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For immediate release

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Maplewood Educator Named Recipient of \$15,000 Award for Excellence

Melissa Sonnek, a principal at Edgerton Elementary School, part of the Roseville Area and located in Maplewood, was surprised April 15 with the news that she is a recipient of a 2019 WEM Outstanding Educator Award for Ethics in Education, an honor that is accompanied by a \$15,000 award.

Sonnek 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.

Sonnek has been working in education for 20 years and currently serves as the principal at Edgerton Elementary School. She emphasizes that every student should have the tools they need to succeed. Working with staff, Sonnek helped to create "The Compass Room" – a place where students can go when they need to find their direction or need a break from the classroom. For example, some students need energy output (a trampoline, swing, etc.) while others need a calming environment (sitting in the egg chair or the tent). It is also a place that can protect dignity and privacy for dysregulated students. The school's behavior coach is also available to help students return to the classroom.

"Melissa is an incredibly gifted equity leader at Edgerton Elementary," said Jenny Loeck, director of secondary education for the Roseville Area Schools. "She leads with love, and her focus on building positive relationships holds the key to improving achievement for all students."

In addition, Sonnek, in collaboration with the Maplewood Police Department, started a partnership program that formed a bridge between Edgerton and their local police officers. It includes positive interactions between students and police officers. Police officers are invited to play with students at recess, talk with students, give high fives as they wait for buses at the end of the day, join kindergarten play time, have lunch with students, participate in school assemblies and play games. The Maplewood police have since used this model and expanded this partnership to other schools in Maplewood as well.

"Principal Sonnek has created many leadership teams so every diverse voice and perspective is heard," shared a colleague. "This encourages everyone to feel pride with our contributions and strengthens our sense of community. She is deeply concerned about students' and staff members' social and emotional development."

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 2019. 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.