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In a press statement from the Kansas Department of Education, MacArthur is sighted as a school that has “dramatically improved to high levels, serving at least 40 percent disadvantaged students.”

By LAURA EASTES • Leader & Times MacArthur Elementary School has been nominated for the 2011 National Blue Ribbon Schools Award Program and is one of five schools in Kansas being recommended for the prestigious honor.



Earlier this month, Kansas Commissioner of Education Diane DeBacker nominated the USD No. 480 grade school to apply for the Blue Ribbon Award, a program that recognizes the top elementary and secondary schools in the nation that gain in student achievement while serving an economically disadvantaged student population. MacArthur Elementary School Principal Shawna Evans said the nomination came as a surprise – but an honor.

“The students are willing to work hard and our teachers and staff are very dedicated and passionate for what they do,” Evans said. “The nomination is a tribute to them and all their efforts made. Everyone had to work as a team to do it. It doesn’t just start at the third grade level when the assessments are given. It starts in kindergarten and building that foundation of learning.”

The nomination marks a first for MacArthur as well as the district. Superintendent Lance Stout said he did not believe a Liberal school had ever been nominated for the dignity.

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Earlier this year, MacArthur was presented with the Governor’s Achievement Award for their exceptional performance on the Kansas State Assessments. The school reached a Standard of

Excellence level in both reading and math as they meet all AYP requirements in 2010.

Evans said high test scores contributed to the nomination.

Director of Human Resources Paul Larkin believes the achievements made on state tests come from not only the school but the entire school community.

“In my opinion, when a school gets the scores like MacArthur has, test scores that qualify to be in this category for Blue Ribbon, it is truly a sign of the leadership, the district and the staff believing all students can learn, and they have high expectations for all students,” Larkin said.

Stout credits Evans and school staff for their ongoing efforts in the classroom and with encouraging parents to be involved in their student’s academic life and the school.

“The parental involvement in this building is very good,” Stout said. “Shawna (Evans) and I talk about this, and she tells me how she holds meetings in the evening at least once a month for parents. They are well attended. She has committees that parents are a part of. I think that plays a significant part in this nomination.”

The next step for MacArthur is an application process with a deadline to return materials to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s office in February. The final selection of the Blue Ribbon schools will be made in September.

Last year, 304 schools across the nation were awarded Blue Ribbon status.

Other Kansas schools up for the 2011 Blue Ribbon award are Oswego High School, Louisburg High School, Gardner’s Sunflower Elementary School and Hutchinson’s Union Valley Elementary School.

Evans, Stout and Larkin agree, the nomination is well deserved and should be celebrated by the entire community.

“It wasn’t just one teacher or one student that made this happened,” Evans said. “It was a combined effort.”

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