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Statewide Honor Awarded to Olympia School for Outstanding Arts Education

Avanti High School recognized as "School of Excellence in Arts Education"

SEATTLE – ArtsEd Washington in partnership with the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) today announced **Avanti High School** in Olympia as the winner of the fourth annual *Schools of Excellence in Arts Education Award*, honoring K-12 schools providing exemplary arts education to their students.

Avanti High School in Olympia School District is a small alternative high school of 156 students and 7 faculty. For the past fourteen years, Avanti has been integrating arts education throughout all subjects to balance and deepen the learning experience for students.

"It is our view that the arts serve as the foundation for all inspiration and creativity, which are two important core values of the school," says Principal Mike Velasquez. "At Avanti, we encourage our students to explore their passions and find their voices; we find that the arts is the best medium to produce well balanced, healthy, and productive adults."

Artistic collaboration is fostered at Avanti to teach teamwork, communication, and peer support. The school has been recognized as a School of Distinction twice in recent years by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

"Our arts education program serves a diverse group of learners, each allowed to work in whatever medium is right for them," observes Velasquez. "Students are becoming independent, reflective, inspired learners that are fully engaged inside and outside of school."

Recent group projects include the "Earth, Air, Fire, and Water" mosaic series, completed by the freshman class, now adorning the Olympia School District board room. Avanti's theater program presents a school play every spring in which students learn all aspects of theater production from stagecraft to performance, while also learning how to work together, manage time, critically assess challenges, and find creative solutions.

“Schools like Avanti demonstrate how the arts can transform the culture of a school and the experience of its students,” notes Una McAlinden, Executive Director for ArtsEd Washington. “Their students are gaining essential capacities for life that deepen all of their learning and prepare them for success long after graduation. That’s what makes Avanti a true School of Excellence.”

“The arts are crucial to whole-child development,” adds AWSP Executive Director Gary Kipp. “We are proud that so many schools in Washington State recognize the value of arts education, and we are especially proud that this year’s award winner is just around the corner from our office.”

Inspired by a program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the *Schools of Excellence in Arts Education Awards* are open to all K-12 schools throughout Washington State with exemplary arts education programs. For more information, visit www.artsedwashington.org.

About ArtsEd Washington

ArtsEd Washington is the only statewide nonprofit working to create enduring system-wide change to ensure that the arts – which include dance, music, theatre, and visual art – play an integral role in the education of every child in every school. No other organization is more adept at empowering schools to provide high-quality arts education and at building public support for arts learning. ArtsEd Washington is a member of the *Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network*. www.artsedwashington.org.

About Association for Washington School Principals

The Association of Washington School Principals is a professional association serving principals, assistant principals, and principals in training. Formed in 1972, the association includes more than 3,400 members from public and private elementary, middle, and high schools statewide. It is governed by a board of practicing principals drawn from the elementary, middle, and high school levels. www.awsp.org.

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