



PRESS RELEASE

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Pennsbury's Afton Elementary School Named a National Blue Ribbon School!

*Recognition for School's Progress in
Closing Achievement Gaps Among Student Subgroups*

(FALLSINGTON, PA – September 27, 2019) Afton Elementary School, the largest of the ten elementary schools in the Pennsbury School District, was named a National Blue Ribbon School on September 26th by U.S. Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. Afton, one of 362 schools recognized nationwide (1% of all schools) was honored for its progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups.

"Congratulations to the entire Afton Elementary School community, past and present, for creating and sustaining an exemplary model of how public schools can meet the diverse needs of all students in a collaborative and engaging manner," said Pennsbury Superintendent, Dr. William Gretzula. "I am honored to call the Principal, Dr. Joseph Masgai, a colleague, and I continue to be inspired by the staff and students at Afton who have a true love of teaching and learning. In Pennsbury, we have long known of the excellence that is present in all that Afton does on behalf of the children and families they serve. Now, the state and country know as well."

Principal Masgai stated, "The entire Afton community is thrilled with being designated as a National Blue Ribbon School! We are bursting with Pennsbury Pride and are honored to represent excellence in education in Bucks County. Congratulations are pouring in and I tip my hat to the extraordinary staff, students, and parents that have created a place for Afton Elementary among the 1% of schools that have achieved Blue Ribbon recognition in the United States."

Afton Elementary, a K-5 school located in Yardley, is home to 583 students and 75 staff members. For the past ten years, ongoing professional development that focused on curriculum, instruction, and assessment has evolved into a school-wide data culture that has transformed and sustained student achievement, according to Dr. Masgai. The past five years of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) reflects consistent double-digit results, well above the state averages in language arts, writing, mathematics, and science. Evidentiary data reflect that universal student performance on the PSSA has been historically 20 to 40% above state averages. This remarkable growth and achievement are the direct result of teachers' diagnostic

abilities to interpret real meaning from data and their prescriptive abilities to design and deliver engaging lessons directly guided by data results.

According to Principal Masgai, "The three interconnected lenses of collaborative strategic planning based upon data, effective staff development, and a shared instructional improvement plan are the tools that have set high standards and expectations at Afton Elementary School, and, more importantly, have shattered stereotypes to yield outstanding results for all students. An emphasis on these three elements provides an egress to simplify work by always focusing on the essentials of good planning and teaching." The community of Afton teachers follows a problem-solving cycle that has evolved into transformational practices that not only correlate with the tenets of National Blue Ribbon Schools, but also cultivates a culture that promotes continuous learning, empirical creativity, and innovative practices.

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes public and private elementary, middle, and high schools based on their overall academic excellence or their progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. (Afton's recognition is under the latter category.) Every year the U. S. Department of Education seeks out and celebrates great American schools, schools demonstrating that all students can achieve to high levels. More than 9,000 schools across the country have been presented with this coveted award. The National Blue Ribbon School award affirms the hard work of students, educators, families, and communities in creating safe and welcoming schools where students master challenging content. The National Blue Ribbon School flag gracing an entry or flying overhead is a widely recognized symbol of exemplary teaching and learning.

Dr. Masgai looks forward to going to Washington, D.C. in mid-November to receive the school's award plaque and National Blue Ribbon School flag during a special ceremony that will honor 312 public and 50 non-public schools for their outstanding achievements.

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