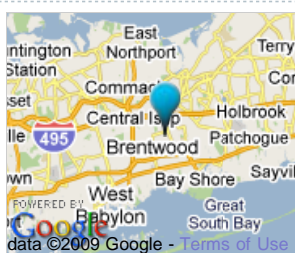


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National education group honors Brentwood High School

December 10, 2009 By JOHN HILDEBRAND john.hildebrand@newsday.com

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Brentwood High School is celebrating a national education group's recognition of its academic progress - and school officials want students who contributed most to that success to get their share of credit.

This afternoon, more than 100 students are gathering for a ceremony marking Brentwood High's selection as a "breakthrough school" by the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Most of those students either have disabilities or speak limited English. Both groups improved academic performance significantly in recent years, enough so that state authorities in March removed Brentwood High from their "needs improvement" list. "I'm not saying money solves all problems, but it certainly was an assist in

this case," said Thomas O'Brien, the school's principal.

Two years ago, Brentwood used an infusion of state financial aid to expand the high school's class schedule from eight to nine periods a day. The change allowed students taking English-language classes to take more courses in academic subjects, thus boosting the number graduating on schedule.

Meanwhile, the school also hired additional math teachers. This provided enhanced math instruction for students with disabilities whose special-education teachers were not certified in that subject.

In May, O'Brien was named New York State High School Principal of the Year. And in November, O'Brien's school was among 10 nationwide awarded "breakthrough" status, which recognizes academic achievement and improvement by secondary schools serving large numbers of impoverished students.

Winning schools each receive \$5,000 grants from the [MetLife](#) Foundation, funded by the insurance company of the same name.

More than 60 percent of Brentwood High's 3,600 students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches because of modest family incomes. Six hundred are English-language learners from 47 countries. "Whatever group you may think of - black, white, Hispanic, Asian - you'll find at Brentwood High School," said Ada Mbugu, 17, a high-ranking senior.

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