Illinois Principals Association Names Dr. Courtney DeMent as 2026 Herman Graves Award Recipient

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Springfield, IL – The Illinois Principals Association is pleased to announce that Dr. Courtney DeMent, principal of Downers Grove South High School, Community High School District #99, has received the 2026 Herman Graves Award. DeMent was announced as the winner at the association's annual conference on October 19, 2026, in Peoria, IL.

The Herman Graves Award, sponsored by Horace Mann Companies of Springfield, IL, was established in 1991 to recognize outstanding service to IPA. Herman Graves was selected as the first honoree, and the award was established because of the intrinsic contributions he made to the Association and his enthusiasm for the profession. Regional winners are chosen from the 21 regional areas of the Illinois Principals Association. From these elite administrators, a state winner is chosen by a committee composed of IPA Past Presidents.

"Dr. Courtney DeMent is a leader of leaders," shared IPA Executive Director Dr. Jason Leahy. "Courtney not only serves effectively as a principal in a high-performing school, but she is also someone who is sought out by her peers for guidance. For the IPA, she has served at all levels of the organization including as a member of the Association's Executive Committee where her steadfast leadership continues to move the IPA forward."

DeMent has been a member of the Illinois Principals Association for 12 years and currently serves as Secretary for the IPA Board of Directors. Previously, she served as State Director, Region Director, Region Secretary, and as a member of the DuPage Region of the Illinois Principals Association. DeMent has also participated in the Illinois State Superintendent's Principal Advisory Council and has presented at the IPA annual educational leaders conference. She is a member of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (now the National Principals Association). DeMent was previously recognized by her peers as the DuPage Region Herman Graves Award winner during the 2022-2023 school year.

DeMent has supported the development of other school leaders by facilitating the Principal Collaborative for the Regional Office of Education in DuPage County and fosters collaboration with other local leaders through the West Suburban Conference Principals Group. She also supports the principalship by consistently attending the IPA Annual Conference (since 2017) and professional development activities within the DuPage region, and she attended the 2024 UNITED conference co-hosted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

DeMent's peers and colleagues shared the following:

"Dr. Courtney DeMent is an exceptional educational leader whose dedication and vision have shaped schools and inspired colleagues across Illinois. With more than two decades of service, she has progressed from Activities Director to Assistant Principal and now serves as a highly respected high school Principal. She is known for her inclusive leadership, genuine warmth, and commitment to supporting fellow administrators. This past year, she delivered an outstanding presentation at the IPA Conference on building positive school culture, reflecting her deep belief in collaboration and community. Dr. DeMent's lasting impact extends well beyond her school, elevating educational leadership throughout the DuPage region and the State of Illinois."

- *Gerrie Aulisa, Director of Educational Programs, Technology Center of DuPage*

"Dr. DeMent embodies the spirit of service, advocacy, and steady leadership that defined Herman's legacy. A dedicated IPA member for 12 years, she currently serves as IPA Board Secretary and has previously served as DuPage Region State Director, Region Director, and an active committee leader. What makes her exceptional is the way she champions the IPA with genuine enthusiasm and purpose. She consistently brings others into the work, elevates new leaders, and uses her broad professional network to expand the association's reach. Courtney is a tireless advocate for school leaders. Her influence spans our district, the West Suburban Conference, and the DuPage Principal Collaborative. Her commitment has strengthened professional learning and leadership culture across District 99 and beyond."

- *Hank Thiele, Superintendent, Community High School District #99*

Dr. Courtney DeMent resides in Lombard, Illinois, with her husband Bobby and their three children, Cooper (8th grade), Charlie (6th grade), and Camden (6th grade). DeMent earned a Doctor of Education from Aurora University, a master's degree in Educational Organization and Leadership from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a bachelor's degree in English education from Bradley University.

The Illinois Principals Association is a leadership organization that serves more than 7,000 educational leaders throughout Illinois. Its mission is to develop, support, and advocate for innovative educational leaders. For more information about the IPA, please visit [www.ilprincipals.org.](http://www.ilprincipals.org)

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