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**For Immediate Release**

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

Horace Mann and the Illinois Principals Association are pleased to announce that Dr. Michelle Willis, principal of Gillespie Elementary School in Chicago, IL, has been named the 2017 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
- Demonstrates creativity and imagination in bringing about positive change
- Willing to take risks to improve student learning
- 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
- Anticipates emerging problems and acts effectively to resolve them
- Involves the community in the life of the school and uses community resources for students.

Dr. Willis has been an active member of the Illinois Principals Association for nine years and has served as a principal mentor and coach through the organization. She is also active in the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the International Literacy Association (ILA), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). Within the community, Dr. Willis is active in the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., The Links Inc., and the Monarch Awards Foundation.

Dr. Willis began her career with Chicago Public Schools in 1993 as a classroom teacher and served as a reading specialist and assistant principal prior to becoming a principal. She continues to serve on curriculum committees for the district and as a presenter for other teachers at city-wide conferences. Under Dr. Willis' leadership, Gillespie Elementary School has moved from probationary status to receiving numerous grants and academic awards and has become one of the original ten schools with a technology focus, making it a Technology Magnet Cluster School. It is Dr. Willis' personal goal to produce well-rounded, tech-savvy productive citizens that are college and career ready.

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. Dr. Michelle Willis will be recognized at the IPA's annual Education Leaders Fall Conference in October 2017 and will receive a \$1,000 honorarium.

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 5,200 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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