

## **Meriden's Casimir Pulaski School Receives Award for Nutritional and Health Programs**

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MERIDEN — Faculty and staff at Casimir Pulaski School have more to celebrate this month than just students returning to classes after the school received an elite award for its nutritional and health programs from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

School officials were notified last month that Pulaski earned the gold award of distinction as part of the Healthier U.S. School Challenge — becoming one of only two schools in the nation to receive the honor. “It’s incredibly exciting,” said Food Services Director Susan Maffe. Pulaski and another school in Florida are the only schools to win since 2012.

“Of course I wanted to be first. I didn’t want to share it with another school, but that’s just the way I am,” Maffe said, laughing. “But it means a lot, and I’m extremely proud.”

In a letter to the school system, Acting Regional Administrator Kurt Messner wrote that the awards “are a way to recognize schools that have created healthier school environments through improvements in the quality of food while providing both nutrition and physical education to promote healthier lifestyles.” The letter continues, “You join a select group of only about seven percent of schools throughout America that are certified...”

Other Meriden schools and schools in Southington, Cheshire and Wallingford have won bronze levels of the award.

Maffe credited Pulaski’s winning the top award to the school’s extended-day schedule. Students at Pulaski, as well as John Barry and Roger Sherman schools, attend school for an additional 100 minutes per day.

Pulaski Principal Daniel Coffey said a big focus of that extra time has been health and nutrition. “We always try to do what’s right for our kids, and along with reading, writing, and arithmetic, that includes health. It’s a big piece that’s often overlooked by students and families,” Coffey said.

Strict standards of nutrition and physical activity have to be met to qualify for the gold award, including levels of participation in school breakfast and lunch programs.

Without the extra time and community programs that extended-day schools have, Maffe said, “Really no other school in the district was even eligible to apply for that level of award. As more schools move toward extended day, they’ll be able to get to that level, too.”

The award comes with \$2,000 — money Maffe says will be used to purchase additional television screens for schools. Nutritional information about school meals is displayed on the TVs.

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