# Superintendent’s Memo #248-19


**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education**

DATE: October 18, 2019

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: United States Department of Education (USED) National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

The purpose of this memorandum is to announce an opportunity for certain schools in Virginia to be recognized through the [USED National Blue Ribbon Schools Program](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/nclbbrs/index.html).

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes: 1) schools whose students achieve at very high levels; and 2) schools making significant progress in closing academic achievement gaps among student groups. The Virginia Department of Education will select Virginia nominees for the 2020 award year in the categories of Exemplary High Performing Schools and Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools based on the eligibility criteria required by USED.

*Exemplary High Performing Schools:* “High Performing” is defined by the superintendent of each state, but at a minimum means:

* 1. The school must be in the top 15 percent of all public schools in the state when schools are ranked on the performance of all students who participated in the most recently administered state assessments in reading and mathematics;
	2. For each of the school’s student groups, the school must be in the top 40 percent of all public schools in the state when schools are ranked on the performance of all students in the student group who participated in the most recently administered state assessments in reading and mathematics; and
	3. For high schools, the school must be in the top 15 percent of all public high schools in the state when high schools are ranked on the most recently available graduation rate.

*Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools*: “Achievement Gap Closing” is defined by the superintendent of each state, but at a minimum means:

1. For at least one student group, the school must be in the top 15 percent of all public schools in the state when schools are ranked by the difference in the gap between the student group and the statewide performance of all students who participated in the most recently administered state assessments in reading and mathematics as compared to the difference in the gap in performance two years prior;
2. For each of the school’s student groups, the school must be in the top 40 percent of all public schools in the state when schools are ranked on the performance of all students in the student group who participated in the most recently administered state assessments in reading and mathematics;
3. For high schools, for each of the school’s student groups, the school must be in the top 15 percent of all public high schools in the state when high schools are ranked on the most recently available graduation rate for the student group; and
4. The increase in the performance of all students in the school who participated in the most recently administered state assessments in reading and mathematics as compared to the performance two years prior must equal or exceed the increase among all public schools in the state.

In addition to the criteria above, all nominated schools must meet the federal targets in reading, mathematics, and graduation rate (if applicable), and must have reading and mathematics assessment participation rates of at least 95 percent. At least one-third of the public schools nominated by each state must enroll at least 40 percent of traditionally underserved students as defined by the superintendent of each state. The definition must include economically disadvantaged students and may include students with disabilities, students who are English learners, migrant students, and/or students receiving services under Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, as amended.

School divisions are not required to determine eligibility before nominating schools. If you would like a school from your division to be considered as a 2020 nominee from Virginia, please send an email indicating the division and full name of the school to ESSA@doe.virginia.gov by Friday, November 8, 2019. Please include the wording "2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools" in the subject of the email.

Questions should be directed to Dr. Lynn Sodat, Director, Office of ESEA Programs, at Lynn.Sodat@doe.virginia.gov or (804) 225-2870.

JFL/ls