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For Immediate Release

Illinois Principals Association Names Dr. Renee Simms and Three Seeds Mentoring as 2019 Reaching Out & Building Bridges Award Recipients

Dr. Renee Simms, principal of Hillcrest High School, Hazel Crest, and Jason Thomas of 3 Seeds Mentoring Group have received the 2019 Reaching Out & Building Bridges Award from the Illinois Principals Association, sponsored by Horace Mann Companies.

The Reaching Out & Building Bridges Award was created to recognize an IPA principal or assistant principal, and an agency, association, or community member displaying an outstanding effort in creating partnerships between schools, principals, associations, and organizations for the betterment of all.

Jason Thomas formed a partnership with Hillcrest High School in 2015 when Mr. Thomas applied for a grant to provide college and career readiness services to disadvantaged, first-generation college students. From the inception, Thomas was committed to helping students realize their dreams of attending college and creating innovative, life-changing educational experiences for students. Hundreds of students are impacted by the many activities organized by Three Seeds Mentoring Group including: college visits, mentoring activities, youth summits, robotics, spelling bees and math contests, and field trips. Mr. Thomas has also participated in public relations, speaking engagements, support and presence at school events including: Half Cap Ceremony, National Honors Society Induction, Career Day, Principal-Parent Advisory Meetings, Parent Teacher Conferences, Orientations, and Board Meetings.

"Our school population is approximately 1,200 of which 60% is eligible for free and reduced lunch," said principal Dr. Simms. "3 Seeds is able to help service more than 700 students who qualify for their services. Without this partnership, so many of our students would not be exposed to college opportunities, and the additional resources they bring into the school."

"Because of 3 Seeds, I have been on several college visits to Northeastern Illinois University, Northern Illinois University, Grand Valley State University, Governor's State University, Illinois State and the University of Illinois – Champaign Urbana," said Jamal Cole, senior at Hillcrest High School. "After all of these visits, I applied to several schools starting my junior year and can happily say that I have been admitted to several of them. I have decided to attend Northern Illinois University."

Simms and Thomas will be recognized in October at a special ceremony during the IPA Education Leaders Fall Conference held in Peoria, IL.

The Illinois Principals Association serves over 5,200 educational leaders statewide and whose mission is to develop, support, and advocate for innovative educational leaders. The Reaching Out & Building Bridges Award is supported by Horace Mann Companies of Springfield, IL. For more information about the IPA, please visit www.ilprincipals.org.

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