



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **OUTSTANDING PENNSYLVANIA MIDDLE SCHOOLS NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED**

Two Schools Identified by the  
National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform as Top Middle Schools

**Champagne-Urbana, IL** – Two exemplary Pennsylvania middle-grades schools have been identified as “Schools to Watch” as part of a recognition program developed by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. The following schools are part of a group of 47 schools across the country receiving this distinction:

- [Boyce Middle School](#)—Upper Saint Clair
- [Fort Couch Middle School](#)—Pittsburgh

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.

Dr. John Harrison, Chair of the National Forum’s Schools to Watch Committee stated, “These schools demonstrate that high-performing middle grades schools have a clear focus on academic growth and achievement. They also recognize the importance of meeting the needs of all of their students and ensuring that each and every child has access to a rigorous, high-quality education. We are proud to have these schools serve as models from which others can learn.”

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. Twelve of the 47 schools recognized have maintained or increased their levels of excellence and are being re-designated. The schools vary in size from several hundred to several thousand students and represent urban, suburban, and rural communities.

"We are pleased that our Schools to Watch program has 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 web site (<http://www.schoolstowatch.org>) features online tours of schools, as well as detailed information about the selection criteria used in the recognition program.

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 organizations are the Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education, the California League of Middle Schools, the Colorado Association of Middle Level Education, the Georgia Middle

School Association, the Association of Illinois Middle Schools, the Kentucky Center for Middle School Academic Achievement, the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, New Jersey Consortium for Middle Schools and New Jersey Department of Education, the New York State Middle School Association & New York State Department of Education, the North Carolina Middle School Association, the Ohio Department of Education, the Oregon Middle Level Association, the Pennsylvania Middle School Association, the South Carolina Middle School Association, the Utah Middle Level Association, and the Virginia Middle School Association. All are planning in-state recognition ceremonies. Sixteen states are currently involved in the program and the addition of these schools raises the total number of Schools to Watch to 164 nationwide.

The National Forum sponsors the Schools to Watch state program with the support of its members and the State Schools to Watch programs. Schools convene at the Schools to Watch Conference in the Washington, DC area June 19-21, 2008.

*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.*

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