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For immediate release

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

Melanie Urban, a teacher at Maple River High School in Maple River Public Schools, was surprised April 18 with the news that she is a recipient of a 2018 WEM Outstanding Educator Award for Ethics in Education, an honor that is accompanied by a \$15,000 award.

Urban 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 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.

Urban has been teaching for 10 years and currently teaches high school social studies, government and economics at Maple River High School. While teaching the fundamentals are essential, Urban also wants to help students transition from high school government class knowledge to active participation in the American democracy. One of the ways she helps students with this transition is by using an activity she created called the "Who Serves Me" project. Each student researches their legislators including stances that these politicians have on a variety of issues. Students are challenged to investigate how these specific issues impact their lives. Urban feels this activity provides students with the tools that they need to become an engaged citizen.

"Having met someone who truly believes and encourages me to be more than my mistakes in life made it that much easier to believe in myself," shared a student. "Mrs. Urban instilled in me the ability to believe I am more than what the negativity of life has to offer. Students are supposed to give teachers the apples, but it was really her who did the giving."

Outside of the classroom, Urban is the Student Council advisor, volleyball coach, senior class advisor, 6-12 PLC leader, and the student election judge training coordinator. "She is dedicated to not only educating in her classroom, but also educating and supporting students outside her classroom to become well-rounded citizens," said Laura Phillips, Dean of Students.

In addition to the *Ethics in Education Award*, honorees are recognized with the *Academic Challenge Coach Award* (teachers who are exemplary coaches of student teams that participate and compete in academic challenges approved by the Minnesota Academic League Council), *Teacher Achievement Award* (exemplary teachers who support, inspire and assist students to attain greater learning as evidenced by student achievement) and *Athletic Coach Award* (teachers who are exemplary coaches of athletic teams).

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 2018. These honorees will be announced in May.

Synergy & Leadership Exchange 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.

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