

News Release

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2019 Principals of the Year recognized

MADISON – State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor and Association of Wisconsin School

Administrators Executive Director Jim Lynch recognized three Wisconsin principals for their excellence in school leadership.

Wisconsin's 2019 Principals of the Year are Michele Trawicki, principal of Marcy Elementary School in Menomonee Falls (Hamilton School District); Ty Breitlow, principal at Chilton High School; and Kathleen Westrich, assistant principal at Ronald Reagan High School, Milwaukee Public Schools.

"Effective school principals are leaders who impact students and communities, long-term," Stanford Taylor said. "Congratulations to our 2019 Principals of the Year, Michelle Trawicki, Ty Breitlow, and Kathleen Westrich, on your skills, hard work, and dedication to the success of your students, schools, and communities."

"Michele Trawicki, Kathleen Westrich, and Ty Breitlow embody the work ethic, character and determination school leaders use to positively impact student success," Lynch said. "They are excellent representatives of this noble profession."

Elementary Principal of the Year

For more than ten years, Michele Trawicki has worked with staff to make sure students, parents, volunteers, and visitors immediately recognize the strength of the Marcy Elementary School community from the moment they enter the building. Breaking down barriers to form a more inclusive school community begins each morning when Trawicki greets students as they get off buses. She ends her day wishing students well as they board their cars in the family pick-up area.

Trawicki serves as a model for growth and empathy, cultivating a team of teacher leaders and learners who partner with families, always holding students at the center. She states, "I have made it a personal rule to never ask my staff to do something that I am not willing to do, and I never assume that I have the only solution." A central tenet of her school's climate and culture grows from the expectation that as educators, they are continually growing together, while building meaningful relationships with students and parents.

Trawicki believes that "at Marcy, we give a new meaning to the term *family*, and we have cultivated a team of teacher learners that lead by example." Meetings and professional development opportunities are crafted

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based on educators' feedback and best practices. Learning opportunities are offered throughout the year, many of them even shared with parents through the Marcy Connects PTO meetings and school conferences.

The concept of shared leadership drives much of the success Marcy Elementary has achieved under Trawicki's direction. High student achievement and staff career satisfaction are among the results.

Shared leadership also establishes the opportunity for Trawicki to serve as a true instructional leader. She meets with collaborative teams for purposes ranging from examining data to addressing students' individual social and academic needs. Trawicki knows her teachers well, and strives to know all of the students in the building and their families. Students and parents receive notes or postcards from her, celebrating new achievements or for trying new ideas.

Trawicki holds a Bachelor of Science in elementary education from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and a master's degree in educational leadership from Cardinal Stritch University. Prior to her position in the Hamilton School District, she was principal at Tonawanda Elementary in the Elmbrook School District.

Secondary Principal of the Year

Ty Breitlow's experiences and accomplishments demonstrate that a positive school culture can turn challenges into growth and literally save lives. When Breitlow himself was in seventh grade, his father, an associate principal, was murdered at gunpoint. School community members "wrapped their arms around me and my family," Breitlow says, and are "the reason I am not dead or in jail."

Now, Breitlow fosters an environment of respect and empowerment at Chilton High School, influencing many students' lives. Fostering staff leadership and professionalism, Breitlow has built what a colleague called "a culture of cohesion and empowerment for both his students and staff." The school under Breitlow's leadership pulls together as one team and has enacted a wide swath of improvements and innovations. Students take advantage of scores of post-secondary credits, new work-based learning opportunities, and expanded advanced placement offerings. Those who earn a Certified Nursing Assistant certification typically get a guaranteed job after graduation.

Breitlow's passion for networking and lifelong learning help him guide staff in incorporating powerful new approaches to improve reading instruction, lift up struggling learners, and meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. He is active in community organizations. Breitlow has secured grants to support the arts, technology integration, and mental health. The school boosts students' well-being through new offerings including mental health therapy and student groups focused on suicide prevention, ninth-grade transitions, and inclusion of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

The new features are working: students have dramatically improved their scores on assessments of achievement, and equity in achievement is increasing. Morale and collaboration are reportedly higher than ever among staff. A parent and school board member wrote in Breitlow's application that students line up in hallways and sporting events to engage with their "caring, patient, and nonjudgmental" principal.

Breitlow holds a Bachelor of Science in teaching from Winona State University, a mentoring certificate from Cardinal Stritch University, and a master's degree in education leadership from Marian University, where he is also pursuing his superintendent's license. Prior to his position in Chilton, he was Dean of Students at Arrowhead South High School.

Assistant Principal of the Year

Listening empathically to students and staff, allowing their voices to contribute to decisions, and advocating for their needs at the school level are hallmarks of Kathleen Westrich's leadership as an assistant principal at Ronald Reagan High School.

Westrich has captained numerous initiatives, including the school's ACT Preparation work. By listening to staff as well as observing classrooms and team meetings to understand her colleagues' strengths and challenges, Westrich fostered a "positive culture around the ACT." The school's composite ACT scores are now showing steady improvement, and observable achievement gaps have begun to shrink.

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When coordinating the ninth grade Failure Prevention Program, Westrich met individually with every single failing freshman, held weekly discussions with teachers, and ultimately instituted sessions after school where struggling students focused on work and received tutoring. In just six weeks, the rate of ninth graders failing at least one class dropped from 66 percent to less than 10 percent.

In leadership capacities such as leading the School Improvement Plan, serving as lead administrator for staff Educator Effectiveness reviews, and planning teacher professional development, Westrich is praised for ensuring that processes retain a clear, meaningful connection to their intended purpose: helping students succeed. Westrich analyzes data for insights to support success and equity for students, and provides guides so colleagues can similarly benefit from data. Westrich uses technology for innovative purposes such as measuring the connection between after-school resource time and academic success.

Westrich is “always available to students,” a current sophomore wrote in a letter supporting her application. “She is very supportive with my coursework” and “reviews our practice test data all the time” to help students identify and improve on weak spots. Westrich also responds to the diverse needs of families: for example, by rescheduling the Parent Nights she had planned in order to accommodate various work schedules.

Westrich holds a bachelor’s degree from Marquette University and master’s degrees from Concordia University–Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. She is a National Board Certified Teacher.

The 2019 Elementary and Secondary Principals of the Year were among 12 public school educators who received 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 and creating a climate to best serve students, families, staff, and community. Major support comes from the Meemic Insurance Company. “They are great partners in recognizing exemplary educational leadership,” Lynch said.

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2019-20b.pdf> or <https://dpi.wi.gov/news/releases/2019/2019-principals-year-recognized>.