

April 13, 2018  
For immediate release

*For additional information:*  
Leah Garry, Synergy & Leadership Exchange  
Phone: 507-389-5115

## **Pine Island Educator Named Recipient of \$15,000 Award for Excellence**

Megan Schimek, a teacher at Pine Island High School in Pine Island Public Schools, was surprised April 13 with the news that she is a recipient of a 2018 WEM Outstanding Educator Award for Ethics in Education, an honor that is accompanied by a \$15,000 award.

Schimek is one of six educators being honored by the WEM Foundation and Synergy & Leadership Exchange for outstanding accomplishments and contributions to student learning. She is one of two recipients of the WEM Foundation's statewide Ethics in Education Award, which recognizes educators who embody ethical behavior and promote ethical development for students through classroom or school activities, policies or curriculum.

Schimek has been teaching for 10 years and currently teaches high school biology at Pine Island High School. To help her students see the big picture of studying biology, Schimek started a Biology Brown Bag Career Seminar series. She invites professionals from the various biology fields to come in during the lunch hour and talk about their jobs and the paths they took to get them there. Many of her students enjoy biology or the medical field but have no idea of the career options available. She feels this is one way to open the doors of possibility to them.

Superintendent Tamara A. Berg said, "Because Schimek has developed mutual trust and respect with her students, she has numerous opportunities to teach beyond scientific concepts. The aforementioned experiences outside of the classroom have provided lifelong experiences that will forever impact our students."

In addition, Schimek co-created a mentorship program called EcoliteracySCHOOL. This program takes high school students interested in health science and University of Minnesota Rochester college students pursuing careers in health on a field experience together. Students practice calling upon nature as a resource for promoting and sustaining their own health as they learn to care for others. This student-to-student partnership benefits the high school students by helping them learn about the college experience from the UMR students and benefits the UMR students by allowing them to practice mentoring and reflect on their own career pathways.

"Ms. Schimek is someone I think of often for inspiration and remember in moments of both defeat and success," shares a student. "Ms. Schimek encourages the contemplation of deeper ideas such as how we fit into this vast world and the impact we leave through our journey of life."

In addition to the *Ethics in Education Award*, honorees are recognized with the *Academic Challenge Coach Award* (teachers who are exemplary coaches of student teams that participate and compete in academic challenges approved by the Minnesota Academic League Council), *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](http://www.synergyexchange.org).

###