

# Congratulations!

## Solomon Schechter Day School of Raritan Valley for Becoming a Blue Ribbon School



### Purpose:

Since the Blue Ribbon Schools Program was established by the Secretary of Education in 1982, it has developed into a national school improvement strategy with three purposes. First, it identifies and recognizes outstanding public and private schools across the nation. Second, the program makes research-based effectiveness criteria available to all schools so they can assess themselves and plan improvements. Third, the program encourages schools, both within and among themselves, to share information about best practices based on a common understanding of criteria related to educational success.

Blue Ribbon Schools are models of both excellence and equity. To be recognized, a school must demonstrate a strong commitment to educational excellence for all students. The program welcomes applications from schools that have demonstrated sustained success in achieving these values, as well as schools that have overcome obstacles and can provide evidence of significant improvements.

### Which Schools May Be Nominated?

Public and private schools serving grades K-12 from the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Department of Defense Dependents Schools, may be nominated. Elementary and secondary schools are eligible to participate in alternate years. Middle schools participate in program with secondary schools.

The minimum period of operation for public and private schools, including newly merged schools, is five years; that is, the school must be in its sixth full year of operation when the application is submitted.

### How Are Schools Chosen?

Each state education agency administers its own program for selecting public schools to be nominated to the national level. Chief State School Officers make their nominations to the U.S. Department of Education. The Council for American Private Education nominates private schools, and officials of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of Defense Dependents Schools nominate their schools. Each of these nominating agencies has an assigned Blue Ribbon liaison who provides guidance to schools applying to the program.

The Department convenes the National Review Panel to evaluate the nominations. The panel consists of approximately 100 outstanding public and private school educators from the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. Based on the quality of the application, the most promising schools are recommended for site visits. The purpose of a visit is to verify the accuracy of the information the school has provided in its nomination form and to gather any additional information the panel has requested. Experienced educators, including principals of previously recognized schools, visit and observe the schools for two days and submit written site visit reports. The National Review Panel considers the reports in its final review of applicants and makes recommendations to the U.S. Secretary of Education, who then announces the names of the schools selected for recognition.



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## What Selection Criteria Are Used?

The National Review Panel considers the following general categories in analyzing the application of each school:

- Student Focus and Support
- School Organization and Culture
- Challenging Standards and Curriculum
- Active Teaching and Learning
- Professional Community
- Leadership and Educational Vitality
- School, Family, and Community Partnerships
- Indicators of Success

Details of these eight categories of selection criteria are provided in the nomination package available through the nominating agencies or on the U.S. Department of Education website.

Each year, special emphases are designated. These represent areas where school performance needs to be greatly improved and where effective models are sought. Schools may choose to seek honors in one special emphasis area in addition to comprehensive recognition.



## What Are the Benefits?

The Blue Ribbon Schools Program has proven to be effective in numerous ways:

- The nomination package provides a comprehensive framework of research-based criteria that schools can use to assess themselves and plan changes. The self-assessment is an opportunity to involve all relevant stakeholders in a common school improvement project.
- Recognition is a powerful energizer for recognized schools to make further improvements.
- By publicly validating school improvement efforts, confidence in recognized schools increases. Their receiving the award often results in higher local funding for schools, greater parent and community involvement in education, and success in the search for outside funds and other resources.
- The public spotlight shines on recognized schools; often they are the subjects of articles in national, state, and local publications. They are designated as the universe from which schools, teachers, or students are selected for special awards from business and industry.
- Recognized schools have opportunities to share their effective practices with other schools as well as to learn from other schools.



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