

NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

O'CONNELL SELECTED AS 2022 PENNSYLVANIA SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR

HARRISBURG (Nov. 8, 2021) -- Dr. Bridget O'Connell, Superintendent of the Palisades School District, has been named the 2022 Pennsylvania Superintendent of the Year by the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA).

The goal of the prestigious awards program, which is part of the National Superintendent of the Year program, is to further inspire exemplary educational leadership and promote a sense of confidence and pride in the nation's public schools. Superintendent of the Year nominees are evaluated on how each candidate demonstrates leadership for learning, communication skills, professionalism and community involvement.

Since becoming superintendent of the Palisades School District in 2011, Dr. O'Connell has demonstrated positive and forward-thinking leadership that has inspired student achievement, community involvement and support, state and national recognition, and systemic models that have served as an example for other districts. As an educational leader, she works collaboratively with School Board and community members, administration, faculty, staff, parents and students to enhance learning opportunities.

Under Dr. O'Connell's leadership, student achievement, academic recognition and a focus on the whole child have been a hallmark of the district's schools. For example, this year Tinicum Elementary was one of 13 thirteen Pennsylvania schools and 325 public and nonpublic schools nationwide recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a

“National Blue Ribbon School” in a program that recognizes schools based on overall academic excellence or progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. In addition, the district’s high school students score consistently high on AP exams, with 52 students earning distinction as AP Scholars just in the past two years.

The district also has received numerous accolades and recognition, including “Top 100 Best High Schools in Pennsylvania” (US News & World Report, 2021), Outstanding Visual Arts Community (PA Art Education Assn., 2020), Best Communities for Music Education in the Nation (NAMM Foundation, 2020), PSMLA Exemplary Program Award for the Palisades HS World Language Department, 2019-21 (PA Modern Language Assn.), Schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention Support Recognition (PA Positive Behavior Support Network, 2020), “Top 2000 High School in the Nation” (US News & World Report, 2020, 2019, 2015), and “Top STEM High School” (Newsweek, 2020). In addition, Palisades High School (seven years), Middle School (two years) and Durham Nockamixon Elementary (one year) continue to fulfill obligations to maintain their “No Place for Hate” designations by the Anti-Defamation League.

Dr. O’Connell has led district-wide efforts to focus on college and career readiness by developing multiple pathway programs for students focused on coursework and hands-on experiences that allow students to reaffirm their college and career interests or, in some instances, help them make decisions in other directions. With her leadership, Palisades developed online learning options years in advance of the pandemic and countless extracurricular opportunities, initiatives that have served as a model for countless districts statewide and nationally.

In addition, Dr. O’Connell leverages social media, traditional media, videos and in-person methods to reach and proactively engage with all stakeholders, efforts that have garnered support by parents and the community. Since March 2020, she has focused on COVID communications, creating community forums to promote ongoing engagement on a wide number of issues. These actions were particularly important last year when the district was

open K-8th grade at the beginning of the school year, 5 days a week, for in-person instruction and at the high school level beginning in October following the completion of a science wing renovation project. Families also had the opportunity to choose online instruction through Palisades Cyber Academy which was established by Dr. O'Connell over a decade ago.

As the district's Act 44 Safety and Security Coordinator, she invites emergency responders, township EMA and local legislators to discussions on district safety and security, forums that have created a space for collaboration and sharing across jurisdictions. She also engages with a district Superintendent Parent Leadership Council to gather feedback from parent representatives from each of the district's five school buildings. These meetings provide information that helps her respond to the concerns of the greater community. In addition, she meets with student groups to learn about their school experiences in order to better meet their needs.

Dr. O'Connell also is committed to professional leadership in Pennsylvania and nationally. She has been elected by PASA members to serve as one of five representatives to the Governing Board of AASA®, The School Superintendents Association. She also serves on the PASA Board of Governors and on the PASA Advocacy Committee. In addition, she has delivered both in-person and virtual presentations for the PASA National Superintendent Certification Program, the PASA New Superintendents' Academy and PASA Leadership Forum and the Lehigh School Study Council of which she is currently chair.

Finally, Dr. O'Connell makes advocacy for public education a hallmark of her leadership. She has represented her district on an NPR segment to discuss CARES funding, been invited to participate in a webinar hosted by U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona concerning efforts to provide vaccine access to adolescents, participated in the AASA Legislative Advocacy Conference to discuss key education issues with members of Congress and their staff, and hosted PA Secretary of Education Dr. Noe Ortega for a district visit. She regularly corresponds with state legislators, maintains a legislation and

advocacy webpage on the district's website, and hosts annual legislative dinners with the district's state representative to discuss current issues facing public education.

"Dr. O'Connell is the consummate professional," said Dr. Mark Hoffman, Executive Director of Bucks County I.U. "She has mentored countless educators, administrators and colleague superintendents throughout her career. She is active locally among Bucks County superintendents and is seen as a leader-among-peers in southeastern Pennsylvania and in the Lehigh Valley."

"Dr. O'Connell [is] an educational and community leader that truly seeks to understand the complexities of public health in order to clearly communicate reliable and accurate information not only to her school district community but throughout the county," said Dr. David Damsker, director of the Bucks County Health Department.

Dr. O'Connell will be honored at a special local event in 2022. As the Pennsylvania honoree, she and 49 other state honorees will be recognized in February during the AASA National Conference on Education.

Dr. O'Connell earned her Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees from Lehigh University (Bethlehem, PA) and is a graduate of Easton Area High School (Easton, PA).

The Pennsylvania Superintendent of the Year is selected by a PASA (Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators) panel of school administrators. The National Superintendent of the Year Program was instituted 35 years ago by AASA® The School Superintendents Association to recognize the outstanding leadership of active, front-line superintendents. Each candidate for the National Superintendent of the Year® Award must first be named by their state association as the State Superintendent of the Year. First Student, AIG Retirement Services and AASA are co-sponsors of the national award program.

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The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators is a professional community of education leaders committed to achieving quality public education for all learners. PASA's members include superintendents, assistant superintendents and other school district and intermediate unit administrators. For more information about PASA, see the association web site at www.pasa-net.org.

AASA® The School Superintendents Association, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders in the United States and throughout the world. AASA members range from chief executive officers, superintendents and senior level school administrators to cabinet members, professors and aspiring school system leaders. AASA's mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children. See the AASA web site for more information at www.aasa.org.

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