

BY JENNIFER OSBORN
SURREY — It is now twice that the Surrey Elementary School has been awarded an "A" from the Maine Department of Education.

What's the magic formula?

"It's all about doing whatever we need to do and keeping an eye on

whatever is working," said Principal Cathy Lewis.

Class size plays a role, too.

Surrey, with an enrollment of 102 students, is a small school. Class size ranges from 8 to 15 students.

"I would say it has a huge influence on the opportunity for

connections," Lewis said. "That's personal connections where students feel they have a relationship. The more opportunity there is for connections, the better it all works. It happens in big schools, but it's harder."

Lewis is all about connections.

Anyone who has

watched the principal work has seen her encourage students with a kind word and a hug.

But the state doesn't base grades on hugs.

The A-F ranking is generated from results of proficiency and growth based on a standardized test, the New England

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Surrey School Wins Top Honors

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Common Assessment Program (NECAP).

To get an A, schools must show improvement in the growth of all students from one year to the next.

Equal weight is given to how much the bottom-scoring 25 percent of students improve from year to year.

That result is what Lewis is most excited about.

The state awarded Surrey a certificate for being in the top 25 schools in the state for greatest improvement among its struggling learners.

"When you take your most struggling students and there's growth in math and reading there, that's what success is about,"

Lewis said.

Key to Surrey's success is knowing where each student is in his or her learning throughout the year. That means conducting three assessments a year: fall, winter and spring.

"We're assessing where kids are and where kids need to be and putting the resources in to get them there," Lewis said.

"You have assessments that tell you where the gaps are," she said. "You alter instruction and try a variety of strategies and you recheck the effectiveness of the strategies to see where kids have grown and you do it on a regular basis."

The school does not rely on one source for math instruction.

"We have Everyday Math as a core curriculum — K through 5 — but there are other math programs in the classroom," Lewis said. "If a child is having a particular problem using that methodology, we bring in an ed tech."

Lewis said the state report card is just one snapshot of the school.

"It's hard for me to take anywhere near as much pride as I might in an 'A,' when Mount Desert Island High School got an 'F,'" Lewis said. The F stemmed from MDI's participation rate on the NECAP — 89.3 percent of students instead of a 90 percent minimum.

"That does not support growth and development," Lewis said. "It supports public humiliation."