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The Principals Center announces the
2018 Joe Richardson Award for Exemplary Leadership

Atlanta, Georgia - The Principals Center is pleased to announce the 2018 Joe Richardson Award Winner. The Joe Richardson Award for Exemplary Leadership is named in honor of the founder of the Principals Center at GSU, Dr. Joe Richardson, who was inspired by Dr. Roland Barth, formerly of Harvard and the founder of the Principals Center movement. This award is given annually by the Principals Center at Georgia State University. The principal nominated for this award is an educational leader who is considered highly competent and successful within the school district and among his/her professional peers. The Award is given to a principal who most represents the mix of leadership attributes that provides for a school environment where both students and staff excel and who exemplifies the characteristics of an instructional leader within a community of learners and leaders.

Dr. Chara N. Willaford, the inaugural Superintendent/Head of School for DREAM Academy Charter School in Bibb County, has been selected as the honoree and will be formally recognized during our Annual New Principals Celebration, to be held next Tuesday, May 1, 2018 at The Jimmy Carter Presidential Center starting at 7 pm near downtown Atlanta. This event honors and celebrates first year principals in the State of Georgia for their commitment to their school communities. Currently, we have 41 new principals across the state that have confirmed their attendance. Our theme for this year is “Lead Fearlessly, Love Hard,” and Dr. Tommy Welch, principal of Meadowcreek High School and GASSP 2017 Principal of the Year, will serve as our Keynote Speaker.

Dr. Willaford will soon celebrate her 20th year in education. She has had an array of educational experiences. Most recently, she served four years as Proud Principal of Sims Elementary School.

Our Mission: To provide practicing and aspiring school leaders with learning and networking opportunities designed to develop their capacity to create schools that work for all children.
located in Rockdale County Public Schools. During her tenure at Sims, the school has transformed from a “Focus” school to one that is high-performing. In fact, the school has the #1CCRPI ranking in Rockdale County Public Schools. Under her leadership, Sims Elementary has attained several honors such as being named a “Beating the Odds” School by the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement and being highlighted a “Success Story” at the 2017 Solutions Summit by the Georgia Department of Education and Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. The Solutions Summit is a summit held to address the challenges faced by chronically underperforming schools.

Dr. Willaford believes in mentorship and facilitates a principals’ PLC designed for principals engaged in school improvement. She also mentors current and future instructional leaders. Dr. Willaford holds NAESP National Principal Mentor Certification and most recently gained Ruby Payne’s Framework for Understanding Poverty Trainer Certification.

Prior to the Principalship, Dr. Willaford served as the district K-12 Coordinator of English Language Arts in Rockdale County Public Schools where she improved teaching and learning by providing instructional and organizational leadership in curriculum development, professional development, instructional alignment, and evaluation in all areas of English Language Arts district wide. Additionally, she was the district coordinator for the Early Intervention Program (EIP). Prior to this, Dr. Willaford served five years as Assistant Principal at C.J. Hicks Elementary School where she excelled at coordinating intervention programs and creating a school wide instructional framework. Prior to coming to Rockdale County Public Schools, Dr. Willaford served as Instructional Coach in Athens-Clarke County, GA. Specifically at a school taken over by the state for Needs Improvement (NI) Year 6 status. Moreover, Dr. Willaford has served as a classroom teacher, Reading Recovery Teacher/Literacy Specialist, Early Intervention Teacher and Literacy/Instructional Coach.

Dr. Willaford is recognized as an instructional leader that guides school communities’ in the process to rise to greatness through hard work, dedication, and perseverance. She has an unwavering commitment to teaching and learning and doing everything with excellence and intention. Her personal motto states, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

Dr. Willaford is from Atlanta, Georgia. She graduated from the prestigious North Atlanta High School of Performing Arts and International Studies. From there, she went on to obtain her Bachelors of Science in Education from Georgia Southern University. She obtained her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction in 2006 from Argosy University-Atlanta.

In her spare time, Dr. Willaford enjoys going on “runcations” which allow her to combine her love of running and traveling, listening to live music, decorating, and spending time with her husband, Sherrod. She is also a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and various professional organizations. The Principals Center looks forward to honoring this exemplary leader and celebrating new principals in Georgia on Tuesday, May 1, 2018.

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