



Miguel Juarez Middle School Principal Nelson Campos Named 2026 Illinois Middle School Principal of the Year

The Illinois Principals Association and Horace Mann Companies are pleased to announce that **Nelson Campos, principal of Miguel Juarez Middle School in Waukegan**, has been named the 2026 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.

Nelson Campos has served as principal of Miguel Juarez Middle School in Waukegan since 2016 and has served in public education for 20 years. Campos has been a member of the Illinois Principal Association (IPA), one of the original members of the Waukegan Men of Color (MCEL) Chapter, and a member of the National MCEL organization. Campos also led the Miguel Juarez leadership team to become members of the Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE) and to be recognized as an AMLE School of Distinction in 2024.

"We have transformed the school culture at Miguel Juarez through developing services designed to address student behavioral concerns while promoting accountability and personal growth," shared Campos. "We have integrated restorative practices, PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports), and appropriate consequences to encourage students to reflect, take ownership, and make positive behavioral changes. As a result, students better understand the impact of their actions, leading to a more inclusive, respectful, and accountable school environment."

Dr. Cynthia Stockman, teacher in the Waukegan Public School District, shared, "Nelson Campos is an exceptional educational leader whose empathy and vision inspire both staff and students. He fosters a positive, inclusive school culture built on trust and collaboration. His leadership style—rooted in compassion, integrity, and open communication—creates an environment where everyone feels valued and supported. Beyond the school, Nelson's community involvement and commitment to student success reflect his deep dedication to education and service."

Lisa Zebedee, a paraprofessional at Miguel Juarez, added "Nelson Campos is passionate about creating safe learning environments where students can achieve high levels of success and establishing a collaborative leadership culture that empowers others to work towards a united vision and achieve collective goals."

Campos has shared his leadership successes with educational leaders statewide and nationally through invited presentations. He was selected to present *Transforming School Climate and Culture* at School Climate Conference and at the National Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE) conference in 2022, 2023, and 2024. He also presented at the National Convening for Men

of Color in Education Leadership (MCEL) in 2023, where he highlighted the journey to establish a local MCEL chapter.

Campos previously served as Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction at Chicago High School for the Arts, and as Assistant Principal at Thomas Jefferson Middle School in Waukegan Public Schools. Campos is currently pursuing his Superintendent's Endorsement and has participated in the Aspiring Superintendents Academy for Latino and Latino Leaders through the American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

Campos received his Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from Foreign University in Cuba, Master of Education in Elementary Education from Northern Illinois University, Master of Education in School Leadership from Concordia University, and is currently pursuing his Superintendent Endorsement from Concordia University, Chicago.

The IPA 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. Nelson Campos will be recognized at the IPA's Education Leaders Annual Conference in October.

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The Illinois Principals Association is a leadership organization which serves over 6,800 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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