



No Child Left Behind--Blue Ribbon Schools

The *No Child Left Behind—Blue Ribbon Schools Program* honors public and private elementary, middle and high schools that are either academically superior or that demonstrate dramatic gains in student achievement to high levels. In addition to being honored at a ceremony in Washington, DC, where each school receives a plaque and flag signifying their status, these schools serve as models for other schools throughout the nation and details of their achievements are shared on the U. S. Department of Education’s website.

I. Background

Since 1982, the U. S. Department of Education’s Blue Ribbon Schools Program has honored many of America’s most successful schools. A Blue Ribbon School flag waving overhead has become a trademark of excellence, a symbol of quality recognized by everyone from parents to policy-makers in thousands of communities. In 2002, the program was renewed to bring it in line with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This renewed program honors schools whose students achieve at very high levels or make significant progress in closing the achievement gap. The No Child Left Behind – Blue Ribbon Schools Program sets a high standard that should be a goal for all improving schools and schools striving for high levels of achievement.

II. Nomination Process

For public schools, the Secretary of Education invites Chief State School Officers (CSSOs) to nominate schools that meet the criteria for recognition from their states. For private schools, the Secretary invites the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) to nominate private schools that also meet the criteria for recognition. Each state is assigned a number of possible applicants based on the number of K-12 students and the number of schools in the state. The number of possible state applicants ranges from a minimum of 3 schools to a maximum of 35. CAPE may nominate up to 50 private schools. The potential total for all nominations is 413 schools each year.

One-third of the schools nominated by each state must have at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Public schools must also make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the current year.

The *No Child Left Behind-Blue Ribbon Schools Program* accepts both public and private elementary and secondary schools that meet either of two assessment criteria:

- *High performing schools:* Schools, regardless of their demographics, that are in the top 10 percent of schools in their states as measured by state tests in both reading (English language arts) and mathematics or that score in the top 10 percent on assessments referenced against national norms in at least the highest grade tested in the last year tested.
- *Dramatically improved schools:* Schools that have at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds and have dramatically improved student performance to high levels in reading (English language arts) and mathematics on state assessments or assessments referenced against national norms in at least the highest grade tested in the last year tested.

A student from a “*disadvantaged background*” is defined by the CSSO of each state. The definition must include students who are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals, and may include students who are limited English proficient, migrant, in need of special services, or receiving services under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

III. Criteria for High Performing Schools

Public Schools:

- Regardless of the school’s percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the school is high performing. “*High performing*” means that the achievement of the school’s students in at least the highest grade tested in the latest year tested places the school in the top 10 percent of schools in the state on state assessments of reading (or English language arts) and mathematics. Disaggregated results for student subgroups, including students from disadvantaged backgrounds, must be similar to the levels of all students tested.
- The school must have made AYP as defined by the state for the past two years, including the year the school is nominated. The school must also make AYP in the year it receives the award.

Private Schools:

- Regardless of the school’s demographics or percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the school is high performing. “*High performing*” means that the achievement of the school’s students in at least the highest grade tested in the last year tested places the school in the top 10 percent of schools in the nation in reading (English language arts) and mathematics as measured by an assessment referenced against national norms or in the top 10 percent in its state as measured by a state test. If a private school administers both state tests

and nationally normed tests, the school must be in the top 10 percent in both. Disaggregated results for student groups, including disadvantaged students, must be similar to the levels of all students tested.

IV. Criteria for Dramatically Improved Schools

Public Schools:

- At least 40 percent of the nominated school's students are from disadvantaged backgrounds and the achievement of its students has dramatically improved to high levels. *"Dramatically improved to high levels"* is defined by the CSSO of each state but, at a minimum, means (a) for at least the highest grade tested, the school has demonstrated a positive trend in test results from the earliest to the latest year reported, and (b) in at least the highest grade tested in the latest year tested, the achievement of the school's students places the school in the top 40 percent of schools in the state on state assessments of reading (or English language arts) and mathematics. Disaggregated results for student subgroups, including students from disadvantaged backgrounds, also show improvement similar to that of all students.
- The school must have made AYP as defined by the state for the past two years, including the year the school is nominated. The school must also make AYP in the year it receives the award.

Private Schools:

- Schools with at least 40 percent of the student body from disadvantaged backgrounds, and have dramatically improved their performance in reading (English language arts) and mathematics to high levels. *"Dramatically improved"* is defined as an increase of at least one-half standard deviation over at least five years and includes the disadvantaged students as shown by disaggregated data. *"High levels"* means that the achievement of the school's students in at least the highest grade tested in the last year tested places the school in the top 40 percent of schools in the nation in reading (English language arts) and mathematics as measured by an assessment referenced against national norms or in the top 40 percent in its state as measured by a state test. If a private school administers both state tests and nationally normed tests, the school must be in the top 40 percent in both.

V. Other requirements for any school to be able to qualify:

- The nominated school has some configuration that includes grades K-12. Preschools are not eligible. Even if the state separates the school into grade levels for administrative purposes, schools on the same campus with one

principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school. For example, a K-12 school will be judged on assessment results in the highest grade tested in the high school part of the school.

- The school has not been in school improvement status or been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
- To meet final eligibility, the school must meet the state's adequate yearly progress requirement in the 2007-2008 school year (unless it is a private school).
- If the school includes grades 7 or higher, it must have foreign language as a part of its core curriculum.
- The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2002 and has not previously received the *NCLB – Blue Ribbon School Award*. (Schools are eligible to be nominated every five years.)
- The nominated school or district is not refusing the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
- The 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 the OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
- 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.
- 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.

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