

January 21, 2025 - For Immediate Release

Illinois Principals Association and Horace Mann Companies
2025 Illinois Middle School Principal of the Year

The Illinois Principals Association and Horace Mann Companies are pleased to announce that Sonia Ruiz, principal of Jane Addams Middle School in Bolingbrook, has been named the 2025 Illinois Middle School Principal of the Year. The award recognizes middle 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.

Sonia Ruiz has served as principal at Jane Addams Middle School for the last 3 years and has spent 16 years as an administrator. Ruiz has also been active in the Illinois Principals Association, currently serving as State Diversity and Equity Chair. She previously served as West Cook Region Director, Diversity & Equity Co-Chair for the Three Rivers and Lake County Regions. Ruiz has also been active in state and national organizations such as Illinois Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (IALAS) the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).

On shaping school culture, Ruiz believes that: "By improving our students' sense of belonging, we create an environment where every child feels valued and supported. Therefore, this is part of our school improvement plan. We intentionally gather voices from our students, staff, and families, which drives our efforts. We analyze the data from our multiple checkpoints, and plan professional development for our staff to ensure we maintain and achieve our goals." Ruiz added, "Equity is also one of the goals in our school improvement plan. Our staff equity committee plans and delivers professional learning that equips our staff with the skills, knowledge, and capacity to increase opportunity and access for each of our learners, with a focus on student groups that have been historically marginalized in educational systems."

"Sonia Ruiz embodies servant leadership: she puts others before herself and she empowers her staff to take risks, reflect, and grow," said Catherine Tecktiel, Dean of Students at Jane Addams Middle School. "She believes in her staff, often more than they believe in themselves, and she balances being a champion for both students and staff simultaneously. She challenges students and staff in a supportive way, always committed to their growth. She builds positive relationships and is never too busy to open her door to anyone - student, staff, or parent - who needs her. She encourages all to be their authentic selves and drives positive change to build an inclusive, supportive environment."

Adam Hurder, Executive Director of Educational Services for Valley View School District 365U, shared, "Sonia is the driving force behind her school's exemplary status. Unlike other surrounding schools in affluent areas, Sonia leads a school and community that faces significant challenges. She takes advantage of her diverse school population (ethnically, linguistically, economically) by valuing inclusion and honoring stakeholders' unique characteristics. By doing so Sonia has engaged not only students but the overall community in school improvement efforts. Within our district's administration team, Sonia is a valued collaborator who consistently gives her peers suggestions and feedback to address challenging and complex situations."

The Middle School Principal of the Year winner was selected from a pool of region nominees provided by the 21 Regions of the Illinois Principals Association. Sonia Ruiz 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 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. Visit <http://www.ilprincipals.org/about-ipa/awards> for more information about the IPA Principal of the Year Awards Program.

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