



NEWS RELEASE

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First Diamond School in Arkansas Honored Again

ROGERS, ARK. -- Kirksey Middle School, the first school in the state to be selected as a Diamond School to Watch, was again chosen to be among a select group of schools designated as model schools in the state and in the nation.

The honor is part of a program started by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. The National Forum identifies high-performing middle schools and highlights their achievements so other schools might benefit from their example. Founded in 1997, the National Forum is an alliance of more than 81 national associations, foundations, researchers, and educators committed to promoting the academic performance and healthy development of middle-school students.

A nationally trained team of evaluators with extensive expertise in middle level education visited Kirksey to review the school's status, observe the school in action, and examine school documents. They also had unlimited access to parents, students and teachers as they conducted interviews to learn more about the school. After the visit, the evaluation team unanimously agreed that Kirksey Middle School fits the definition of being a school that is conscientiously moving to fully meet the nationally endorsed criteria of high performing middle schools and that it has made marked progress in meeting all the criteria, including measurable gains in student achievement of all students over time.

"It's very rewarding to receive such state and national recognition when you see day in and day out how hard the teachers work and how much they care," said Kirksey principal Roger Hill.

The criteria of the Schools to Watch program focus on three areas: academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and social equity. Among the more than 37 areas reviewed, evaluators looked at whether all students are expected to meet high academic standards and whether the curriculum is rigorous and non-repetitive. They also looked at whether teachers offered students challenging and engaging activities. In the area of developmental responsiveness, evaluators analyzed whether the school creates a personalized environment and groups students and adults in small learning communities that feature stable, close, and mutually respectful relationships. They considered whether teachers foster curiosity and creativity and whether students have the opportunities to pose questions, reflect on their experiences and participate in decisions. In the area of social equity, the evaluators looked at

whether the school welcomes and encourages the active participation of all of its families and whether the school values diversity, civility, service and democratic citizenship.

“The culture of the school is very positive and constructive,” Hill said. “The students like going to school at Kirksey, and the parents are very satisfied. There is a culture that makes this school work.”

After having demonstrated the school excels in using these best practices for educating middle school students, Kirksey is one of 79 schools across the nation that are designated Schools to Watch. Kirksey Middle School will be nationally recognized in Washington, D.C., in June.

For more information:

- about Kirksey Middle School, contact Dr. Roger Hill, KMS principal, at 479-631-3625
- about the Rogers Public Schools, call Ashley Kelley, district communications coordinator, at 479-636-3910.
- about Arkansas Diamond Schools to Watch, contact Charles Green, state program co-chair and executive director of the Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education, at 501-490-1825.
- about the National Forum for Middle School and Schools to Watch, visit www.schoolstowatch.org.

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