

National ESEA Distinguished Schools

Overview and Selection Process¹

Program Overview

The National ESEA Distinguished Schools Program is a project of the [National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators](#) (NAESPA) that publicly recognizes qualifying federally funded schools for positive educational advances and the outstanding academic achievement of their students.



Established in 1996, the program showcases hundreds of schools identified by states for their success in one of three categories:

- Category 1: Exceptional student performance and academic growth, as determined by each state
- Category 2: Closing the achievement gap between student groups, as determined by each state
- Category 3: Excellence in serving special populations of students (e.g., homeless, migrant, English learners, economically disadvantaged, etc.)

Each year, Tennessee is invited to nominate two public schools for this award. Visit the [National ESEA Distinguished Schools](#) website for more information and to view [stories of success](#) from past awardees.

National ESEA Distinguished School Eligibility

Schools are named by the state and collectively exhibit the following common characteristics:

- A poverty rate of at least 35 percent for the selected year.
- Demonstrated high academic achievement for two or more consecutive years.
- Met or exceeded state standards of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for at least two consecutive years.

¹ Adapted from the [National ESEA Distinguished Schools](#) website

National ESEA Distinguished School Annual Timeline

Note: Timeline may vary slightly from year to year based on guidelines from NAESPA.

Date	Event
October	Department analyzes TCAP results to determine nominations
Early November	Nominations are finalized and schools are notified
Mid-November	Department submits nominations for National ESEA Distinguished Schools to NAESPA
December - January	Schools work with NAESPA to complete their online profile and prepare for conference recognition
February	Schools recognized at the annual National ESEA Conference

Tennessee Selection Process

Tennessee utilizes the same selection process for [National Blue Ribbon Schools](#) and National ESEA Distinguished Schools, adhering to the following business rules/steps:

Note: LEAs are eligible to receive one award per year (i.e., one National Blue Ribbon award or one National ESEA Distinguished Schools award).

Step 1. Blue Ribbon: Exemplary High Performing Schools

Select the first six schools from the top 15 percent in TCAP overall performance composite score (using success rate percentile). Schools must:

1. Be in the top 40 percent in all tested subgroups
2. Be in the top 15 percent in graduation rate (high schools only)
3. Have at least 100 students enrolled and have assessment data for at least 10 students in each tested grade for reading and math
4. Have an assessment participation rate of at least 95 percent
5. Have no history of testing irregularities
6. Have been in existence for the last 5 years, and all tested grades at least 3 years
7. Have no violations or pending suits with the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Justice, or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
8. Have not received Blue Ribbon or National ESEA Distinguished School award in last 5 years
9. Must have two Title I schools in this list (i.e., schools that receive Title I funds due to 40 percent poverty, or waiver for between 30-40 percent). If no Title I schools are in the top six, select the top four overall, then the first two Title I schools in the top 15 percent

Step 2. National ESEA Distinguished Schools

The next two Title I schools in the top 15 percent after Blue Ribbon School selection become National ESEA Distinguished Schools. Schools must:

1. Be a Title I school with a poverty rate of at least 35 percent
2. Have demonstrated achievement or growth for two or more consecutive years on TCAP
3. Be eligible in one of two categories (both categories must be represented):
 - a. Category 1: exceptional student performance and academic growth for two or more consecutive years

- b. Category 3: excellence in serving special populations of students (e.g., economically disadvantaged, homeless, migrant, English learners, etc.)
4. Have not received Blue Ribbon or National ESEA Distinguished School award in last five years

Questions?

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