



News Release

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Ellis Elementary School Wins \$20,000 Symetra Heroes in the Classroom 'MVP Award'

BELLEVUE, Wash. and CHICAGO — (Nov. 9, 2018) — Symetra, a national provider of employee benefits, annuities and life insurance, awarded Ellis Elementary School with a \$20,000 Symetra Heroes in the Classroom® “MVP Award.” The education grant will fund *“Colorín Colorado: nuestro cuento ha comenzado,”* a two-pronged effort that combines a culturally relevant after-school literacy program for Spanish-speaking students and their families with a bilingual performing artists series. The program’s goal is to promote intercultural understanding and respect in the Round Lake Beach, Illinois, school and larger community through an authentic exploration of Hispanic culture.

“Symetra is proud to act as a catalyst for innovative programs that benefit community schools. *‘Colorín Colorado’* helps meet a critical need in a positive, proactive way. We believe that by helping English language learners thrive as members of our community, *everyone* benefits,” said Tracy Wort, assistant director, Community Relations at Symetra. “Together with the Chicago Bears, we applaud educators like the Ellis Elementary team who are reaching out to underserved student populations — they are the true MVPs.”

George McCaskey, chairman of the Chicago Bears, a Symetra Heroes in the Classroom program partner, joined Wort for the presentation to Ellis Elementary Principal Debra Holland and bilingual education teachers Olivia Carreiro, Christine Forster, and Monica Silva-Alejo during a special assembly on Nov. 7 at the Grades 1–5 school.

Since 2010, the Symetra Heroes in the Classroom program has honored Chicago-area K-12 teachers for educational excellence during the regular NFL season. Each of the 16 schools with a 2017 Symetra Heroes in the Classroom honoree was eligible to submit an MVP Award grant proposal. Nominated programs were evaluated on a range of criteria, including innovation, feasibility and demonstrated need.

About “*Colorín Colorado: nuestro cuento ha comenzado*”

“Colorín Colorado” will be the first teacher-designed, culturally driven after-school program Ellis Elementary has implemented and will have two components. A literacy program will support students who speak Spanish as a home language—nearly 43 percent of the school’s population—by targeting the entire family, not just students. It will teach Spanish-speaking families how they can support their children’s literacy development, despite linguistic limitations. It will also model how families can build their children’s awareness of their heritage, culture, and language while being immersed in American culture. It will complement Ellis’s existing literacy program in mainstream and bilingual classrooms by providing authentic, engaging, culturally appropriate Spanish literacy support to families. Biliteracy has been proven to have a positive correlation with academic achievement.

In addition to the after-school literacy program, the MVP Award grant will help bring bilingual performing artists to the school for assemblies and family nights. Performers, such as storytellers, will contribute to intercultural understanding and respect in the school and larger community by providing all Ellis students and their families the opportunity to learn about and more actively engage with Hispanic cultures.

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About Symetra Heroes in the Classroom®

Symetra has partnered with the Chicago Bears on the teacher-recognition program since 2010, honoring more than 130 area teachers to date. The company established Symetra Heroes in the Classroom® in its Pacific Northwest hometown in 2006, has recognized 568 teachers nationwide and contributed nearly \$1 million to schools for classroom books, supplies and in support of student programming.

Symetra Heroes in the Classroom are recognized in front of their students and peers at surprise in-school presentations, and they receive a \$2,000 donation from Symetra for classroom books and supplies. In addition, they receive tickets to a Bears home game and are acknowledged during an on-field presentation at Soldier Field.

Teachers may be nominated by their principal, district staff, student or student's parent. The winners are selected based on their ability to make a real difference in students' lives; to go above and beyond in their day-to-day responsibilities; and to help students build life skills. More information about Symetra Heroes in the Classroom is available at www.SymetraHeroes.com/Bears.

About Symetra

Symetra Financial Corporation is a diversified financial services company based in Bellevue, Washington. In business since 1957, Symetra provides employee benefits, annuities and life insurance through a national network of benefit consultants, financial institutions, and independent agents and advisors. For more information, visit www.symetra.com.

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