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**For Immediate Release**

**Illinois Principals Association and Horace Mann Companies Announce**  
**2025 Illinois Elementary School Principal of the Year**

The Illinois Principals Association and Horace Mann Companies are pleased to announce that KiLee Lidwell-McFerren, principal of Lincoln Elementary School, Canton IL, has been named the 2025 Illinois Elementary School Principal of the Year. The award recognizes elementary school principals who have demonstrated a positive impact on their students and learning community. Criteria for the award include:

- Demonstrates a positive impact on education and advocacy for children
- Ensures the school climate is positive and reflects high staff and student morale
- Moves actively to implement the goals and objectives of the school
- Works collaboratively with teachers and other staff to improve the educational program and student achievement
- Involves the community in the life of the school and uses community resources for students.

KiLee Lidwell-McFerren has served as principal of Lincoln Elementary School for the past 8 years and has served as a school administrator and IPA member for 12 years. McFerren has also participated in professional growth opportunities throughout her career including training in math instruction, reading instruction, mental health and wellness, technology, nonviolent crisis intervention, and Professional Learning Communities.

“CUSD #66 has adopted the Four Pillars, which are: Collaboration, Problem Solving, Creative Thinking, and Innovation,” said McFerren. “These are essential skills for our students to succeed in a global society, and all programming, activities, enrichment, and structures support the Four Pillars. I personally believe the most important quality a student can have to be successful in a global society is being a good human. Through interactive reading, assemblies, PBIS, Restorative Practices, and our SEL curriculum, we are modeling and teaching what it is to be a good human.” McFerren added, “We recite our Lincoln School Pledge every morning, which includes the statement: ‘I will be caring to others while learning from our differences.’ Through expanded library offerings, monthly assemblies, and various student organizations, we celebrate different perspectives, cultures, beliefs, and abilities. I believe that we learn, we love, and we grow together at Lincoln School.”

Julie Tarvin, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for Canon Union School District shared, “Mrs. McFerren excels at creating a warm, welcoming educational environment where students feel a deep sense of belonging and community at Lincoln School. Her unique ability to make every student feel valued and important fosters a positive school culture. Parents place their trust in Mrs. McFerren and fully support their children's educational endeavors under her guidance. Learning is always a priority for Mrs. McFerren, and her leadership is reflected in the school's strategic improvement plan, which focuses on key areas such as reading, math, and social-emotional learning. She is dedicated to continuously analyzing and refining instructional practices to drive student achievement. Her staff hold her in high regard, and together they have built a strong sense of efficacy around supporting all students in reaching their full potential.”

“Under (McFerren)’s leadership at Lincoln Elementary, student achievement has soared, evidenced by exceptional academic results and vibrant student activities,” shared Dr. Jeff Utsinger, Assistant

Superintendent of Canton Union School District. “KiLee fosters a nurturing environment where every child feels valued and inspired to excel. Her commitment to collaboration shines through in the overwhelmingly positive survey scores from students, staff, and parents alike. Her dedication, love for education, and ability to inspire those around her have transformed our school community. She builds strong, positive relationships with her staff, creating a culture of trust and teamwork that enhances our collective success. KiLee embodies the qualities of an outstanding leader and truly deserves this recognition for her remarkable impact on our students and staff.”

The Elementary School Principal of the Year winner was selected from a pool of region nominees provided by the 21 Regions of the Illinois Principals Association. KiLee Lidwell-McFerren will be recognized at the IPA’s annual Education Leaders Annual Conference in October 2025.

Horace Mann -- the largest national multiline insurance company focusing on educators' financial needs – provides auto and homeowners insurance, retirement annuities, life insurance and other financial solutions. “*Founded by Educators for Educators*” in 1945, the company is headquartered in Springfield, Ill. Visit [www.horacemann.com](http://www.horacemann.com) for more information.

The Illinois Principals Association is a leadership organization which serves over 6,600 educational leaders throughout the state of Illinois. You can find out more about the IPA at [www.ilprincipals.org](http://www.ilprincipals.org). Visit <http://www.ilprincipals.org/about-ipa/awards> for more information about the IPA Principal of the Year Awards Program.

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