

April 15, 2015
For immediate release

For additional information:
Joyce Swenson, Synergy & Leadership Exchange
Phone: 507-389-2461

Rochester Administrator Named Recipient of \$15,000 Award for Excellence

James Sonju, a principal from Lincoln K-8 District Wide School in the Rochester Schools district was surprised April 15 with the news that he is a recipient of a 2015 WEM Outstanding Educator Award for Ethics in Education, an honor that is accompanied by a \$15,000 award.

Sonju 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.

"I beat the odds thanks to Mr. Sonju showing me what I could accomplish by believing in myself and showing me how to approach life," said a former student. Those words meant a great deal to Sonju who credits embracing a "whatever it takes" attitude to lead, inspire and invest in others.

Sonju has been in the education field for 22 years. Six years ago he set out to create a program to provide science education excellence for everyone to create a healthier world. In partnership with the Mayo Clinic and Winona State University the Integrated Science Outreach Program (InSciEd Out) was born. Since its inception Sonju and team have put together more than 30 creative and dynamic curriculum modules that include science, math, history, social studies, language arts, art and physical education. The new curriculum is loaded with engaging and authentic science for K-8 students.

"The InSciEd Out program that Mr. Sonju helped develop has led to global partnerships and outcomes beyond imagination, all focused on growing humanity. This illustrates his core value of servant leadership. He continues to ensure that diversity is empowered through his work," a colleague shared.

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 2015. 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.