



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

November 20, 2015

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, 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 recognition of certain schools in Virginia through the [USED National Blue Ribbon Schools Program](#). The Department of Education encourages school divisions to nominate schools.

The Department will select nominees based on the eligibility criteria required by USED. School divisions are not required to determine eligibility before nominating schools. In order to ensure equity in the nomination process, priority selection of "finalist" schools by the Department will be based on those schools or school divisions that have not been nominated by Virginia in the past.

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program honors elementary and secondary schools whose students achieve at high levels or schools that make significant progress in closing the achievement gap. The program sets a standard of excellence for all schools striving for the highest level of achievement. Schools are eligible for the recognition if they meet either one of two criteria outlined below.

1. *Exemplary High Performing Schools*. "High performing" is defined by the superintendent of each state, but at a minimum means:
 - a. the performance for all tested students in the school in the most recent year tested in both reading 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 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; and
 - c. the graduation rate of nominated high schools must be in the top 15 percent of all high schools in the state for the most recent year; **or**

1. *Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools*. "Achievement gap closing" is defined by the superintendent 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 and mathematics based on progress in closing achievement gaps between the school's subgroups and the state's all-students group over the past five years;

- b. for each subgroup, the performance of all tested students in the subgroup in the most recent year tested in both reading 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. the graduation rates of students in all subgroups in a high school must be in the top 40 percent of all high school graduation rates for that subgroup in the state; and
- 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 and mathematics.

Additional information is available on the USED National Blue Ribbon Schools Program Web site at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/nclbbrs/index.html>.

If you would like a school from your division to be considered as a 2016 nominee from Virginia, please send an e-mail indicating the division and full name of the school to Christopher.Kelly@doe.virginia.gov by Friday, December 11, 2015. Please include the wording "National Blue Ribbon Schools" in the subject of the e-mail.

For questions, please contact Christopher Kelly, education coordinator, by e-mail at Christopher.Kelly@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 225-2122; or Dr. Susan Fitzpatrick, grants and reports manager, by e-mail at Susan.Fitzpatrick@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 225-2897.

SRS/VT/ck