National validation



Pickens County School Superintendent Dr. Henry Hunt, left, joins Holly Springs Elementary School Principal Donna Harden, faculty and staff in celebrating the Pickens school's designation as a Blue Ribbon School. KEN OSBURN/STAFF

Holly Springs among 3 in state named Blue Ribbon Schools

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PICKENS — Holly Springs Elementary School is a tight-knit family.

Kindergarten teacher Lori Newman attended Holly Springs. Her mother taught there, and her children attend the school now. Kyndal Gravely's two children also attend Holly Springs, where she is a fourth-grade teacher.

Gravely and Newman are two of many on the Holly Springs faculty and staff that are also Holly Springs parents. Some faculty are former students and some are Holly Springs grandparents, Principal Donna Harden said. Harden's children attended Holly Springs, too.

The family atmosphere is part of what makes Holly Springs a great school, said Dr. Henry Hunt, Pickens County school district superintendent.

On Thursday, the school learned that others have recognized its specialness. The U.S. Department of Education named Holly Springs a Blue Ribbon School, one of three South Carolina schools selected for the honor this year.

Nationally, 304 schools were recognized. Winners will receive engraved plaques and Blue Ribbon School flags during an awards ceremony in November in Washington, D.C.

School faculty and staff and district officials gathered in the Holly Springs cafeteria Thursday to celebrate their recognition with a cake and punch.

"For Holly Springs to be recognized as a Blue Ribbon School, I think validates the work that the faculty and staff here at Holly Springs Elementary have done in the past years," Hunt said.

"This is not the result of just one year's work. They have worked for years to provide a student-centered curriculum and atmosphere at Holly Springs School."

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RIBBON

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Winning schools must either achieve in the top 10 percent in their state or have at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds while making dramatic improvements in test scores, according to the U.S. Education Department.

Holly Springs, which has more than 70 percent of students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, met both requirements, the department said.

Harden said in an email the only challenge in working with disadvantaged students is not seeing them as disadvantaged.

"All children have the ability to reach their full potential when they are treated with respect, continually motivated, have high expectations before them and are cared for in a nurturing environment," she said.

The school has 221 students in grades 4K-5.

Townville Elementary in Anderson District 4 and Gadsden Elementary in Richland County School District were the other two state schools named. They also met both requirements, the department said.