

Lincoln Public Schools

Kooser Elementary School dedicated to the sweet music of poetry

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The sweet music of Ted Kooser's poetry, and the voices of children and teachers, rang out at the dedication ceremony for the new Kooser Elementary School in north Lincoln.

"It just doesn't get any better than this," Kooser said as an audience of students, families, Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) staff and community residents applauded. "I am deeply honored to have my name on this school – to have my name associated with the teachers and staff who will nurture and care for the children here."

Kooser Elementary School, named for the Pulitzer Prize-winner and former U.S. Poet Laureate, was the second of three new schools dedicated this fall by LPS. It is one of four new schools constructed with funding from the community's 2006 bond election.

"But Kooser is more than a brand new elementary school," Superintendent Susan Gourley said. "It represents a pledge we made to our community – to our students – to our families – a pledge to create a lasting legacy of opportunity for future generations. Public education is the most important work we do in this community. Our schools shape our lives, shape our neighborhoods, shape our future."

The afternoon dedication ceremony featured music from students and staff members, a time capsule (to be opened when this year's kindergartners graduate from high school in 2022) and plenty of speeches.

"There are such very good reasons we build new schools," said Kathy Danek, representing the LPS Board of Education. "We know that an investment in public education will pay off for students, families - for our community and for our country. We know that education is the key to maintaining our legacy of achievement."

Principal Ann Jablonski introduced Kooser as "a delightful man who shares in our passion for books, children and learning. We are most honored to have our school named for him."

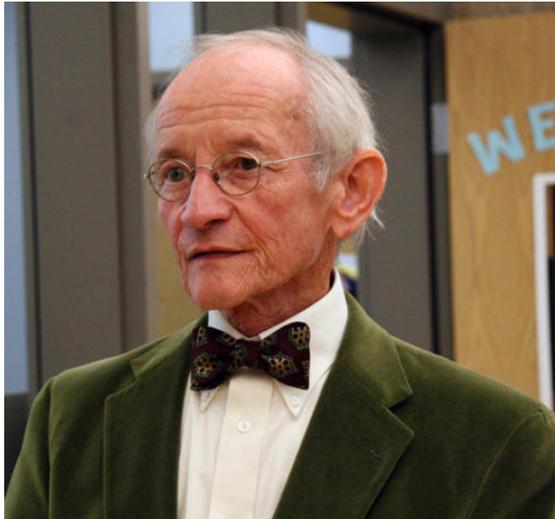
When Kooser took the podium, he told the story of when he was a young boy and attended elementary school. "It never occurred to me that the school was named after someone."

"The name of a school is just a name," he continued. "But what makes a school remarkable is the people who work there and give their lives for education."

In conclusion, Kooser read a poem called *Learning to Read* that he wrote in honor of the dedication ceremony.

Learning to Read

*At this instant, all over the globe,
in sunlight that places its hands
on their shoulders, or in lamplight
that flows like warm water over
their fingers, hundreds of thousands
of children, some of them sitting alone
and some with others, though each alone
with his or her thoughts, are opening
books for the first time ever,
and beginning to turn through
the pages, pinching the edges
as if they were butterflies' wings,
holding those butterflies open
to study the colorful patterns
then letting them close, then
spreading them open again, and with
the turning of those pages*



Kooser Elementary School is named for Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Ted Kooser, the featured speaker at the dedication of the new school.

*little puffs of words fly up, maybe
dusted a little with the colors
of the butterflies' wings, each puff
by itself not enough to fill even
the shortest, simplest sentence,
but each in its own way essential,
a part of something soon to happen,
and those puffs, as buoyant as
tiny bubbles, jostle and fizz up
against each other, rising higher,
and the trees above the children
begin to stir from all those words
and colors rising through,
lush summer trees on the part
of the world tipped into the sun,
bare winter trees on the part
in partial shadow, trees in warm
daytime on one side of the globe
and trees at midnight on the other —
the words now lifting higher,
forming colorful clouds that begin
to drift across the sky, each wisp
a sentence and each bigger cloud
a paragraph, and far below,
as the world rolls forward into
light, and a new day begins,
more children, girls and boys,
in schools like this one, open
the bright wings of books
and, for the first time ever, feel
a little puff of understanding
fly up against their lips and pop,
leaving the pleasant, lingering
taste, like honey, of a word.*