SANTA FE – Two New Mexico schools have been named National ESEA Distinguished Schools after being nominated by the state Public Education Department.

The honor goes to:

Wagon Mound Elementary School, serving 43 students in the Wagon Mound Public School District, and

John F. Kennedy Middle School, serving 715 students in Gallup-McKinley County Schools.

“These two schools exemplify the important work in education that is taking place in our state as we continue to close the achievement gap,” Public Education Secretary Kurt Steinhaus said. “We congratulate the efforts of students, educators and families in these Gallup and Wagon Mound communities. They spotlight excellence in academic growth and exceptional support of special populations.”

Wagon Mound Elementary School is being recognized for exceptional student performance and academic growth for two or more consecutive years and John F. Kennedy Middle School is acknowledged for excellence in serving special populations of students, especially Native Americans.

ESEA stands for the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act, federal legislation passed in the 1960s as part of the War on Poverty to close skill gaps in reading, writing and math. Since 1996, the National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators has been selecting examples of superior, federally-funded school programs for national recognition.

Title I of the act was originally intended to compensate for the considerable educational deprivations associated with child poverty. Both distinguished New Mexico schools are Title I schools, which means they receive federal funding because they serve large numbers of students from economically disadvantaged homes.

“As a Wagon Mound alumni, it really makes me happy to see my students going in the right direction, and making leaps and bounds,” Wagon Mound Schools Superintendent Anita Romero said. “I am hopeful that my staff is setting the foundation needed for a brighter future for all our students. I am very proud of all of them and can’t wait to let everyone know of their achievements.”

She explained that school administration and staff decided to break up students by test scores, not grade level. They were placed in two-hour reading and math blocks, incorporating science and social studies into these time frames to provide well-rounded academic experiences.

The New Mexico schools are among approximately 100 schools throughout the country that will receive national recognition for exceptional student achievement at the 2023 ESEA National Conference Feb. 1-4 in Indianapolis and online.

Selected schools demonstrate a wide array of strengths, including team approaches to teaching and learning, focused professional development opportunities for staff, individualized programs for student success and strong partnerships between the school, parents and the community.

State education agencies nominate schools for the title under three categories:

Exceptional student performance for two consecutive years

Closing the achievement gap between student groups

Excellence in serving special populations of students

Staff Reports