
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

JOE MCTIGHE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAPE
Interview Transcript

CAPE stands for the Council for American Private Education, and we are a coalition of 20-plus national organizations and state affiliates that serve religious and independent elementary and secondary schools.

CAPE started coordinating the private school component of the Blue Ribbon Schools program soon after the program first started, back in the early 1980s.

The first thing that an aspiring or hopeful private school should do, is visit CAPE's website, which is capenet.org, where we have posted on the Blue Ribbon Schools page everything a school needs to know to apply for this program, including the national standardized test scores that schools must meet at each grade level. And private schools have to be in the top 15% of test scores across the nation, in each grade level, in order to be eligible for the program.



Joe McTighe, Executive Director, CAPE

Once they know they have met testing criteria, they can then submit the CAPE the exact same application that public schools use, and CAPE has a panel of educators that are experienced in the Blue Ribbon Schools program, and they review the applications and select 50 that meet the testing criteria and that have completed the application correctly and that have demonstrated exemplary school practices as described in the application.

We then nominate those 50 schools to the U.S. Department of Education, and the Department makes the final selection and announces the winners in September, and everybody's happy. School officials get to come to Washington for an awards program in November, and it's quite a celebration of excellence in education.

Blue Ribbon status conveys to other schools the same message it conveys to parents, namely the message that students in the school have met very high achievement levels and the school has demonstrated exemplary practices, based on the program's criteria and the judgment of a respected review panel. And that counts for a lot.

The nature of the private school world is that parents are selecting those schools. They don't have to go to any private school because they live in particular ZIP code area. They can select any private school they want. And so when there's that option to choose, they tend to choose schools that meet their

standards of what a school should be, and one of the standards of course would be academic excellence.

I love the awards ceremony, where I get to meet a lot of dedicated educators who are committed to excellence and are very happy to be in Washington to celebrate the accomplishments of their schools. and the fact that they're at an event that is acknowledging their contribution to the lives of students and to society in general is quite exciting.

The Blue Ribbon School applications contain remarkable stories of generosity and effectiveness in education. Educators are not acknowledged and recognized and rewarded nearly enough for their contributions and accomplishments. And this program is a bright exception to that. It is good to be a part of it.