

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DPI-NR 2016-48

Monday, April 25, 2016

Contact: Tom McCarthy, DPI Communications Director, (608) 266-3559

Three honored as 2016 Principals of the Year

MADISON — Wisconsin’s 2016 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), focus on instruction and building relationships that support students and staff in taking the next steps toward improvement and success.

Wisconsin honorees for 2016 are:

- **Associate Principal of the Year** — Paul Hermes of Freedom, Bay View Middle School, Howard-Suamico School District, Green Bay;
- **Elementary Principal of the Year** — Melissa Herek of Elroy, Lawrence-Lawson and Cataract Elementary Schools, Sparta Area School District; and
- **Secondary Principal of the Year** — Robin Kvalo, Portage High School, Portage Community School District.

“School leaders know the importance of building a school culture that values every student,” said Evers. “Our 2016 Principals of the Year are model educational leaders who focus on instruction and creating a welcoming and safe school environment that prepares students to be college and career ready.”

“Current research demonstrates that school leadership has an enormous impact on student learning. Our Principals of the Year represent the best qualities of this critically important profession,” Lynch said.

Associate Principal of the Year Paul Hermes

Under his leadership, Bay View Middle School has implemented a 1:1 device program that has changed the classroom experience for students, including more personalized learning, project-based lessons, and blended learning opportunities. The seventh- and eighth-grade building educates nearly 900 students, who benefit from “House” organization that ensures students have strong connections with an adult.

Hermes created and led a modernization of student performance data collection. The move from paper to a digital format facilitates the work of a committee that does quarterly analysis to target intervention. His program, “Now or Noon,” provides a place for students to receive academic support for assignments and complete late work. The data panel identified gender gaps in academic performance, and with Hermes’ leadership, examined strategies to close that gap. A student, writing on behalf of his former principal, commended him for always making time for his students. “For too many students, me included, our ‘outside of school’ lives aren’t always the best places. I always

(more)

appreciated that Bay View was a place that could help me with that ‘outside stuff’ and be a place where I could feel like many other kids — safe, supported, and cared for.”

Bay View’s Harbor Program, developed by Hermes, serves an unmet need: the students who struggle with behavior and academics. Rather than being sent to “day treatment” outside of schools, the special education teacher running the Harbor Program provides individual instruction and counseling to improve students’ behavior so they can integrate back into regular classes. A parent remarked that, “It has been amazing to see these students become successful and ready to enter high school with more confidence.”

Hermes implemented “flipped meetings,” which provide informational material in a screencast, freeing time for staff to engage in active, collaborative, engaging tasks. “This has allowed us to re-capture nearly 25 hours of effective professional learning,” Hermes reports. The school’s Tech Fest also allows teachers and administrators to lead conference-like sessions, teaching others about technology and how to use it in the classroom.

Hermes is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh with a bachelor of science degree in broad field social studies. He earned his master’s degree in educational leadership from Marian University in Fond du Lac. Hermes was recognized as Associate Principal of the Year at the January State Associate Principal Conference in Madison, and he represented Wisconsin at the national principals’ convention in Florida.

Elementary Principal of the Year Melissa Herek

“Excellence for All: Whatever It Takes” is the motto for Lawrence-Lawson Elementary School. Herek embraces a shared leadership style that empowers her staff to make suggestions and work together toward that goal. Through consensus, staff focused on student behavior, implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS). After five years of efforts, school data showed that the improved school and classroom climate resulted in a gain of two weeks of instructional time.

Herek strives to provide her staff with ongoing professional development opportunities that will have a significant influence on student academic achievement. Through a partnership with Viterbo University in La Crosse, Herek encouraged her staff to obtain a reading license. One educator who took advantage of the opportunity said her teaching skills were much more effective. Additionally, several staff members joined Herek in presenting at the state reading conference.

The school’s Community Learning Center (CLC) benefits from Herek’s leadership and attention. She ensures that CLC staff understand the school’s PBIS system as well as Universal Instruction, ensuring a smooth transition between the school day and after school activities. Students in need of additional academic support receive help with homework and English language learners are assigned college tutors.

To build community, Herek has developed partnerships with the local Hispanic Resource Center and Boys and Girls Club. There’s a Friday backpack program to provide food for the weekend and boxes of donated household items, clothing, and blankets wait in Herek’s office for distribution to those in need. Other outreach activities include a summer bookmobile, which brings books, food, and learning activities to families in several locations around the district; parenting workshops and speakers; family nights; and meetings with parents.

She began her career as a kindergarten teacher in the Reedsburg School District, followed by positions as a third-grade teacher, Reading First coordinator, and K-12 district reading specialist. Prior to her work in the Sparta Area School District, Herek was an elementary principal in the Mauston School District. She has also served as an adjunct reading teacher at Viterbo University. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Stout, with a bachelor of science degree in early childhood education, Herek has earned several degrees from Viterbo University, including a master’s in education, reading specialist, educational leadership, and director of instruction.

(more)

Secondary Principal of the Year Robin Kvalo

When she began as principal at Portage High School in 2011, Kvalo said it wasn't something she would have predicted for her career, but "it is the most rewarding move I have made." Prior to her work at the high school, Kvalo was a teacher and elementary principal in Portage for 17 years. Kvalo's focus on instruction and building relationships is considered the driving force behind the complete school culture change for Portage High School. The turnaround has created a positive climate that is inviting and inclusive for students and staff members.

The school's Collaborative Learning Teams have uninterrupted time for staff members to focus on creating and supporting a learning environment that helps students to build academic, employability, and life skills sets needed for success. Today, the school offers three college courses plus Advanced Placement and dual credit options. Her STEM initiative allows students entering the manufacturing workforce a pathway to employment. During her tenure ACT scores have increased, more students are ready in mathematics and English as measured by the local technical college, failures are down, and grade point averages are up.

A parent writing in support of Kvalo's nomination for a Kohl Foundation Leadership Award said that Kvalo has worked to "bring the community into our schools and take our schools to the community." Students are involved in internships with local businesses, tutoring students at the elementary schools, building homes, and taking an active role in community service. Professionals bring their expertise to students, including frequent visits from a local chef to mentor culinary students and leadership programs led by a local business consultant. The school's 1:1 computing initiative launched only after teachers had a year to work with trainers on how to use and implement devices in the classroom. Kvalo is passionate about professional development and has encouraged several staff members to seek training and larger roles in leadership.

Kvalo's energy extends to co-curricular activities as well. For example, she is involved with the Future Business Leaders of America, running mock interviews, listening to speeches, and role playing various scenarios to help prepare students for competitions. The school is also noted for having a Memorial Wall to acknowledge Portage High School graduates who have served in the military. Additionally, Kvalo hosts an annual veterans program at the school.

Kvalo earned her elementary education degree and her master's degree in educational administration from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In addition to her years in Portage, Kvalo has worked in the Fort Winnebago, Rusch, Endeavor, Caledonia, and Lewiston Elementary Schools.

The 2016 Elementary and Secondary Principals of the Year were among 12 public school educators who received Principal Leadership Awards from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation earlier this spring. Criteria for being chosen to represent the state's school principals and assistant or associate principals include setting high standards for instruction, achievement, and character as well as creating a climate to best serve students, families, staff, and 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 comes from the Meemic Insurance Company.

###

NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2016_48.pdf. Additional information about the Principal of the Year program can be found at <http://www.awsa.org>.