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Franklin Pierce Administrator Tops in State

Washington High's James Hester is state's Assistant Principal of the Year

SEATAC—Feb. 8, 2007— It's not surprising that personalization is the top priority of this year's Washington State Assistant Principal of the Year.

As a graduate, a former teacher and now assistant principal of Washington High School in the Franklin Pierce School District, James Hester is all too familiar with the school and its challenges. Yet it's this familiarity that helps him in his current role, making sure other students also feel that same connectivity to the school.

Hester was honored today during the Association of Washington School Principals' (AWSP) Assistant Principal of the Year luncheon at the Seattle Marriott-SeaTac. The luncheon is held each year in conjunction with AWSP's Assistant Principals' Conference.

"I strongly believe that even the strongest school improvement plans will fail in the absence of a positive school climate," said Hester. "I tell our staff that our students need to have the sense that the adults have things under control and one of the most important ways we convey that message is simply being visible," he said. "Personalization at Washington starts with the expectation that all staff will be at the door to greet students as they enter the classroom. Walk through the halls between classes and you will see teachers at their doors talking with each other and our students," Hester added.

"The presence of staff in our halls provides many opportunities for positive interaction and conveys a sense of safety to our students."

"It's clear James feels a unique connection to Washington High, and he wants that same connection for all of his students," said Gary Kipp, AWSP executive director. "Research continues to demonstrate that a positive and personalized school environment is the key to improved student achievement. James' leadership reflects his own personal commitment to student and staff success at Washington High. He is a remarkable administrator, one we will continue to watch with great enthusiasm."

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Washington High School serves a diverse student population of about 950 students; nearly half qualify for free or reduced student lunches. Closing the achievement gap has become a top priority for Hester and his colleagues. In the past two years, the school has narrowed the gap between white and African American students in reading to just 3 percent; results were similar in writing.

“James is an outstanding leader and has demonstrated his commitment to his profession, staff and students with an enduring belief that all students can learn,” said Dr. Steve Rasmussen, superintendent, Franklin Pierce School District.

“When James became the assistant principal at Washington, he took on the responsibility of overcoming the challenges of a diverse and low-income student body, low test scores and a high achievement gap. Through his collaboration with teachers, administrators and parents, he developed a plan to overcome these challenges that was both comprehensive and achievable,” he said.

“I cannot say enough about James’ abilities and future potential contributions to public education.” Hester has been an educator for 12 years, five of which have been as an administrator. He began his career as a social studies teacher at Washington High in 1994. In 2002, he moved into the administrative ranks, moving into the assistant principal role at Kentwood High in the Kent School District. After two years in Kent, he returned to Washington where he has served as assistant principal since July 2004.

“What I enjoy most about being an instructional leader is working one-on-one with teachers,” said Hester. “Nothing is more professionally rewarding than to see significant instructional improvements in a staff member I have been working with. And the payoff is the improved classroom environment, which directly benefits our students.”

Hester earned his principal’s certificate from Pacific Lutheran University in 2002. He holds a master’s in teaching from the University of Puget Sound and is a graduate of The Evergreen State University in Olympia.

The NASSP State and National Assistant Principal of the Year Program annually honors a single winner from each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) schools. From that pool of outstanding administrators, one national winner is chosen.

This year’s state award is presented by the Washington Association of Secondary School Principals. Assistant principals at the middle and high school level alternate nominating duties for this honor each year.

All state and national winners will be honored this April at a black-tie event in Washington, D.C. During their stay in the nation’s capitol, the honorees will participate in professional development and networking activities with their peers.

Interviews for the national award will be conducted during the NASSP Convention in Las Vegas, NV, Feb. 23-25. The national winner will also be announced at the convention and will be awarded \$5,000, which can be used in their school or for personal professional development. Virco, Inc., a school furniture manufacturer, is the sole sponsor of the NASSP State and National Assistant Principal of the Year Program.

About the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP)

The Association of Washington School Principals is a professional association serving principals, assistant principals and principals in training. Formed in 1972, the Association now includes more than 3,500 members from public and private elementary, middle and high schools statewide. It is governed by a board of practicing principals composed of members drawn from three grade-specific boards representing the elementary, middle and high school levels. The mission of AWSP is to support principals and assistant principals and the principalship in the education of all students. For more information on the Association, visit the AWSP Web site at www.awsp.org.