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STATE SCHOOLS CHIEF O'CONNELL HONORS SCHOOLS REDESIGNATED AS "SCHOOLS TO WATCH™–TAKING CENTER STAGE" MODEL SCHOOLS

SACRAMENTO — State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell today recognized seven California schools redesignated as model middle schools in the Schools to Watch™–Taking Center Stage (STW-TCS) program.

“These seven schools continue to make progress on their trajectory toward success as high-performing middle schools. They meet the distinctive needs of their students, help build a strong record of student achievement, and are making significant progress toward narrowing the achievement gap,” said O'Connell. “Credit goes to the students, their teachers, administrators, and parents who all work hard together making these schools examples of educational excellence.”

The re-designated schools are:

1. Castaic Middle School (Castaic Union Elementary School District, Castaic, Los Angeles County);
2. Culver City Middle School (Culver City Unified School District, Culver City, Los Angeles County);
3. Gaspar de Portola Middle School (San Diego Unified School District, San Diego, San Diego County);
4. McKinnleyville Middle School (McKinnleyville Union School District, McKinnleyville, Humboldt County);
5. R.H. Dana Middle School (Wiseburn Elementary School District, Hawthorne, Los Angeles County);
6. Silverado Middle School (Dry Creek Joint Elementary School District, Roseville, Placer County); and
7. Toby Johnson Middle School (Elk Grove Unified School District, Elk Grove, Sacramento County).

STW-TCS is designed to identify high-performing school models that demonstrate academic excellence, developmental responsiveness to the needs and interests of young adolescents, social equity, and organizational support. STW-TCS models host visitors from California and around the world who are looking for replicable practices that will help them improve their middle schools and close the achievement gap.

In order to be named a STW-TCS re-designee, schools must have conducted an extensive self-study and completed a narrative application. Each site was reviewed by a team of middle grades experts in January 2009. The process gauged each applicant's understanding and implementation of the California Department of Education's 12 recommendations for middle grades excellence that form the basis of *Taking Center Stage—Act II: Ensuring Success and Closing the Achievement Gap for All of California's Middle Grades Students (TCSII)*. Built by, and for, middle grades educators, *TCSII* is an innovative Web-based resource. Selected schools must also be a high-performing middle school as defined by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. California is one of 17 states working with the National Forum to designate and promote model middle schools throughout the country.

Initially, the seven re-designated schools were recognized for their success in four areas: (1.) implementing best practices focused on academic achievement; (2.) responding to the developmental needs of young adolescents; (3.) offering a fair and equitable education for all students; and (4.) instituting organizational processes and procedures that foster and sustain academic growth.

Castaic, Culver City, and Silverado middle schools have been STW–TCS schools for six years and were among the first schools in the national program to be re-designated a second time. Despite changes in leadership in many of these schools, the vision and progress continues, as shown by the hard work and dedication of the faculty and support of the district and community.

The seven middle grades schools named today are among 24 others selected in previous cycles since 2003 as STW-TCS designees. They will be formally recognized at the California League of Middle Schools annual conference in San Diego, March 13-15, 2009. At the conference, the redesignated schools will have an opportunity to showcase their accomplishments and network with other middle grades educators from around the state.

STW–TCS is a collaborative effort of 12 education organizations that form the California Middle Grades Alliance. The organizations are AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination); the Middle Grades Council of the Association of California School Administrators; the Middle and High School Improvement Office of the California Department of Education; the California League of Middle Schools; the California Middle Grades Partnership Network; the California School Boards Association; the California

Schools to Watch™–Taking Center Stage Program; the California State Parent Teacher Association; the California Teachers Association; the Secondary Subcommittee of the Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee of the California County Superintendents Education Services Association; GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs); and United Way of Greater Los Angeles.

For more information about the Schools to Watch™–Taking Center Stage model school program, visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gq/mg/stw.asp>.

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