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Contact: Jocelyn McCabe, Director of Communications
Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP)
360.357.7951 or 360.951.5269 (mobile)
jocelyn@awsp.org

Yakima Principal Awarded High School Principal of the Year
“Culture of One” approach yields success for many at Eisenhower High

OLYMPIA—Stacey Locke, principal of Eisenhower High in Yakima has been named the state's top high school principal of the year by the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) and its high school board. She has been the school's principal since 2003.

As the principal of a large comprehensive high school, Locke is credited with bringing together a diverse student population—and the school staff that serve it—in an effort to boost student achievement. The school's demographics (63 percent free and reduced lunch, 49 percent Hispanic and nearly 25 percent in either a transitional bilingual program or considered migrant) belie its recent successes. Consider:

- In 2002, the school dropout rate was 7.8 percent. Today, the rate has dropped below 1 percent.
- Last spring, 90 percent of all students (grades 9-12) and their families participated in student-led conferences.
- Eisenhower saw a 35 percent increase in its scores on the WASL reading test and a 33 percent jump in WASL writing scores between 2003 and 2007. Eighty percent of 10th-graders passed reading and nearly 87 percent passed the writing exams last year. A smaller gain was made in math (just nine percent in that same timeframe); 38 percent met standard on the 2007 math WASL.
- The number of Hispanic students taking and passing the WASL at Eisenhower has also steadily increased over the last seven years. In 2001, only 15 percent of Hispanic students passed the writing WASL. Last year, 79.2 percent hit the mark.

Locke is also credited with dramatically changing the culture of her high school, making school a more personal experience for each student—no small task in a school of about 2,000 students. Under Locke's direction, this “culture of one” as it's known, has engaged students, staff, families and a community that was previously fractured over the school.

At Eisenhower, Locke says, every student has his or her own story that is recognized, heard and honored. Programs have been specifically designed to personalize education for every student at “Ike” and connect parents and families to school. Each student is provided with an educational mentor who guides and supports that student's educational experience from the first day of school freshman year.

“Stacey Locke's leadership focus is singly on improving learning achievement opportunity for all students,” said Robert Mc Mullen, director of high school programs for AWSP. “In the seven years I have known her, there has been significant change in the student demographic and sharp rise in the student poverty at Eisenhower High School. In the face of this, Stacey's focus has remained unwavering and has, in fact, also has grown more resolved.

“The power of Stacey’s leadership lies with her steadfast focus on addressing root issues. She has built a deep sense of trust among the staff and established a learning culture in which all adults openly practice and develop their craft,” added Mc Mullen. “As a result, the student achievement has been consistently on the rise for all students.”

In the fall of 2006, Locke and her staff created and implemented what’s become known as the I-POD program, an effort that identified incoming freshmen who were at greatest risk of failing in school. Nearly a quarter of the incoming freshmen (122 of 650 students) fit the criteria for this new program, and were immediately placed into a three-period block of classes (English, math and science) taught by teachers who chose to work in the program. This year, 98 percent of those students are still in school, and the program has been expanded to include one at the sophomore level.

Yakima Public Schools Superintendent Ben Soria said Locke’s initiatives have made a dramatic difference in the quality of the educational experience at Eisenhower.

“Stacey is an outstanding high school principal who truly cares about her students. I am delighted that Stacey’s leadership has been recognized by her peers. That, in my opinion, is the most rewarding.”

Locke first came to Eisenhower as an assistant principal in 2000; three years later she was promoted to principal. Before she was at Eisenhower, she was athletic/activities director at West Valley [Yakima] Junior High. Prior to that, she spent 13 years as a middle and high school classroom teacher teaching physical education, health, athletic training and traffic safety.

Locke earned both her master’s in education and bachelor of education from Central Washington University in Ellensburg. She completed a leadership workshop through Harvard University and is currently pursuing her superintendent’s credentials through Washington State University in Pullman.

Locke was selected as the state’s High School Principal of the Year from 11 regional finalists. A panel of high school principals who serve on the Association’s high school board evaluated the applications. Candidates, both at the state and national level, are evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Collaborative Leadership:** Involves teachers, staff members, parents, students and the community in achieving the goals of the school; provides direction or focus to achieve the school’s goals as a member of the school’s leadership team; models continuous professional growth; balances management tasks with instructional leadership tasks.
- **Personalization:** Establishes and maintains a positive school climate that reflects high student and staff morale; interacts professionally and tactfully with others; creates structures that enable teachers to develop an appreciation for each student’s abilities; acknowledges achievement or accomplishments of students and teachers; models values, beliefs and attitudes that inspire others to higher levels of performance; develops and maintains dialogue with representatives of diverse community groups.
- **Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment:** Improves teaching and learning by implementing programs and improvement efforts; observes, supervises and evaluates teachers and instructional programs to maximize the learning opportunities for every student; analyzes multiple sources of data to improve instructional practices and outcomes; demonstrates knowledge of learning, teaching, research and programs that maximize student performance.

Locke’s nomination will put her in the running for the National High School Principal of the Year, a program sponsored by MetLife and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Launched in 1993, the MetLife/NASSP Principal of the Year program annually recognizes outstanding middle level and high school principals. It has become a nationally-known vehicle for spotlighting secondary school principals whose schools include some configuration of grades 6-12. Those honored are ones who have demonstrated extraordinary leadership, commitment to students and staff, service to their communities and contributions to the overall profession of educational leadership.

Each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity and the Department of State, Overseas Schools select one middle level and one high school principal. From these state winners, six finalists (three middle level, three high school) are selected and eligible for the National Principal of the Year award.

Each finalist receives an award and a \$1,500 grant. The National Principals of the Year receive an award and a \$5,000 grant. These grants are used to improve learning at the recipient's school, including, but not limited to, a special school project and/or professional development opportunities.

Locke will be officially honored at AWSP's Principals' Conference Oct. 26-28 in Spokane. She will also serve as Washington state's representative in the national award program hosted by NASSP. To learn more about the MetLife/NASSP Principal of the year program, visit the Web at www.principals.org.

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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.