

Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color

Two Merrillville Schools Earn National Acclaim for Establishing Winning Formulas to Help Boys and Young Men of Color Thrive in the Classroom

Merrillville High and Salk Elementary Receive COSEBOC School Award for proven success in closing the achievement gap among boys of color

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Chicago – Two Merrillville schools are among just five nationwide to receive the COSEBOC school award, which recognizes and rewards schools that have a proven track record of effective pre K-12 education of male students of color. The Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC) announced the awards this week in advance of its annual “Gathering of Leaders” this week in Chicago.

COSEBOC is a national network of schools and highly-respected educators, researchers, policy-makers and advocates focused on sharing and promoting promising approaches and initiatives that improve education at schools with significant populations of young men of color.


“Identifying schools that have developed effective, creative and sustainable approaches and sharing those successes with other educators is the cornerstone of the work we do at COSEBOC,” said Ron Walker, Executive Director, COSEBOC. “The COSEBOC School Awards are proof and evidence of the fact that there are educational environments that work extremely well for boys and young men of color. We will now begin to work with Merrillville High and Salk Elementary to see how its practices can be replicated in other schools across the nation.”

Students and faculty from both schools will be on hand this week at COSEBOC’s 7th annual Gathering of Leaders to present their winning formula for success and achievement to educators who are attending the national meeting in Chicago.

“The Merrillville School Corporation has long maintained a strong belief and commitment to recognize diversity as a strength and positive quality,” said Merrillville Community Schools Superintendent Tony Lux. “Teachers, administrators and support staff provide unrelenting effort to provide all students, regardless of personal challenge, with the support to meet high expectations for academic success through a philosophy of Rigor-Relevance-Relationships. This belief system has become what we mean by ‘The Merrillville Advantage’.”

Superintendent Lux stressed that state test scores among boys of color at both Merrillville

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High and Salk surpassed the average school of all students across the state who took the state exams. That achievement is among many that met COSEBOC School Award criteria.

Merrillville High School

Over the last 15 years, MHS has experienced a dramatic demographic shift in its student population – from 14 percent student of color and 6 percent receiving free and reduced lunch to 84 percent and 53 percent respectively. As a result of this demographic shift and a racial incident, parents, school leaders, and community members came together for dialogue about diversity. The outcome of this dialogue was a community-wide recognition that Merrillville’s diversity was, in fact, its strength and declared it "The Merrillville Advantage".

Student academic success at MHS has resulted from programs such as a trimester schedule, which allows for more credit opportunities for male students of color over their high school matriculation, a ‘Failure is not an option’ motto, credit and homework recovery initiatives, and mentoring of freshmen by upperclassmen. Merrillville impresses upon students the importance of resiliency and accountability through powerful and pervasive positive messaging. Upon entering Merrillville High School one of the first things that you notice are the posters and signage on the walls, reflecting the climate and culture of the school.

Salk Elementary School


Over the past 15 years, Salk Elementary has experienced a dramatic demographic change and a significant increase in enrollment - resulting in more diverse student needs. Diversity training and dialogue became an increasingly important part of understanding of their new population. This training included the creation of corporation Study Circles.

Salk’s academic success is in part due to its use of innovative Balanced Literacy and Inquiry Math frameworks. Its focus on professional development and a “no excuses” motto ensure also student success. Salk Elementary is designed to teach positive choice making through positive behavior support and interventions. Salk instills its students with an awareness of the importance of community service by being “Bucket Fillers” and through its extensive opportunities for participation in community service projects.

Through extensive research, COSEBOC has determined that the most effective schools combine a culture of high-quality instruction, whole school community engagement and high expectations, with a focus on social and emotional development, helping students develop their personal identities through a connection to their cultural and historical legacies, and instilling in students the responsibility to serve their communities.

Along with the recognition, each COSEBOC School Award recipient will receive a \$10,000 grant. The COSEBOC School Awards are supported by the Campaign for Black Male Achievement, Open Society Foundations.

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The schools were selected based on a rigorous, three-stage selection process, the COSEBOC School Award's blue ribbon panel determined that these five schools were successful in engaging and educating male students of color based on traditional measures of success, including test scores, graduation rates and college attendance.

In addition to **Merrillville High** and **Salk Elementary, Best Academy** in Minneapolis; **Devonshire Elementary School** in Charlotte, NC; and **Thurgood Marshall Academy** in Washington DC also received COSEBOC School Awards.

"These five schools are unrepentant in their belief that students can succeed and soar to great achievement levels. Each is led by a principal who is determined to build great schools. Most importantly, they know that great schools are not an accident," said Walker.

About COSEBOC

The mission of the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC) is to connect, inspire, support and strengthen school leaders dedicated to the social, emotional and academic development of boys and young men of color.

COSEBOC is a networked learning community of educators, researchers, policymakers and caring adults that support school leaders with high quality professional development so they can realize this vision of making success an attainable goal for every male student of color. For more information about COSEBOC including: standards and promising practices, membership, and professional development opportunities, visit www.coseboc.org.

Please contact the following to arrange interviews with representatives from COSEBOC or Thurgood Marshall Academy.

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