

# National Blue Ribbon Schools

## Overview and Selection Process<sup>1</sup>

### Program Overview

The National Blue Ribbon Schools (NBRSS) Program recognizes public and private elementary, middle, and high schools based on their overall academic excellence or their progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. Every year, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) seeks out and celebrates great American schools: schools demonstrating that all students can achieve high levels. Now in its 38th year, the NBRSS Program has bestowed almost 10,000 awards to more than 9,000 schools, with some schools winning multiple awards. Visit the [National Blue Ribbon School Program website](#) for more information and to search [previous recipients](#) of the award.



### Blue Ribbon Eligibility for Public Schools

USED invites states to nominate schools for recognition as National Blue Ribbon Schools. Annually, Tennessee is invited to select up to six schools to be nominated for the award. In submitting nominated schools, the state must certify that the nominated schools meet the minimum requirements established by USED for nomination.

- To be eligible for nomination, a school must meet several criteria based on the performance of its students on state assessments in English language arts and mathematics or a composite of performance on these assessments with other measures of student performance (e.g., student growth on state assessments, performance on state assessments in other subjects, graduation rates, or other indicators in the state's accountability system).
- In Tennessee, schools are nominated in the performance award category of *Exemplary High Performing*. Schools are ranked based on the performance of all students on the most recently administered TCAP assessments in English language arts and mathematics combined.
- The nomination criteria for high schools include additional performance criteria based on graduation rates.
- At least one-third of the public schools nominated by each state must be schools with a high percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (i.e., students receiving services under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the [U.S. Department of Education National Blue Ribbon School Program](#) website

- Additional requirements include, but are not limited to:
  - Three of the nominated schools must be from rural LEAs as defined by the [National Center for Educational Statistics](#).
  - The nominated school must have been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2017, and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2022.
  - The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years.
  - The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, USED reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award.
  - The nominated school should not have been identified by the state within the last two years as "persistently dangerous."
  - The nominated school or local educational agency (LEA) should not be refusing the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct an LEA-wide compliance review.
  - The OCR should not have issued a violation letter of findings to the LEA concluding that the nominated school or the LEA as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the LEA to remedy the violation.
  - The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) should not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the LEA as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
  - The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (the school will provide a URL link to the policy within their application), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. USED reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.
  - There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in a USED monitoring report that apply to the school or LEA in question; or if there are such findings, the state or LEA has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.
- More information about Blue Ribbon eligibility and performance award criteria can be found [here](#).

## Blue Ribbon Annual Timeline

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

Month	Event
October	Department analyzes TCAP results to determine nominations.
Early November	Nominations are finalized and schools are notified.
Late December	Department submits nominations for National Blue Ribbon Schools to USED.
January	Nomination processes and data for public schools considered for nomination are reviewed by USED and an assessment panel for alignment with the general eligibility criteria of the program.
Early February	States officially submit approved schools for nomination and USED invites schools to apply for the award.
Early April	Completed school applications are due to USED.
April – June	Applications are reviewed for completeness, quality, and accuracy.
August	States certify that nominated public schools have met all eligibility requirements.
September	The Secretary of Education announces NBRS.
November	Two representatives from each school, the principal and a teacher, attend the recognition ceremony in Washington, DC.

### 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 three schools from rural LEAs as defined by the National Center for Educational Statistics. If no schools from rural LEAs are in the top six schools, select the top three overall, then the first top three rural schools in the top 15 percent in TCAP overall performance composite score.
10. 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 the last five years

**Questions?**

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