



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

October 31, 2014

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: United States Department of Education's National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

The purpose of this memorandum is to announce an opportunity for recognition of certain schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia through the United States Department of Education's National Blue Ribbon Schools Program (Blue Ribbons Program). The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) encourages school divisions to nominate eligible schools according to the criteria.

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

1. *Exemplary High Performing Schools.* "High performing" is defined by the Chief State School Officer (CSSO) of each state, but at a minimum means: (a) that 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) that 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) that 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
2. *Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools.* "Achievement gap closing" is defined by the CSSO of each state, but at a minimum means: (a) that 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) that 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) that 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) that 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 U. S. Department of Education's National Blue Ribbon School Program Web site at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/nclbbrs/index.html>.

If you would like the VDOE to consider a school from your division as a 2015 National Blue Ribbon nominee from Virginia, please send an e-mail indicating the name of the school to Susan.Fitzpatrick@doe.virginia.gov by Friday, November 21, 2014. Please include the wording "National Blue Ribbon Schools" in the subject of the e-mail. The VDOE will select nominees based on the eligibility criteria required by the United States Department of Education. Please note also that priority selection of "finalist" schools by the department will be based on those schools or school divisions that have not been nominated in the past. The department's goal is to ensure equity throughout the state whenever possible.

For questions regarding the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, please contact Dr. Susan Fitzpatrick, grants and program manager, at (804) 225-2897 or by e-mail to Susan.Fitzpatrick@doe.virginia.gov, or Selena McBride, grants and reports manager, at (804) 371-4989 or by e-mail to Selena.McBride@doe.virginia.gov.

SRS/BWR/pl