



Colorado Association of Middle Level Education
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EXCEPTIONAL MIDDLE-GRADES 'SCHOOLS TO WATCH' ANNOUNCED

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Loveland, CO – Polaris Expeditionary Learning School has been recognized as a 2016 Colorado Trailblazer Schools to Watch. The Colorado Association of Middle Level Education recognizes Polaris for challenging students to use their minds well, being sensitive to the unique developmental needs of early adolescence and providing every student with a high-quality learning experience. Polaris is one of 100+ schools that will be recognized nationwide at the National Schools to Watch Conference on June 23, 2016 in Washington, DC.

"Polaris demonstrates that high-performance is the result of intentional focus on the whole child. A personalized environment that cultivates student curiosity, creativity, social-emotional, and intellectual development results in dynamic schools where students thrive!" explained Diane Lauer, State Director of the Colorado Schools to Watch program. "Polaris recognizes the importance of inspiring and empowering teachers to unleash the potential of all their students."

Selection is based on a written application that requires schools to show how they met criteria developed by the Forum. State teams organized by the Colorado Schools to Watch (www.coloradoschoolstowatch.com) program conduct site visits in order to affirm that they have indeed met the rigorous requirements of the award. These teams observe classrooms, interview administrators, teachers, and parents, review achievement data, suspension rates, instructional quality, 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. This year four schools were newly designated as Colorado Schools to Watch: Grand Valley Middle School, Rocky Heights Middle School, Polaris Expeditionary Learning School, Preston Middle School, and one redesignated site, Corwin International Magnet School.

"These Schools to Watch are indeed special; they make education so exciting that students and teachers don't want to miss a day. They have proven that it is possible to achieve a high degree of educational excellence, and any middle-level school can truly learn from their example," said Ericka Uskali, Forum executive director. "We are pleased that our Schools to Watch program have shown that schools can meet high academic expectations while preserving a commitment to healthy development and equity for all students," Uskali 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 developed a web site (www.middlegradesforum.org) that features online tours of schools, as well as detailed information about the selection criteria used in the recognition program.

Nineteen states are currently involved in the program and the addition of these Polaris raises the total number of Schools to Watch to over 400 nationwide.

The National Forum sponsors the Schools to Watch state program with the support of members, the National Association for Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the Association of Middle Level Education, Learning Forward, and the State Schools to Watch programs.

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. (www.middlegradesforum.org)