

CALEDONIA -- The United States Department of Education has selected Caledonia High School as a 2023 National Blue Ribbon School.

Caledonia High is receiving the Blue Ribbon Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing School Award for its progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. The award is based on assessment results from the 2021-2022 school year.

“The Lowndes County School District takes immense pride in the acknowledgment of Caledonia High School being honored as a Blue Ribbon School,” LCSD Superintendent Sam Allison said. “This accomplishment stands as a testament to the dedication put forth by the students, educators, families and the entire community. The recognition bestowed upon Caledonia High School is undeniably well-deserved and evident through its consistent high achievements and unwavering dedication to upholding excellence year after year.”

In all, 353 schools were recognized for their overall academic performance or their progress in closing achievement gaps among student groups on assessment.

“The honorees for our 2023 National Blue Ribbon Schools Award have set a national example for what it means to Raise the Bar in education,” U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said. “The leaders, educators and staff at our National Blue Ribbon Schools continually inspire me with their dedication to fostering academic excellence and building positive school cultures that support students of all backgrounds to thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

“As the Biden-Harris Administration partners with states and schools to accelerate academic success and transform educational opportunity in this country, we take tremendous pride in the achievements of these schools and their commitment to empowering educators, serving students and engaging families.”

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program has recognized great American schools (public and private elementary, middle and high schools) since 1982. The National Blue Ribbon School Award affirms the hard work of students, educators, families and communities in creating safe and welcoming schools where students master challenging and engaging content.

Gregory Elliott worked as CHS assistant principal in 2019-20 before becoming the school's principal prior to the 2020-21 school year. The school retained its 'B' grade due to COVID-19 that first year before it earned an 'A' in 2022. CHS was the 15th ranked 9-12 high school in the state of Mississippi in 2022.

"The No. 1 thing is our teachers. We have great teachers," Elliott said. "There have been very few changes on staff. I wouldn't trade our teachers for anybody in the state."

Caledonia High was one of four schools the Mississippi Department of Education nominated for a National Blue Ribbon School Award. Elliott said staff members had to write multiple essays on a variety of subjects as part of the nomination process. He said it took him and his staff nearly two months to complete the essays and submit them. Elliott said the process included a lot of research to answer questions about the school, including the year of Caledonia High's first graduating class (1910).

"When you say you're a Blue Ribbon school, everybody knows what that means," Elliott said. "It is a huge recognition. Everybody knows that means the school has done something amazing academically."

CHS assistant principal Murray Woody said the award is the culmination of a lot of hard work from the LCSD Central Office down to the CHS parents, students and teachers. He said Caledonia is now one of 16 current National Blue Ribbon High Schools in the state of Mississippi.

Woody also said CHS was lauded as a high performing school for its scores in the state accountability standards.

“It takes everybody to accomplish the success our school has earned,” said Woody, who is in his fourth year as assistant principal at the school. “We have a phenomenal staff at CHS.”

Elliott credited Roger Hill, the longtime principal at Caledonia Elementary School, for helping set the tone for all Caledonia schools as well as the district. He said Hill helped “put Caledonia on the map,” and the middle and high school are trying their best to follow suit.

Elliott also praised the parents for their support in helping Caledonia schools earn a reputation for their excellence.

“I think that is something the community has always taken pride in. Everybody knows how high Caledonia is academically,” Elliott said. “We have gotten a lot better recently in sports and had some success there, but for years people recognized us for academics, and it is a big deal.

“I am extremely excited for our staff and our students. They get to poke their chests out and say, ‘Yeah, we’re an ‘A’ school and one of the best schools in the state of Mississippi.’ ”

On Aug. 29, Caledonia High came in at No. 21 in the U.S. News & World Report’s 2023-24 Best High School Rankings. The list ranked 17,680 out of nearly 25,000 reviewed public high schools in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. It includes charter, magnet and traditional schools.

In addition to earning an ‘A’ grade last year, Caledonia High’s volleyball team won a state championship, the football team advanced to the third round of the Class 4A playoffs and its band received superior grades in all categories, which Woody said put the school in a select group in the state.

In 2022, Mississippi’s Florence Elementary School (Rankin County School District), Hayes Cooper Center (Cleveland School District), Petal

High School (Petal School District) and Oak Grove Lower Elementary School (Lamar County School District) earned Blue Ribbon status.

Up to 420 schools may be nominated each year. The U.S. Department of Education invites nominations for the National Blue Ribbon Schools Award from the top education official in all states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, the Department of Defense Education Activity and the Bureau of Indian Education. The Council for American Private Education nominates private schools.

The 2023 National Blue Ribbon Schools Awards Ceremony will be Nov. 16-17 in Washington, D.C.

Photographs and brief descriptions of the 2023 National Blue Ribbon Schools are available at:

<https://www.nationalblueribbonschools.ed.gov/>.

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