

School 23 celebrates community ... and being No. 1

Community marks top ranking in quality index with rally and parade

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Packed full with teachers, parents, community members, and of course, students, the energy in the gymnasium of School 23 matched that exuded by a tearful Principal John Gonzalez Jr., as he stood before the crowd in celebration.

“Today is a big day for Francis Parker School No. 23 and our community,” said Gonzalez. “We celebrate the great news that we have been ranked the best (public) school in Monroe County.”

That ranking, revealed earlier this month, is according to the USA Today Network’s New York State School Quality Index, which looks beyond standardized test scores and measures every public and charter school in New York on a variety of non-academic factors that parents say they value, but can be hard to measure.

That a city school would top the list might be surprising to those who are accustomed to a more traditional measure of a school’s success, but those at the Barrington Avenue school were anything but surprised.

“Even though this news came out in the newspaper, I knew we were the best school way before that,” said Gonzalez, who paused, overcome by emotion. “It’s about the hard work that we do everyday to be a community, to get to know each other, to understand one another and to love one another. I want to thank the students who, everyday, show me what it means to be a principal. I’m getting emotional because I’m beyond happy right now.”

Music filled the gymnasium as the students seated on the gymnasium floor whooped and hollered in response to the words of their principal, before exiting the building and embarking in a celebratory march around the block as onlookers stood back and admired the spectacle.

Kristen Housel, a parent in attendance held her daughter, Paige, a pre-k student at the school, as the

As the parade continued on and teachers led their classes around the Park Avenue neighborhood, the pride was evident.

“We work so hard. This is a much fairer system, and it looks at the whole experience,” said Robin Goldberg, a second- grade teacher. “This place is like a family, and everything we do, we do thinking about what’s best for all of the children here.”

Goldberg added that the school is what it is because of a team mentality that everyone in the school community has.

“It’s not just teachers leading the way, it’s staff members, too. Our custodians are teachers. Our parent liaisons are teachers, everyone who works here is a teacher to these children,” said Goldberg. “We really are a community school.”

Patricia McKinney, is proof of that. McKinney, who has worked at School 23 for seven years, has held positions ranging from work in the lunchroom to work as custodial staff. She’s served as a parent- teacher liaison for the past two years.

“It’s a high-energy, fun, loving school, and it’s about time that’s recognized,” said McKinney. “This is a very exciting moment for us.”

To see how your school ranks, check out the Quality Index database.

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Students, teachers and parents celebrated at Francis Parker School 23 with a parade through the Park Avenue neighborhood after being named “Best School in Monroe County” by the USA Today Network’s New York State School Quality Index.

crowd marched on. Housel's older daughter, Casey, is a second-grader at School 23.

"I was probably the first to brag to everyone I know (when the ranking came out). Everybody asks when we're moving out to the suburbs, and we have no plans to do that. I think the ranking speaks volumes," said Housel.

"You think of where you're kids are going to be all day long, and you want it to be the next best thing to home and I think that this has been such a good fit for us."

Housel said that it's the warmth of the teachers, staff and kids that have made the school feel like home.

Myles Able-Kehoe, a fifth-grade student, said that it's the variety of opportunities that the school offers its students that makes it so great.

"I think we got voted the best school for a good reason," said Able-Kehoe. "We have lots of really good electives and stuff."

Able-Kehoe said that his favorite class is drama, and that the school has a play coming up in January.

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