

NATIONAL BLUE RIBBON SCHOOL

Whittier earns top honor

Clinton school one of best in the nation

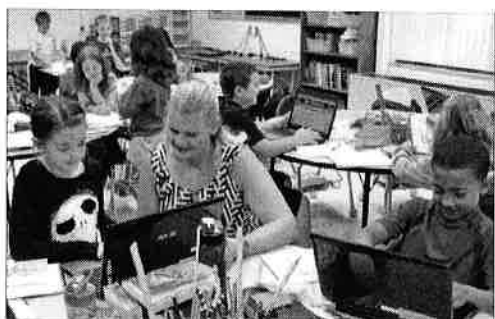
BY AMY KENT

Assistant Editor

CLINTON — The Clinton School District continues to impress state and national education organizations by receiving yet another distinguished award — this time for Whittier Elementary School. The U.S. Department of Education on Tuesday named Whittier Elementary School a 2015 National Blue Ribbon School, one of only five schools recognized in Iowa and 335 private and public schools across the nation to receive the designation.

It's the first time any Clinton school has achieved the designation,

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Students in Krystal Haskell's fifth-grade class at Whittier Elementary School learn using technology and collaboration, an effort that led to a 2015 National Blue Ribbon award from the U.S. Department of Education. Pictured front from left are Megan Kelley, Krystal Haskell and Brooklynn Peters; middle from left are Sophia Petersen, Elizabeth Prater, Devon Brown and Morgan Carney; and back from left are Adam Deters and Nicholas Ball.

Submitted photo

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and something Brian Kenney, principal at Whittier, said reflects the district's ongoing effort to strive for greatness.

"I'm proud of Whittier, this is a huge accomplishment for us, but this is about the district," Kenney said. "This is a district-wide professional development model that all the buildings are doing, and all four elementary (schools), the middle school and high school are wonderful.

People don't realize the gem they've got here; this is as good as it gets and we're going to keep getting better." According to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, the Blue Ribbon award is given out based on a school's overall academic excellence or its progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. He went on to say in the announcement the honor recognizes students' accomplishments and the hard work and dedication from staff, faculty and the students that went into their success.

Kenney attributes all of that success to the district's implementation of Professional Learning Communities.

The PLC approach is a combination of professional development among teachers that translates to the actual teaching of students through collaborative learning and teamwork.

Each school in the district utilizes a PLC, which is broken out by grade level and curriculum subject, but all are guided under a four-question umbrella - what do faculty want students to learn, how will they know if each student has learned it, how will they respond to those who haven't learned it and how will they respond to those students who have learned it.

Embracing the PLC led Whittier for the last two years to exceed the 90th percentile in reading and math in Iowa Assessment Testing, which led to the National Blue Ribbon acknowledgement.

"This designation puts us in the top 5 percent of all schools in Iowa and the top 15 percent of all schools in the entire country," Kenney said.

"That's a big deal." Superintendent Deb Olson agreed.

"Principal Kenney, the teachers, staff, students and the families at Whittier have pushed themselves to achieve at an extremely high level," Olson said. "Our district and community celebrates with them on this important designation." It isn't just district administrators, school board officials or other district stakeholders who are taking notice of Clinton's distinguished school system.

Other districts across the state are impressed with what Clinton is accomplishing on an annual basis and are looking to those administrators for guidance to bring their own districts to that level.

"We all travel to conferences in Des Moines and Chicago and we meet up with our fellow principals here and there, and we are constantly getting asked for information and support," Kenney said. "We absolutely lead the way. (The Clinton School District) is as good as it gets in the entire state." U.S. Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, and U.S. Rep.

Dave Loeb sack, D-Iowa, also congratulated Whittier on its accomplishment, with Loeb sack adding that quality education is an integral part to the future of the country.

"There is nothing more important than providing a world-class, 21st-Century education to each and every child in Iowa," Loeb sack said. "I would like to congratulate the students at Whittier Elementary School for their hard work, and the faculty, staff and parents for their commitment to ensuring these children receive the high-quality education necessary to compete in a global community." *Assistant Editor Amy Kent may be contacted at amykent@clintonherald.*

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