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AWSA Recognizes Hartford's Jordan Stephans as Wisconsin Middle School Assistant Principal of the Year

MADISON, WI — The Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA) has named Jordan Stephans as the 2027 Wisconsin Middle School Assistant Principal of the Year.

As assistant principal at Central Middle School in the School District of Hartford Jt. #1, Stephans has helped bring meaningful changes to the school's culture, student support systems, and extracurricular opportunities. Since joining the school in 2023, he has worked to establish consistent expectations, strengthen relationships with students and families, and create more opportunities for students to connect with their school community.

“Jordan Stephans approaches challenges with determination, creativity, and a genuine commitment to students,” said AWSA Executive Director Jim Lynch. “His leadership at Central Middle School has helped create a more supportive learning environment while opening doors for students to discover their interests, build relationships, and develop as leaders. We are pleased to recognize his outstanding contributions to public education in Wisconsin.”

When Stephans arrived at Central Middle School, the school was facing significant behavioral challenges. He responded by developing “The Wildcat Way,” a schoolwide framework that establishes clear expectations for students to be respectful, responsible, and safe. Working with staff, he helped create consistent approaches to addressing behavior, incorporating proactive supports and recognizing students who demonstrate positive character traits.

Stephans has also strengthened the school’s use of data to guide decisions about student behavior and attendance. Through monthly team meetings, staff examine behavioral trends, identify areas of concern, and develop targeted interventions.

“Since joining the Hartford team in 2023, Mr. Stephans has brought calm, steady, and thoughtful leadership,” said District Administrator Tara Villalobos. “His diligence has led to the reinstatement of co-curricular activities and athletics, updated summer school programming, and a more consistent approach to behavior management. Through his collaboration with Principal Dr. Lori Rugotska, he has helped transform Central Middle School in a short time.”

Another significant accomplishment has been Stephans' work expanding opportunities for students beyond the classroom. As the school's athletic and activities director, he helped restore school-sponsored athletics after more than a decade without them. Beginning with cross country and track and field, the school has since added boys and girls basketball and expanded its extracurricular offerings to include 14 clubs.

Stephans holds a master's degree in educational leadership from Cardinal Stritch University and a bachelor's degree in physical education, health education, and adaptive physical education from Carroll University. He also serves as a youth baseball coach through the Hartford Recreation Department.

The Wisconsin Assistant Principal of the Year program recognizes assistant and associate principals whose leadership has resulted in improved student learning, instructional collaboration, and a safe and positive school environment. Nominations are accepted from teachers, parents, principals, and others across Wisconsin. Selection criteria include a commitment to personal excellence, collaborative leadership, personalization, curriculum, instruction and assessment, and serving as an established and respected community member.

A committee representing teachers, superintendents, board members, parents, and the Department of Public Instruction reviews the applications and selects an AP of the year at the middle school and high school levels. Considerable support comes from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation.

Stephans will be formally recognized at the Wisconsin Associate Principal Convention in January. He will also receive $1,000 for use on a project of his choice at Central Middle School, and will represent the state of Wisconsin at the National Assistant Principal of the Year Celebration in Tampa, FL, in February 2027.

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