal. Boys ended up dancing with boys. It just so happened it was the largest kid in the

room. I'm guessing this 7th grader was around 200 pounds. When she saw this kid was disturbed about having to have a boy partner, she became the partner for him. She was in the dance and leading it. She touches kids."

Tamra Pagan, 14, is one of the many students touched by Thompson.

"She makes you want to get up and jump and play the piano—just to be up there with her. She makes you want to do things. She makes you want to dance," Pagan said.

"She cares about us. She asks us, 'If there's something wrong, tell me so maybe I can comfort you about it and I can get you to do this.' She sees what's inside of us that doesn't come out."