
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

West Side Elementary School
Elizabethton, Tennessee

Video: 2020 Terrel H. Bell Awardee John Ross Wright, Jr.

Hello, I'm John Wright from West Side Elementary School, nestled in the Highlands of Upper East Tennessee in the town of Elizabethton. When West Side was founded in 1929, they began the day with the ringing of this bell. And in 1948, when the school moved to its current location, the bell did not make the journey. This year, West Side found and took ownership of the original bell and had it restored. And at the beginning of the year, we rang it for the first time in over 70 years.

Winning the Terrel H. Bell award has made it a banner year for bells at West Side, and I'm honored to receive this award because of what Terrel Bell stood for in education. Every child needs to belong to a group or to be good at something, and if we first love those children, then it will give them the motivation to succeed. I've been principal at West Side for eight years and it's been a phenomenal experience. I tell people I've got the greatest job in the world, and the reason is because I work with a group of like-minded people who have high academic expectations and believe that our students can meet those expectations. You have to have buy-in at all levels. We can't do it alone.

To sum it all up, I would say the thing that drives every decision I make is I think, what would I want for my child? I think every student should have the same opportunities that my children had. And I just want to say once again how honored I am to receive this award. I have read about the other nine principals and previous principals that have received this award, and I am just humbled to be in the presence of such a great group of educators.