
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

2019 National Blue Ribbon Schools Ceremony

November 14, 2019

Terrel H. Bell Awards: Secretary DeVos and Erin Roche

Betsy DeVos, U.S. Secretary of Education: Good afternoon everyone. Thank you so much Corinne for that very kind introduction. I'm just sad that I missed you and your classmates playing the beautiful music I know you did. Let's give the Severna Park Orchestra another round of applause.

Before I begin, I do want to take a moment to offer my heartfelt prayers to the teachers, families, and students of Santa Clarita, California. This tragedy is another devastating reminder that our nation must come together to address the underlying issues that create a culture of violence. This administration's committed to keeping our nation's students and teachers safe at school. I know all of you join us in that commitment.

I'd like to especially thank Earl Franks, representing elementary school principals, Bob Farrace, representing secondary school principals, and Jim Barnes, representing the middle school principals. We look forward to working with you to keep all students and teachers safe and to expand education freedom for all students.

I also want to thank Adam Honeysett, Aba Kumi, Francis Hopkins, and everyone at the Department who played a role in this ceremony and celebration. They've done a great job. Let's give them a round of applause a moment.

Of course, the primary reason we're here today is to celebrate all of you. This year's National Blue Ribbon schools and recipients of the Terrel Bell Award for outstanding school leadership, National Blue Ribbon schools show what's possible when communities create vibrant, innovative cultures of learning and teaching. You show what's possible when you put student achievement above all else. You know that a world class education is the great equalizer, the surest way for each student to pursue their own dreams and achieve their own goals. And we know that every child is unique. Different students in different places have different needs. We recognize different kinds of schools precisely because of this reality.

Every Blue Ribbon school is a standout on its own, but let me highlight a couple of them in the hope that you will draw inspiration and learn from one another. At Communications High School in New Jersey, students are immersed in honors and college level courses which prepare them for careers in as you might expect, communications. They tear down the silos between business and education and provide a theme based curriculum in partnership with community and industry partners, including local colleges and universities. Students there are finding their vocation and pursuing it.

Students at Maxine Smith STEAM Academy in Memphis have their learning augmented by exciting experiments and industry field trips, which prepare them to tackle local community problems and fill

local Memphis needs. Each National Blue Ribbon school embodies that kind of excellence and uniqueness. Your vision for meeting students' needs and guiding them toward achievement is inspiring.

But as you know, this sort of success is about so much more than any school building. After all, at the end of the day, when the lights are off and the doors are locked, that's all it is. A building. It's the people, your work, your care and your love who make it truly special. That's why it's such a treat to be here to honor the 2019 Terrel H. Bell Award winners. School leadership matters and your students' success demonstrates that. Principals, you are there for your students and your teachers wherever and whenever they need you.

Whether late at night or early in the morning, over a long weekend or through the summer. Whether you're visiting students and parents in their homes, hosting new learning opportunities or reaching out to community or business partners, whatever the situation, you're there. You're there to lift up a discouraged teacher or lend an ear to another who needs to be heard. You're there to meet with parents who are concerned about their child, to help your students stand up when they fall and cheer them on when they succeed. You're being recognized today because you're excelling and you are helping your students and teachers to do the same.

That's one reason I champion you and the freedom you need to run your schools according to what you know your students and families need, for your team to be able to personalize instruction so that every one of your students can truly succeed. We are committed to expanding education freedom for principals, teachers, and importantly for students. We know that education freedom unleashes countless new avenues for teaching, for creating, for innovating, for learning. Each of your students has tremendous potential. They're capable of achieving great things and their formation is our shared opportunity. That formation begins at home and it is aided by all of you. So on behalf of everyone at the Department of Education, thank you for all you do for your students every day. Thank you very much.

