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Tacoma Home to Top Elementary Principal for 2008
*Bryant Montessori's Paula Bond Named Washington State Distinguished Principal*

OLYMPIA— As a rule, kindergarteners like surprises—principals don’t. But for Bryant Montessori’s Paula Bond, today was an exception.

With her staff and colleagues gathered round her, Bond was named the 2008 Washington State Distinguished Principal by the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) today during a surprise ceremony at her school in Tacoma. Representatives from the Association and the Tacoma Public Schools office also joined in the celebration.

“It has been a joy this year to learn about and watch children progress at Bryant Montessori School. To be able to join in honoring the architect and heart of Bryant is an immense privilege,” said Dr. Art Jarvis, superintendent, Tacoma Public Schools. “Paula is a visionary who connects with students, families and community members to improve and support student learning. We are fortunate to have her as part of our district team.”

“Paula is an incredible leader for her school, her district and for this state,” said Gary Kipp, AWSP executive director. “I’ve had the opportunity to work with Paula and visit her at Bryant, and you could tell when she was doing her work—responding to staff or talking with a parent—the conversation always turned to what’s best for the students,” he said.

“Paula is passionate about helping all students succeed and creating a team environment to reach that goal. She is the kind of person you would want leading your own child’s school,” Kipp added.

“We wish her the best as she goes on to represent Washington state at the national level.”
An urban school with a diverse and significant (nearly 63 percent) free- and reduced-lunch population, Bryant has struggled to become the school it is today. When Bond first came on board in 2000, just 175 students were enrolled. Student achievement was lagging and staff morale was in need of improvement. Today, the K-8 school has grown to nearly 500 students; student achievement has increased and the staff at Bryant now operates more like a team, due in large part to Bond’s leadership.

Another key component of Bond’s success cited by the awards committee: her community outreach efforts. Given the school’s location—in a high crime, high poverty neighborhood—Bond has had to forge ties with residents, along with local churches, law enforcement, local political leaders and families. As a result, more people feel connected with the school, and ownership in Bryant is now shared across the community.

But it is perhaps Bond’s work as an instructional leader that has yielded the most remarkable results. Over time, Bond has worked with her staff to implement multiple programs aimed at improving student achievement, beginning with reading. The school has tapped various state and federal grant programs (such as “Walk to Read” and Reading First) to blend in conjunction with the Montessori method of teaching to boost student learning. And while WASL scores are not where they would like them to be, there has been progress.

“Paula is clearly a visionary leader who has had a tremendous impact on her school community,” said Cheryl Boze, principal of Odyssey Elementary in Mukilteo and the state’s 2007 Distinguished Principal. Boze served on this year’s search committee for the award.

“If I were to describe her in two words, I would choose ‘change agent.’ When Paula became principal at Bryant, expectations of staff and academic achievement of students were low. The school was declining in enrollment, was losing both staff and teachers, and the mobility rate was 85%. Paula acknowledged the ‘brutal facts’ but told her staff and parent community that together, they would turn the school around and they would soon have a waiting list of families wanting to enroll their children in the school,” she said.

“In a few short years, this is precisely what has occurred.”

Bond has been principal for nearly 15 years and has led the efforts at Bryant since 2000. She has also held administrative positions at Elk Plain and Naches Trail in the Bethel School District. Prior to that, she served as director of gifted education at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and for Tacoma Public Schools. She began her career as an elementary education teacher in Montana and Colorado. Her principal’s certification was completed at the University of Puget Sound; she also earned a master of arts in special education/gifted education from the University of
Colorado and a bachelor of science in early childhood education from Bowling Green State University.

Bond was selected as this year’s nominee from a group of 18 applicants. She will be recognized for her accomplishments by the Association of Washington School Principals and its component board, the Elementary School Principals Association of Washington, this fall at the Principals’ Conference in Spokane.

The National Distinguished Principals Program is sponsored by the National Association of Elementary School Principals in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Education and AIG VALIC. Bond will represent Washington state in the national program, and will be recognized as a state winner at a formal award ceremony this fall in Washington D.C. Nominees participate in a series of events and activities over the course of two days, culminating in a formal awards banquet.

To read more about Bryant Montessori online, visit http://www.tacoma.k12.wa.us/schools/es/bryant/.

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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.