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For immediate release

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## **Rochester Educator Named Recipient of \$15,000 Award for Excellence**

Will Ruffin II, a teacher from Lincoln K-8 Choice District-Wide School in the Rochester Public Schools was surprised March 21 with the news that he is a recipient of a 2017 WEM Outstanding Educator Award for Ethics in Education, an honor that is accompanied by a \$15,000 award.

Ruffin is one of six educators being honored by the WEM Foundation and Synergy & Leadership Exchange for outstanding accomplishments and contributions to student learning. He is one of two recipients of the WEM Foundation's statewide Ethics in Education Award, which recognizes educators who embody ethical behavior and promote ethical development for students through classroom or school activities, policies or curriculum.

Ruffin has been teaching for eight years and currently teaches fifth grade at Lincoln K-8 District-Wide School. In addition to teaching, Ruffin serves as the coordinator and leader for the All Pro Dads program which is designed to bring fathers into the school on a regular basis. He also helped launch the program at other schools throughout the district.

"Will is an artful teacher creating his learning canvas as a masterpiece in action for ALL students in his learning environment," said Jim Sonju, school principal. "He has created a learning environment with flexibility, differentiation in which students can work at their own pace in subjects, while still having solid foundations and maintaining accountability for each student."

Last year, Ruffin incorporated Genius Hour into the daily schedule. Genius Hour is education's version of a Google initiative. Google allows their employees to dedicate 20% of their work time to research projects they are interested in pursuing. In class, Ruffin offers half an hour a day for the students to research topics they are passionate about, or simply want to learn more about. Students are learning skills today's employers seek: teamwork, creative problem solving, leadership, decision making, use of technology and reflection.

"Will's relationship with students is less about authority and more about mentorship," shared a colleague. "He formally mentors two students after school each day and is also involved with the Rochester after-school program but a quick to his classroom reveals that he mentors all students under his watch every hour of every day."

In addition to the *Ethics in Education Award*, two honorees are recognized with the *Academic Challenge Coach Award* (classroom teachers who are exemplary coaches of student teams that participate and compete in academic challenges endorsed by the Minnesota Academic League Council) and two with 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](http://www.synergyexchange.org).