

Ruediger Achievers

*Ruediger Elementary School
Tallahassee, Florida*

Ruediger Achievers recognizes students with outstanding attendance, citizenship, and academic achievement, while also delivering encouragement to all students about what it takes to be successful not only in school but also throughout life. The core of the Achievers program at Ruediger Elementary is its quarterly Awards Assemblies, held three times a year for all of the students and their parents, and the fourth time as a fifth-grade graduation ceremony.

There is more to the assemblies than handing out certificates, however. Each assembly features a musical performance by local and collegiate choruses or professional musicians. After performing, the musicians discuss the overlaps between the attitude and hard work required for musical success and for academic success. The emphasis is always on setting goals and the process of being successful, which includes hard work, practice, effort, and attitude.

Because the staff of Ruediger knows it is never too early to prepare students for college, they plan the last ceremony of the year as the fifth-grade graduation at Tallahassee Community College. In addition to participating in the graduation ceremony, students and parents tour campus, hear about college requirements, and attend a celebratory lunch.

Ruediger used to hold its awards ceremonies by grade level in the school's cafeteria. Students were singled out and recognized by the audience of parents, staff, and other students. The principal liked the practice, but suggested that these assemblies needed a little

more spice, so the musical performances were added. They also now highlight a connection to the school's mission, which calls for a positive learning environment, good citizenship, and the development of individuality, self-growth, and responsibility.

To prepare for the quarterly assemblies, teachers identify those students qualified to receive an award. Teachers publicize the program to parents and students. Administrators invite community organizations to participate, and community members volunteer their services. Parents attended and reinforced the program's theme with their children. The event was publicized through school newsletters, e-mail lists, the School Advisory Council, and the PTO.

These expanded ceremonies have had positive results, with full participation from the student body during the first three programs. An average of 25 to 30 parents attended each assembly. Students received a big self-esteem boost from earning awards and learning about the importance of good behavior and academic success.

Thanks in part to this program, the school has received accolades of its own: a grade of "A" from the Florida Department of Education and the "Distinguished Title I School of Florida" award from the US Department of Education.

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