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Mandan, Beach and Mohall Schools Receive ‘Blue Ribbon’ Honors

BISMARCK, N.D., Sept. 23, 2024 – North Dakota School Superintendent Kirsten Baesler on Monday congratulated schools in Beach, Mandan and Mohall for earning the U.S. Department of Education’s prestigious “Blue Ribbon School” award.

All three schools were chosen because of their exemplary academic performance, the Education Department said. They are Lincoln Elementary, in Beach; Red Trail Elementary, in Mandan; and the Mohall-Lansford-Sherwood K-12 public school in Mohall.

“Today we celebrate these examples of excellence in North Dakota education,” Baesler said. “Blue Ribbon schools are rightly considered among the best in our country, and every North Dakotan should take pride in their achievements.”

It is the second Blue Ribbon honor for Beach’s Lincoln Elementary, which last won the award in 2008. It is the seventh North Dakota school to be honored twice. The school has 155 students in grades prekindergarten through 6.

Lincoln Principal Lynn Swanson called the award “a huge honor and a testament to how hard our teachers and staff work. I’m super excited for them, the kids and our families and community.” She expects at least one root beer float celebration in the future, she said.

Swanson was invited to apply for Blue Ribbon recognition by an email from the Department of Public Instruction in February, and she laughingly admitted she thought the message was spam. “I was in shock. It was February, getting toward the end of the school year, and things were kind of overwhelming, as they always are this time of year for schools,” she said. However, a phone call with NDDPI confirmed the message’s authenticity.

Doing the paperwork needed for the Blue Ribbon Schools application was extensive and time-consuming, said Swanson, who estimated she spent two weeks on the task. But it was useful and encouraging to be reminded of Lincoln Elementary’s accomplishments, she said.

“To come up with all of that material causes you to look back at how much we do, and helps you to remember the positive things,” she said. “It was nice to remember all of the good things we do.”

(Continued)

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Page 2

Dave Steckler, principal of Red Trail Elementary, said the Blue Ribbon designation highlighted the work of “our school community, which consists of students, staff, and parents. All of us working together promotes a model of doing what is best for each child, and when that occurs, accomplishments happen.”

“I’m just proud of our staff, students, and families,” Steckler said. “They have supported what we do, and we wouldn’t be at this level without them embracing our daily systems and expectations for our students and staff.”

[Red Trail Elementary](#) opened in 2014. It now has 442 students in grades prekindergarten through five.

Steckler said the school planned a celebration with a student assembly on Monday, and the recognition will continue with students and their families throughout the school year.

Keith Campbell, superintendent of the Mohall-Lansford-Sherwood district in northwestern North Dakota, praised the Blue Ribbon application work of principals Janet Asheim and Heidi Newgard and the school’s teachers and leadership teams.

To be eligible for Blue Ribbon consideration, each school must complete a comprehensive application that includes information about its student test results, curriculum, instruction, professional development, leadership, and family and community engagement. Applications require a significant amount of time and research.

“We’re proud of what we’re doing, we’re proud of the work our students and our teachers have been doing,” Campbell said. “This is the crown on the top of your cap. We’re making progress and we are proud of it.”

Mohall-Lansford-Sherwood operates a single school building in Mohall, with about 320 students in grades kindergarten through 12.

“We’ve done a lot of work since (the COVID-19 pandemic) especially to put our students in the best position to move forward at a pretty rapid rate,” Campbell said. “The journey we were on, we’ve done much, but we still have a lot of room to grow.”

The Blue Ribbon School program recognizes public and private schools where students have had exceptional academic achievement or recorded substantial improvements in their learning. The Beach, Mandan and Mohall schools were all honored as exemplary high-performing schools.

Nationally, the Education Department recognized 356 Blue Ribbon schools on Monday, including the Beach, Mandan and Mohall schools in North Dakota. There are more than 98,000 K-12 public schools in the United States, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

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