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NUC JOJ ZNK LGXSKX LOD ZNK

NURK OT NOY PKGTY ?

COZN G IGHHGMK VGZIN.

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Fruitport Middle School receives national honor for high performance

By FAN staff

After four years of hard work and multiple evaluations by middle level school experts, Fruitport Middle School has been awarded the high honor of Michigan School to Watch for 2012! Fruitport now is one of 10 Michigan schools, and one of less than 300 nation-wide, to receive this prestigious designation demonstrating academic excellence, social equity, developmental responsiveness and effective organizational structure. "These schools are exemplars of middle level education in the state, and join nine other schools that have been designated in (Michigan)," said Dr. Nic Cooper, the state director of the Schools to Watch Program.

On April 19, Dr. Cooper attended the award ceremony at the middle school to present the coveted Schools to Watch banner to the Principal Team, staff, school board members, Superintendent Bob Szymoniak, guests and the entire student body.

Selection is based on a written application that required schools to show how they met a rigorous 37-point criteria developed by the Forum. Over time, schools that appeared to meet the criteria were then visited by state teams who observed classrooms, interviewed administrators, teachers, students, and parents, and looked at achievement data, suspension rates, quality of lessons, and student work. Schools are recognized for a three-year period, and at the end of three years must repeat the process in order to be re-designated.

In media advisories, Dr. Cooper summarized the award: "Led by principal Ellen Beal, Fruitport Middle School stands out as a school that has worked

- 46th percentile in three years!
- 75% of students demonstrated math proficiency (up from 66%) and
- 88% of students demonstrated reading proficiency (up from 70%)
- Parent surveys consistently reflected high confidence in the middle schools' ability to educate all students
- Significant reduction in discipline referrals and out of school suspensions.

How they did it:

Hearing that board members, parents and former superintendent Nick Ceglarek wanted to improve academic rigor, Ellen worked with her



Dr. Nic Cooper with Middle School Principal Ellen Beal, CMU Instructional Coach Dave Nizinski and Middle School Assistant Principal Jamie Venema.

assistant principal, Jamie Venema, and the teaching staff to examine the factors contributing to student success, as well as the barriers to student success. In 2008, Beal contacted Schools to Watch officials asking them to visit Fruitport to assess the middle school and help establish a baseline to work from as they engineered plans to enhance student achievement. Beal and Venema also methodically used weekly professional development time, with guidance from a Central Michigan University team, to create physical, emotional and content-rich conditions for student success.

The Schools to Watch Program is a national recognition developed by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform and given to middle schools throughout the country that substantially meet a set of criteria consistent with the latest research on middle level education. Launched in 1999, Schools to Watch began as a national program to identify middle-grades schools across the country that were meeting or exceeding 37 criteria developed by the Forum. The Forum website, www.schoolstowatch.org, features detailed information about the selection criteria.

A school recognized as a School to Watch retains that designation for three years before it must re-apply for designation and demonstrate continued growth. Nationally, 19 states participate and, with the addition of this year's designees, 334 schools have been designated nationwide.

The other Michigan schools receiving the award this year include Boyd W. Arthurs Middle School in Trenton and New Buffalo Middle School in New Buffalo.

The school being re-designated this year is Ludington Magnet Middle School, Detroit.

Dr. Deborah Kasak, National Forum executive director, expressed her appreciation for the new designees by saying, "We are pleased that our Schools to Watch program has shown that schools can meet high academic expectations while preserving a commitment of healthy development and equity for all students. *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."

The National Forum sponsors the Schools to Watch program along with the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE/ formerly NMSA), the National Association for Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Learning Forward, ASCD, and State Schools to Watch affiliates.

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform is an alliance of 65 educators, researchers, national associations, and officers of professional organizations and foundations dedicated to improving education in the middle grades.



Dr. Nic Cooper, state director, Michigan Schools to Watch, announced the award in April with sign holders Antonio Flores, Cody Rabach and Eliza Johnson and Middle School Principal Ellen Beal.

hard to excel and has embraced school improvement with tenacity. The staff and administration heard feedback with a focus on improving their practice and becoming one of the best middle schools in the state. They have developed a collaborative culture that is energizing and supportive. There is little doubt about their concern about the students and their desire to put their needs first. Likewise, there is little doubt that they don't see this as a terminal process, one with an end, but a growth process that is ongoing and leads to continually improved practice and outcomes over time.

Prior to our visit, they noted their progress on previous reflective questions and stated where they believed they needed to go in the future. It is this dedication that assures us that they will continue to grow and will provide a model for excellence for other middle schools around the state...

Linda Hopping, chair of the National Forum's Schools to Watch oversight committee, stated, "these schools demonstrate that high-performing middle grades schools have a clear focus on academic growth and achievement. They also recognize the importance of meeting the needs of all of their students and ensuring that each and every child has access to a rigorous, high-quality education. We are proud to have these schools serve as models from which others can learn."

- Consider a few examples of improvement:
- In 2008, Fruitport Middle was ranked only in the 22nd percentile in the Michigan Public School Top to Bottom rankings of all schools statewide.
 - They were scoring 66 percent proficient on the 8th grade math, 70% proficient on the 8th grade reading tests.

By 2012:

- Fruitport Middle School went from the 22nd percentile on the state Top to Bottom rankings to