

# National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

ERIKA BOLIG, NBRS LIAISON, MICHIGAN

Interview Transcript

I actually started in Jan of 2014. Michigan had not been participating in the National Blue Ribbon School program for over ten years. I was director of our office of evaluation, strategic research, and accountability, so this was a phenomenal opportunity. While we had a rewards program within the state of Michigan—it was an annual designation—it didn't seem to mean nearly as much as the national blue ribbon does to the schools each year that we've been nominating them again.



*Erika Bolig, Michigan NBRS State Liaison*

It's been phenomenal for the state as a whole. It's had significant impact on the schools that have received the award but also has filtered to other schools just even in little things that they can do that will start them on the strong path to improvement.

Our state superintendent, Brian Whiston, has launched this huge initiative to make Michigan a top ten state in ten years. In September, when National Blue Ribbon Schools was announced, we really pointed out that these are the types of schools that will help Michigan be a top ten state.

Michigan made the decision especially after the first year to actually do half of the schools meeting the 40% or more disadvantaged and half of the schools meeting the less than 40%.

I work with a really phenomenal data specialist in our office. First we identify which schools meet the criteria then put them into the two buckets, the 40% or more disadvantaged and the less than 40% disadvantaged, and then rank order the schools in order to do the nominations.

When the schools have accepted the nomination and are working on the actual applications I have offered support, and then it's waiting anxiously with all of them until we get the data to make sure that they meet the final requirements of making the AMO's on the most recent test data. And then I each of the years have gone with our schools from Michigan to the national ceremony in Washington dc and help celebrate with them.

The first time that I went to the Blue Ribbon ceremony in 2014 I told people that it is probably the best educational experience that I have been a part of in my entire career. In terms of the motivation that is there, the things that they give you to think about, being there with all of the greatness across the entire country is just phenomenal.

My background is in developmental psychology and particularly with disadvantaged students. So for me to go back into these schools [that] are 40% or more—and it's not to belittle anything that the other schools are doing—but to be able to see the things that they have done, that there are no excuses and to see how much they are collaborating and they have very high expectations for all of those students, and you know, knowing how bright the future is for those students because of the staff that have worked so very hard for them.