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**For Immediate Release**

## **Horace Mann and Illinois Principals Association Announce 2019 Illinois Elementary School Principal of the Year**

Horace Mann and the Illinois Principals Association are pleased to announce that Dr. Michael Merritt, principal of Brentwood Elementary School, Des Plaines, has been named the 2019 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. Michael Merritt has served as principal of Brentwood Elementary School for the past five years and has been an active member of the Illinois Principals Association for twelve years. Currently, Merritt serves as North Cook Region State Director and member of the Board of Directors for the Illinois Principals Association. Merritt has previously served the Illinois Principals Association on the State Superintendent's Principal Advisory Council, North Cook NAESP Representative, State and Region Director for the North Cook Region, Region Director for the Three Rivers Region, and Dean of Students Representative for the Three Rivers Region. Dr. Merritt's educational career includes experience as an Assistant Principal, Dean of Students, District 504 Coordinator, and middle school physical education and health teacher.

"In the spirit of the words of Rita Pierson, 'every child needs a champion,' I find it necessary to take that another step and realize that all learners and educators need a champion," said Merritt. "I try to exemplify this by frequently recognizing the time and effort our learners and educators put forth to accomplish their daily successes. Our team also follows a mindset of recognizing families for their continual support of our mission in reinforcing the love of learning. We know from research that people are inspired by being recognized for the good they do and encouraged by realizing the growth we can make when building upon our success. Let's celebrate our successes, build upon them to continually improve, and provide the best culture possible focused on supporting learners."

"Dr. Merritt is a student-centered leader who thinks outside the box," said Dr. Art Fessler, Superintendent of Community Consolidated School District 59. "His ability to problem-solve and develop relationships with all stakeholders reinforces his strong interpersonal skills and desire to promote life-long learning."

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. Merritt will be recognized at the IPA's annual Education Leaders Fall Conference in October 2019.

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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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