

Press Release

Harvard, Yale, and Harwood Elementary.

As a “No Child Left Behind-Blue Ribbon School,” this school for 145 students is among the academic elite.

Last Wednesday, a pep rally atmosphere filled the Harwood gymnasium/cafeteria as dignitaries from the world of academia gathered to honor the school.



Patricia Chlouber, from the U.S. Department of Education, joined a room full of Harwood students and staff and the West Fargo High School Jazz Band in honoring Harwood Elementary.

Nationwide only 286 schools, of a possible 120,000, were distinguished as a Blue Ribbon School. Two were from North Dakota. The other is Divide County High School in Crosby.

Harwood Elementary was nominated for the national award by North Dakota Superintendent of Public Instruction Wayne Sanstead, who presented a Blue Ribbon plaque during the celebration.

“Every adult needs a child to teach because that’s how adults learn,” Sanstead told the students.

On behalf of the U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spelling, Chlouber presented a Blue Ribbon School certificate and conferred on Harwood Elementary the title “model school.”

Harwood Principal Jerry Barnum discussed his level of satisfaction, excitement and enthusiasm about the whole ordeal.

“I think when you have little people and you work with them in any job, it goes day to day, and you like watching them improve,” Barnum said. “You don’t get many opportunities to celebrate like this. We are pretty honored to be selected.”

Barnum gave credit to the parents of Harwood students, saying there is 100 percent participation in parent-teacher conferences.

“The parents here are so supportive of the kids and the school. It is so key to the children’s success. Parents expect that the children will come here to learn, and they expect us to teach them. That’s the way it’s supposed to be,” he said.

He also applauded the staff.

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“The staff is excited and honored that their efforts have paid off in the children’s achievements. The staff is the backbone of the school. Everything we do in education centers around what happens in the classroom,” he said.

The formula of accountability plus high standards equals success, he added.

“My intention is to continue to expect that children will excel and give them the opportunity to do that. We’re going to continue to focus on learning.”

Harwood qualified for the award because its students scored well on state tests. Students in grades three through five take state tests every fall to measure their proficiency. No Child Left Behind considers reading and math scores. The Blue Ribbon award is awarded to schools that show significant increase or all-around excellence in their test scores over a three-year period. Harwood has ranked among the top 10 percent of schools in North Dakota for the past three years in the number of students deemed to be proficient in reading and math. In the third year 100 percent of third-grade students tested proficient in math.

Harwood Elementary is the first Blue Ribbon School in the West Fargo School District and the only elementary school in North Dakota.

School Board President Duane Hanson said celebrations like this are one of the best parts of being on the Board.

West Fargo Superintendent Dana Diesel Wallace called the honor “a significant accomplishment” and said it’s the result of hard work by everybody in the school.

Barnum attended a Blue Ribbon award ceremony in Washington D.C. on Nov. 9, with Harwood first-grade teacher Mrs. Melicher.

The No Child Left Behind-Blue Ribbon Schools program honors public and private K-12 schools that are either academically superior in their states or that demonstrate dramatic gains in student achievement.

On July 28, 2002, the Secretary of Education announced that schools singled out for national honors would reflect the goals of the nation’s new education reforms for high standards and accountability.

Previous to 2002, the award was a self-nomination.