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October 28, 2025

Peter G. Schmidt Elementary Principal Kim Doughty is Named 2026 Elementary Principal of the Year

Tumwater principal builds culture of belonging, visibility, and collective leadership



OLYMPIA — Kim Doughty, principal at Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School in the Tumwater School District, has been named the 2026 Washington State Elementary Principal of the Year. Doughty will also be recognized nationally by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) as one of their National Distinguished Principals representing Washington state.

At the heart of Doughty's leadership is a simple yet powerful belief: every student, staff member, and family deserves to feel seen, known, and valued. Under her guidance, Peter G. Schmidt Elementary has become a place of hope and high expectations for all learners.

Doughty and her team launched the Human Lighthouse initiative, anchoring the school's culture around visibility, connection, and hope. Through student leadership programs, cross-grade buddy systems, and staff visibility tools, she has strengthened trust and relationships across the entire school community. Panorama student data shows a 16% increase in students' sense of belonging since implementation. Ninety-two percent of staff reported in mid-year feedback that they felt more connected to leadership, and 89% reported feeling like they were part of a strong team.

"I'm driven by the idea that schools should be places of hope. That means doing the hard work to make sure every child is learning, growing, and surrounded by adults who believe in them—even on their hardest days," says Doughty.

Doughty's leadership is equally grounded in systems thinking and collaboration. She has refined her school's MTSS framework, implementing a "Mobile MTSS" rapid-response system for students needing timely academic or behavioral support. Her team also created a live skill-tracking dashboard to monitor real-time progress, resulting in a 14% increase in literacy benchmarks and a 22% reduction in Tier 2 behavior referrals.

"Kim prioritizes both academic excellence and social-emotional well-being, fostering an environment where students are supported in every aspect of their growth. Her inclusive and student-centered approach ensures that each learner is recognized for their unique strengths and provided with the resources and encouragement they need to succeed," writes Assistant Principal Brittany LaPalm.



Strong leaders, strong schools, strong students.

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Beyond her own building, Doughty helps design statewide professional learning for principals and grew her own leadership through the Next Level Leaders program. She is known for mentoring aspiring school leaders and cultivating leadership across the Tumwater School District.

National Distinguished Principal Program

Doughty will be recognized next fall in Washington, D.C., as part of the NAESP National Distinguished Principal program, sponsored in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education. Each state selects one elementary principal annually to honor outstanding leadership, service, and contributions to student success.