



ELIZABETH FORWARD SCHOOL DISTRICT



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For Immediate Release

Elizabeth Forward Middle School Redesignated as a PA Don Eichhorn Schools: School to Watch

The prestigious redesignation is based on a school's Innovative Education Initiatives and the ability to show continued growth

December 4, 2024: ELIZABETH, PA: Elizabeth Forward Middle School has earned and been re-designated for the fourth time, as a “Pennsylvania Don Eichhorn Schools: School to Watch.”

Pennsylvania Schools to Watch State leaders selected each school for its Academic Excellence, Developmental Responsiveness, Social Equity and Organizational Structures and Processes. In addition, each school has strong leadership, teachers who work together to improve curriculum and instruction, and a commitment to assessment and accountability to bring about continuous improvement. The program was developed by the National Forum to Accelerate



Middle-Grades Reform. In partnership with the Pennsylvania Association for Middle Level Education (PAMLE), Kutztown University, and the Horace Mann Service Corporation, PA STW has been recognizing schools since 2006-07.

“We congratulate these schools for being places that do great things for all their students. These schools demonstrate that high-performing middle grades schools are places that focus on academic growth and achievement,” said Bruce Vosburgh, PA State STW Director. “They are also places that recognize the importance of meeting the needs of all their students and ensure that every child has access to a challenging, high-quality education. “These schools have proven that it is possible to overcome barriers to achieve excellence, and any middle-level school in any state can truly learn from their examples.”

Elizabeth Forward Middle School Principal Dr. Trisha Martell said the district is proud and honored to receive this distinguished award. “The fourth redesignation of Elizabeth Forward Middle School as a Pennsylvania Don Eichhorn School to Watch is a testament to our unwavering commitment to academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and effective organizational structures. This honor reflects the dedication of our educators and

staff, students, parents, and community in fostering an environment where every student thrives. We remain steadfast in our pursuit of continuous improvement, ensuring that all students receive a high-quality, equitable education.

Dr. Martell has been an administrator at EFMS since 2009. The original designation as well as each redesignation occurred under Dr. Martell's leadership.

On Oct. 3, Vosburgh and five members of his team spent the day at EFMS observing and interviewing principals, teachers, students, staff, and parents. In its redesignation assessment, STW pointed to several programs that highlighted EFMS' strengths.

Some included:

1. Technology continues to be used seamlessly to support instruction, and the Student Tech Helpers are used by teachers to support their technology needs.
2. New technology, Prisms VR, are used to support math and science teachers and students. Prisms seeks to write a new chapter for education that harnesses the next generation of computing with monumental advancements in spatial computers, AI, and network infrastructure, all of which is enhanced by the Director of Digital Teaching and Learning in Elizabeth Forward.
3. The RIASEC framework is used by teachers and students in every classroom. Career connections and language are naturally becoming a part of daily learning. This practice will ensure that students consistently engage in career-connected learning as part of their academic experience. The Beable Life-Ready Literacy platform has expanded to all grade levels.
4. Co-teaching at Elizabeth Forward demonstrates effective inclusion practices and could be a model for other districts. Partners PE fosters inclusivity and social skills for regular and special education students.
5. Support services for the school community have been enhanced through the addition of a second full-time counselor, a full-time behavioral specialist from Adelphoi, and school-based therapists from Clarvida. Parents and students expressed feeling emotionally safe due to the relationships built with support services and staff.



The Elizabeth Forward Middle School was originally designated a PA Don Eichhorn Schools: Schools to Watch in 2013. They earned redesignations in 2016, 2019, and 2022.

“We’re excited to have our Middle School redesignated as a “Pennsylvania Don Eichhorn Schools: School to Watch,” said Dr. Mary Carole Perry, EFSD Assistant Superintendent. “This honor shows how hard our students, staff, and community have worked to make our middle school a great place to learn and grow. It’s a reminder that when we work together, amazing things can happen, and we’ll keep building on this momentum to help every student succeed.”

This year, STW gave the designation to fourteen schools across the state. Three have been designated for the first time, four schools for the second time, four for the third, two for the fourth time and two for the sixth.

These fourteen schools will be recognized at the Pennsylvania Association for Middle Level Educations State Conference on February 22, 23 & 24, 2025, at the Double Tree Pittsburgh-Greentree where Elizabeth Forward Middle School will give a presentation. Each of these schools will have a local celebration in either May or June of 2025 in their buildings. They will also be recognized nationally with all the other recognized STW schools across the country in Washington DC at the National Forum's National Schools to Watch Conference on June 26-28, 2025.

The Schools to Watch selection process is based on a written application that required schools to show how they met criteria developed by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. Schools that appeared to meet the criteria were then visited by a state team, which observed classrooms, interviewed administrators, teachers, students, and parents, and looked at achievement data, suspension rates, quality of lessons, and student work.

Schools are recognized for a three-year period, and at the end of three years they need to reapply to continue to be recognized as a STW school. They must also demonstrate progress on specific goals to be re-designated. Unlike the Blue-Ribbon recognition program, "Schools to Watch" requires schools to not just identify strengths, but to also focus on areas for continuous improvement; thus, the three year redesignation. The redesignation process is based on the schools' continued growth since their last STW recognition.

"As a 2024-25 redesignated School to Watch school, we are pleased that schools throughout our state will have an opportunity to visit your school and experience firsthand what a high performing middle grade school is like while daily working on its trajectory towards success," Vosburgh wrote in a letter to the school.

For more information or print-quality photos, please contact Communications Specialist Charlie Deitch at 412-983-3845 or Dr. Trisha Martell, Principal, at 412-896-2336.