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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ham Lake Teacher Named Honoree in Outstanding Educator Program

Ruth Thom, a teacher at DaVinci Academy of Arts and Science, a public charter school in Ham Lake was surprised April 19 with news that she is a recipient of a 2018 WEM Outstanding Educator Award as an Academic Challenge Coach, an honor that is accompanied by a \$15,000 award.

Thom is being honored with an *Academic Challenge Coach Award*, which recognizes teachers who are exemplary coaches of student teams that participate and compete in academic challenges approved by the Minnesota Academic League Council.

Thom has been teaching and coaching for 21 years and currently teaches advanced academics to elementary students at DaVinci Academy. In addition to teaching, Thom coaches Math Masters. Thom feels it is her job to challenge students with work that is beyond their comfort level, and to teach them the value of persistence in the face of difficulty. Math Masters is one opportunity for doing this. She recognizes the importance for gifted and talented students to face with problems that require effort and mental stimulation. Math Masters problems provide depth and complexity by demanding that students not only compute equations, but also analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information. These are the higher level thinking skills that will benefit students the rest of their lives.

“Prior to Ruth coming to DaVinci Academy, we had a very skeletal program for advanced academics,” shared academic director Terry Moffatt. “She has helped develop a comprehensive formal identification process, a pull-out program with expanded curriculum for students in grades 3–5 in reading and math, as well as creating an increased awareness by all staff about teaching gifted and talented students.”

In addition to teaching and coaching, Thom has designed, developed, and coordinated district-wide gifted and talented programs and services for three different Minnesota school districts, and trained numerous teachers in identifying and meeting the needs of GT students.

“Through her work in advanced academics in our school, she can help children think critically while solving challenging problems,” said a colleague. “She teaches them to continue trying to solve a challenge and to not give up when the solution is hard to find.”

In addition to the *Academic Challenge Coach Award*, other educators are being honored with the *Ethics in Education Award* (exemplary educators who embody ethical behavior and promote ethical development for students through classroom or school activities, policies or curriculum), *Teacher Achievement Award* (exemplary teachers who support, inspire, and assist students to attain greater learning as evidenced by student achievement) and *Athletic Coach Award* (teachers who are exemplary coaches of athletic teams).

Educators are first nominated for the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards Program by students, parents, colleagues or community members. Those who accept the nomination provide additional information for consideration by Synergy & Leadership Exchange and a blue ribbon selection panel, which reviews and ranks the nominees. In addition to the six statewide honorees, additional educators have been selected as regional honorees for 2018. These honorees will be announced in May.

Synergy & Leadership Exchange is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering collaboration to advance the development of ethical citizens, providing educational resources, and celebrating achievement and best practices in Minnesota schools, businesses and communities. For more information on the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards Program and Synergy & Leadership Exchange, visit: www.synergyexchange.org.