

Remarkable Leadership

2017
WASHINGTON STATE
PRINCIPALS
OF THE YEAR



ELEMENTARY
ADINA BRITO

Evergreen Elementary
Shelton SD



MIDDLE LEVEL
DOUG KAPLICKY

East Valley Middle School
East Valley SD



HIGH SCHOOL
DAN BESETT

Wilson High School
Tacoma PS

What takes a principal from “great” to “remarkable?” Each year, AWSP recognizes three principals whose work goes above and beyond. The Principal of the Year awards honor a principal at the elementary, middle level, and high school level, providing significant recognition on the state and national level.

Our process starts with open nominations, so if you know a great principal or assistant principal, head to www.awsp.org/poy and nominate today. From our nominations, our elementary, middle, and high school component boards

take on the tough task of narrowing down the amazing administrators receiving nominations before deciding on a winner. This year, these three principals caught our eye with the ways they knocked their leadership out of the park:

- **Adina Brito**, Elementary Principal of the Year
- **Doug Kaplicky**, Middle Level Principal of the Year
- **Dan Besett**, High School Principal of the Year

Read on to find out just what made this year’s winners deserving of a little extra recognition. ■

2017 WASHINGTON STATE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR

ADINA BRITO

PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

Creating a Culture, Planning with Data, Managing Resources, Engaging Communities, Closing the Gap



Ironically, Adina Brito didn't see herself as a principal.

But the 2017 Elementary Principal of the Year has worked through that. As principal of the dual-language school Evergreen Elementary in Shelton, Brito saw beyond her own inhibitions in order to help students move beyond theirs.

As the first person in her family to attend college, she chose teaching because she wanted to have a positive impact on society. She taught for five years in Yakima before moving to North Thurston Public Schools, where she then taught for nine years.

It was then she began to reconsider her mother's suggestion to step out of the classroom and pursue a more prominent role, as a principal.

"All the principals I'd worked for or had as a student were official-looking and intimidating," she said.

But creating the conditions necessary for student success on a bigger scale, outside of the classroom, appealed to Brito.

"I got to this point where I wanted to see kids being successful on a grander scale, on a school-wide scale," Brito told the Kitsap Sun. "How can you make it a whole system so all or a majority of kids can have the same opportunity they might have if they're in that amazing teacher's classroom?"

Brito earned her administrative certificate at Seattle Pacific University in 2009 and had her first administrative job in Federal Way, as an administrative assistant, before returning to the North Thurston School District as an assistant principal at Mountain View Elementary for two years.

She has served as principal of Evergreen, the district's only dual language school, for the last four years. Many of Evergreen's parents have limited English proficiency, so Brito has made parent outreach a core focus of her work. Monthly Tea and Talk events help inform parents of school initiatives and to address concerns. She also works to create fun, hands-on activities that can be

replicated at home through other events like Reading and Math Nights so parents can engage in the learning process with their children.

“As the first person in her family to attend college, she chose teaching because she wanted to have a positive impact on society.”

"High expectations and standards for all is the rule for all students at Evergreen, but at the same time Adina is empathetic and passionate to ensure that all students succeed in all respects, not only academically," noted Shelton School District Superintendent Alex P. Apostle, Ph.D, who went on to add, "She is also a visionary and embraces the philosophy of challenging the "status quo" in her effort to provide the very best and challenging opportunities for both staff and students." ■

2017 WASHINGTON STATE MIDDLE LEVEL PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR

DOUG KAPLICKY

PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

Creating a Culture, Planning with Data, Managing Resources, Engaging Communities, Closing the Gap



Doug Kaplicky knows how to handle a curve ball.

So when the East Valley [Spokane] School District asked the middle school principal — a former marketing and public relations manager for the Los Angeles Dodgers minor league system — to transition a K-8 school to a middle school in just 42 days, he knew just what to do.

The process started with an empty 70,000 square foot building with no phones, computers, and a new staff flooding in from eight other schools. Kaplicky stepped up and successfully launched the school right from the get go, embracing his use of data along with his instructional leadership.

The result: A home run. Students, families and staff give Kaplicky high marks for launching the new school, and for his overall leadership.

“During his tenure at East Valley Middle School, Doug Kaplicky has exemplified what it means to be a

“ He has vision, follow through, and a true calling to serve students by putting kids in the middle of all decision making. He is thoughtful with his planning and execution of a whole school program and is intuitive to the needs of both the school and the greater East Valley Community.”

great principal and a great leader,” according to his assistant principal Stacy Delcour. “He has vision, follow through, and a true calling to serve students by putting kids in the middle of all decision making. He is thoughtful with his planning and execution of a whole school program and is intuitive to the needs of both the school and the greater East Valley Community.”

Now two years past the grand opening, Kaplicky attributes the smooth launch to his building’s work on school climate.

“Keeping middle school students happy can be a challenge, and we have students who are excited to come to school,” Kaplicky said in an interview just after the launch.

He’s also created opportunities for students and families to get more engaged in school including parent advisory groups, student reward systems — even home visits to help keep students on track and attending classes.

As middle level principal of the year, Kaplicky was one of 36 nominees for the honor.

Kaplicky has been a school administrator for 13 years, serving as a principal for 11 of them. He earned his B.S. in Education in 1995 from Washington State University, where he also earned his Master’s and principal certification in 2002. ■

2017 WASHINGTON STATE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR

DAN BESETT

PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

Creating a Culture, Planning with Data, Managing Resources, Engaging Communities, Closing the Gap



If Wilson High Principal Dan Besett is indeed a rock star, then this year is his farewell tour.

As the 2017 Washington State High School Principal of the Year, Besett was already well-loved by students, families and faculty alike in the Tacoma area before the recognition was bestowed last spring. Under Besett's leadership, he set a state record by winning seven consecutive School of Achievement awards, dating back to 2011. Wilson's graduation rate has climbed to 94 percent, highest of any of the Comprehensive Tacoma high schools. Besett's dedication, focus on student success, and his support of all students and staff were prominent themes in his nomination.

"Dan really leads by example. He's the first one here in the morning and he's often the last one to go," said Bernadette Ray, Wilson's assistant principal. "He's the Ram Man. He's 100 percent Wilson Rams, every day."

He credits support from district administrators and the school board for helping him expand student options districtwide. This has allowed him to guide students toward different options, ranging from after school and summer classes, online credit courses and high school completion programs at area two-year colleges.

“ Under Besett’s leadership, he set a state record by winning seven consecutive School of Achievement awards, dating back to 2011.”

Besett took the reins as Wilson's principal in 2005 after serving as the school's assistant principal since 2000. Prior to that, Besett worked at the American International School of Lagos, Nigeria as part of a partnership fostered by the U.S.

State Department in the 1960s. Ironically, it was this time away that helped shape his passion for education back home. In an interview with the Tacoma News Tribune, Besett explained how, as an assistant principal, he once focused on school spirit and athletic programs. But time abroad shifted his focus back to academics for all students.

"I realized how much we have in the Unites States," he told the paper, noting that in Africa, he saw the value people place on education and on educators themselves.

In reflecting on his career, Besett says the real reward in all his years of teaching comes from seeing students achieve their goals.

"There is nothing better than helping a student who has hardships and challenges in life make it across the finish line at the Dome." ■