

U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Communications & Outreach, Press Office  
400 Maryland Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20202

FOR RELEASE: Nov. 16, 2010

Contact: Press Office (202) 401-1576 or [press@ed.gov](mailto:press@ed.gov)

**Terrel H. Bell Award for Outstanding School Leadership is Presented to:  
Ms. Darlene Brister, Principal, Ryan Elementary School, Baton Rouge, La.**

In honor of her exceptional work as a principal, Darlene Brister will receive the Terrel H. Bell Award for Outstanding School Leadership at the 2010 Blue Ribbon Schools Awards Ceremony today in Washington, D.C. Principals nominated for the Terrel Bell Award are school leaders committed to fostering successful teaching and learning. They help their students meet high standards and have demonstrated that when it comes to educating America's children, failure is not an option.

“Under Darlene Brister’s leadership, Ryan Elementary School has thrived,” said Education Secretary Arne Duncan. “She supports her teachers and believes in her students’ potential, and that has led to great achievements in the classroom. Test scores are going up, and these kids are more confident in their capabilities. Darlene’s enthusiasm is contagious. She truly cares for these students and has given each one of them the opportunity to receive a high-quality education.”

Darlene is described by her faculty and administrators as a self-initiated, transformational and courageous leader whose quest for education excellence and increased student achievement is a relentless pursuit. She is known to stroll along the hallways and into classrooms to maintain awareness about the happenings within her school. Her faculty lovingly refers to her unique school management strategy as M.B.W.A. (Management by Walking Around). They believe her style of leadership builds interpersonal relationships with both faculty and students.

When Darlene took the reins of Ryan Elementary School in 1998, the school was performing at in the 19th percentile and was ranked 53rd in a district with 60 schools. Faced with the challenges of high poverty and high crime rates, parents with little to no high school education, students ill-prepared for studies, and tight budget cuts, Ryan Elementary was in trouble. It had been labeled an Academically Unsatisfactory School and was on the verge of being managed by the state.

These daunting challenges did not deter Darlene. Instead, she set her sights on turning the school around. She believed that for the school to be successful, she and her faculty had to provide a positive, nurturing and safe environment for students to counteract the effects of their impoverished home settings. She set high expectations for all — students, teachers and parents — and held everyone accountable for student achievement and the success of the school. She coached her teachers and other building level principals personally to maximize adult and student learning. She has inspired both her students and teachers to reach high levels of achievement. She is sensitive to the needs of all her students and actively guides her staff in the

use of practices and strategies that have not only closed achievement gaps but improved the levels of achievement for all students.

Darlene has trained her staff to use data to recognize which students need targeted interventions. With her “no excuses” attitude, she encourages her teachers to teach with a sense of urgency. They prepare for student deficiencies and expect excellence from themselves and their pupils. Darlene set up “pyramids of interventions,” through which every adult in the building is assigned a group of students to mentor. She and her faculty provide parental workshops, make home visits, and provide resources such as books that may be taken home, books on tapes and math manipulatives to support at-home learning. To provide such tools, Darlene seeks out additional funding for instructional resources through grants and community partnerships. These resources contribute to the successful educational programs at Ryan Elementary.

Due to Darlene’s determination, Ryan Elementary now out performs most schools in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System. The school’s population hasn’t changed; it still has the same student population — 96 percent minority, 95 percent of students on free and reduced priced lunch, and a 35 percent mobility rate — but it has risen to be one of the highest performing schools in the district. Darlene has proven that with good teaching and hard work, all students can achieve, regardless of their family income, ethnicity or neighborhood, or disability.

Ms. Darlene Brister is an outstanding school leader who inspires, guides and sustains others; she is a leader willing to do whatever it takes to meet students’ needs. She shows that with effective leadership and teaching, and a conviction that all students can learn, schools can become powerful, joyful places that generate energy in their communities.

The Bell award is given by the U. S. Department of Education, together with the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Middle Schools Association and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. The award recognizes outstanding school leaders and the vital role they play in overcoming challenging circumstances. Principals are nominated by their school communities during the final stages of the Blue Ribbon Schools application process. Terrel H. Bell was the secretary of education under President Reagan.

Note to editors: A photo of Ms. Brister with her award is attached.

###