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Center Hill High School, 13250 Kirk Road, Olive Branch MS 38654

## National Blue Ribbon School

### CHHS celebrates coveted award in socially distant ceremony

By Shelby Parsons  
Editor

After earning National Blue Ribbon status in September, the coveted award was made official at a schoolwide celebration Nov. 2. Following COVID-19 guidelines with masks and social distancing, the ceremony was held in the parking lot in front of the

or be nominated each year for the national title, which is awarded to schools for their excellent academic performance or progress in closing significant gaps among disadvantaged groups.

At the beginning of the ceremony, the Select Women's Choir sang the National Anthem and the band performed. On a day that began with

has received respect, not only statewide, but nationally," Uselton said.

As the ceremony closed, Payne

#### How it happened

Only four schools in Mississippi received Blue Ribbon recognition this year. CHHS was named an Exemplary High Performing School and was

The 2020 National Blue Ribbon Awards Ceremony was changed to a virtual event because of the pandemic.

"It's disappointing to not be able to go to Washington, D.C., to accept

school.

"Center Hill High School is only one of 367 Blue Ribbon Schools in the entire country," Mississippi Superintendent of Education Carey Wright said. "There are roughly 130,000 schools inside the United States. This means that Center Hill High School is among the top .3% of all schools in the country."

According to a U.S. Department of Education press release, 420 schools may apply



Carey Wright

temperatures in the mid-30s, Principal Doug Payne commented on the sunny and mild weather.

"It turned out to be an absolutely beautiful day," he said. "We're here today to recognize our school's accomplishments. This doesn't happen without the support of our community."

That support includes Center Hill students and staff, Payne said, as well as state and local officials.

In his remarks, DeSoto County Superintendent of Education Cory Uselton referred to the school's hashtag and motto, "Respect the Hill."

"Center Hill High School

directed two students to unveil the new National Blue Ribbon banner at the school's front entrance.

"It is a tremendous honor," he said. "It's a symbol of excellence that we will receive with great pride and will display with great pride."

nominated by the state, Payne said. CHHS now joins Center Hill Middle and Center Hill Elementary as the only schools in the district with this recognition.

"I'm just honored to work with such amazing people," said Angel Pilcher, a teacher who served on the school's 13-member Blue Ribbon committee. "Getting this award just reiterated a fact that we already knew, that our school is awesome."

that award in person, but I'm still so excited that our school has been given this honor," said Pilcher, who as Teacher of the Year was supposed to attend the awards ceremony.

Pilcher added that expectations are now even higher for CHHS.

"This accomplishment has set the bar high for our school," she said. "I imagine every student, teacher and administrator is going to want to keep that standard."



Photo by Jose Esquivel

Sophomore Kaylee Novosad gets some Blue Bell ice cream from coach Sean Barker at the National Blue Ribbon celebration. [More event photos are online at chhsponyexpress.com](https://chhsponyexpress.com).



Photo by Landis Henderson

Principal Doug Payne looks on as seniors Zandon Haralson, left, and Candice Buford unveil the National Blue Ribbon banner at the school's front entrance. "It is a tremendous honor," Payne said. "It's a symbol of excellence that we will receive with great pride and will display with great pride."