

2008 Guidance for Chief State School Officers
The No Child Left Behind – Blue Ribbon Schools Program
U.S. Department of Education



Application Process

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What are the eligibility requirements for a nominated school?

The Chief State School Officer (CSSO) must ensure that the schools meet the criteria for recognition before sending their names to the Secretary. The nomination criteria, including assessments, must pertain equally to all schools nominated from the individual state. The CSSO may also wish to verify that the schools are indeed eligible after the schools have completed their applications, but before they are submitted.

Based on state data, the CSSO certifies that the nominated schools meet one of two criteria:

- 1) The school has a student body composed of at least 40 percent of the students from disadvantaged backgrounds and has shown dramatic improvement in test scores to high levels in at least over the past three to five years in reading (or language arts or English, if appropriate) and mathematics. A minimum of three years of data in the highest grade tested in the last year tested is required for applications from schools meeting this criterion.

“Dramatic improvement” is defined by the CSSO of each state. Disaggregated results for student groups, including disadvantaged students, must also show dramatic improvement over the past three to five years.

“High levels” is defined by the CSSO of each state, but at a minimum means that the achievement of the school’s students places the school in the top 40 percent of schools in the state on state assessments of reading (language arts or English) and mathematics in the highest grade tested in the last year tested even if the school makes AYP.

A student from a *“disadvantaged background”* is defined as one who is eligible for free or reduced-priced meals at the school, is limited English proficient, is a migrant student, or is a student receiving services under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

- 2) Regardless of the percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the school is high performing. *“High performing”* means that the achievement of the school’s students places the school in the top 10 percent of schools in the state on state assessments of reading (language arts or English) and mathematics in the highest grade tested in the last year tested even if the school makes AYP.

At least one-third of the schools nominated by each state must have, in the 2007-08 school year, at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds, whether these schools show dramatic improvement to high levels or are high performing. For example, if a state nominates seven schools, at least three must have at least 40 percent of its enrollment from disadvantaged backgrounds. States may not submit schools that have been in school improvement status within the last two years.

Additionally schools must meet the following requirements:

1. The nominated school has some configuration that includes grades K-12. For example, preschools are not eligible. Even if the state separates the school into grade levels for administrative purposes, schools on the same campus with one principal, even K-12 schools, must apply as an entire school. For example, a K-12 school will be judged on assessment results in the highest grade in the high school part of the school.
2. The nominated school has made adequate yearly progress for the past two years and has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
3. To meet final eligibility, the school must meet the state’s adequate yearly progress requirement in the 2007-2008 school year. AYP must be certified by the state and all appeals resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the nominated school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its core curriculum, and it is taught to the same groups of students for the entire year.
5. The nominated school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2002 and has not received the 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, or 2007 NCLB-Blue Ribbon Schools Award.
6. The nominated school or district is not refusing the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
7. OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
8. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school, or the school district as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
9. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

What exactly does the state need to do to nominate schools?

The following procedures are designed to help you and the assessment/accountability personnel in your state nominate schools for the Blue Ribbon Schools Program that meet the criteria for a high performing school or a dramatically improving school performing at high levels.

Procedure I. Determine the minimum percentage of students meeting plus exceeding the state standard in reading and in math for schools in the top 10% in your state for every grade in which state reading and math assessments are administered.

- A. For reading (language arts or English) in one of the assessed grades, follow these steps.
- Step 1: For each school in the state serving that grade, determine the percentage of students in that grade meeting plus exceeding the state standard in reading (e.g., students who are proficient or advanced).
 - Step 2: Rank order all of these schools, from the highest to the lowest, based on the percentage of students meeting plus exceeding the standard in that grade.
 - Step 3: Identify the schools in the top 10 percent of the list of rank-ordered schools from Step 2.
 - Step 4: From the schools in the top 10 percent, identify the school with the lowest percentage of students meeting plus exceeding the standard in that grade. *Note that the lowest school in the top 10 percent of all schools is the same as the school at the 90th percentile of all schools.*
 - Step 5: In Column I of the table for reading results at the end of this document, record in the row for the appropriate grade the percentage of students meeting plus exceeding the standard in reading in that grade in the school identified in Step 4.
 - Step 6: Repeat the procedure for reading in *each assessed grade*.
- B. For mathematics, repeat the above steps.

The values entered into Column I of the reading and math tables at the end of this document are referred to as the “cut scores” for the 90th percentile school at each assessed grade in reading and math.

Procedure II: Determine the percentage of students meeting plus exceeding the state standard in reading and math for schools in the top 40% in your state for every grade in which state reading and math assessments are administered.

