

## **National Blue Ribbon at St. John the Evangelist**

On September 24, 2013, the auditorium exploded with cheers and vigorous waving of blue pompoms as it was announced that St. John the Evangelist had been selected as a U.S. Department of Education National Blue Ribbon School.

One of only fifty private schools in the nation to be given this designation in 2013, SJE was also one of only seven Maryland elementary schools, public or private, to win the honor as a “high-performing” school. That means that SJE was ranked among the highest performing schools in reading and math, with its students testing in the top ten percent of all students in the state in those areas.

Public and private schools submit applications that discuss all aspects of a school’s “personality”: student academic achievement, school culture, extracurricular activities, and parent involvement. A particularly strong aspect of SJE’s application was our emphasis on building a culture of virtue and the vital sense of community that anyone who enters the school immediately understands.

Since the awarding of the Blue Ribbon in 2013, SJE has continued to meet the Blue Ribbon Standards in Reading and Math in all applicable grades. Our scores are well above the national average in these areas on nationally normed standardized tests.

## **History of the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program is a United States government program created in 1982 to honor schools that have achieved high levels of student achievement or made significant improvements in closing the achievement gap among student subgroups.

In 1981, then-Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell commissioned a study of American education. The report, issued two years later as *A Nation at Risk*, described a “rising tide” of mediocre schools that threatened the nation’s future.

Secretary Bell created the National Blue Ribbon Schools Award to bring exemplary U.S. schools to public attention and to recognize those schools whose students thrived and excelled. Schools must show how data are interpreted and used and how curriculum, instruction, professional development, and student support promote student success. Working with the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Bell launched the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program.

### **Criteria**

- The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program accepts nominations of both public and non-public schools that meet one of two criteria:
  - Exemplary High Performing Schools are among their state's highest performing schools as measured by state assessments or nationally normed tests.
  - Exemplary Achievement Gap-Closing Schools are among their state's highest performing schools in closing achievement gaps between a school's subgroups and all students over the past five years.
- Eligible schools must have been in existence for five years and cannot have received the award within the five prior years.
- Schools must have excellence in the fields of academics, arts, and athletics.
- The Blue Ribbon award is considered the highest honor an American school can achieve. Each school that is given the honor of a Blue Ribbon Award shares several key characteristics: they have administrators and teachers who are dedicated to high standards of learning for all students, they engage in data collection and analysis to determine the efficacy of instruction and assessment, they have students who demonstrate academic excellence, and they undertake professional development to stay at the forefront of best practices.

### **Benefits of the National Blue Ribbon Program**

The National Blue Ribbon of Distinction serves a number of different purposes. First, it identifies the highest achieving schools in the country, using standards that correctly interpret student performance and improvement. Second, the program makes criteria available to all schools to help them evaluate their current quality status and find appropriate places for improvement.

Finally, the National Blue Ribbon program facilitates the exchange of information between the award-winning schools and those looking for solutions to their own obstacles. The recognition some schools receive stimulates the efforts of other schools to achieve the high standards as well. Because proven programs are shared among all schools, lower achieving institutions have models to help them raise their own bar and vie for the award in subsequent academic years.