Principal Liana Szeto Receives National Award

November 14, 2012 (San Francisco) - In honor of her exceptional work as a principal, Liana Szeto received the Terrel H. Bell Award for Outstanding School Leadership from the U.S. Department of Education on November 13, 2012.

Principals nominated for the Terrel Bell Award are school leaders committed to fostering successful teaching and learning. They help their students meet high standards and have demonstrated that when it comes to educating America’s children, failure is not an option.

“You can’t have a great school without a great principal,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. “It’s the principal who shapes the vision and sets the tone for their school. It’s the principal who inspires and models the excellence he or she knows their school can reach. We don’t celebrate success enough in education – and the Bell Award recognizes these principals for the essential work they do every day.”

Szeto was hired in 1984 as a kindergarten teacher for the nation’s first public school Chinese Immersion Program. As a pioneer in the new program, she poured her energy into working with university faculty to refine the curriculum and teaching methodologies, hosting information sessions on why Chinese immersion is important, finding and mentoring teachers and bringing parents onboard as partners —she rose to be the program’s Lead Teacher.

Szeto continued her work to become principal of Alice Fong Yu School in 1995. More recently, she steered the transition from a small elementary school program to an independent, inclusive K–8 school, consulting with middle school content experts to create grade-appropriate curricula and materials in Chinese.

“I build leadership in teachers, students and parents” says Szeto. “Teachers and parents are engaged in hiring decisions and student leadership is a top priority.” Szeto adds that faculty members organize themselves in teams to plan integrated projects and common assessments; many serve as educational leaders, with positions on the Math Professional leadership program, Stanford University’s Strategic Educational Research Project, the National Science Teacher Association, and the district’s early childhood school readiness initiative.

The Bell award is given by the U.S. Department of Education, together with the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Middle Schools Association and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. The award recognizes outstanding school leaders and the vital role they play in overcoming challenging circumstances. Principals are nominated by their school communities during the final stages of the Blue Ribbon Schools application process. Terrel H. Bell was the secretary of education under President Reagan.

###