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Burlington-Edison Principal Earns Top State Honor

Beth VanderVeen honored for commitment to students, staff and B-EHS community

OLYMPIA—March 2, 2006—The Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) is pleased to announce that Beth VanderVeen, principal of Burlington-Edison High in the Burlington-Edison School District, is this year’s High School Principal of the Year for Washington state.

“Strong principal leadership is the hallmark of a successful school, and Beth VanderVeen is no exception,” said Gary Kipp, AWSP executive director. “Beth’s leadership has had a significant impact on the teaching and learning at Burlington-Edison High. She has a very clear vision for her school, and her leadership is helping everyone work toward that goal.

“Beth’s an excellent choice for this award, and the students and staff of Burlington-Edison High are fortunate to have her as their leader,” Kipp added. “We know she will represent our state well in the national competition.”

VanderVeen has been a building administrator for 12 years, 10 of which have been spent leading Burlington-Edison High. She began her educational career as an instructional assistant at Ferndale High in 1986. She then transitioned to Snohomish High, where she taught science and diversified occupations, and also completed her administrative internship. VanderVeen got her start at Burlington-Edison High in 1994, where she was the assistant principal for two years before moving into the principalship. Throughout her career, VanderVeen has coached fast pitch and has been an active advisor to several extracurricular activities in her school.

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“Beth VanderVeen is very deserving of this award. The role of the high school principal is one of the most challenging and demanding jobs in education,” said Richard Jones, superintendent of Burlington-Edison School District. “Beth has met and exceeded my expectations in meeting the challenges of her work and she works tirelessly to improve the quality of education for all students.

“Beth does not settle for the status quo, and is leading her staff through a comprehensive school improvement process to create new action plans to better serve our students,” he added. “Beth would never ‘toot her own horn’, but those who work with her know of her tireless dedication to the staff and students of Burlington-Edison High School.”

VanderVeen is a strong proponent of the FISH! Philosophy, a program made popular by employees of the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle. Among other principles, this philosophy encourages participants to “choose their attitudes” and to “make each other’s day.” According to VanderVeen, the use of FISH! has allowed her staff and students to work smarter while establishing a community of caring adults and students at her school.

“The atmosphere that we’ve created has helped to sustain and enhance B-EHS’ commitment to continuous school improvement,” said VanderVeen. “We care about our kids, we care about each other, we care about the success of our school and we care about the future of our community.”

VanderVeen’s knack for caring is evident in B-EHS’ recent improvements on the 10th-grade WASL scores, which rose 17.1 percent in math and 10.3 percent in reading from 2003-04 to 2004-05. VanderVeen attributes these gains to the good work by her students and the effectiveness of her teaching staff, who she describes as “content area experts” who continuously align their curriculum with benchmarks and standards.

“My leadership style stems from the belief that it is my job to provide the resources, time, structure and direction for my staff so that they can continuously align their curriculum with benchmarks and standards as well as create a seamless transition between courses and grade levels,” said VanderVeen.

A further example of VanderVeen’s leadership style is evident in her work with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). In 2005, VanderVeen led the effort to garner a school improvement grant from OSPI. The program is designed to help schools better understand systemic and academic challenges that may be affecting student achievement.

“A big step in my own leadership development was applying for [the OSPI grant],” said VanderVeen. “The process emphasizes principal leadership and using data to drive decisions. And while I believe we’ve used the data to help us make some sound decisions, we’ve discovered that we’ve really just scratched the surface. We’re still looking for ways to address the achievement gap between our Hispanic and Caucasian students, as well as our high and low income kids. But I know we can get there.”

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

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students and staff, service to their communities, and contributions to the overall profession of educational leadership. The program honors principals who have demonstrated excellence in the areas addressed by the selection criteria, including:

- Educational leadership – Implementation of strategies for improving teaching and learning by putting programs and improvement efforts into action;
- Problem-solving skills – Demonstration of time management skills, resolution of short- and long-term objectives and awareness of current education issues;
- Staff and self-development – Commitment to continued professional growth, teaching of others and fostering creativity; and
- Community service – Involvement in the community in the life of the school and use of community resources for students.

Each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity and the Department of State, Overseas Schools select one high school principal for the state award. VanderVeen was one of 16 candidates selected from high school leagues around the state. Three high school principals are then selected from the pool of state candidates. These three are then eligible for the National Principal of the Year award.

Each state finalist receives an award and a \$1,500 grant; the National Principal of the Year receives 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.

VanderVeen will be officially honored at AWSP's Principals' Conference this October in Vancouver. 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. Select "Awards" then "Principal of the Year."

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.