

Press Release for 2004 Colorado Trailblazer Schools To Watch Program

The Colorado Association of Middle Level Education (CAMLE), the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, and HealthONE have announced the first annual 2004 Colorado Trailblazer Schools To Watch (CTSTW) awards. Casey Middle School, Boulder Valley School District, and Prairie Middle School, Cherry Creek School District, are the recipients of this award that showcases their progress in the areas of academic excellence, social equity, developmental responsiveness, and organizational structures for middle schools.

Casey Middle School is a school of 335 students in grades six through eight. They face unique challenges with 48% of its student population being second language learners and over half of its families living below the poverty level. The school's diversity is reflected in the faces of many of its staff members, with a significant number of staff being fluent Spanish speakers. Standardized scores from the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) reveal significant progress in student achievement over the past three years. Notable programs include a bilingual immersion program for both English and Spanish speaking students, collaborative staff development, community outreach programs (after school activities, a community liaison, bilingual parent meetings and publications), and partnerships with the University of Colorado. The staff of Casey is led by Dr. Ellen Miller-Brown.

Prairie Middle School is a school of 1628 students in grades six through eight with a mobility rate of almost 30%. Located in Aurora, it faces tremendous challenges given its large and diverse population. Approximately 43% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Prairie's achievement scores have increased significantly this past year earning the school an "improvement rating" on the School Accountability Report (SAR). They are working on collaborative staff development and analyzing data to continue improvement. One of Prairie's commendable programs is the significant change in culture and climate indicated by children introducing themselves and welcoming strangers in the hallways. Parent and community volunteers provide "Red Cross" hall monitoring, helping students get to class on time and being their cheerleaders. Dr. Kandy Cassaday leads the faculty at Prairie.

These schools have put processes in place that have them on a trajectory to high performance. Their selection consisted of a rigorous application process and a team site visit using the criteria from the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, an alliance of leaders committed to improving education for young adolescents. These culturally diverse schools have shown that middle school concepts can be implemented and students' developmental needs met while increasing student achievement. They are very responsive to the needs of this unique age group and their parents.

Celebrations will occur at both schools in early April. At that time, through funds provided by HealthONE, the school community will be awarded a banner to display and a check for \$5000 for dissemination of best practices and continued school improvement. These schools will be opening their doors to visitors from other schools around the state to learn from their successes. The CAMLE organization will be honoring both schools at their yearly conference in October 2004.

For more information about the Schools to Watch program in Colorado, contact Copper Stoll, Executive Director of CAMLE at 720-554-5180.