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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bellingham Principal Named State's 2005 High School Principal of the Year

Commitment to students, staff, community earn Steve Clarke praise from peers

OLYMPIA – If the students and staff at Bellingham High School had their way, Principal Steve Clarke would be principal of the year every day. Fortunately for Clarke, he can now claim the title for at least a year.

This week, Clarke was named the state's High School Principal of the Year by the Washington Association of Secondary School Principals, the high school component board of the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP). Clarke will now serve as the state's nominee for the National High School Principal of the Year program, sponsored by MetLife and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Clarke's own career has been closely tied to the Bellingham community. He began his career teaching English and drama at B.H.S. He then entered the principalship in 1993, serving first as assistant principal at Nooksack Valley Jr./Senior High School, then back at Bellingham High. He then became interim principal at Sehome High School, and took his current post back at Bellingham High School. As the planning principal from 1998-2000, he helped the student body transition from a 1938 building that closed for a major remodel in 1998 and reopened in 2000.

"Steve has been outstanding in meeting the challenges and creating a school where students and staff want to be," said Dr. Dale Kinsley, superintendent, Bellingham Public Schools.

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“When the decision was made to close Bellingham High School for two years in order to do a total renovation, I knew it would take a very strong and dynamic individual to lead the school during the planning and reopening process,” he said.

“In the five years since Bellingham High School reopened, Steve has built and sustained a school culture based on shared leadership with a strong focus on student learning through powerful teaching, and an expectation that adults will know all students and support their success. He has shown resilience and determination as a leader, handling a wide range of highly emotional and divisive student and staff issues,” added Kinsley.

“Steve is an outstanding high school principal and educator. He is most deserving of this recognition by his peers.”

In 2003-04, Clarke was thrust into the national spotlight when it was revealed that Lee Malvo, one of two men involved in the Washington, D.C.-area sniper shootings, had attended Bellingham High School.

“It’s rare for a principal to be faced with a situation the likes of this, but Steve Clarke was able to turn this into a teachable moment for everyone in that community,” said Robert Mc Mullen, director of high school programs for AWSP. “Steve took that incident to heart, realizing this was one of his students at his school. I think his reactions to this incident—and all the other routine administrative responsibilities of this job—speak volumes about his character,” he said. “It’s clear from talking to teachers and parents of students at Bellingham High that Steve is more than just a building administrator. In many people’s eyes, he *is* the high school.”

Clarke was selected from an initial pool of 12 regional finalists from around the state. A panel of high school principals who serve on the Association’s high school board evaluate 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.

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- **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.

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.

Clarke will be officially honored at AWSP's K-12 Conference this October in Spokane. He 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. Select "Awards" then "Principal of the Year."

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About the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP)

The Association of Washington School Principals is a professional association serving principals and assistant principals. Formed in 1972, the Association now includes more than 3,500 members from public and private elementary, middle and high schools statewide. 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.