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DeLand School Sings the Blues

By Camille Murawski

St. Barnabas only DeLand school to ever win national Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Award

For the first time, a DeLand school has been awarded a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Award from the U.S. Department of Education.

St. Barnabas Episcopal School, 319 W. Wisconsin Ave., learned of the honor last week, following a rigorous nomination process that began in March of this year.

"This is a huge honor for St. Barnabas Episcopal School and the City of DeLand," said Karen Lyon, head of the school.

According to an e-mail received from U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige, 214 public and private schools were the first ones to be honored under the new No Child Left Behind- Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence program.

In Florida, four private schools and three public schools received this honor.

The award is given to schools with students in kindergarten through 12th grade, public and private, that are either academically superior in their state or demonstrate dramatic gains in student achievement.

Lyon, who has been at St. Barnabas for the past nine years, said the 340 students at

the small, private institution are held to the national standards of the Iowa Test of Basic Skill (ITBS). Students at St. Barnabas scored in the top 10 percent of the ITBS last year.

St. Barnabas students are not required to take the FCAT, a state-mandated measure of success for public-school students.



St. Barnabas Episcopal School in DeLand was recently awarded the Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Award by the U.S. Department of Education. The small, private school is the only DeLand-area school to receive the award, and one of 214 across the country to receive the honor this year.

In its application packet to the Florida Department of Education, St. Barnabas attributed the success of its students to the

school's Thematic Integrated Instruction Model of teaching.

What this means, explained Lyon, is that the curriculum focuses on learning as a whole. If the students are reading about the Civil War, not only will they read about Gettysburg, but they will also listen to period music from the era. They will learn about the art styles of the day, and in their math class, they will, perhaps, chart Union Gen. William t. Sherman's march to the sea.

St. Barnabas students also participate in Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE), a comprehensive, international environment, science and education program. GLOBE students conduct various protocols involving clouds, temperature, rainfall, and hydrology and transfer their data to a central data processing facility via the Internet.

The students then receive data from other GLOBE schools, acquire the pertinent information, and collaborate with scientists, students and communities worldwide in using the data collected for education and research.

The GLOBE program is another example of how St. Barnabas integrates science, geography, math, language arts, computer technology, multicultural experiences, critical thinking, problem solving, and personal relationships. This way, Lyon explained, students who learn concepts differently will have an ample opportunity to let the message sink in.

Each class begins the day's activities with a few minutes of something called Brain Gym, Lyon said.

"It's not yoga," Lyon said, smiling, but a kinesthetic experience that gets the brain ready to learn. Brain Gym can consist of

simple stretching exercises, or a few energizing musical bars, poetry, or perhaps a stimulating art display.

A recent visitor to the school was shown to John Davies' sixth-grade science room, where Davis was leading his students in mini-labs

"Right now, they're learning about the chemistry of matter," Davies said, "And over there, they are figuring out a chemical formula, and over there, they're working on density."

Davies said the sixth-graders are learning the building blocks of chemistry so that later in the year when they start working with sulfuric acid and other compounds, they will have a better understanding of the importance of accurate measurements and observations.

Lyon said Davies and the other faculty members engage in a "constant, day-to-day assessment" of each student and the curriculum, as well as faculty self-evaluation.

Although St. Barnabas is a private school, it receives some public funding from Florida Children First. A few years ago, the state enacted the program to allow Florida corporations to contribute to nonprofit organizations providing scholarships to economically disadvantaged students.

In return, corporations would receive tax credits.

Currently, 12 students at St. Barnabas are recipients of the 3,500 annual scholarships. The money is not awarded to the school, Lyon explained, but to the students' families.

As long as the economic criteria continue to be met, the scholarship stays with the child throughout his or her St. Barnabus education. ♦