

## **Five Schools named Schools to Watch**

The Kentucky Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform has named five middle-level schools 2011 Kentucky Schools to Watch. The schools are Belfry Middle School (Pike County), Benton Middle School (Marshall County), Monroe County Middle School (Monroe County), North Middle School (Henderson County), and Olmstead School (Logan County).

The Schools to Watch program, currently in 19 states, is part of an initiative developed and guided by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. Schools are recognized for a three-year period; then, at the end of three years a school must reapply. For the current three-year period, there are about 300 schools that have been designated as Schools to Watch. Fourteen schools in Kentucky are designated.

The Kentucky Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform selected each school for its academic excellence, its responsiveness to the needs and interests of young adolescents, and for being committed to helping all students achieve at high levels. In addition, each school has strong leadership, teachers who work together to improve curriculum and instruction, and an organization that sustains continuous improvement and achievement.

“These schools are true communities of learning,” said Fran Salyers, Kentucky Schools to Watch program director.

Schools submitted a written application showing how they met 37 criteria for excellence developed by the National Forum. State teams visited schools that appeared to meet the criteria to observe classrooms and interview administrators, teachers, students and parents. The teams

also looked at achievement data, suspension rates, quality of lessons, student work and other school documents.

Launched in 1999, the Schools to Watch program identifies middle-grades schools across the country that are meeting or exceeding the criteria developed by the National Forum. In 2002, the National Forum began working with states to replicate the Schools to Watch program as a way to introduce the Forum's criteria for high-performance and to identify middle-grades schools that meet or exceed that criteria.

"We are pleased that our Schools to Watch program has shown that schools can meet high academic expectations while preserving a commitment to healthy development and equity for all students," said Deborah Kasak, National Forum executive director. "These Schools to Watch are indeed special. They make education so exciting that students and teachers don't want to miss a day! These schools have proven that it is possible to overcome barriers to achieving excellence, and any middle-level school in any state can truly learn from their examples."

Members of different education organizations in each participating state have received training and support from the Forum to implement their Schools to Watch programs. In Kentucky, the lead organization is the Kentucky Center for Middle School Academic Achievement (CMSAA), housed at Eastern Kentucky University. The other partners are the Kentucky Department of Education, Kentucky Forum, and Kentucky Middle School Association.

MORE INFO ...

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