

AVONWORTH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pittsburgh, PA - January 4, 2021 - Avonworth Middle School has been designated as a Don Eichhorn Schools to Watch 2021. This is the 4th time that Avonworth Middle School has been selected as a Don Eichhorn Schools to Watch (STW). The first designation for Avonworth Middle School was twelve years ago.

Avonworth Middle School joins 36 other Pennsylvania middle-grades schools previously recognized and still active in the STW process. The six re-designated schools will be recognized at the Pennsylvania Association for Middle-Level Educations Virtual State Conference on February 27 & 28, 2021. Depending on the status of schools in the spring, each of these schools will have a local celebration in either May or June of 2021 in their school. They will also be recognized nationally with all the other recognized STW schools across the country in Washington, DC, at the National Forum's National Schools to Watch Conference on June 24-26, 2021.

Avonworth Middle School Principal, Mr. Mike Hall, stated, "Being re-designated for the 4th time as a Schools to Watch school provides additional validation to our school's educational journey. Our programming changes over the past three years have been encouraging and meaningful. I am proud of the way our school continues to grow in its commitment to developmentally appropriate middle school practices. The whole school community is dedicated to doing what is best for students."

PA STW State leaders selected each school for its Academic Excellence, Developmental Responsiveness, Social Equity, and Organizational Structures and Processes. Also, 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. Bruise Vosburgh, PA State STW Director, stated, "We congratulate these schools for being places that do great things for all of their students. These schools demonstrate that high-performing middle grades schools are places that focus on academic growth and achievement. They are also places that recognize the importance of meeting all of their students' needs and ensure that every child has access to a challenging, high-quality education. In addition, each of these schools has successfully been able to provide quality education to their students either through a hybrid or total virtual model. 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.”

The Schools to Watch selection process is based on a written application that required schools to show how they met criteria developed by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. Schools that appeared to meet the criteria were then visited by state teams, which observed classrooms, interviewed administrators, teachers, students, and parents, and looked at achievement data, suspension rates, quality of lessons, and student work. With this being a Pandemic year with limited access to schools, each of these schools was visited virtually over a two-day period.

Schools are recognized for a three-year period, and at the end of three years, they must demonstrate progress on specific goals to be re-designated. Unlike the Blue Ribbon recognition program, “Schools to Watch” requires schools to identify strengths and focus on areas for continuous improvement; thus the three-year re-designation. The re-designation process is based on the school’s continued growth since their last STW recognition.

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 researched-based criteria developed by the National Forum. The Forum developed a website <https://www.middlegradesforum.org/> that features online tours of schools, as well as detailed information about the selection criteria used in the recognition program. There are now 17 states across the country, which have trained Schools to Watch State TEams, with more than 650 schools recognized across the country.

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform began as an alliance of 65 educators, researchers, national associations, and officers of professional organizations and foundations dedicated to improving education in the middle grades.

Information about the STW program can be found on the website for the National Forum. <https://www.middlegradesforum.org/schools-to-watch>

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