



For Immediate Release:

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## **Meriden Public School Receives National Award for Nutrition and Physical Education Initiatives**

**(MERIDEN, CT)** – The Casimir Pulaski Elementary School in Meriden is one of two schools in the nation to receive top honors in the HealthierUS School Challenge (HUSSC). The Meriden school earned the Gold of Distinction award by championing changes to improve the quality of the foods offered in school, teaching students about nutrition, and providing more opportunities for physical activity.

“Healthy schools help lay the foundation for lifelong healthy habits for our children. Schools like Pulaski that provide nutritious meals, promote physical activities, and equip students with knowledge about their health are serving their students well in the long run,” said Governor Dannel P. Malloy.

USDA Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Kevin Concannon, joined by U.S. Representative Elizabeth Esty, Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor and other state and local officials today presented Meriden Superintendent Mark Benigni with the award.

“Initiatives such as the HUSSC are creative ways to promote our students’ health and well-being. Nutrition education and physical education provide our youngsters with the skills and knowledge necessary for lifelong health,” Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor said. “We congratulate the Pulaski Elementary School community on its well-deserved award.”

A partnership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and state departments of education, the HealthierUS School Challenge is a voluntary initiative that has been incorporated as part of First Lady Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move” campaign. It recognizes schools that participate in the national school lunch program and school breakfast program that have demonstrated a commitment to excellence in the quality of food available to students as well as opportunities for both nutrition education and physical education.

Casimir Pulaski Elementary School is the only school in Connecticut to receive a HUSSC Gold of Distinction award, and one of the first of two in the country to receive the award under the new HUSSC criteria. The Gold of Distinction is the highest national level of recognition awarded by the USDA to Child Nutrition Programs. Less than one-half percent of all schools nationwide have this distinction.

“We are honored to be one of only two schools in the nation to receive this prestigious award. It is a great credit to the dedicated staff, enthusiastic students and supportive families of the Meriden Public Schools,” said Superintendent Benigni.

“We are extremely honored to receive this recognition,” said Susan Maffe, Director of Food Services, Meriden Public Schools. “It feels great to have reached such a high level of excellence in providing our students with nutritious meals and physical education.” Maffe is also an Executive Board Member for the School Nutrition Association of Connecticut (SNACT.)

In order to qualify for a Gold of Distinction award, a school must submit a formal application and meet criteria that includes educating children about nutrition, offering healthy breakfasts and lunches that demonstrate exemplary implementation of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and nutrition standards set by the USDA, and providing nutrition education and opportunities for students to engage in physical activity.

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