



For Immediate Release

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Wakefield Middle School Named a 2026 Arizona School to Watch®

TUCSON, Arizona (March 10, 2026) Wakefield Middle School has been recognized as an Arizona School to Watch, a designation that highlights exemplary middle schools demonstrating academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and strong organizational structures. The Schools to Watch program is part of a nationwide initiative led by the National Forum, a nonprofit organization that brings together educators, researchers, and education leaders to improve middle grades education.

Located in the Tucson Unified School District and led by Principal Josephine Lane, Wakefield Middle School was selected following a rigorous application and site evaluation process that examined how the school supports the unique academic and developmental needs of young adolescents.

Lead Site Evaluator and 2025 Schools to Watch Principal, Manjula Reddy, noted that Wakefield Middle School demonstrates many strengths aligned with the Schools to Watch framework. Observations during the visit highlighted consistent instructional practices across classrooms, including the clear use of learning targets and success criteria, the gradual release model of instruction, and strong routines that support productive learning environments.

Students at Wakefield consistently demonstrated responsibility and readiness for learning. The evaluation team observed students following established expectations throughout the campus, from moving through hallways and stairways appropriately to arriving prepared for instruction in each class.

The team also recognized the school's strong, positive culture and welcoming environment. Families shared that they chose Wakefield because of its strong reputation within the

Tucson Unified School District, frequently describing the school community as unified and supportive. Staff members were noted for rallying around students and ensuring they receive the support needed to succeed.

Wakefield offers a wide range of opportunities that allow students to explore interests and talents beyond the core classroom. Students and families highlighted programs such as Mariachi, chess, and STEM as meaningful opportunities that enrich the middle school experience. Evaluators also observed that instruction is intentionally paced so that students who need additional support or acceleration receive the time and guidance necessary for continued academic growth.

Wakefield Middle School's Schools to Watch application reflects a strong commitment to continuous improvement and middle grades best practices. The school has developed systems that support both academic rigor and student well-being, including a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports program, CharacterStrong social-emotional learning initiatives, and a data-driven Multi-Tiered System of Supports. These structures help ensure that all students have access to rigorous coursework while receiving the support they need to thrive.

Through collaborative professional learning, data-informed decision making, and intentional structures that support both academic growth and student voice, Wakefield continues to build systems that ensure every student is supported in reaching high expectations.

Wakefield Middle School will now advance to national recognition at the National Schools to Watch Conference in Washington, D.C., held annually in June. This conference brings together middle school educators from across the country to celebrate schools earning the Schools to Watch designation and to participate in professional learning focused on improving middle grades education.

Wakefield will also be celebrated at the 2026 Arizona Middle Grades Summit at Arizona State University in September. They will join a statewide and national network of exemplary middle grades schools committed to ongoing improvement.

The evaluation team expressed sincere appreciation to the students, staff, and families who welcomed them during the visit and shared their experiences.

"Wakefield Middle School reflects a strong foundation and a clear commitment to student success," said Reddy. "It was a pleasure to visit the school and learn more about this dedicated community."

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