

## 2 Principals Honored For Reviving Schools

18 Administrators Receive Post Awards

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Principals Lucretia Jackson and Joanne Uyeda each took over struggling schools and, using innovative techniques and a personal touch, turned them around. This fall, both were proud to announce that their schools had met benchmarks set by the No Child Left Behind law.

The women will be honored Monday as recipients of the Distinguished Educational Leadership Award, sponsored by The Washington Post.

Jackson, the principal of Maury Elementary School in Alexandria, and Uyeda, the principal of Abingdon Elementary School in Arlington, are among 18 Washington area principals who will be honored at an awards ceremony at The Post.

Jackson, who has worked in the Alexandria school system since 1980, spent eight years as principal at Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy and was widely credited with its turnaround. In 2004, Alexandria Superintendent Rebecca L. Perry transferred Jackson to Maury Elementary, a move that angered many Lyles-Crouch parents but was a boon to a struggling school.

Jackson introduced a culture of involvement and passion, staff members said.

The following year, Maury Elementary's Standards of Learning scores improved dramatically, going from the lowest in the city to among the highest. The school has made what federal standards call adequate yearly progress two years in a row and became fully accredited this year.

"Instead of hiring high-dollar outside consultants who didn't know our school history or population, Ms. Jackson used funds to provide small stipends for faculty and staff to collaborate, study, and reflect on our own practices," Suzanne W. Lank, a literacy coach at the school, wrote in a letter nominating Jackson for the award.

"We met on weekends in one another's homes and amidst a flurry of chart paper, professional books and meaningful conversations about our school, we made a plan about how to make it all happen at Maury."

Jackson organized open houses for parents and brought in volunteer tutors. She made classes smaller and added after-school lessons.

Her enthusiasm and dedication are infectious.

"She is there at 6:45 every morning and she's still there at 6:45 in the evening," Perry wrote. "She greets every student, every day, with a hug. She greets staff with high fives."

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Jackson said she was "ecstatic" to be chosen but said the credit went beyond her. "I strongly believe that the award is the result of the teamwork of many hands, many minds and one goal," she said, adding that the school's improvement was brought about by "teachers and parents and central office and administration, and the community as well."

In Arlington, Uyeda also is known as a "turnaround specialist." She had spent 10 years as principal at Glebe Elementary School when she requested a transfer to Abingdon Elementary. It was a time when, as Abingdon science teacher Anne Whitten Sywilok wrote in a nomination letter, "test scores were low [and] staff morale was on the decline."

Since then, Standards of Learning test scores have risen in all subjects, and a sheaf of letters from staff members bursts with enthusiasm about the school's improvement under Uyeda.

"She looks beyond existing practices to see what might be altered or modified to better serve the student population," wrote Abingdon Elementary library media specialist Kristy Nienstedt. "She is not afraid to 'tweak' an approach once it is in place."

One tweak was the elimination of early-release Wednesdays that are a feature at most Arlington elementary schools. That added up to an additional three weeks of instructional time, which Uyeda used to introduce a program called Project G.I.F.T. (Gaining Instruction, Fostering Talents) in conjunction with the University of Virginia. The program rotates students through segments in architecture, journalism and a science lab. Uyeda also introduced a program in which all fourth-graders learn to play the violin.

"Our students have the unique advantage of experiencing Claymation, architecture, violins and communication classes," said Colleen Weiser, co-president of Abingdon Elementary's PTA. Project G.I.F.T. "has really been a program that can showcase and appreciate each child's unique talents," she said.

Abingdon Elementary is a Title I school, which means it has a large number of poor students, yet it has excelled under Uyeda's leadership, parents and teachers said.

"You had a diverse student population be able to achieve" adequate yearly progress, Weiser said. "I think, if we wouldn't have had Joanne Uyeda and Project G.I.F.T., that we would be on a list of schools at risk."

"The parents of many students, if left on their own, may not have the financial capacity to pay for the same experiences if offered off-site," she said.

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