

The Morning News

Local News for Northwest Arkansas

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Two Springdale Schools Receive Honors

By [Rose Ann Pearce](#)
THE MORNING NEWS

SPRINGDALE -- Bands played and choirs sang Monday as J.O. Kelly and Helen Tyson middle schools students, teachers, administrators and community leaders accepted a new title.

The two Springdale schools and one in Cabot join Birch Kirksey Middle School in Rogers as the only four Arkansas Diamond Schools to Watch.

The Schools to Watch initiative is associated with the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. Schools are recognized for high performance as academically excellent, developmentally responsive and socially equitable, according to the organization's Web site. Arkansas is one of 16 states in the alliance.

"It doesn't get much better than this," said Superintendent Jim Rollins.

"This is the day to celebrate. This is all about you," Mona Briggs, a charter school superintendent, told students at Kelly and Tyson. Students and teachers were joined by about 175 guests at each school's celebration. Briggs is the co-director of the Arkansas Diamond Schools to Watch program.

Third District Rep. John Boozman, R-Rogers, presented students at each school a U.S. flag that had flown over the Capitol.

Gov. Mike Beebe sent his congratulations in a letter read by Diana Julian, deputy commissioner at the Arkansas Department of Education.

Springdale Mayor Jerre Van Hoose read a proclamation.

At Tyson, Briggs told students, "This is a powerful, powerful moment for this school and this community."

Accolades also included teachers and building administrators who are "the human face of reform ... they come early, stay late and do what it takes," Briggs said.

She predicted both schools will become models for other schools.

Julian said, in an interview as dignitaries and the media traveled between schools, there is still work to be done.

"A big gap still exists in many schools in the state," Julian said, adding Springdale schools are

exemplary for bringing together the community, teachers, parents and district and building administrators to build a strong learning environment.

"For all kids to learn and succeed, it's important to make every child have the same expectations and the same support system," Julian said.

For parents, Briggs said the recognition should stimulate "extreme confidence" that their children's potential is being met at the two schools whether they are gifted or have special needs.

Local and national education observers note national recognition for schools is important.

"Winning an honor like Schools to Watch spotlights our nation's best efforts for reform and most outstanding examples of education quality," said Jay Marino, chairman of the education committee for the American Society for Quality.

Coosa Middle School in Rome, Ga., was a U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon school in 2005. Principal Lisa Landrum said the recognition had a positive impact on that school's culture by improving the morale of faculty, students and community.

"The kids are still very proud," she said. The Georgia school is similar to those in Springdale with about 600 students in sixth, seventh and eighth grades. About 60 percent of the students qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

State Sen. Dave Bisbee, R-Rogers, said he was on the front line of education reform in the General Assembly after the historic 2004 Lakeview decision that led to numerous changes in the Arkansas education system.

Between the two hourlong programs at each school, Bisbee said he is glad to see standardized test scores slowing rising around the state. He views the improvement as a reward for the work that went into meeting the mandates in the Lakeview decision from the Arkansas Supreme Court. He predicted full results may not be fully known for a decade or longer.

AT A GLANCE

J.O. Kelly Middle School

Principal: Sara Ford

Address: 1879 E. Robinson Ave.

Year Opened: 1995

Mascot: Knights

School Colors: Blue and white

Enrollment: 864*

Poverty Rate: 67 percent**

Motto: Every day, every Knight college bound.

* As of Oct. 1, 2007

** The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

Helen Tyson Middle School

Principal: Susan Buchanan

Address: 3304 S. 40th St.

Year Opened: 1995

Mascot: Hornets

School Colors: Green and gold

Enrollment: 812*

Poverty Rate: 61 percent**

Motto: Helping to mold successful futures.

* As of Oct. 1, 2007

** The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price meals.

Source: Springdale School District