- A. For reading (language arts or English) in one of the assessed grades, follow these steps.
- Step 1: For each school in the state serving that grade, determine the percentage of students in that grade meeting plus exceeding the state standard in reading (e.g., students who are proficient or advanced).
 - Step 2: Rank order all of these schools, from the highest to the lowest, based on the percentage of students meeting plus exceeding the standard in that grade.
 - Step 3: Identify the schools in the top 40 percent of the list of rank-ordered schools from Step 2.

- Step 4: From the schools in the top 40 percent, identify the school with the lowest percentage of students meeting plus exceeding the standard in that grade. *Note that the lowest school in the top 40 percent of all schools is the same as the school at the 60th percentile of all schools.*
- Step 5: In Column II of the table for reading results at the end of this document, record in the row for the appropriate grade the percentage of students meeting plus exceeding the standard in reading in that grade in the school identified in Step 4.
- Step 6: Repeat the procedure for reading in *each assessed grade*.

C. For mathematics, repeat the above steps.

The values entered into Column II of the reading and math tables at the end of this document are referred to as the “cut scores” for the 60th percentile school at each assessed grade in reading and math.

Procedure III: Select and Nominate Schools

To select schools for nomination for the program, schools must meet the requirements on pages 2 and 3 of 10 in this document. The following information is intended to clarify the requirements on page 2 of 10. States may use additional criteria in the selection process to nominate schools to the Secretary.

1. Poverty Status:

States must nominate at least one-third of the schools from those with at least 40 percent of the students from disadvantaged backgrounds, that is, eligible for free or reduced lunch, whether the schools show dramatic improvement to high levels (in the top 40 percent of schools) or are high performing (in the top 10 percent of schools).

2. High Performing Schools Assessment Data:

- A. High performing schools must be in the top 10 percent of schools (at or above the 90th percentile of schools) on state assessments in both reading (language arts or English) and mathematics in the highest grade and most recent year tested even if that grade has fewer than three years of data and even if the school makes AYP. The percentage of students meeting plus exceeding the state standard in the highest grade and most recent year tested must equal or exceed the cut score for that grade in Column I of the reading or math table at the end of this document. High performing schools are eligible regardless of the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch.
- B. Test results for the most recent year in grades other than the highest grade tested and disaggregated test results for students eligible for free or reduced lunch or in minority groups should also be at or near the levels of all students tested at the highest grade. Please note that schools may not report results for numbers of students under 10.

3. Dramatic Improving Schools Assessment Data:

- A. Dramatically improving schools must have least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds, that is, eligible for free or reduced lunch.

- B. Dramatically improving schools must be in the top 40 percent of schools (at or above the 60th percentile of schools) on state assessments in reading (language arts or English) and mathematics in the highest grade and most recent year tested even if there are fewer than three years of data and even if the school makes AYP. See cut scores in Column II in the appropriate table at the end of this document.
- C. If a dramatically improving school does not have at least three years of data for the highest grade tested in reading (language arts or English) or mathematics, the school still must be in the top 40 percent of schools (at or above the 60th percentile of schools) on state assessments in reading (language arts or English) or mathematics respectively in the highest grade tested in the most recent year tested.
- D. Dramatically improving schools must show dramatic improvement as defined by the state, but it must at least demonstrate a positive trend in test results over the 3-5 year period for which test results are available. For example, if 67% of the students are “meeting plus exceeding” the state standard in reading for grade 6 in 2002-03, more than 67% of students must be “meeting plus exceeding” the state standard in reading for grade 6 in 2006-07.
- E. Test results in grades other than the highest grade tested and disaggregated test results for students eligible for free or reduced lunch or in minority groups should also be improving at a similar rate as all students. Please note that schools may not report results for numbers of students under 10.

Also, please note that if a school only has test results for one grade and it is the lowest grade served by the school (e.g., in grade 6 for a 6-8 school or grade 9 for a 9-12 high school), the results of that one grade cannot qualify the school for nomination.

Once schools are selected for nomination, please confirm that the percentage of students meeting plus exceeding the state standard in both reading and math in the highest grade in the school (and the highest grade with at least three years of results for dramatically improving schools) qualifies the school according to the cut scores recorded in the tables at the end of this document. Please also contact the school to ensure that the school is interested in completing the application according to the process found on the Department’s website: www.ed.gov/programs/nclbbrs/awards.html. Substitute another eligible school if a school has no interest in the program. It is the Department’s intention that all schools nominated both qualify and apply for the Blue Ribbon Schools Program.