

NATIONAL DISTINGUISHED PRINCIPAL

Karen L. Krisch Named Pennsylvania's 2023 National Distinguished Principal



Karen L. Krisch, Principal of Marion-Walker Elementary School in the Bellefonte Area School District, has been named **Pennsylvania's 2023 National Distinguished Principal (NDP)** by the Pennsylvania Principals Association. She was honored with this award at SUMMIT23 for PA Educational Leaders in August. As a state winner in the National Association of Elementary School Principals'

(NAESP) National Distinguished Principal (NDP) Program, Mrs. Krisch will also be honored by NAESP this fall.

An educator for 29 years, Mrs. Krisch served in her current role as principal at Marion-Walker Elementary School (K-5) since 2017. Previously, she was principal at Bellefonte Area Elementary School (2013-2017); principal (2005-2013) and vice principal (2002-2005) at Bellefonte Area Middle School; and an assistant administrator for the Bald Eagle Area School District (2000-2002). She also taught vocational education (Career Prep class) at the secondary level for six years, specifically to high-poverty students.

"We congratulate Karen Krisch, an exceptional leader and principal, for being named Pennsylvania's 2023 National Distinguished Principal. Karen has demonstrated a passion for social and emotional learning in her continued efforts to make it part of their school and district culture. In addition, her outstanding leadership skills and devotion to the Marion-Walker Elementary students, staff and community are qualities that make her a distinguished principal and a role model for principals and school leaders across the commonwealth," said Dr. Eric Eshbach, Executive Director, PA Principals Association.

Under Mrs. Krisch's leadership, many significant initiatives and programs have been implemented at her school and in the district. Serving as a mentor to new principals in the district is at the top of that list. She was also instrumental in helping to bring reform to the district's safety plan and protocols over the years. This included students and staff being accounted for during all safety drills, providing armed intruder training to students and staff, serving on the emergency operations team, and most recently, revamping the reunification process. She is also passionate about social and emotional learning (SEL) and has had extensive training in school-based mindfulness as well as serving as a presenter on the topic. She has also worked with researchers from Pennsylvania State University to determine the effectiveness of the district's SEL programs. "In my school, mindfulness is

part of this process to encourage self-care for teachers as well as students," she shared.

In addition to being a member of the Pennsylvania Principals Association and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, Mrs. Krisch is a member of the Pennsylvania Association for School Administrators, the Pennsylvania Association for Student Assistance Professionals (PASAP) and Leadership Centre County (Class of 2019). She has presented at the PASAP Conference (2010 – present) and at the Central Intermediate Unit 10 Annual PARA Conference 2022, and co-authored an article published in Phi Delta Kappan on leadership for mindful practices.

"I am so honored to be selected as the NDP for Pennsylvania. I have been able to become a good principal because I have been surrounded by other great principal colleagues who have mentored me along the way. My school teams have always contributed so much to my growth as a principal over the years. I would not be here without all of them," said Mrs. Krisch.

Mrs. Krisch earned a Bachelor of Science in communications disorders from The Pennsylvania State University, a Bachelor of Science in elementary education from Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania and a Master of Science in international education from Northcentral University. In her spare time, she has a "craft room," and spends much time Cricut crafting. "I also ride my bike to school even though the teachers tell me I look like Ms. Gulch from the Wizard of Oz," she joked. ■

"Karen Krisch is a consummate professional and a truly remarkable principal and leader in our district. She goes above and beyond for the students, staff and families in the Bellefonte Area School District and in her elementary school. She is a most deserving, exemplary principal."

Dr. Tammie Burnaford
Superintendent
Bald Eagle Area School District