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## **Kevin Ponce Named 2019 Golden Director of the Year Award Winner**

NATIONAL HARBOR, MD, Nov. 26, 2018 – School Nutrition Services Director Kevin Ponce, of Oklahoma City Public Schools, Oklahoma City, Okla., is the 2019 recipient of the Foodservice Achievement Management Excellence (FAME) Golden Director of the Year Award. Ponce will receive his award at the FAME award ceremony at the JW Marriott in Austin, Texas during the School Nutrition Association’s 2019 School Nutrition Industry Conference. The Golden Director of the Year Award, the National FAME Awards most prestigious honor, is awarded to a director who demonstrates outstanding achievement in leadership, spirit and dedication, innovation, career awards, management and systems, humanitarianism and community involvement, and bettering the lives of students. Ponce is also the recipient of the 2017 FAME Silver Leadership Award.

“I’m honored, humbled, and blessed being selected as the 2019 FAME Golden Director of the Year,” said Ponce. “It’s not about winning an award. It means a recognition of teamwork in moving forward, as a district, in a positive direction even though we face many challenges along the way. I’m so thankful to work with a great team of school nutrition professionals. When voices and inclusion happens, when empowerment and trusts are exchanged, as a TEAM, customer service improves and confidence skyrockets to serve our children and community the best we can.”

With nearly 19 years of school nutrition service, Kevin Ponce continues to establish himself as a leader in the school foodservice industry with recognized management experience, a visionary approach to meeting student needs, and planning for a variety of contingencies to ensure that students are fed. Ponce rose rapidly through the ranks over his career in school nutrition. Beginning with Oklahoma City Public Schools, he served as an Area Supervisor for 22 of the city’s 90 schools before he became the Director at Western Heights Public Schools. Three years later, Ponce became the Director at Mid-Del Public Schools for seven years before returning to Oklahoma City Public Schools in his current position as School Nutrition Services Director. Since his return to Oklahoma City Public Schools, Ponce helped obtain over \$5.5M in grants for the city’s school nutrition program.

Ponce’s commitment to child nutrition is evident in his efforts to combat Type II diabetes, which affects 12 percent of children in Oklahoma City Public Schools. By introducing salad bars to schools and increasing the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, he increased healthier options for students and saw a 5 percent increase in lunch participation. Ponce’s management skills were showcased during the unexpected



state-wide teacher walkout in early 2018. By implementing a command center and selecting strategic sites throughout Oklahoma City, Ponce mobilized transportation and foodservice teams to provide meals to over 20,000 students at over 100 locations during the walkout. In addition to his work in Oklahoma City schools, Ponce collaborated with the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma for Kids Program to provide emergency weekend nutrition to hungry elementary students. Bill Hendrix, Resource Development Department at the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma said, “Kevin...has shown both excellent commitments to feeding children both through the School Cafeteria Feeding program and also has recognized the need to feed children over the weekend”.

Colleagues highlight Ponce’s innovative budget management and focus on providing fresh foods prepared on-site when describing his career achievements, particularly in his current role. By eliminating a contract with a management company in favor of a school-run operation, Ponce eliminated over \$600,000 in contract fees and realized \$1.6 million in savings through the reallocation of labor. In his second year as the School Nutrition Director for Oklahoma City Public Schools, Ponce implemented a 100 percent Community Eligible Provision that saved thousands of dollars while providing free lunches to 46,000 students. His leadership and vision resulted in a 2016-17 end-of-year revenue balance of over \$5 million, up from \$26,000 when he assumed his Director role.

Ponce is an active member of the School Nutrition Association, having served in a number of state leadership roles including SNA State President, and on the SNA Board of Directors as the Southwest Regional Director. He is also the co-author of the children’s book, “Fruit, Veggies, and Poi” and a contributing writer for the Child Nutrition Executive Magazine. Ponce is a 20-year veteran of the United States Air Force and a native of Maui, Hawaii.

*For 30 years the FAME Awards have been honoring school nutrition professionals who raise the industry standards by tackling challenges within their school districts and communities. The 2019 FAME Awards ceremony event is scheduled for January 13, 2019 at the JW Marriott Austin, Austin, Texas, site of the School Nutrition Association’s (SNA) 2019 School Nutrition Industry Conference (SNIC).*

*FAME event tickets can be obtained by visiting [www.fameawards.net](http://www.fameawards.net). For event updates throughout the year, visit [www.fameawards.net](http://www.fameawards.net) or [www.facebook.com/fameawards](https://www.facebook.com/fameawards).*

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