



NJDOE News

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**DOE Recognizes Four Schools to Watch®  
In Burlington, Camden, Essex and Hunterdon Counties**

Education Commissioner Lucille E. Davy today announced that four middle grades schools have been selected as the 2008-09 New Jersey Schools to Watch® in recognition of their commitment to academic excellence and student development.

Schools containing grades 6, 7, and/or 8 are eligible for this program, which identifies schools that do an outstanding job of addressing student performance without sacrificing other aspects of student growth. The schools are showcased statewide and nationally to promote their approaches to instruction, parent and community involvement, and teacher professional development.

“Early adolescence is a critical time in a student’s development both personally and academically; therefore, it is appropriate that we recognize schools that do an exemplary job of educating the whole child,” said Commissioner Davy. “These four schools serve as shining examples of the learning and progress that can take place when school leaders are creative and proactive in their approach to teaching and learning.”

This year’s New Jersey Schools to Watch are:

- Medford Memorial Middle School, Medford Township, Burlington County
- Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle School, Berlin Township, Camden County
- Roosevelt Middle School, West Orange, Essex County
- Holland Township School, Holland Township, Hunterdon County

The schools will be recognized at the April 15 State Board of Education meeting, the New Jersey Middle Schools Association Conference on March 27, and the annual Schools to Watch conference June 25 to 27 in Washington, D.C.

New Jersey Schools to Watch is a partnership between the Department of Education (DOE) and the New Jersey Consortium for Middle Schools at Kean University. New Jersey is one of 18 states that participates in Schools to Watch, which is sponsored by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. New Jersey joined in 2007.

Schools must apply for the New Jersey Schools to Watch program. Participating schools use national criteria to engage in self-assessment and reflection with an emphasis on strong academics, **respect for student needs and interests, equal access to a high-quality education**, and sustained **support for school improvement**. Schools are subject to an intensive review and full-day site visit, culminating in recognition of their strengths and recommendations for improvement.

“The learning that takes place in grades 6, 7 and 8 is an essential component of the preschool through high school continuum,” said Commissioner Davy. “As Governor Corzine continues his commitment to education through increased opportunities in early childhood education and as we increase the rigor of our high school academics, it is even more important that we have high-quality middle level programs like the ones in the schools announced today.”

Schools to Watch are designated for three years and must continue to show improvement and a commitment to the needs of middle level students. Each school must agree to host visitations and share best practices at state conferences and workshops.

This year, DOE and the Consortium have made a commitment to provide additional support to the schools not selected as Schools to Watch.

All schools that applied for the designation will become part of a professional development program which will provide on-site consultation, technical assistance, and other professional learning opportunities to help schools

address areas that do not yet meet the Schools to Watch criteria. Some schools that meet many but not all of the criteria will be designated "Aspiring Schools to Watch."

In 2007-2008, New Jersey designated three schools: Mountain View Middle School in Mendham (Morris County), Maurice River Elementary School (Cumberland County) and Ocean City Intermediate School (Cape May County).

Applications for the 2009-10 Schools to Watch program will be available on DOE's Web site beginning in May and will be due in October. For more information on the Schools to Watch program, please go to:  
<http://www.nj.gov/education/archive/dsis/stw/>.

### **Background Information on 2008-09 New Jersey Schools to Watch**

#### **Medford Memorial Middle School, Medford Township, Burlington County**

**Configuration: Grades 7 and 8**

**Enrollment: 692**

Medford Memorial Middle School's high-level student work and its use of technology is evident across content areas with many interdisciplinary connections. The school uses a pre-teaching model to assist struggling students.

The school also has a daily 40-minute enrichment period for students to explore interests and challenging courses such as environmental science, creative writing, forensic science, TV technology, public speaking, computer animation, music and Challenge Spanish. High school credit is available for algebra and Spanish.

The school's advisory council, which includes school staff and parents, meets on a regular basis to discuss programs and initiatives. The school uses the online program Genesis to keep parents informed and has a homework hotline. The principal and vice principal also communicate with parents using video messages.

