

News Release

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Principals of the Year named in Wisconsin for 2015

MADISON — Wisconsin’s 2015 Principals of the Year, announced by Tony Evers, state superintendent of public instruction, and Jim Lynch, executive director for the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA), balance their administrative and instructional leadership roles with a laser focus on student academic achievement.

Wisconsin honorees for 2015 are:

- **Associate Principal of the Year** — Mark Peperkorn of Wind Lake, Pilgrim Park Middle School in Elm Grove, Elmbrook School District, Brookfield;
- **Elementary Principal of the Year** — Sandra Mountain of Manitowoc, Random Lake Elementary School, Random Lake School District;
- **Middle Level Principal of the Year** — Sara Eichten, Somerset Middle School, Somerset School District; and
- **High School Principal of the Year** — Paul Brost of Waunakee, Monona Grove High School in Monona, Monona Grove School District.

“Strong school leaders engage with their staff and students with the goal of graduating all students college and career ready,” said Evers. “Our 2015 Principals of the Year are model educational leaders who are in the forefront for creating a welcoming and safe school environment, focusing on student academic achievement, and using data to improve staff and student outcomes — critical initiatives that improve our schools and make a difference for children.”

“Administrative leadership is second only to classroom teaching as a school-based factor that improves student achievement. Our 2015 Principals of the Year are members of a noble profession and represent the best in principals throughout Wisconsin,” Lynch said.

Associate Principal of the Year Mark Peperkorn

Colleagues say Peperkorn’s work has transformed the school and the lives of individuals. Pilgrim Park Middle School Principal Mike Sereno cites Peperkorn’s laser focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment as being instrumental in the shaping of more engaging instruction in all of Pilgrim Park’s classrooms. He watched Peperkorn grow into a strong instructional leader over his four years at Pilgrim Park, who has an “unwavering belief that every child is capable of incredible accomplishments.”

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Peperkorn leads the school's Culture and Climate Committee and insists on including parents, staff, and students so that a variety of viewpoints are included. With students and parents actively engaged in making the school a more welcoming and accepting environment, the school has seen a significant decrease in the number of behavior incidents that occur for all groups of students.

Despite a role that includes involvement in student disciplinary matters, Peperkorn has had a marked effect on students. One, who admires his assistant principal and admits to having more than occasional contact and consequences, called Mr. Peperkorn a "real guy" who will "tell you straight up what you did wrong and how you can fix it." A parent, praised Peperkorn for supporting her student who transferred from another school. "Mr. Peperkorn took a personal interest in our son and his passions," she said. Even after the student moved on to high school, she said Mr. Peperkorn called early in the student's freshman year to offer encouragement. "I will forever be grateful that he has been a part of our children's lives," she said.

Peperkorn earned a bachelor's degree in secondary education from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and a master's degree in educational leadership from Marian University in Fond du Lac.

Elementary Principal of the Year Sandra Mountain

Knowing her students by name and embracing their running hugs during the Back-to-School Barbeque is part of the positive school environment that Mountain has nurtured during her 12 years as principal at Random Lake Elementary School. She strives to balance her "many hats" as a principal by finding connections so her data collection, paperwork, or other efforts do dual duty and has at its heart, student achievement. She leads the Collaborative Approach for Reaching Every Student (C.A.R.E.S.), a team process that involves parents, teachers, and other school staff members working together to design a learning plan based on each student's individual assessment data. Additionally, she ensures that not just struggling learners, but those in need of additional depth and breadth, have interventions that maximize achievement.

Recommended for the Principal of the Year award by third-grade teachers Laurie Lundgren and Rebecca Rauwerdink, Mountain is praised for keeping teaching staff informed when promoting and implementing changes. Calling her their "leader and friend" the teachers cited as an example the wealth of information and coaching Mountain provided to prepare for Educator Effectiveness. "She has coordinated learning opportunities that have walked staff step-by-step through the process ... letting us know we were in this together."

District Administrator Tom Malmstadt praised Mountain's commitment to all students and her daily approach to leadership. Her technological skills were instrumental in the district's 1:1 computing effort, which began in the elementary school during the 2012-13 school term.