Erin Roche, School Ambassador Fellow: Good afternoon. My name is Erin Roche. I am a School Ambassador Fellow at the US Department of Education as well as the proud principal of Prescott Elementary School in Chicago Public Schools. As a neighborhood school scheduled to be closed in 2010 for low enrollment, Prescott's story over the last 10 years is particularly inspiring as achieved the National Blue Ribbon School Award this year. And there are two teachers here with me, Amanda Kirschner and Jennifer Farris, who are important school leaders that made this happen. As all of you know that there are important teacher leaders at your schools that help to transform the lives of students.

From my experience at Prescott for the past 12 years. I value deeply the work of school leaders such as the Terrel H. Bell awardees to elevate school culture and expectations that result in vibrant communities. It is my pleasure to introduce this year's Terrel H. Bell awardees.

As school leaders, our work is sometimes characterized as challenging, but I know that regardless of the size of our schools or the students in our buildings, we shape the future each day as we prepare our students to realize their gifts and use those gifts to persevere through challenges and seize the opportunities ahead. Great leadership is critical to National Blue Ribbon school excellence. Principals and administrators leading National Blue Ribbon schools are strong, hardworking, and visionary. They set the tone and direction for their schools. They inspire creativity and hard work in teachers and staff

and students. They embrace families in their local communities and they use resources wisely to enrich each student and fulfill a shared vision of success.

No one understood this better than the second United States Secretary of Education, Terrel H. Bell. Shortly after Secretary Bell established the National Blue Ribbon school recognition program in 1982, it created the distinguished principal's award. Now named for Secretary Bell himself, the Terrel H. Bell Award recognizes outstanding school leaders and their vital role in guiding their students and schools to excellence, often under challenging circumstances. The Bell Award honors Secretary Bell's memory and celebrates school leaders who have realized his vision of great American schools. Principals in successful schools modestly attribute their school's success to a stellar team of staff, faculty, parents, and community members, and they are right.

We know that it is the principal who shapes the vision, sets the tone, and targets the energy of the many people in the school. The principal was the one who inspires, cajoles, and models the excellence he or she knows that the school community can reach. This award is presented by the US Department of Education together with the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the Association for Middle Level Education, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals in memory of former US Secretary of Education, Terrel H. Bell as a small token of our national appreciation for this essential work. Secretary Bell held education as his highest priority, trusting that all students would find it in their personal key to success as he had. Before we recognize our 2019 Terrel H. Bell Award recipients, I'd like to use this opportunity to honor all of our 2019 National Blue Ribbon School leaders. Will principals, school leaders, and teacher leaders please stand and be recognized.

Thank you so much for your hard work in leading your schools to this recognition and for caring for every child. I now invite Secretary DeVos and our friends from the Principal Associations to present the awards. Now as I call each Bell Award recipient, please come up to receive your award.

From the Eichold-Mertz Magnet School of Math, Science, and Technology in Mobile, Alabama, Michelle Dubose Adams.

Would our awardees please come to the other side of the stage? Sorry. And usually when I'm at a stage and I'm at a podium giving out, it's diplomas and they're to eighth graders. So these are really old eighth graders here.

From the Liberty Elementary School in Fresno, California, George Petersen.

From the John Barry Elementary School in Meriden, Connecticut, Daniel Crispino.

From the Lieutenant Colonel Horace Meek Hickam Elementary School in Honolulu, Hawaii, Alisa Bender.

From Our Lady of Mount Carmel Academy in Chicago, Illinois, Shane Staszczuk.

From the Van Buren Elementary School in Plainfield, Indiana, Ray Helmuth.

From the Unionville Elementary School in Unionville, Indiana, Lily Albright. Congratulations.

From PS 253, The Magnet School of Multicultural Humanities in Brooklyn, New York, Lisa Ditillo Speroni.

From the Hubert R. Hudson Elementary School in Brownsville, Texas, Rachel Ayala.

From Jack Lowe Sr. Elementary School in Dallas, Texas, Sandra Barrios.

Congratulations to all our award recipients and thank you for creating strong and thriving cultures of learning and high achievement, high expectations that have enabled excellence in your school.

Aba Kumi, Director for National Blue Ribbon Schools Program: Thank you. We just want to do a quick class picture.