Faculty meetings are teacher-led and focus on professional development, not housekeeping issues. The school has a three-year template for faculty learning focused on the Understanding by Design framework and differentiated instruction.

#### **Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle School, Berlin Township, Camden County**

**Configuration: Grades 5 to 8**

**Enrollment: 236**

During the last three years, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle School has engaged in significant reform. The principal introduced Resnick's *Principles of Learning* and incorporated it into professional evaluations. Teams write yearly grade-level missions and covenant statements about how they work together. The school has used a systematic approach to curriculum development using the Understanding by Design model, the Standards Clarification Project and interdisciplinary instruction as guiding principles.

Essential questions and rubrics are visible in most classrooms. All students have 80 minutes of math and language arts literacy each day with part of that time dedicated to Accelerated Reader and Accelerated Math. The school uses the STAR Reading and Math tests to benchmark student progress and individualize instruction. The school also engages students in learning through the use of technology, including AlphaSmart Neo IIs, responders, Smart Boards and wireless slates, as part of regular classroom activities.

Students are challenged to think about how they learn. Every student engages in the Let Me Learn (LML) Learning Connections Inventory, which measures the degree to which students use one of four interactive learning processes. The process enables teachers to focus on a student's learning behaviors, and improves their ability to differentiate instruction and provide support when combined with benchmark assessments.

The school uses a flexible schedule. Science and social studies have a daily 80-minute block that can be rearranged to facilitate projects and labs. It also uses a flexible morning or afternoon schedule to hold awards celebrations to recognize students for academics, behavior, character, athletics, music, and technology skills.

#### **Roosevelt Middle School, West Orange, Essex County**

**Configuration: Grades 7 and 8**

**Enrollment: 469**

Roosevelt Middle Schools has used the Schools to Watch process to increase rigor, refocus its energy, sustain a student-centered approach, and improve conversations about data, instruction, and students.

The school is a caring and supportive environment where students feel connected to the school. Roosevelt students know that teachers care about their well-being beyond the school day. The school's counselors and the school resource officer work with the advisory program to address issues such as bullying and harassment, character development, and other adolescent issues such as alcohol and substance abuse.

In response to concerns about mathematics achievement, all students now receive instruction in either pre-algebra or algebra by the end of grade 8. Teachers emphasize and use higher-order questioning and students are encouraged to address and resolve issues, questions, and problems. The school created monthly themes to drive interdisciplinary connections and instruction.

As part of the Schools To Watch process, data analysis revealed that one student subgroup was being suspended at a higher rate than other subgroups. The school obtained assistance from a community organization to provide mentors and role models for identified students. The mentorship program is in its early stages but shows promise of reducing the number of student suspensions.

**Holland Township School, Holland Township, Hunterdon County**  
**Configuration: Kindergarten to Grade 8**  
**Enrollment: 670 (K-8); 237 (Grades 6-8)**

The school uses theme-based integrated units that foster continuity of learning across disciplines. An alternate schedule allows teachers to plan integrated units and create extended learning blocks. For example, students in grade 8 designed an eco-friendly amusement park using technology, math, science, social studies and language arts skills. In grade 6, teachers focused on civil and human rights as a coordinating theme.

The school implemented student-led conferences. Students assemble work samples and discuss goals, work product, and behavior with teachers and parents. The school provides students with a checklist and goal planner for use during the conference.

Students in grades 7 and 8 serve as peer helpers to assist younger students by acting as buddies for strength, support, and guidance. For example, the science club -- Connecting Reading through the Outdoor World (CROW) -- used a Toyota mini-grant to design elementary-grade-level backpacks that can be used by families to investigate science in their own backyards.

The school was recognized by the New Jersey Association of Student Councils with a Community Smile Award, amassing more than 6,600 hours of community service. Students support a local food bank, participate in an anti-smoking youth project called REBEL, and collect donations for a number of local and national charities. Students also sponsor an annual luncheon for senior citizens and veterans.