

**Appreciation** > Winner of coveted award is principal of little-known Emining Boys High school

# Win a big surprise, says principal

Koech says he did not expect to take home prize as beating more than 8,000 colleagues was not easy

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When Mr Solomon Koech attended the annual Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association meeting in Mombasa this month, he had no idea what awaited him.

That he would emerge the 2016 Principal of the Year was the least of his expectations, let alone his dream, as he would later confess in an interview with the *Nation*.

"Being declared the country's best principal was a big surprise and I can only say thank you, thank you, thank you God, for the victory," said the 46-year-old.

The head of the little-known Emining Boys High School in Baringo County becomes the first principal from the South Rift region to win the award.

The soft-spoken teacher took the heads' meeting by storm and beat other secondary schools heads across the country to clinch the annual award. The event was graced by President Uhuru Kenyatta.

It is perhaps the highest national award that secondary school heads dream of winning before they retire.

This is the second time in a row this year that Emining Boys is hitting the headlines after Bethwel Kiplimo beat all odds to emerge one of the top candidates in last year's Kenyan Certificate of Secondary Education examination by scoring a mean grade of A of 84 points.

"It wasn't easy to win the award as there was stiff competition and rigorous vetting that took four days but I am happy the judges trusted the quality of my work inside and outside the classroom," he told the *Nation* yesterday.

When his name was read out he almost collapsed with joy.

"I remember uttering these words which still ring in my heart: Thank you God," said Mr Koech who teaches biology and agriculture.



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Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association chairman John Awiti (right) congratulates the Principal of the Year 2016 Solomon Koech of Baringo County at the end of the 41st Annual National Conference of Principals at Wild Waters in Mombasa, last week.

His victory started at the sub-county level where he emerged the best and at the county level he maintained his winning streak.

His star continued rising in the Nakuru-Mau region where eight counties participated, and he went on to beat his challengers to emerge first.

"When I won at the regional level I promised my competitors I will not disappoint them at the national level and I am happy that has come to pass," said the father of five.

The victory saw him return home Sh100,000 richer. Earlier at the regional level, he was awarded Sh50,000, Sh35,000 at the county level and Sh20,000 at the sub-county competition.

The Egerton University alumnus said his admiration for his former teachers, who were respected by the society, has been his inspiration as a teacher.

"Teaching is in my blood and that is why in 1996 I was offered an opportunity to be an

agriculture extension officer but I turned down the offer and I opted to become a teacher," said Mr Koech.

What is his secret of success? "Persistence, commitment and a desire to achieve the best without minding whether there is somebody watching you and involving God in every step you take."

He attributed his victory to teamwork by the teachers and non-teaching staff, students and the board of management.

"This victory is as a result of the cooperation of my teachers who wake up as early as 5am and retire to bed at 10pm daily, my students and the board of management, and that is why I dedicate this victory to them."

According to him, the wave of strikes in schools is as a result of parents losing touch with their children.

"There is something wrong with parenting as parents have abdicated their role of guiding their children," he lamented.

His lowest moment as a principal is whenever he is forced to send students home due to non-payment of fees.

"My heart cries when I see the student go home because I know what they lose may not be recovered."

According to Mr Koech, the judges were looking for a transformative principal inside and outside the classroom who loves his work and has uplifted the lifestyle of the community near his school.

"I have led the school fraternity in planting aloe vera plants near our school and this has helped in stopping soil erosion and has enhanced food security," said Mr Koech.

**8,000** Number of school heads  
Mr Koech had to beat to be declared principal of the year



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