
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

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Interview Transcript

It's a long time ago that I got involved with the National Blue Ribbon Schools. I think it's probably been about 24 years. I was asked to work on Blue Ribbon Schools because I'd been working on the Teacher of the Year Program and was fairly good at getting sponsors and seemed to really take to the whole notion of recognition. My regular title is the Executive Director of Partnership Development and it's understood that a great part of that is recognition programs.



*Darla Strouse, Maryland NBRS
Liaison*

We have a huge program here. We do some things that I think other states may not do. We celebrate and work with those schools throughout the year, even prior to them being named a National Blue Ribbon School. In Maryland it's a very big deal to be selected as a Maryland Blue Ribbon School. We do tours of excellence; we go to the schools and celebrate with them and try to bring the press out to talk about what makes those schools very special. We have full school assemblies. The district people are there, the superintendent and leaders in the district; we bring our sponsors with us.

The sponsors help support many of the things that we're doing. Sponsors designate gifts to the NBRS that are substantial – technology equipment and gaming instructional licenses, and gifts of supplies. We give each school a two-thousand-dollar award, and that's based on our sponsorships as well.

I think that National Blue Ribbon Schools is one of the most important schoolwide programs that puts the spotlight on success when it comes to our schools. The Blue Ribbon Schools is extremely important because it lets the public know we do have many wonderful public schools in our country. I am passionate about it. I wrote my dissertation on the importance of rewards to schools and in some cases looked at rewards versus sanctions and I just think it is the greatest motivator as well as an affirmation of the hard work and great work of educators.

We need to make certain that this is the most prestigious award for a school in the state. There are a few other nice awards, being a green school, Title 1 awards, but since we have a small number of National Blue Ribbon Schools it's even more prestigious to be one of six.

We have made Blue Ribbon Schools and Teacher of the Year and Milken Awards so grand in many ways that it's more than just “that was a nice day of recognition, now we move on to something else.” Our elected officials know what this program is and I believe have opened their eyes to the importance of recognizing what's working and in many cases marketing that.