



8 principals vying for honor

Organizations recognizing exceptional leaders at high-needs schools

by [Sherry Anne Rubiano](#) - Apr. 5, 2008 07:35 PM

The Arizona Republic

Eight Valley principals are in the running to be named a Rodel Exemplary Principal, a new honor that recognizes exceptional leaders in high-needs schools.

The Rodel Charitable Foundation of Arizona, in partnership with Social Venture Partners Arizona, launched the Rodel Exemplary Principal Initiative to reward outstanding principals and train the next generation of principals.

"Oftentimes, we tend to overlook the importance of outstanding leadership in the school," said Carol Peck, president and CEO of the Rodel Foundation. "You can have an excellent classroom with an excellent teacher, but without a highly skilled and competent principal, you rarely will have an outstanding school."

Out of the eight finalists, four will be selected as the first Rodel Exemplary Principals. The winners each will receive \$5,000 in savings bonds. Each also will be asked to mentor three aspiring principals.

The honorees will be announced April 13 in *The Arizona Republic*.

The finalists are Kathy Davis, Sevilla West Elementary; Debbie Hutson, Lela Alston Elementary; Angela Graziano, Bret Tarver Elementary; Susan Lugo, Loma Linda Elementary; Howard Paley, Edison Elementary; Barbara Pierce, Madison Camelview Elementary; Diane Silvestri, Arrowhead Elementary; and Jeff Sprout, Montebello Elementary.

Superintendents nominated principals from schools where at least 70 percent of the students received free or reduced-price lunch, and where schools have demonstrated high student achievement. A committee narrowed down the pool to eight finalists and conducted school site visits.

The Rodel Exemplary Principal Initiative is based on the success of the foundation's Rodel Exemplary Teacher Initiative, which began in 2003.

Peck said all the teachers who have received mentoring through the program have continued teaching for at least three consecutive years.

She said she anticipates the Exemplary Principal Initiative will encourage more teachers to become principals, especially with the shortage of potential principals looming.

"It's our hope that after seeing the four Exemplary Principals that we pick, that some teachers that would not have shown an interest before in being a principal or didn't have exemplary role models will have an opportunity to learn from some of the best and see how exemplary the role of principal really can be," she said.

Kathy Davis

Sevilla West Elementary/ Alhambra Elementary district

4-8

How long have you been a principal? Eighth year

Degrees: Master's degree in education administration, Arizona State University

Residence: Goodyear

Age: 40

When you're feeling challenged, what drives you to continue?

When I see the growth our kids make. When a student is proud of their latest achievement score or a student says something nice about what a teacher did for them. Our kids know our teachers take the extra time to care about them and to talk to them, not only about academics but about their social lives.

What one tip would you give to new principals?

Acknowledge successes and improve deficiencies. Even when you're new, there are things you didn't know were going to be part of your job. You need to find the people who are doing what you expect and acknowledge them. Make them public in order to model and have that growth.

Pat Kossan

Angela Graziano

Bret Tarver Elementary School/ Cartwright School District

How long a principal? 15 years

Degrees: Bachelor's degree in elementary education and master's degree in elementary education, with an emphasis in mathematics instruction, from Arizona State University; and educational specialist degree in educational leadership from Nova University

Residence: Peoria

Age: 48

When you're feeling challenged, what drives you to continue?

The students. Usually if I'm having a bad day, I go into a classroom and watch the kids and go out to the playground and talk with the kids. It helps me re-focus on why I'm here.

Why are you a principal in a school serving so many children in poverty when you could be a leader anywhere?

I love my kids. Just given the opportunity of having a great teacher in the classroom, in a supportive culture of a school, it just proves the phrase that any child can learn. It just depends on if they're given the opportunity or not.

Sherry Anne Rubiano

Debbie Hutson

Lela Alston/Isaac School/district

K-3

How long have you been a principal?: Seven years

Degrees: Bachelor's in education from Arizona State University in 1974; master's in early childhood education from University of Phoenix in 1990

Residence: Phoenix

Age:54

What one tip would you give to new principals?

