

On Heels of National Award, LaSalle Academy Looks Toward Expansion



By [Mina Bloom](#) | October 2, 2015 2:45pm | *Updated on October 5, 2015 8:49am*
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LaSalle students celebrating at Friday's pep rally.
DNAinfo/Mina Bloom

OLD TOWN — At a Friday morning pep rally to celebrate LaSalle Language Academy being [named a 2015 national blue ribbon school](#), public officials and

school Principal Beth Bazer said the school is "bursting at the seams" and is poised to expand.

Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, a Democrat whose district includes the Old Town magnet school at 1734 N. Orleans St., told parents, teachers and a sea of students donning LaSalle gear and waving blue and yellow signs that the national blue ribbon award "sent a message."

"It sent a message to me that we can do better. This school has proven it. We deserve more space at LaSalle," said Feigenholtz, which elicited cheers from the crowd and a standing ovation from the other public officials at the event, including Mayor Rahm Emanuel, U.S. Rep Mike Quigley, Chicago Public Schools chief executive officer Forrest Claypool, Chicago Public Schools chief education officer Janice Jackson, former LaSalle principals and members of the local school council, among others.

At LaSalle, sometimes two or three different classes have to share one classroom, and those teachers have to whisper to their students, Feigenholtz said.

After those remarks, Feigenholtz briefly turned to Claypool, and then said, "Forrest Claypool reminded me that in Springfield we're responsible for coming up with more revenue to do that," which elicited laughs and cheers from the crowd.



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Bazer subsequently took the podium, saying "I can't disagree with one thing that Representative Feigenholtz said."

After the pep rally, Bazer told DNAinfo Chicago that the school has had a "space problem" for a while now, and she hopes the national award will lead to an expansion.

Bazer said when Feigenholtz made her remarks, Emanuel leaned over to Bazer and said, "We'll talk and we'll get it done."

"So I've got my fingers crossed that maybe something will happen. The school is fantastic either way," she said.

Emanuel didn't take questions from media at the event, and a mayoral spokesman couldn't be immediately reached for comment.

Nearby Lincoln Elementary, 615 W. Kemper Pl., recently expanded by building a new multi-million-dollar annex. But the decision to build it was a [controversial](#) one, with some questioning whether it was getting more attention than other schools with worse problems because it was in affluent Lincoln Park.

[Dyett High School hunger strikers](#) and supporters [crashed](#) the ribbon-cutting ceremony in September, which resulted in shouting matches and tears.

The bulk of Friday's pep rally was spent congratulating students, teachers and parents for winning this year's national blue ribbon award, which was announced [Tuesday](#). The school was one of 335 schools across the country chosen to receive the honor from the United States Department of Education this year.

It was one of two Chicago schools to win. A Catholic school in Jefferson Park, [St. Cornelius Elementary School](#), 5252 N. Long Ave., was also recognized. St. Cornelius, however, is [faced with closure](#).

Since 1982, the honor has been awarded to schools that achieve overall academic excellence or progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups, according to the award's website.

LaSalle's comprehensive language program was on full display at Friday's pep rally, with students greeting the crowd in more than five different languages.

"When I look out at this crowd, I know it's not a mistake. I know it's by design. We have teachers and students who are committed to diversity," Jackson said at the event.

LaSalle enrolls about 560 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, with an average class size of 31 students per classroom, according to [CPS data](#). The student body is 32 percent white, 30.8 percent black, 20.9 percent Hispanic, 8.8 percent Asian and 7.5 percent multi-racial, according to data.

As of the 2013 - 2014 school year, the school ideally holds 540 students and was rated "efficient," not "overcrowded," according to the most recent CPS data available.

A CPS official couldn't immediately provide the building's current capacity for enrollment.

In his remarks about the national blue ribbon honor, Emanuel pointed to principal Bazer, who has been on the job for four months now, as well as previous longtime principals, including [Elisabeth Heurtefeu](#), for not being "afraid to be held accountable."

He also thanked the teachers who motivate students, parents, who are involved in their education, and the kids for working hard, calling the combination the "secret recipe for a great education."

"Let us not forget that the most important door they walk through for their education is the front door of their home. To all of the parents, and teachers who made that bond of education, the whole city owes you a great deal of gratitude," he said.