

Lincoln Elementary celebrates Blue Ribbon Schools award

Written by Staff Reports

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Award recognizes schools for overall academic excellence

Lincoln Elementary, a school of the Gallup-McKinley County Schools district, has received the prestigious National Blue-Ribbon Award from the U.S. Department of Education. This year 353 schools were chosen nationwide, with only three of those schools being from New Mexico. The other two schools were Lydia Rippey Elementary in Aztec and Monte Vista Elementary in Albuquerque.

The U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon School Program recognizes public and private schools for their overall academic excellence or their progress in closing achievement gaps. According to the department, over 10,000 Blue Ribbon School Awards have been awarded to over 9,000 schools, and the award "affirms the hard work of students, educators, families, and communities in creating safe and welcoming schools where students master challenging and engaging content."

This is the first time in the 40 years that the award has been given that any school from GMCS has been chosen.

"Winning the Blue-Ribbon award is an exceptional achievement for our district, especially for Lincoln Elementary. Earning this award took hard work on many levels, and between many groups of people," GMCS's Superintendent Mike Hyatt said in a press release published Sept.

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19. “Within the last few years our district has put several initiatives into place to greatly improve the quality of the education that our students receive. The teachers at Lincoln Elementary have fully utilized the tools, resources, and support available to them to ensure their students’ success.”

The official announcement of the award arrived Aug. 19, but the students and staff at Lincoln Elementary have been anxiously awaiting the good news for months. The process to be considered for this award started last school year with former principal Kelley Fitzmaurice.

Fitzmaurice described the experience of going through the selection process.

“I spent about 50 pages of that application just bragging about the teachers. It was over 40 hours of work to submit all of the information that they were wanting,” he said.

Fitzmaurice, with the help of his staff and district leadership, submitted extensive and detailed documentation describing their school culture and philosophy, curriculum, assessments, instructional practices, professional development, leadership structures, and parent and community involvement. When they submitted their final school data to the U.S. Department of Education, they were hopeful they would get the award, but they also did not want to get their hopes too high.

The school celebrated this major accomplishment Sept. 22 with an outdoor ceremony. It was also recognized during the Sept. 25 school board meeting. Some of the schools’ students spoke about what it meant to them to have their school win this award.

“I like Lincoln because the staff are kind and they help me learn,” Eli Lovato, a Lincoln Elementary student, said. “I’m proud to be at a Blue Ribbon school. I want to thank all my teachers and Gallup-McKinley County Schools.”

Dr. Arsenio Romero, Secretary of the Public Education Department, praised the three schools for being paragons for other schools to follow.

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“We could not be prouder of our Blue Ribbon Schools this year and the success of each school is rooted in their ties to community, strong leadership and resilience,” Romero said. “Each school offers us something to be inspired by and something to aspire to. Congratulations to the students, staff and communities that make Lincoln Elementary, Lydia Rippey Elementary, and Monte Vista Elementary such proud examples of excellence in education.”

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham also congratulated the winners.

“I want to congratulate these teachers, administrators, students, and their families on their hard work to achieve Blue Ribbon status,” said Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham. “This is what we can accomplish when we focus on supporting educators and creating classroom environments that make learning accessible for all students.”

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