



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Stephaan Harris, (202) 357-7504, Stephaan.Harris@ed.gov

**U.S. Education Secretary Appoints Alabama Principal
To Board Overseeing The Nation’s Report Card**

Appointment fills position for elementary school principal

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona today appointed Dilhani Uswatte, principal of Rocky Ridge Elementary School in Hoover, Ala., to a three-year term on the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees the country’s only ongoing, nationally representative assessment of student achievement.

The Governing Board is a nonpartisan body established by Congress in 1988 to oversee and set policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as The Nation’s Report Card. NAEP provides objective information on student performance in various subjects and reports on student achievement across the nation, in states, and in select large urban districts.

The 26-member Governing Board is responsible for deciding which subjects NAEP assesses, determining assessment content, setting achievement levels that describe student performance, and pursuing new ways to make NAEP results useful and meaningful to the public.

“We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Uswatte as the elementary school principal representative on the Governing Board,” said Lesley Muldoon, the executive director of the Governing Board. “After the disruptions of the pandemic—evidenced by stark declines on The Nation’s Report Card last month—it’s more important than ever to help educators and families understand how children are progressing academically and how best to help each and every one of them succeed. Dr. Uswatte’s distinguished record as a STEM teacher, principal, and mentor to fellow educators will strengthen the Board’s efforts to ensure that The Nation’s Report Card informs educational recovery and acceleration efforts nationwide.”

Uswatte brings more than two decades of experience working with students, families, and teachers—earning local and national accolades along the way. Since 2014, she has served as the principal of Rocky Ridge Elementary School. Under her leadership, Rocky Ridge earned international STEM accreditation through AdvancEd (now Cognia), becoming the first school in the district and 11th in the state to do so. Prior to joining Rocky Ridge Elementary, Uswatte was an eighth-grade math teacher and department chair at Berry Middle School in Hoover, Ala.

Uswatte has received several awards and honors for her exemplary leadership, including being inducted into the Alabama Teacher Hall of Fame and named the 2019 Alabama Education Leader of the Year and a 2020 National Distinguished Principal. In 2009, she received the National Milken Educator Award.

Since then, she has developed and implemented a mentoring program for Milken award winners to help them mentor other teachers in their districts.

“The selection of Dr. Dilhani Uswatte to serve in the elementary principal position for the National Assessment Governing Board will greatly benefit our nation’s students, especially as schools focus on unfinished learning,” said L. Earl Franks, executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. “Her proven successes as a teacher, an assistant principal, and a principal wouldn’t have happened without her dedication and passion for her students and her commitment to ensuring high-quality educational opportunities for all. With recognition at the local, state, and national levels for her exemplary and innovative leadership, her voice representing the elementary school level on the Board is a win for education as a whole and will be instrumental in navigating the path forward for assessing student achievement.”

Adds Eric Mackey, Alabama state superintendent of education: “It is truly a privilege to engage with educators who are transformative in their approach to leading students. Dr. Uswatte is that kind of educator. She was making a huge impact in the field of education early in her career, as evidenced by her designation as a Milken Educator Award recipient in 2009. Since then, she has leveraged the recognition and networking that came with that distinction to coach other educators as a part of the mentoring group she helped establish known as the Alabama Milken Visionary Partnerships. Through this initiative, Dr. Uswatte and other Milken Educator Award recipients are revitalizing and strengthening education in Alabama. This appointment as the elementary principal Board member is the natural progression of someone with such a boundless approach to education reform. Dr. Uswatte brings with her enthusiasm and innovation that will benefit the Board specifically and the field of education in general. As a state, we are so proud of her and cannot wait to see the impact she makes.”

The announcement comes after four other Board members (listed below by the positions they represent on the Board) were appointed by Sec. Cardona last month. They include:

- **Eighth-Grade Teacher** – Michael A. Pope, science teacher for the Department of Defense Education Activity Dependent Schools at Zama American Middle School at Camp Zama in Japan.
- **Fourth-Grade Teacher** (reappointed) – Nardi Routten, Creekside Elementary School in New Bern, N.C.
- **General Public Representative** – Anna King, National PTA president, from Oklahoma City, Okla.
- **Secondary School Principal** – Jon T. Pickinpaugh, principal at the UMÓⁿHOⁿ Nation Public School in Macy, Neb.

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The National Assessment Governing Board is an independent, nonpartisan board whose members include governors, state legislators, local and state school officials, educators, business representatives and members of the general public. Congress created the 26-member Governing Board in 1988 to set policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress. For more information about the Governing Board, visit www.nagb.gov.