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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Vadnais Heights Educator Named Recipient of \$15,000 Award for Excellence

Laura Nelson, a teacher at The Academy for Sciences & Agriculture High School, a charter school in Vadnais Heights was surprised March 24 with news that she is a recipient of a 2017 WEM Outstanding Educator Award as an Academic Challenge Coach, an honor that is accompanied by a \$15,000 award.

Nelson is one of six educators being honored by the WEM Foundation and Synergy & Leadership Exchange for outstanding accomplishments and contributions to student learning. She is one of two recipients of the WEM Foundation's statewide Academic Challenge Coach Award, which recognizes teachers who are exemplary coaches of student teams that participate and compete in academic challenges approved by the Minnesota Academic League Council.

Nelson has been teaching and coaching for 15 years. She currently teaches high school history and geography and coaches Youth in Government Model Assembly, Model United Nations and World Food Prize.

A colleague shared, "Laura is a passionate teacher who works to give her students not only an understanding of history and government, but to help them think for themselves and to guide them in developing strong character. She is a resourceful, creative and solution-oriented person who is frequently able to come up with new and innovative approaches to student assignments. She is highly respected by colleagues, parents, students and community partners."

The programs Nelson coaches allow students to excel and reach higher levels of competition, but for her the focus is on their learning and the impact they can make on their community and the world. That is why she chooses to commit herself to the programs she coaches.

"These programs provide the perfect vehicle to show learning doesn't have to take place in a classroom and knowledge gained through school can be used to make a difference in the world," shares Nelson.

"Mrs. Nelson gets to know her students well as both students and as people," said a parent. "She suggests students participate in programs that meet their interests and loops the parents in on the opportunities available to the students."

In addition to the *Academic Challenge Coach Award*, other educators are being honored with the *Ethics in Education Award* (exemplary educators who embody ethical behavior and promote ethical development for students through classroom or school activities, policies or curriculum) and the *Teacher Achievement Award* (exemplary teachers who support, inspire, and assist students to attain greater learning as evidenced by student achievement).

Educators are first nominated for the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards Program by students, parents, colleagues or community members. Those who accept the nomination provide additional information for consideration by Synergy & Leadership Exchange and a blue ribbon selection panel, which reviews and ranks the nominees.

In addition to the six statewide honorees, additional educators have been selected as regional honorees for 2017. These names will be announced in May.

Synergy & Leadership Exchange (Synergy) is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering collaboration to advance the development of ethical citizens, providing educational resources, and celebrating achievement and best practices in Minnesota schools, businesses and communities.

For more information on the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards Program and Synergy & Leadership Exchange, visit: www.synergyexchange.org.