
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

SHERRY PANIZO, NBRS LIAISON, OHIO

Interview Transcript

I started working at the Department of education 11 years ago. I was assigned to one of the state awards that we have for our high poverty – high performing schools and the Blue Ribbon was also part of that assignment.

The other state award is called Schools of Promise. The Ohio State Board of Education had a work group or commission on closing achievement gaps. They found that there are high poverty schools that despite you know the high risk their students have for low performance these schools are doing really well with those students. There tends to be some overlap between our Schools of Promise and our Blue Ribbon schools because of the fact that when we look at performance at the state level, some of the bar we set is very similar.



Sherry Panizo, Ohio NBRS State Liaison

When people want to know what is going on in the schools, it really helps that we have established a relationship with the schools that we have nominated for the Blue Ribbon. I think the applications that schools fill out for Blue Ribbon, really give these schools a chance to highlight what they are doing to really help students. These schools don't just stumble upon it by luck. It really does take work, a concerted effort, a systemic effort to help all students perform at these high levels.

We have a school improvement office. They work steadily and put a lot of effort working with the lowest performing schools in Ohio. These Blue Ribbon and our Schools of Promise are on the other end of that spectrum. But what can these school improvement folks learn from these Blue Ribbon schools and Schools of Promise that will help inform the work?

In some cases, our school improvement folks have been in a school building that is in an urban area, high poverty, and sometimes there are staff in the buildings that feel that they are stuck with kids that are high poverty, parents that are not as engaged so there is nothing we can do about it. That is there thinking but then we can turn and show how we have a district or school with similar demographics and they are performing well and here is why. It is not just about the fact that there is somebody who is over there who has been successful, it is what they are doing to be successful with these kids. Whatever that practice is, whether it gets down to differentiated instruction, to wrap around services, to really focusing the curriculum and helping students understand that they are here not just for today, but when they think about college and career, these are the kind practices that you see in Blue Ribbon. How can we get these ideas to work in the lowest performing schools? So that is how I weave Blue Ribbon not only in my work but across the agency as well.