

**2013 TERREL H. BELL RECIPIENT**

**Vicki Harmdierks, Principal**

**Gertie Belle Rogers Elementary School**

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**Mitchell, South Dakota**

**Mitchell School District**

**Superintendent Dr. Joseph Graves**

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As a former coach for over twenty years, Principal Vicki Harmdierks runs her school like a team. She believes her job is to provide the vision and the goals, and to nurture the players on the team to meet the challenges of obtaining and sustaining high student achievement. Harmdierks works to develop strong, positive relationships with every staff member, focusing on how their strengths can help support student achievement.

Harmdierks leads by example for her staff and her students. She is always researching, looking at and sharing data to drive decisions that reflect the school's vision and goals. She purchases books for her staff for book studies on current issues and encourages teachers to attend workshops or take advantage of in-house professional development.

Each fall, Harmdierks brings together a team of teachers to a data retreat where she helps them understand the information collected about their school, classrooms, and individual students, so they can diagnose and develop treatment. By developing in her teachers the ability to fully understand what is transpiring in their school, she creates teacher leaders who take ownership for the entire school and who may develop new solutions to improve it.

Under Harmdierks's leadership, Gertie Belle Rogers implemented the Before/After School Empowerment (BASE) program to assist students who had not yet reached proficiency. Before school, teachers work with students on math and reading; after school time is set aside for homework assistance. At the end of the last school year, the total time students accumulated added up to 173 days of school. Teachers who run BASE have the opportunity to earn one to three graduate credits toward renewing their teacher's certificate.

Harmdierks also works with the community to recruit volunteers who contribute to the school's success. Members of the local retired volunteer organization assist with students and classroom teachers, supporting individual students, small groups, and supervising the computer lab. Through the Experience Works program, Harmdierks secured community volunteers to maintain the library during the school year and during the summer to support the Summer Reading program.

Gertie Belle Rogers has been recognized by the South Dakota Department of Education as a Distinguished/Exemplary School for eight consecutive years. It is a testament to Harmdierks's leadership that everyone in this rural community simply expects the school to achieve at high levels despite changing demographics that have led to an increased free/reduced price lunch population and higher levels of transience.