
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

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Interview Transcript

I've always been an educator, and been working with the national blue ribbon program—gosh, maybe 25 years ago I was part of the group of teachers that would come in and read the Blue Ribbon applications. Even at that point of my teaching, it was so empowering to see all the things that were being done. And not just to see what was being done, but the effect and impact that it had. It was just dynamic.



Catherine Rust, Missouri NBRS State Liaison

About seven years ago, I was invited to be on a small committee that would look at how we could improve our Blue Ribbon Program and then help write the criteria. I was the supervisor for the office of quality schools in the section for school improvement, and I specifically worked for accreditation and accountability. We would go into the buildings, do observations, so it really helped us to identify what are the high expectations that we need to reach. What could we capture that good schools are doing, what are those protocols, what are the practices?

This is probably the best part of my job because in dealing with accreditation, there's always the ups and downs, but dealing with Blue Ribbon, it's all up! Whether it's notifying our schools that they have qualified for Blue Ribbon, or if it is letting the legislators know that they have a school in their area that is a Blue Ribbon school. And you always go into a story of all of the things that they have done and all of the things they've overcome to get to this point.

When a school reaches out to see what they need to do to be a blue ribbon school, I take them through the process of looking at their APR, annual performance report, at the building level and going through to identify where the percent proficient and advanced is identified, and I also take them to our criteria to know what the cut scores are, and then explain how we rank the schools to receive that top eight for us here in Missouri.

Probably five years ago, we chose to align our Missouri Gold Star School program with the National Blue Ribbon so that the criteria were similar, and the timeline was similar. And that has really helped our schools tremendously, to see that alignment. Those that have already achieved the Blue Ribbon as principal or as superintendent, they truly know what it takes to reach that level and then they also understand how important that application process is, both for affirmation and reflection for the building to know quantitatively, how did they get there, but also, qualitatively, to be able to describe and share their story.