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SMMUSD Middle School Receives California Gold Ribbon

Santa Monica, Calif. – Lincoln Middle School in Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District was named this week as California Gold Ribbon School – the state’s highest award for academic excellence. Lincoln was selected for developing an innovative protocol that improves student writing by emphasizing teacher and parent collaboration, improved student feedback and providing targeted one-on-one conferences with students.

“This award is a resounding validation of the quality of teachers and student-oriented programs created and implemented in Santa Monica-Malibu Unified,” Superintendent Sandra Lyon said. “Educators at our schools are constantly working and collaborating to find new and better ways to support students on their journeys to success.”

The awards, which have temporarily replaced the California Distinguished School awards, go to campuses that successfully implement new academic content and performance standards for all students, including English learners, as demonstrated through model programs chosen by the schools.

Lincoln was recognized for strategies that sought to close the achievement gap in seventh- and eighth-graders; its goal to ensure that all students have access to the same quality of rigorous, appropriate instruction that increases English fluency and results in classroom writing scores that are proficient or above.

The Gold Ribbon program is intended to run for two years, providing the state with an interim way to recognize excellence while California adopts new statewide assessments in math and English language arts (ELA) aligned with the California Common Core.

The model programs targeted by the Gold Ribbons echo some of the new state measures for school improvement required under the Local Control Funding Formula, an overhaul of school finance in 2013-14 that tied additional revenue to high-needs student groups, such as English learners, foster children and socio-economically disadvantaged students.

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Eligible schools are to show model programs that improve student performance under the Common Core for ELA and math, California English Development standards and Next Generation Science Standards. The programs should feature standards-based activities, projects, strategies and practices that can be replicated by other schools.

Classroom activities at Lincoln are focused on paragraph development, sentence structure and use of evidence. Based on a District rubric, teachers grade essays and use a developed score sheet that seeks to give tangible and concrete feedback in terms of strengths and weaknesses.

Targeted students who didn't achieve proficient scores or above on their essays responded positively to the one-on-one conferences with teachers.

Seventh-grade teachers also hosted a writing night to encourage further collaboration between students and parents to increase involvement, academic understanding and experience.

Unlike the Distinguished Schools program, Gold Ribbon applicants nominate themselves. But both systems include site visits by a team of educators as part of the final determination of winners; both also rotate annually between secondary and elementary schools.

Photo Caption:

Lincoln Middle School won a California Gold Ribbon for an innovative program that improves student writing; pictured is the team involved in explaining and demonstrating the program to the state: (left to right) Sarah Blitz, 7th grade humanities; Marianna O'Brien, 8th grade science; Sara Greenfield, 7th grade humanities; Suzanne Webb, principal; Sharon Hart, 7th grade humanities and Gretchen Gies-McLaughlin, 8th grade English.

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As a community of learners, the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District works together in a nurturing environment to help students be visionary, versatile thinkers; resourceful, life-long learners; effective, multilingual communicators and global citizens.