

2015 Guidance for Chief State School Officers
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

U.S. Department of Education



Nomination Process

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2015 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program Nomination Process

Introduction

Since 1982, the U.S. Department of Education's National Blue Ribbon Schools Program has honored America's most successful public and private elementary, middle, and high schools. A National Blue Ribbon Schools flag waving overhead has become a trademark of excellence, a symbol of quality recognized by everyone from parents to policymakers in thousands of communities.

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes 1) schools whose students achieve at very high levels or 2) schools making significant progress in closing achievement gaps among different groups of students. The Program sets a standard of excellence for all schools striving for the highest level of achievement.

National Blue Ribbon Schools are honored each year at a recognition ceremony in Washington, DC. The applications from the award-winning schools are posted on the Department's website. A small group of National Blue Ribbon Schools are visited each year to identify educational practices that have been especially successful.

The Department invites Chief State School Officers (CSSOs) for all states and the District of Columbia, the territories, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) to nominate schools for recognition as National Blue Ribbon Schools. In this document, CSSOs will refer to the chief school officers for the states and for the public education entities named above. In submitting the list of nominated schools, the CSSO must certify that the schools meet the minimum requirements established by the Department for nomination. As described below, states must rely on their state accountability and assessment systems to identify schools for submission to the Secretary.

Requirements for the State Nomination Process

The number of schools each state may nominate is based on the number of K-12 students and schools in each state, ranging from a minimum of three schools to a maximum of 35. For information about nomination allocations, contact Aba Kumi, Director, National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, Aba.Kumi@ed.gov or by phone: (202) 401-1767.

At least one-third of the public schools nominated by each state must have enrollments which include at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds. A student from a "*disadvantaged background*" is defined by the CSSO of each state. The definition must include students who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals and may include students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient, migrant, or receiving services under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

The Department also recommends nominated schools reflect the demographic and geographic diversity of the state's school-age population.

Each state's nomination criteria must pertain equally to all schools nominated by the state.

Eligibility Requirements Based on School Performance

In order to be eligible for nomination, a school must meet several criteria based on the performance of its students on state assessments in reading (English language arts) and mathematics. A school may be nominated in either of two performance award categories:

1. *Exemplary High Performing Schools*: “High performing” is defined by the CSSO of each state, but at a minimum means:
 - a. The performance of all tested students in the school in the most recent year tested in both reading (English language arts) and mathematics must be in the top 15 percent of all schools in the state when schools are ranked based on the performance of all tested students.
 - b. For each of the school’s subgroups, the performance of all tested students in the subgroup in the most recent year tested in both reading (English language arts) and mathematics must be in the top 40 percent of all schools in the state when schools are ranked based on the performance of tested students in that subgroup.
 - c. For the most recent year in which graduation rates are available in the state, the graduation rate of a high school must be in the top 15 percent of all high school graduation rates in the state.
2. *Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools*: “Achievement gap closing” is defined by the CSSO of each state, but at a minimum means:
 - a. The school must be in the top 15 percent of all schools in the state for both reading (English language arts) and mathematics based on its progress in closing achievement gaps between the school’s subgroups and the state’s all-students group over the past five years, comparing the most recent year to the earliest year.
 - b. For each of the school’s subgroups, the performance of all tested students in the subgroup in the most recent year tested in both reading (English language arts) and mathematics must be in the top 40 percent of all schools in the state when schools are ranked based on the performance of tested students in that subgroup.
 - c. For the most recent year in which graduation rates are available in the state, the graduation rate of each of a high school’s subgroups must be in the top 40 percent of all high school graduation rates for that subgroup in the state.
 - d. The change in the performance of all tested students in the school over the past five years, comparing the most recent year to the earliest year, must not be less than the change in the performance of all tested students in the state in both reading (English language arts) and mathematics.

In addition to meeting the above performance criteria, a nominated school must have at least 100 students enrolled and have assessment data for at least 10 students in each tested grade for both reading (English language arts) and mathematics. States with a large percentage of schools with fewer than 100 students enrolled may include up to a similar percentage of these schools in their nominations as long as each school has assessment data for at least 10 students in each tested grade for both reading (English language arts) and mathematics.

Also, all nominated public schools must meet their state’s Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) in reading (English language arts) and mathematics or make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in reading (English language arts) and mathematics in each of the two years prior to nomination (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and must do the same for the year in which they are nominated (2014-2015).

Special Assessment Provision for the 2015 Award Year

Some schools in some states participated in field testing in the 2013-14 school year for new assessments developed by the assessment consortia. These schools may not have assessments results available for this school year. The Department has decided to allow states with such schools to use the state assessment results from the 2012-13 school year to nominate schools for the 2015 award year. These will be the same assessment results that were used to nominate schools for the 2014 award year. Thus, if these states rank order schools in the same way for the 2015 award year, it is likely that the same schools would be eligible for the 2015 award. (If such a state revises its nomination plan for the 2015 award, there may be other schools that are eligible for nomination.) These states, however, should have additional schools that are still eligible—schools that were not nominated for the 2014 award—based on meeting the above school performance criteria and the other criteria listed below. If not, the state should contact Aba Kumi, Director, National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, by e-mail: Aba.Kumi@ed.gov or by phone: (202) 401-1767.

