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Keisha Scarlett Named Washington State 2014 Middle Level Principal of the Year

South Shore PK-8 School principal helps close academic and social achievement gaps in Seattle

OLYMPIA—South Shore PK-8 School Principal **Keisha Scarlett** was named this year's Washington State Middle Level Principal of the Year by a panel of principals representing the Association of Washington Middle Level Principals, a component of the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP). She was one of nine nominees from across the state.

Scarlett has been principal at South Shore PK-8 School since 2010, where more than 89 percent of the students are of color and more than two-thirds of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch programs. The school was founded in 2002 in partnership with Seattle Schools, the New School Foundation and the City of Seattle. The school is known for its innovative whole-child PK-3 program, an approach that aims to give students a firm foundation in academic, cognitive, social and emotional skills and habits.

Scarlett was hired at South Shore in 2010 as the fourth principal in eight years. The school had been struggling with a large number of family departures after grade 3, and an influx of new students from a nearby closing school. It was also dealing with a high teacher attrition number.

Under Scarlett's leadership, South Shore's math program was accelerated. A survey was sent out to parents and the community for feedback on the school's program and curriculum. The school's master schedule was changed to support a more personalized environment, including a daily 20-minute advisory period for socioemotional literacy skills and an hour-long Flex-Friday period for small group projects and social skills. And, Scarlett worked to bring in the best teachers possible with a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education.

Says Scarlett, "Over the past four years, I have worked to attract and retain high quality teachers. With only 240 students and each core teacher instructing an entire grade level, it is imperative to create a 'culture of excellence.'"

Scarlett's work has paid off. South Shore now boasts staff positions that include a full-time art teacher, a part-time STEM teacher, a new music teacher and a Chinese/Mandarin teacher, all of which answer to the community's feedback on what it would take to retain students through to the middle school program.

Today, South Shore is the fourth highest performing K-8 school in the district. Continuous enrollment has increased such that there is now a waiting list at each grade level, with many families attempting to move their students to South Shore even during their eighth grade year.

Kelly Aramaki, Seattle Public Schools' Executive Director for the Southeast Region and 2013 Elementary Principal of the Year, says this about Scarlett: "When I'm discouraged or frustrated by challenges in our profession, I go to her for wisdom and inspiration. Last year I happened to be named Washington State Elementary Principal of the Year. Yet, Keisha is ten times the principal I was."

Scarlett has worked as an educator in Seattle Public Schools since 1999. She taught STEM at Mercer Island Middle School until 2005, when she moved to the central office to become a STAR Consulting Teacher. In 2007, she became a math coach at Denny Middle School, and in 2008 she took an assistant principal position at McClure Middle School, where she worked until taking a principal position at South Shore PK-8 School in 2010.

Scarlett graduated from Clark Atlanta University in 1996 with a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry. She earned her Master of Teaching degree in elementary education from Heritage University in 1999, and her administrative certification from the University of Washington in 2008.

National Distinguished Principal of the Year Program

Scarlett will be honored this fall in Washington D.C. as part of the [National Distinguished Principal of the Year program](#), which is sponsored by the [National Association of Elementary School Principals](#) in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Education and VALIC. All state winners participate in a series of events and activities over the course of two days, culminating in a formal awards banquet. There is no national winner at the elementary level.

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