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# National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

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EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

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CHRISTOPHER KELLY, NBRS LIAISON, VIRGINIA  
Interview Transcript



My name is Christopher Kelly, Education Coordinator with the Virginia Department of Education. I started with the Department six years ago in the Office of Program Administration and Accountability, and the Blue Ribbon Schools program is managed out of our office. I'm responsible for overseeing that program and working with the Title I Distinguished Schools program.

For the selection of the Blue Ribbon Schools, the process begins in the Fall with a notice to superintendents to nominate high performing schools in their school district. In December our office gets together with our education information management department, to review schools' eligibility. Then we cross-reference the list of nominees and the rank list that we get from our EMIS [education management information system] department. Then we have a committee that reviews these schools to ensure that the schools we choose are qualified with the percentile performance and the other related elements for this award. Then the committee also determines that list to represent Virginia and the diverse representation it has.

I think the biggest thing that we've done in our office differently is after the award and after they've been selected and after the ceremony, we work with them that following year to continue to promote so their community knows about it.

We feel it's important to communicate this prestigious award to all of our schools. So, in addition to a press release that we work through our communications office, the Department works with the Blue Ribbon schools to help them promote their success. In the past two years we assist them in developing a public relations promotion strategy. We encourage our schools to host celebration events and invite their local state delegates and officials to visit their schools and enjoy the celebration throughout the year. We assist them with developing their own personal press release and encourage them also to invite press to their schools to do a story. One of the most recent components we've added is a digital promotion component to promote their accomplishments through social media. Within the Department, we ask them to include @VDOEnews or the hashtag VDOE-news within their posts and then our communications office takes that information, and then expands upon it and promotes it throughout the state. The final thing that we do is we share other digital promotions we've seen across the Commonwealth with Blue Ribbon Schools. We've seen divisions create videos and feature items on their websites. We share these examples with our Blue Ribbon Schools to help them promote this prestigious award.

I saw some of our school divisions that are large, urban school divisions have a lot of resources. Where we select a broad representation in our rural districts or districts that don't have those resources, I felt it was important to help them and guide them with that process.

I feel that National Blue Ribbon Schools is a pinnacle of our reward programs and really helps put the spotlight on the success of our schools. We know that when a school is selected as a Blue Ribbon school, they recognize and the community recognizes that it is the highest achievement that a school can receive.