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Congressman Joe Courtney Visits Northeast School, Tells Students to be Proud of National Blue Ribbon School Award

(VERNON, Connecticut) – Students at Vernon’s Northeast School got a special visitor and a special gift Thursday as they continue to celebrate their school’s recognition as a National Blue Ribbon School.

U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, congratulated students for the hard work that earned Northeast School the National Blue Ribbon School award from the U. S. Department of Education, and presented the school with an American flag that had flown over the U.S. Capitol.



U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney of Vernon speaks to fifth graders at Northeast School Thursday.

“Northeast School is a very special place,” Congressman Courtney told fifth graders as he recalled his son Bobby’s time as a student at Northeast many years ago. “Bobby had teachers who worked hard to help him

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and it made a huge difference in his life. I'm so grateful to the team that is here. It is very clear to me that kind of commitment to students is still what this school is all about."

Congressman Courtney tried to help the students understand the significance of their achievement. Of the more than 100,000 public schools in the United States, Northeast School was among the very few selected for recognition as a National Blue Ribbon School because of the hard work of students and their teachers. As a member of the education committee in the U.S. House of Representatives, Congressman Courtney said he knows how "intensely competitive" the selection process is.



U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney and Assistant Superintendent of Schools Robert Testa and two students hold an American flag that flew over the U.S. Capitol. Congress Courtney presented the flag to Northeast School Thursday in recognition of the school earning National Blue Ribbon School designation.

"You guys did it," he said. "Think about that. That is a really huge statement about the work that every single one of you is doing. Because you worked so hard, because you've got such great teachers, you have been recognized in Washington, D.C., as being a center of excellence and that's something you should feel really good about."

Northeast School was among 367 schools nationwide and four in Connecticut to be honored.

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The annual awards program recognizes schools for their overall academic excellence or their progress in closing the achievement gap. Northeast was recognized for closing the achievement gap, but has actually achieved both, ranking among the top 15 percent of all schools in the state the past two years and helping its high need students achieve at a high level.

Each year since the 2015-16 school year, the number of students at Northeast School meeting or exceeding grade level proficiency in English Language Arts and Math has increased.

For the 2015-16 school year, 56.9 percent of Northeast Students met or exceeded the standard in English Language Arts and 44.5 percent met or exceeded the standard in math.

By the 2019-19 school year, the number of students meeting or exceeding the standard increased 22.8 percent in English Language Arts to 69.9 percent, and in math the number increased 44 percent to 64.1 percent of students meeting or exceeding the standard.

The same level of progress has been demonstrated in the Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability results, which are essentially a report card for a school's whole approach to teaching students.

In four of the last five years, Northeast School's score has beat the state average. And the past two years, Northeast School was rated among the top 15 percent of schools in the state.

Northeast School Principal Brenda Greene said what's special about the National Blue Ribbon School Award is that schools cannot apply for it.

"You work hard, do your job and focus on helping your students be successful," she said. "And maybe your school is recognized. What is important is that the kids have a great experience here and are prepared for middle school and high school. The foundational skills you get in elementary schools are not taught again. This is it. We put a lot of pressure on ourselves to make sure students are ready for middle school."

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Robert Testa said it is gratifying for Vernon schools to receive not only state recognition but national recognition.

The teachers and staff at Northeast School create an environment for children to learn, to grow and to be successful, Testa said.

"One measure we look at is how many students are connected to at least one adult," Testa said. "In this school, all of our students are connected to adults. That's what creates the climate where every student is noticed, every student is challenged and every student is supported so that they can do the best they can."

Congressman Courtney posed for a photo with school students and staff with the flag he brought from the capitol.

"Remember this moment," he told the children. "This is a very rare thing and you should all feel very good about it."

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