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Commissioner Pryor honors Schools of Distinction

Best of the best recognized for highest performance, most improvement

(HARTFORD, CT)—Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor today recognized the Schools of Distinction from across the state, and the Department also announced a new competitive grant opportunity for those schools to share information on what works best for turning around school performance.

The second annual Schools of Distinction Recognition Breakfast honored 73 schools in three categories: those with the highest overall student performance, those whose students made the most progress, and those with the highest performing subgroups of students, such as students living in poverty, black and Hispanic students, students who are learning English, and students with disabilities.

“These schools honored today show us that great things are possible with the right mix of innovation, resources, and a belief in doing what’s right for our children,” Governor Dannel P. Malloy said. “This distinction is earned through the grit, talent, and passion of the schools’ teachers and leaders. We are proud of them for their accomplishments and look forward to seeing such successes replicated for students across the state.”

“Today we recognize schools that are excelling, those that are making significant progress, and those that are transitioning to higher levels of performance,” Commissioner Pryor said. “These schools have distinguished themselves as the best of the best, and we honor them today. We hold up their performance to highlight best practices and share innovative ideas to improve outcomes for all students and close our achievement gaps. Congratulations to all our Schools of Distinction for earning this honor.”

The Department identified this year’s Schools of Distinction using 2012–13 Connecticut Mastery Test and Connecticut Academic Performance Test data. To qualify, schools must score high enough to be placed in Connecticut’s top school classification categories and must have made significant progress in closing the achievement gap for the majority of historically low-performing student subgroups.

Turnaround Office Division Director Morgan Barth announced a grant opportunity next year for Schools of Distinction to receive up to \$50,000 and become a Spotlight School. Winning schools will be able to use half of the award as they see fit, and will use the other half to create tools and resources for sharing best practices with Connecticut’s turnaround schools.

The breakfast featured a presentation by Clark Lane Middle School in Waterford, named a School of Distinction two years in a row, which shared information about one of the methods it has used to improve student achievement. Although Clark Lane’s student body contains a significant number of students in poverty, it was cited among the schools with the highest overall performance and achieved an even higher level of excellence. School representatives highlighted their innovative work around teacher evaluation as one of the reasons for their school’s success.

The Department also paid special recognition to three schools that made the most progress in improving their performance: Cherry Brook Primary School in Canton, Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication in New London, and Northeast Elementary School in Vernon. Cherry Brook was also cited in the highest overall performance category.

Connecticut recognizes Schools of Distinction as part of its school rating and accountability system, which the U.S. Department of Education approved in 2012 as part of the state's request for flexibility in meeting certain portions of the federal No Child Left Behind act.

A complete [list](#) of this year's Schools of Distinction is available on the Department's website.

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