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EXCEPTIONAL MIDDLE-GRADES 'SCHOOLS TO WATCH' ANNOUNCED

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Eastlake, CO – Seven exemplary middle-grades schools across the state of Colorado have been named “Schools to Watch” as part of a recognition program developed by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. Having established partnerships with education leaders in 19 states, the Forum and the Colorado Association of Middle Level Education announced the names of schools that meet its strict criteria. **[list of schools below]**

Each school was selected by state leaders for its academic excellence, its responsiveness to the needs and interests of young adolescents, and its commitment 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 a commitment to assessment and accountability to bring about continuous improvement.

Diane Lauer, State Coordinator of the Colorado Schools to Watch program stated, “We congratulate these schools for being places that created exceptional learning for adolescents. These schools demonstrate that high-performance is a result of intentional focus on individual student academic growth and achievement. These schools recognize the importance of meeting the needs of all of their students and ensuring that every child has access to a rigorous, high-quality education.”

Selection is based on a written application that required schools to show how they met criteria developed by the Forum. Schools that appeared to meet the criteria were then visited by state teams who observed classrooms, interviewed administrators, teachers, 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. Of the seven schools identified this year, six are first time designees and one is a redesignation.

The schools vary in size from several hundred to nearly a thousand students and represent urban, suburban, and rural communities. Each will be honored in Washington, DC at the National Schools to Watch Conference in June, 2011.

"We are pleased that our Schools to Watch program have shown that schools can meet high academic expectations while preserving a commitment to healthy development and equity for all students," said Dr. Deborah Kasak, 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," Kasak said.

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 developed a web site (<http://www.schoolstowatch.org>) that features online tours of schools, as well as detailed information about the selection criteria used in the recognition program.

Todd Wynne
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Diane Lauer
Schools to Watch
Coordinator

In 2002, the 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 identify middle grades schools that meet or exceed that criteria. Different education organizations have taken the lead in each state, but all have received training and support from the Forum to implement their Schools to Watch programs. The lead state organization in Colorado is the Colorado Association of Middle Level Education (www.camle.com) which is the state affiliate of the National Middle School Association (www.nmsa.org). CAMLE will be hosting their annual Colorado Schools to Watch conference in September, 2011 where each School to Watch will share replicable practices of success. Other schools that are demonstrating evidence-based practices will be invited to showcase their programs at this gathering.

Nineteen states are currently involved in the program and the addition of these 6 schools raises the total number of Schools to Watch to over 300 nationwide.

The National Forum sponsors the Schools to Watch state program with the support of members, the National Association for Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Middle School Association, the National Staff Development Council, and the State Schools to Watch programs.

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. (www.mgforum.org)

New Colorado Trailblazer Schools to Watch

- Altona Middle School – Longmont (St. Vrain)
- Gypsum Creek Middle School – Gypsum (Eagle County)
- Hotchkiss K-8 School – Hotchkiss (Delta County)
- Jenkins Middle School – Colorado Springs (District 11)
- Powell Middle School – Littleton (Littleton)
- Steamboat Springs Middle School – Steamboat Springs (Steamboat)

Redesignated Colorado Trailblazer Schools to Watch

- Russell Middle School – Colorado Springs (District 11)