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Dr. Owings Honored Regionally by Principal Association

MARCH 12TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Poplar Bluff, MO - Poplar Bluff Middle School Principal Dr. Brad Owings was named ‘distinguished principal’ of the Southeast Region during the 31st annual conference of the Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals held Saturday, Feb. 29, at Osage Beach.

A principal of 17 years, Owings was hired in Poplar Bluff in 2015 at the former 5th and 6th Grade Center, and led the transition the following year to the Middle School which—with 1,200 students at the time—was the largest upper elementary school in the state, according to education officials.

The move to the former High School campus involved bringing fourth grade teachers in from the district’s lower elementaries, helping to develop procedures and schedules for the reconfigured grade span and planning the logistics of traffic patterns for parents, all the while having hired 15 first-year educators.

“I have often been amazed at the number of students Dr. Owings knows by name” and frequently “knows their story,” wrote Middle School intervention teacher Kris Sittig in a nomination letter for the award. She continued: Owings shows the “same respect to his secretarial, maintenance and school cafeteria staff” as he does faculty.

Cultivating a positive climate is the most important job of a building administrator, wrote Owings in his nomination essay, and a leader does so by providing teachers with

“autonomy, mastery and purpose,” he stated. His personal mission, he went on, is to equip staff members with “everything they need to be the best version of themselves,” and create a “culture of continuous learning for adults.”

“It’s so easy to get caught up in the ‘busy-ness’ of being a principal that we lose sight of the real work,” which is relationship-building, Owings noted as a professional challenge.

“Dr. Owings possesses a broad working knowledge of both the pedagogy and the business of education,” said R-I Superintendent Dr. Scott Dill in a letter of support, adding that Owings is an “asset to the profession” and believes in students “at his core.” The superintendent elaborated: “He believes in their potential and sees for them a future brighter than they, themselves, can often envision.”

On a personal note, Owings is married to sixth grade Middle School teacher Holly, and together they have four children. Dave Elledge, co-pastor of The Bluff Church, where the family attends, stated that Owings “seems to have found a wonderful balance” between home life and his career. “Dr. Owings is seen in our community as an administrator who truly cares for his students, his teachers and staff, and the Poplar Bluff community,” Elledge commented.

While Owings has recently accepted a job offering in Southwest Missouri for the 2020/21 school year, his successor—to be recommended for approval by the Board of Education during the next monthly meeting—will be left with a solid foundation once he or she takes the reins in July. Gains were made in both English language arts and mathematics, along with all subgroups on state assessments from 2018 to 2019 at the Middle School.

The three best practices that the outgoing principal—who received his doctorate in 2010 from the University of Missouri at Columbia—listed are vital in helping all students find success are: School-wide Positive Behavior Support, Response to Intervention and Professional Learning Communities.

Over the past few years, the Middle School has ‘rebooted’ its PLC model, collaborating in teams to track data on student progress using common formative assessments; established common RTI time so each grade level can provide differentiated instruction for students struggling or in need of extension activities; and started the SW-PBS process, reinforcing student expectations.

Pictured: Dr. Brad Owings, Middle School principal, is recognized among colleagues on Saturday, Feb. 29, during the MAESP Distinguished Principal banquet at Osage Beach.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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