Mountain is active in her community and professional organizations. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and a master's degree from Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee. Her education specialist certificate came from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Middle Level Principal of the Year Sara Eichten

Eichten started as a middle school teacher in the Somerset School District, moving to the principal position in 2010. She has worked to improve the academic focus and collaborative efforts of the school staff, initiating professional learning communities led by veteran teachers who applied or showed potential as leaders. "For a veteran staff, my teachers and support staff are open to change and even if they have doubts, they are willing to attempt anything if it may benefit students and improve our culture," she said.

The culture of celebration and "Thank you Thursdays" that Eichten started has supported positive staff morale. Eichten asks teachers to share weekly learning targets rather than lesson plans, shifting the focus to what students will learn rather than what teachers will teach. She is instrumental in the Girls are SMART workshop, which brings in high school students and teachers, as well as members of the community, to encourage girls to explore Science, Math, and Researching Technology.

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Based on observations of student behavior, she formed a committee to create a school-wide behavior plan. Using the Six Pillars of Character, the plan sets clear expectations and consequences for poor behavior choices. Coupled with a system to honor students who show strong character, disciplinary office visits and suspensions dropped over 50 percent. A student praised the principal's ability to solve problems and care for the well-being of every student and noted that the school's behavior program has reduced bullying by emphasizing how it can affect other people.

Eichten earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. Her master's degree in education, with an emphasis in literacy and learning, is from Hamline University. She has done postgraduate work at Hamline University, headquartered in St. Paul, Minn.; Silver Lake College, based in Manitowoc; and Viterbo University in La Crosse.

High School Principal of the Year Paul Brost

Driven to be in a continuous improvement mode that uses data to keep on track, Brost makes sure his teachers have easy access to performance data that can be used to improve curriculum and instruction. He works with three School Improvement Plan (SIP) teams to ensure 80 percent mastery (C or better grades) by students of the universal curriculum and improvements in attendance and discipline data, equity, and growth on ACT assessments for all students and subgroups of students, including college and career readiness skills. All teachers are on one of the SIP teams, and each has a full voice in decision-making and strategic planning.

Teacher and instructional coach Nichole North Hester noted Brost's quiet leadership that is trusting, cultivating, and unfaltering. She said that he is a firm believer in proving guidelines and structure but not being prescriptive. His trust in the people he hired allows staff to take ownership of student learning. "Because Paul has encouraged me and provided me the time and space to grow, I have pushed my teaching practice to be constantly improving...." His ability to share leadership empowers staff to "blossom as individuals and as leaders," she said.

A high school senior noted that it's "abundantly clear" that her principal cares about students. He met regularly with a number of students who were struggling in a math class to make sure the class was improving and that the students were happy with the improvements.

A parent noted that the school is small enough "that each kid is known and looked out for." She commended Brost for supporting students and staff members. One of his many trademarks as a principal is the custom of wearing a T-shirt over his dress shirt and tie for one of the extracurricular groups to show support. For example, he'll wear the swim team shirt when they are headed to state and the theater shirt on the weekend of their production. "This small act makes the students (and staff) feel so supported in their extracurricular endeavors."

Brost earned a bachelor's degree from Mankato State University in St. Paul, Minn. He earned master's and doctorate degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Nominations for the Principal of the Year program come from fellow administrators, school board members, teachers, students, or parents. Criteria for being chosen to represent the state's school principals and assistant or associate principals include a commitment to personal excellence; collaborative leadership; personalization; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and being an established and respected member of the community.

The Principal of the Year Selection Committee is made up of representatives from AWSA, the Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Association of School Boards, and Wisconsin PTA. Major support

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comes from the Meemic Insurance Company. “They are great partners in recognizing exemplary educational leadership,” Lynch said.

The elementary, middle, and high school Principals of the Year will be recognized at their respective AWSA convention next school year.

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2015_57.pdf. Additional information about the Principal of the Year program can be found at <http://www.awsa.org>.