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Inner-City Teaching Corps Alum, Zack Ruelas, Wins Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching
3rd grade teacher at St. Malachy is one of 10 to earn Golden Apple recognition

CHICAGO (May 10, 2012) – The Alain Locke Initiative is proud to announce that today Zach Ruelas, an alumnus of the nonprofit's Inner-City Teaching Corps, received the Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching. Ruelas, a 3rd grade teacher at St. Malachy School in Chicago's West Haven neighborhood, was chosen from a pool of nearly 600 nominees from throughout the Chicago metropolitan area. Among Ruelas' many teaching accomplishments, perhaps one of his most significant is that when he began working with his students last fall, only 16 percent of them were on grade level. Now 50 percent are on grade level and 24 of his 25 students have made 1.5 years reading growth (according to AIMSweb fluency) – all in less than one school year.

Ruelas, 27, and a San Jose, CA native, graduated from Colorado State University with a Sociology degree. In 2006, Ruelas joined The Alain Locke Initiative's Inner-City Teaching Corps (ICTC) where he learned the skills that have made him a high-quality teacher leader who is making an impact on urban education.

Since 1992 ICTC has identified and developed some 400 talented teachers to be life-long, high-impact education leaders. ICTC's two-year program prepares new teachers through a rigorous alternative certification program, in partnership with Northwestern University, and intensive in-classroom coaching from ICTC's experienced master teachers. ICTC teachers are placed in Chicago's highest-need schools. Many of ICTC's alumni have gone on to school leadership and have been recognized with prestigious teaching awards. Ruelas taught at St. Malachy during his ICTC commitment, and remains at the school today. To date, nine ICTC members have been Golden Apple finalists and of those finalists, four, including Zack Ruelas, have won the prestigious award. Ruelas' sister, Veronica Ruelas, is an ICTC alum and was a Golden Apple finalist in 2008.

"Zack's ICTC experience has helped him to cultivate the skills to become a teacher leader," said Keelin Philippe, The Alain Locke Initiative's director of teacher coaching. "Now he is using his leadership skills to be a mentor teacher to others at St. Malachy and provides them guidance on reading assessments and how to best evaluate results."

Without a doubt, Ruelas is making a difference in the classroom. During the 2010-2011 school year, his accomplishments included:

- Increased Terra Nova Reading scores from the 47th percentile to the 58th percentile
- Increased Terra Nova Math scores from the 40th percentile to the 75th percentile
- Increased Terra Nova Science scores from the 36th percentile to the 78th percentile
- Increased Terra Nova Social Studies scores from the 51st to the 69th percentile

In addition to the empirical evidence of Ruelas' teaching skills, Philippe said that he has great reverence for the students and school. "Students come to class early to see Zack, and they stay after school to be with him as well. He's a no-nonsense teacher, but definitely has a fun side that inspires his students."

Located near the United Center on Chicago's near west side, St. Malachy is in the heart of a community that faces the challenges of poverty, unemployment and gang violence. The school serves a predominantly African-American student population of approximately 250. Ninety-five percent of its preschool to eighth

grade students qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program. Fifty percent of St. Malachy's students reside in the 60612 and 60624 zip codes, including those from the Rockwell and Henry Horner homes.

"Zack truly gets his students excited to learn," said Bridgid Miller, St. Malachy School principal. "Our 3rd grade classrooms consistently have had the best attendance, and that really says something about the fact that he encourages learning and makes students *want* to come to school." Miller also commented about Ruelas' strong use of technology in the classroom, using white boards to encourage math and reading development.

Golden Apple has recognized outstanding Chicago-area educators annually since 1986. Each Golden Apple Award recipient receives a tuition-free, spring semester sabbatical to study at Northwestern University. Each winner also receives a \$3,000 cash award. Perhaps most importantly, Golden Apple teachers become Fellows of the Golden Apple Academy of Educators, providing a stronger voice and a larger stage from which to make an impact, through ongoing professional development and engagement in education reform, such as the mentoring of future teachers through Golden Apple's Scholars program. The recipients of the 2012 Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching will be honored at a black-tie event in October at WTTW/Channel 11 Studios in Chicago. WTTW will also broadcast the awards in a one-hour television program following the event.

About The Alain Locke Initiative

The Alain Locke Initiative, named after the first African American Rhodes Scholar, is a national nonprofit education organization focused on closing the achievement gap by energizing urban schools with the high-impact leaders of today and tomorrow. The Alain Locke Initiative was founded by Pat Ryan Jr., a leading technology and education entrepreneur. Pat also founded *INCISENT Technologies*, ranked by Inc. Magazine as the #4 fastest growing private software company in the U.S. in 2008. A former inner-city teacher and gang narcotics police officer in Chicago, Pat created The Alain Locke Initiative by combining three urban education programs he founded over the past twenty years: the Inner-City Teaching Corps – empowering urban classrooms with the leaders of tomorrow; the Alain Locke Charter School – one of the nation's most successful urban charter schools; and The Ryan Fellowship and its predecessor program ExSL to identify and develop principals ready to create student achievement-accelerating urban schools. Rooted in an entrepreneurial spirit, The Alain Locke Initiative is driven by mission, results and a sense of possibility to close the achievement gap and provide an equal education for all children. For more information, visit www.alainlocke.org.

About Golden Apple

Celebrating its 26th anniversary, Golden Apple began with founders Mike and Pat Koldyke and a shared inspiration — to offer outstanding teachers a level of recognition and engagement in the larger work of education reform. Golden Apple's successful track record of integrated, innovative programs and resources enhance the quality, resiliency, and creativity of classroom teachers and improve teaching and learning throughout Illinois. Qualified, passionate educators — including Golden Apple Award-recipients and finalists — lead a small staff of dedicated employees with functional and program expertise. A connected and committed board of directors oversees Golden Apple's strategic direction. Together with a larger community of expert educators, this nonprofit organization works to ensure that all Illinois children have the excellent teachers they deserve. Visit www.goldenapple.org for more information.

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