

# Chelan High School Earns National Award

By: Michael Curry



Recently, I was on my way to work and I realized that my destination was some place special. Sometimes, life can turn into a routine or an unconscious habit. We go through the motions and forget to stop and smell the roses that we might pass by every day. Every once in a while, it's good to get a wakeup call that gives us a jolt and reminds us to stop and take a look around and appreciate, once again, those things that we might take for granted. I've been teaching school for how long now? 1991! My students listen to music from that era and call it the "oldies"! I've been teaching for almost 18 years and I am reminded once again that I work some place special. It's so much more than just insurance and a paycheck. Maybe the fact that out of all the high schools in Washington state (over 400), Chelan High School was chosen to receive the Department of Education's National Blue Ribbon School Award. Wow! I'm not just driving to work. I'm driving to

an award-winning institution! I'm driving to a place where the efforts of the students, the community, the support staff, the teachers and the administration, all play a key part in making this place number one in the entire state, and one of the top schools in the nation. Going to work is a great drive!



So what is this Blue Ribbon award? The Blue Ribbon Schools Program honors public and private schools that are either academically superior or that demonstrate dramatic gains in student achievement to high levels. In addition to being honored at a ceremony in Washington, DC, where each school receives a plaque and a flag signifying their status, these schools also serve as models for other schools throughout the nation. Accepting this honor in DC will be CHS Principal, Barry DePaoli and CHS math teacher and Lake Chelan School District Teacher of the Year, Marty Rothlisberger. Of the schools submitted by each state, at least one-third must meet the first criterion of having 40

percent of the students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The program requires schools to meet either of two assessment criteria. It recognizes schools that have at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds that dramatically improve student performance in accordance with state assessment systems, and it rewards schools that score in the top 10 percent on state assessments.



So here's the challenge. Take a whole bunch of parents, teachers and teens from differing cultures, races, languages, religions, political persuasions, and various upper/middle/lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who are all up and down the grade level scale, and try to teach them the skills that are going to carry them on to higher educational institutions and future careers. No problem! Bring it on! Actually... it takes a lot of hard work and dedication in all aspects of education. We would be hard pressed to accomplish the daunting task of educating the children who have our future in their hands if even one of the entities involved were not in the picture. Support of parents and community is paramount to the success of our administrators, teachers and students as they address the many challenges of educating our youth in a complex and ever-changing world.

So often, the headlines across the nation show us the bad news. Problems and scandals involving business, economy, politics, and education are top stories on the news channels and front pages in bold print of every newspaper across the nation. Much of the time, the good stories, the victories, and the hard-fought gains go unrecorded, unrecognized and are buried beneath the doom and gloom that seem to be the focus for ratings in the media. But Lake Chelan School District's Superintendent, Dr. Jim Busey, isn't about to let this prestigious award go unnoticed. *"We are extremely proud of our students, staff, and families that continue to perform at exceptional levels regionally, statewide, and nationally. This national recognition for Chelan High School is an impressive honor as we continue our pursuit of **Educational Excellence for Everyone.**"* These sentiments are echoed in a letter to Dr. Busey and staff by our state's Superintendent of Public Instruction, Terry Bergeson, congratulating Chelan High School. *"Your Blue Ribbon award is an honor that is shared by your whole school. Administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and parents at Chelan should all be extremely proud of your accomplishment. Your success gives encouragement to schools in Washington and around the country that are engaged in the important work of improving the education of our young people."*



Like many schools in Washington State, the demographics of Chelan High School are a major challenge. Our student population is roughly made up of 54% Anglo, 44% Hispanic, 1% Native American and .50% Asian/Black. English and Spanish are the 1<sup>st</sup> languages of much of our population and the socioeconomic scale is just as diverse. Nevertheless, CHS has received numerous awards and recognition for having high academic GPA's in its sports programs. Also factored into the Blue Ribbon award are the various and numerous school clubs and their involvement with school and community. CHS has an active student body, lead by Victoria Wright and Cindy Avila, who are our ASB President and Vice President. These two dynamic young

ladies come from very different cultures, yet work together hand in glove. *"I'm so proud that Chelan High School received this great honor"* says Victoria. *"Ever since I started attending this school, I knew it was extraordinary. It is amazing to see this school publicly recognized for its excellence."* Cindy echoes her sentiments. *"To be recognized as the number one school in Washington State is a tremendous honor. I'm proud to be one of the many leaders of CHS. We're all in this together."*

