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Idaho schools honored as national Distinguished Schools, Blue Ribbon nominees

(BOISE) – Four Idaho schools producing stellar results in helping at-risk students achieve have been identified for national recognition by the State Department of Education, Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra announced.

Harold B. Lee Elementary in Dayton and Murtaugh Schools in Murtaugh were selected as this year's Title I-A Distinguished Schools for Idaho. Rexburg's Lincoln Elementary and Garwood Elementary in Rathdrum are Idaho's two nominees for the National Blue Ribbon Award.

The Distinguished Schools will be honored during the National Title I Conference in February, and Blue Ribbon honorees will be named in September 2018.

"This is truly one of the best parts of my job, recognizing Idaho schools and educators for outstanding efforts in helping their students achieve regardless of background, economic status or prior performance levels," Superintendent Sherri Ybarra said. "With skill, hard work and individual attention, these educators accomplish amazing things."

The annual Distinguished Schools awards recognize outstanding achievements by two Title I schools from each state that are serving a high proportion of at-risk students.

Harold B. Lee Elementary, in the West Side Joint School District, was honored in the category of Exceptional Student Performance. The school outperformed 91.1 percent of other Idaho schools in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency in the content standards for both English language arts and mathematics in 2017. More than 50 percent of Harold B. Lee students come from an economically disadvantaged household.

In the Murtaugh Joint District, Murtaugh Schools' selection came in the category of "Closing the Achievement Gap." Once identified as among the lowest-performing schools in Idaho, the school is now in the top quarter of all Idaho schools in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency in both English language arts and mathematics. More than 75 percent of its students come from economically disadvantaged households.

In order for a school to qualify for the Distinguished School Award, it must: have a poverty rate among students' families of at least 35 percent for the selected school year; demonstrate high academic achievement for two or more consecutive years; and meet or exceed state-determined criteria based on two or more consecutive years of achievement data.

Like this year's Distinguished Schools, Idaho's two Blue Ribbon nominees are covered by Title I-A, a federal program that provides funding to districts and schools, helping students who are most at risk meet state academic standards and be proficient on state assessments.

The Blue Ribbon nominees, both nominated as Exemplary High Performing Schools, are Lincoln Elementary in the Madison School District and Garwood Elementary in the Lakeland District.

Lincoln Elementary outperformed 92.6 percent of other Idaho schools in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency in English language arts and mathematics in 2017. Garwood Elementary outperformed 88.6 percent of other Idaho schools by the same measure.

Garwood improved its mathematics proficiency rate from 48.7 percent in 2015 to 62.2 percent in 2017, with particularly strong improvement in the performance of students with disabilities and minority students. Lincoln greatly increased its participation rate in English language arts assessment from 84.9 percent in 2015 to 98.7 percent in 2017, exceeding the state requirement of 95 percent.

National Blue Ribbon winners, two from each state, will be announced in September 2018. In order to be nominated for the award, a school must be in the top 15 percent of all schools in the state, ranked on the performance of all students who participated in the most recently administered state assessments in reading/English language arts and mathematics. Idaho nominees must have at least 40 percent of their students identified as low-income.

Idaho's Distinguished Schools and Blue Ribbon nominees will each receive \$15,000 from state Title I funds.

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