

HCPS Honored For Dual-Language Program

By VIC BRADSHAW Daily News-Record

HARRISONBURG — Harrisonburg City Public Schools has been recognized for an innovative English language learners program by a education publication and ranked as a top 15 school division in Virginia by a website.

District Administration magazine, a national publication based in Trumbull, Conn., recognized the division in the at-risk/ELL category for a program to boost the proficiency and achievement of English language learners in its annual Districts of Distinction program.

Meanwhile, niche.com, a Pittsburgh-based website that provides data-based analysis on neighborhoods and school districts, gave the city school system an overall “A” grade in its 2018 analysis and ranked it 15th out of 131 Virginia school divisions and 652nd out of 10,574 nationally.

Superintendent Scott Kizner announced the honors at Tuesday night’s School Board meeting.

Districts of Distinction recognizes school divisions that are making a difference by putting new ideas to work.

Harrisonburg was honored for starting an English-Spanish dual-language kindergarten classroom after noticing performance gaps between ELL and non-ELL students in 2012, according to the magazine’s website.

The effort has since been expanded to the city’s five elementary schools and has served more than 600 students. It’s also been extended into other schools for recent immigrants who don’t speak English.

Since the program began, the percentage of Latinos who obtained the advanced high school diploma required to be accepted into a four-year Virginia public university has risen to 48 percent from 34 percent. For all ELL students, the advanced diploma rate has climbed to 45 percent from 30 percent.

Kizner said after the meeting that the District of Distinction honor is a sign of the special efforts faculty members are making to educate students.

“To me,” he said, “it reinforces to our staff and community that the hard work of our school division is helping students learn.”

Niche.com uses data points from the U.S. Department of Education to compile its Best School Districts in America rankings. State test scores, college readiness, graduate rates, SAT/ACT scores and teacher quality are among the factors considered.

Harrisonburg graded at an “A-plus” for diversity, in which it ranked sixth out of 131 districts in Virginia.

The city system received “A” grades in teachers, college preparation, clubs and activities, resources and facilities, and administration. The district’s academics and health and safety received “A-minus” grades.

Harrisonburg graded out at a “B” in sports and a “B-minus” in food.

The division ranked as the ninth best place to teach out of 131 Virginia districts ranked.

Kizner said the award should assure the public “that the investment that they’re making in public education in Harrisonburg is being recognized by other groups that don’t necessarily have to recognize us.”

Contact Vic Bradshaw at 574-6279 or vbradshaw@dnronline.com