*"These two dynamic young ladies are a great example of our mission statement"*, says CHS Principal, Barry DePaoli. The CHS mission statement, found on the Lake Chelan School District website at [www.chelanschools.org](http://www.chelanschools.org), reads like this:

**"Our mission is to prepare students to attain high academic standards and to promote character qualities which provide the foundation for success."**



Mr. DePaoli continues, *"When a student feels valued and appreciated in school, there's no telling how far he or she can go."* The CHS principal started his career in Canada teaching at the middle school, high school and community college levels. He began teaching leadership, as well as vice principal in Kimberley, British Columbia at the middle and high school levels. Mr. DePaoli also worked at Skillsource in Wenatchee for one year, then took over at Glacier Valley High School, converting it from a credit retrieval program to an alternative high school. From there, he began his administrative work for Lake Chelan School District by serving as

the MS principal for five years, the MS/HS principal for two years and, this year, as the HS principal. *“The single most compelling reason for CHS receiving national recognition is the quality of instruction in our school”* says Mr. DePaoli. *“Our teachers are not only experts in their respective content fields; they also care deeply about our students. When you combine teaching expertise with compassion, the results are powerful. I feel extremely fortunate and privileged to work in a building where all people – teachers, secretaries, counselors, and custodial staff care about all students.”*

Some other factors taken into account in receiving the award were the involvement in sports and clubs offered at CHS. *“We have established collaborative partnerships with businesses throughout the community to provide inspiring opportunities for our students”* says 2004 Washington State Teacher of the year nominee, Vicki Taylor, CHS’s school nurse, teacher and Med Club Advisor. *“As a result of these partnerships, many of our students have successfully pursued rewarding careers. An example is our medical partnerships with the hospital, clinics, physical therapy clinic, and veterinary clinics. Former students have been inspired to become veterinarians, physical therapists, nurses, physician assistants, dental hygienists, nurse practitioners, and EMTs.”*



This success is echoed in the CHS agriculture program, as stated in The National Association of Agricultural Educators, Inc. newsletter:

*“Chelan’s FFA program, headed by Rod Cool, has been selected as the 2008 Washington Outstanding Middle/Secondary School Agricultural Education Program. This award, given by the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE), recognizes the nation’s most successful agricultural education programs by highlighting the local programs and teachers that achieve success. Winners are educators who have developed an outstanding agricultural education program at either the middle*

*school or high school level. Applicants are judged on a variety of criteria, including teaching philosophy, effective classroom and experiential instruction, development of partnerships, and professional growth.”*



CHS takes pride in the various clubs offered such as International Club, Art Club, Drama, FCCLA, FBLA, Knowledge Bowl, and many others. These clubs are very active throughout the state and even competitive nationally with some of our local students even being elected to State and National offices. This exposure and experience also helps the kids earn much needed and highly coveted scholarships, such as the Gate’s Millennium, which has been awarded to several CHS students over the years and pays their full ride through college. The same can be said of Chelan’s popular sports teams. Involvement is high and CHS continually receives multiple

awards for having teams with such high GPA’s. *“As coaches, we believe that students should strive for excellence on and off the court”*, says CHS Boys Basketball coach, Joe Harris. *“Bringing an A game to class might very well be a main factor in playing an A game when stepping onto the court or field.”* Homework clinics and study halls are frequently set up by the coaches to help students with challenging schedules get their class work and homework done. CHS athletes are held accountable in maintaining above a 2.0 in order to be eligible to participate. There is always high motivation for sports participants to get quality school work turned in.

All in all, Lake Chelan School District understands what it takes to put together a winning team. It’s working together with the local businesses, community leaders, veterans, parents, teachers, and students to create a

quality program with high expectations and measurable outcomes. Our success is the success of a caring community in concert with a capable staff and administration. This Blue Ribbon goes to all of us, no matter which road we take to get to work.