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Lawrence school district to hold Martin Luther King Jr. celebration Thursday



Posted by Rochelle Valverde

January 19, 2016 at 12:42 p.m.

In nearly 30 years, much has changed since South Junior High students read poems about the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. But Monday, as South students first did in 1987, young students presented those same poems to honor King on his namesake holiday.

In 1987 — a year after the first observance of the national holiday — Clenece Hills, then a teacher at South, came up with a program to celebrate it at the school. As part of the program, 18 students read a verse about the life of King that started with one of the 18 letters in his name, Hills explained on a podcast this week. After each student read, he or she lit a candle, so that once complete there were 18 candles burning to symbolize the contributions of King.

On Jan. 19, 1987, assemblies to celebrate the holiday were held at both New York Elementary School and South, according to an article from that day, [King's life inspires local pupils](#).



(Staff photo by Ben Biglieri)

New York School sixth graders Katie Rison, left, and Kami Logan sing "I Woke Up This Morning," a song of the civil rights movement, at a program honoring the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. this morning.

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On Monday, 18 South Middle School students presented the same poems on the podcast, which airs on KLWN radio. Students read poems, which provide historical information about King and his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. South drama teacher, Ericka Waller, directed the presentation with assistance from Mark Robinson, South vocal music teacher. You can listen to the podcast, which is about 40 minutes, on [KLWN's website](#).

The poems are published in the book "M Is for Marching" that was written by Hills. The school, which has long had a diverse student population, has held an annual celebration honoring King for nearly three decades before it became a districtwide event. This year, the Lawrence school district's second annual MLK awards return to South on Thursday.

Thursday's MLK event will include performances, a gallery and award ceremony. Performances include spoken word, dance by the Haskell Indian Nations University Alaskan Club and the Cordley Elementary Bell Choir.

The gallery includes displays from the NAACP, Free State High School Student Civil Rights and Haskell Indian Nations University.

The awards honor students, teachers, school staff and community members or groups for four awards: MLK Character, MLK Dreamers, MLK Heart of Service or MLK Champion of Equity. The community nominates individuals or groups for awards, and the finalists are below.

The event will be held Thursday at South Middle School, 2734 Louisiana St. Doors open at 5:45 p.m. and the show begins at 6:30 p.m.

MLK Award finalists:

MLK Heart of Service Award Finalists Danny Boone Salazar, Lawrence High Lynisha Thomas, Lawrence High Samantha Saltz & John Bode, New York Elementary

MLK Heart of Service Award Finalists (Community) Clenece Hills, Retired teacher Jennifer Baker Powers, Raintree Njeri Shomari, School volunteer

MLK Character Award Finalists (students) Elementary: Arabella Gipp, Schwegler Hudson Robinson, Hillcrest Elementary Prwsha Hamarasheed, Hillcrest Elementary

Middle School: Ja'Brandion Douglas, Southwest Middle School Layla Hunter, Liberty Memorial Central Middle School

High School: Cynthia Falley, Lawrence High Ernesto Hodison, Free State High Tatyana Younger, Lawrence High

MLK Dreamer's Award Finalists Students: Angeliz Feliciano, Liberty Memorial Central Middle School Chloe McNair, Liberty Memorial Central Middle School Elle Cormaney, Sunset Hill Elementary Joshua Newsome, Prairie Park Elementary

Adults: Regana "Rita" Rials, Liberty Memorial Central Middle School Mickey Woolard, Propel Foundation & retired teacher

MLK Champion of Equity Award Finalists Marie Taylor, Kennedy Elementary Rick Doll, USD 497 Superintendent Kel Catterton, Liberty Memorial Central Middle School

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