Enjoy the kids and keep the fun in the job and keep inspiring the team because the teachers have a very difficult job. We do a lot of team building.

Why are you a principal in a school serving so many children in poverty when you could be a leader anywhere?

We can make so much more of a difference there. The children lack so many more experiences that we are able to give them. They often don't have the experiences at home that affluent families have.

Betty Reid

Susan Lugo

Loma Linda Elementary/Creighton Elementary School District

Pre-K through eighth grade

How long have you been a principal? Nine years

Degrees: Bachelor's, master's and doctorate in educational leadership and supervision from Arizona State University

Residence: Phoenix

Age: 41

What one tip would you give to new principals?

Listen first, then act. The adults and children around you will tell you what needs to be done to make a school better.

Why are you a principal in a school serving so many children in poverty when you could be a leader anywhere?

It's my personal mission to insure that children of poverty experience the same educational opportunities as those from more well-to-do areas of the Valley. These children have less, and therefore, they need more: highly effective teachers, solid research-based curriculum, and enriching experiences. It's up to me to lead a team that creates an environment where children experience success each day.

Lori Baker

Howard Paley

Edison Elementary/Mesa Public Schools

How long have you been a principal?: Five years

Degrees: University of Nevada-Las Vegas: bachelor's degree in special education; Northern Arizona University: master's degree in education leadership

Residence: Chandler

Age: 45

What do you do to motivate and encourage parents to get involved?

I try to develop a positive relationship before there are any problems, so that involves visibility and speaking at school functions and getting to know the students, that way the parents know I know about their child. I want them to see their child's future and the potential, to get a picture of it.

How do your students know you have high expectations for them?

You communicate directly exactly what you expect from them. The students need tangible rewards, so for example, we have the Edison math challenge. The top kids will have rewards, but we also include each class.

- *Ray Parker* Howard Paley

Barbara Pierce

Madison Camelview Elementary/Madison Elementary district

K-3

How long have you been a principal?: Six years

Degrees: Bachelor's and master's degrees in elementary education from Northern Arizona University

Residence: Scottsdale

Age:54

How do your students know you have high expectations for them?

I tell them exactly what I want from them. I make sure my information is real clear, and I give them the tools to be successful. I encourage and give them specific feedback.

Why are you a principal in a school serving so many children in poverty when you could be a leader anywhere?

It goes back to the students. I know I'm in a school that has a high poverty level, but I look at them as students. I don't think about the poverty level. I think of them as what do we need to do to help them be successful at their grade level, with (academic) standards and socially and emotionally? I just think of them as kids and what their needs are.

Anne Ryman

Diane Silvestri

Arrowhead Elementary School, Paradise Valley Unified School District

How long have you been a principal? Four years

Degrees: Bachelor's degree in elementary education from Arizona State University; master's degree in administration from Chapman University

Residence: Cave Creek

Age: 51

What do you do to motivate and encourage parents to get involved?

. We truly are a community school. We have parents on campus from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. There are parent classes, English classes, computer classes. There are night activities where parents come in with their kids and read.

How do you use student-achievement data to make teaching decisions?

We are a data-driven school and base everything on what's best for kids. With technology the data is available at our fingertips. We use it for everything, from grouping students to looking at the student's previous year's test scores to looking at a set of students' scores to improve instruction in weaker areas.

Ofelia Madrid

Jeff Sprout

Montebello School/Alhambra School District

How long a principal?: Four years

Degrees: Bachelor of science in biomedical engineering; master's degree in education; and a doctorate in education administration and supervision, all from Arizona State University

Residence: Tempe

Age: 42

When you're feeling challenged, what drives you to continue?

A love for making a difference in kids' lives. And sometimes, I sit down and write thank-you notes to people, and it quickly helps me to get my motivation back.

Why are you a principal in a school serving so many children in poverty when you could be a leader anywhere?

At the age of 22, I dedicated my life to serving in an urban environment. I feel like this is a very important cause, to bring the message of the importance of education into our urban centers and to see kids be successful.

- Meghan E. Moravcik