



NJDOE News

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DOE Names Three "Schools to Watch" for Middle Grade Excellence

Three middle schools that have shown continued improvement have been designated as "New Jersey Schools to Watch," Department of Education officials announced today.

The schools' programs will now be shared with schools state- and nationwide to promote innovative approaches to middle grade, school and classroom instruction that focus on creative models that help all students achieve better results.

"New Jersey joined the Schools to Watch program so that we could highlight middle schools that make the extra effort to support sustained learning," Education Commissioner Lucille E. Davy said. "This initiative is one part of the department's focus on middle school education and improving student performance."

The following schools will be recognized at the March 19 State Board of Education meeting in Trenton: Mountain View Middle School, Mendham Borough, Morris County; Maurice River Elementary School, Maurice River, Cumberland County; and Ocean City Intermediate School, Ocean City, Cape May County.

Students and staff from the schools will also be recognized at a dinner at Kean University on Wednesday, March 5.

"Schools to Watch" was founded by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform in 1999. The National Forum is an alliance of more than 60 educators, researchers, and officers of national associations and foundations dedicated to improving schools for young adolescents across the country. New Jersey joined last year and is one of 16 states in the nation that participates.

The New Jersey Schools to Watch program is a partnership between the department and the New Jersey Consortium for Middle Schools at Kean University. This year, a panel of education experts reviewed 36 applicants before narrowing the pool to eight finalists and finally to the three schools announced today.

The schools were judged on three criteria:

- Academic excellence: Do programs challenge all students?
- Developmental responsiveness: Are the programs sensitive to the unique needs and developmental challenges of early adolescence?
- Socially equal: Do the programs provide every student with high quality teachers and resources? Do they provide fair opportunities for all students?

Background on the schools:

Mountain View Middle School, Mendham Borough/Morris County

Grades 5-8

Enrollment: 302

Mountain View Middle School embraces the work of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. The school also participated in the New Jersey STAMP pilot in world languages.

To ensure that all students succeed, grade level teams meet daily to share insights and concerns about students and to plan relevant and engaging lessons. The school uses a modified block schedule with class periods of 58 minutes for core subjects and 50 minutes for related arts.

At the end of every day, students have a 30 minute "EEE" (Elective, Enrichment, and Extended Learning) period. During this time, students participate in more than 70 different opportunities to explore interests not traditionally addressed in the curriculum. Students can also use this time to seek extra help and on Fridays, everyone uses the time to "Drop Everything and Read."

Finally, Mountain View recognizes the special needs of young adolescents through character education and the

implementation of the Friends of Rachel Program, a peer program that focuses on kindness and compassion.

Maurice River Elementary School, Maurice River/Cumberland County

Configuration: Preschool to grade 8

Enrollment: 392

After fourth grade, students at Maurice River are organized on academic teams for two years in grades five/six and seven/eight. Known as looping, this practice has permitted students to develop a sense of community separate from the younger children housed in the same school.

Teachers on teams have a common planning period and lunch period each day to coordinate instruction and address the needs of students. Shared leadership is a key element of the school; school personnel often wear many different hats in their role as educators.

Students can clearly articulate the use of writing rubrics and create blogs to critique the writing of others. The school is also implementing the use of Cornell Notetaking in many classes as a connection to the AVID program at Millville High School, and uses the Junior Great Books program in literacy classes. The school's literacy coach, this year's Cumberland County Teacher of the Year, provides in-house professional development to ensure articulation across grade levels.

Ocean City Intermediate School, Ocean City/Cape May County

Configuration: Grades 4-8

Enrollment: 412

The Ocean City Intermediate School has an acceleration program where students with disabilities and underperforming students preview the upcoming vocabulary and essential content of a subject in a small group setting before getting the material in the regular education classroom. Flexible mathematics instruction allows many students in grades six to eight to take Algebra I in grade seven and Geometry in grade eight.

The school day is organized into 26 modules of fifteen minutes, allowing for 90 minute blocks (six mods) for both language arts literacy and mathematics and three mods for social studies and science. Teams discuss how to use the modular time to allow for extended learning, labs, and special projects.

CORE classes, including health and physical education and the arts, meet for one hour on alternate days. Ocean City has strong ties to the community, entering into partnerships with the town library and the community center where students take swimming as part of physical education.

Finally, while offering a unique array of afterschool activities, the "PB&J Club" is by far the most popular. In this service club, students have prepared more than 3,000 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for a local homeless people.

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