Other National Blue Ribbon Schools Eligibility Requirements

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.
2. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must offer foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
3. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2009, and tested grades must have been part of the school for at least the past three years.
4. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon School award in the past five years: 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, or 2014.
5. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
6. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
7. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office for Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
8. OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
9. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
10. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

State Plan for Nominating National Blue Ribbon Schools

The Department is using a new process that requires all states to describe the procedures they will use to determine which schools are eligible for nomination. All states must develop and submit a plan for how they will identify and select schools eligible for recognition in each performance category: (a) Exemplary High Performing Schools and (b) Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools. This new process recognizes that many states are implementing significant changes in academic standards, assessments and accountability metrics and targets. States may submit revisions of the plan they submitted for the previous award year. As in the previous year, states may choose to nominate only Exemplary *High Performing Schools* or *Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools* or both. The plan must describe the procedures the state will use for each category in which they choose to nominate schools. The following description of appropriate content should be used as a guide in determining what revisions need to be made.

For identifying either *Exemplary High Performing* or *Achievement Gap Closing Schools*, the plan must address the following questions:

1. What measure of student performance will be used to rank order schools based on the performance of all or subgroups of students on the state assessments (e.g., average student scale score, percentage of proficient students, student growth based on value added or growth percentiles)?
2. Will schools be ranked separately for reading and mathematics, requiring a school to be ranked sufficiently high in both subjects, or after combining each school's performance in reading and mathematics?
3. Will certain types of schools be excluded from the ranking process (e.g., enrollments under 100, less than 10 tested students in each grade in reading or mathematics) or will those schools be filtered out after the ranking process is completed?
4. Will schools be ranked within each grade, within grade levels (e.g., elementary, middle, high), or across all grades tested? If not across all grades tested, how will schools that serve more than one grade or grade level be ranked?
5. For which subgroups, including special low-performing groups or super subgroups, will schools be ranked based on subgroup performance?
6. What is the minimum for the number of students tested in a subgroup in a school in order to include a school in a ranking based on that subgroup's performance?
7. What is the minimum for the number of students tested in a subgroup in a school before the school is held accountable for being in the top 40 percent for that subgroup?
8. What type of graduation rate based on which year was used to rank order high schools on graduation rate?

For identifying *Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools*,

1. For which two years (e.g., the most recent year and four years prior) will the gap between each school's subgroups and the state all student group be calculated so that the change in the gap from the earlier to the most recent year for each school can be ranked for each subgroup?
2. For which two years (e.g., the most recent year and four years prior) will the difference between each school's all student group and the state's all student group be calculated so that the change in

this difference from the earlier to the most recent year for each school can be calculated to demonstrate that the school's all students group has not declined relative to the state's all student group

Submitting State Nomination Plans to the Department

States are required to submit their nomination plans, as outlined above, for review. Plans can be submitted online through a secure portal located at [State Liaison National Blue Ribbon Portal](#). Reviewers will follow up with questions, suggestions, or comments when necessary. Should technical assistance be required while developing plans, state liaisons should contact Aba Kumi, Director, National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, by e-mail: Aba.Kumi@ed.gov or by phone: (202) 401-1767.

Submitting State Nominated Schools to the Department

Once plans are reviewed and accepted by the Department, states will implement their own methodology for nominating schools. Submissions of nominated schools will be made online through a secure portal located at: [State Liaison National Blue Ribbon Portal](#). The submissions will include descriptive information and demographic data for each nominated school. In addition, submissions will supply a URL to each school's most recent public report card.

Before submitting nominations, the Department recommends that state liaisons contact the principal of each school under consideration to confirm interest in applying for the National Blue Ribbon School award. In addition, the Department recommends that state liaisons offer to review completed school applications before final submission to ensure that applications reflect the high quality expected by the CSSO. This review would also serve to verify that the school meets the approved state eligibility criteria and all other requirements of the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program. Finally, the Department recommends schools and states hold off publicizing their nominations until after the Secretary's announcement of the awards.

Timeline for 2015 National Blue Ribbon Schools

Date	Due
September 25, 2014	The Secretary sends a letter of invitation to the CSSOs, DoDEA, BIE, and CAPE requesting nominations of schools.
November 21, 2014	Plans for public school nominations from CSSOs, DoDEA, BIE, and non-public school nominations from CAPE are due to the Department.
December, 2014	Plans for nominations are reviewed for alignment with the general eligibility criteria of the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program.
December 12, 2014	Non-public school applications are due to CAPE.
January 12, 2015	Public school nominations from states are due to the Department.
January 15, 2015	The Department invites schools nominated by CSSOs to apply for recognition as National Blue Ribbon Schools.
January 30, 2015	CAPE selects its nominations.
March 20, 2015	Completed public and non-public school applications are due to the Department.

Date	Due
April-May, 2015	Applications are reviewed for completeness, quality and accuracy.
August, 2015	States certify that nominated public schools have met all eligibility requirements.
September, 2015	The Secretary announces the 2015 National Blue Ribbon Schools.
November, 2015	Two representatives from each school, the principal and a teacher, attend the recognition ceremony in Washington, DC.