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Chesapeake Middle School Principal Receives \$25,000 Milken Educator Award

CHESAPEAKE, Va. — Hugo A. Owens Middle School Principal Amber Dortch today received a \$25,000 Milken Educator Award during a surprise assembly at the Chesapeake school. The award was presented by Secretary of Education Anne Holton, Superintendent of Public Instruction Steven R. Staples, and Milken Family Foundation Senior Vice President Jane Foley in the school gymnasium, which was filled with cheering students and faculty.

Dortch, who celebrated her 35th birthday on December 9, has served as principal of Hugo A. Owens Middle since 2013. Under her leadership, the school has maintained its Fully Accredited rating despite significant increases in the rigor of the commonwealth's standards and assessments in mathematics, English and science.

"Amber Dortch epitomizes the 21st-century instructional leader who inspires her teachers and equips them with the tools, strategies and data they need to improve outcomes for students," Staples said. "She is a constant presence — in the halls and in the classrooms — always encouraging students to believe in themselves and to make every moment count."

During 2014-2015, 83 percent of Hugo A. Owens Middle students passed their state reading tests, a 10-point increase from the previous year. Eighty-nine percent passed in mathematics, a six-point improvement over achievement in 2013-2014.

"As important as the test results is the school climate that Amber has fostered in which all students are valued and challenged to succeed," Holton said.

"She is a leader and a doer, working together with faculty and students to help the whole school thrive," said Foley.

Dortch began her career with Chesapeake Public Schools in 2000 as a Spanish teacher after earning a bachelor's degree in modern languages from Longwood College. In 2005, she earned a master's in educational policy, planning and leadership from the College of William & Mary.

The Milken Educator Awards program recognizes and rewards teachers, principals and other public school educators who promote excellence and innovation. Dortch is the 41st Virginia educator to receive the award since 1999.

Recipients are selected on the basis of multiple criteria related to instructional practice, leadership, student achievement and accomplishments outside the classroom. Since the launch of the Milken Educator Awards in 1987, the Milken Family Foundation has distributed more than \$66 million in awards to more than 2,600 educators across the country including \$1,025,000 million in Virginia.