

Bluffton Exempted Village Schools

2023-2024 Winter District Newsletter

~~ News from the Superintendent ~~

The end of the school year is quickly approaching, and we want to congratulate the students in the Class of 2024 for their noteworthy achievements. We encourage our seniors, and all our students, to finish the school year strong in these last three months of the 2023-2024 school year. Graduation will be on Saturday, May 25, at 7 P.M. in the high school gymnasium. We wish this class the very best as they leave the halls of BHS for the last time and enter a new stage of their lives. We hope we have prepared the students well to be successful in whatever career path they choose.

On March 19, 2024, The Bluffton Exempted Village School District will have an issue on the ballot for the renewal of 3.541 mills, which generates \$714,000 per year. The money is used in the general fund for the operations of the school district.

This is not a new tax; it is a renewal of an existing tax for five years.

- In 2014, this tax was at 4.9 mills and generated \$714,000 per year.
- As tax valuations go up, the amount of mills to generate the same dollar amount goes down; therefore, the 4.9 mills in 2014 which generated \$714,000 can be renewed at 3.541 mills and still generate the same \$714,000.
- If passed, the first collection will begin in calendar year 2025.

In this newsletter, you will find highlights from each of our schools to this point in the year and read of upcoming events. Our students are involved in various activities. A number of students take advantage of College Credit Plus courses at our high school and at several universities. Depending on the grade level, students have access to an abundance of opportunities from classes, school clubs, and extra-curricular activities such as student senate, art club, Latin club, foreign language club, academic teams, ocean focus, esports, marching band, concert band, jazz band, concert choir, show choir, SADD, volunteer club, drama club, musical performance, golf, cross country, swimming, softball, baseball, soccer, tennis, football, cheerleading, volleyball, wrestling, basketball, and track. Participation in these activities fosters a sense of belonging, a strong work ethic, and learning experiences which can be used beyond the classroom and long into the future. Please encourage your children to become involved in activities they find interesting and rewarding.

Our elementary school was named as one of the top elementary schools in the state. This ranking of schools, as found in the [US News and World Report](#), lists Bluffton Elementary in the top 1.3% of all elementary schools in the state of Ohio. This is an incredible achievement for our school district and our community.

Congratulations to all those involved who made this accomplishment happen.

As I have stated before, we have fantastic students, staff, and parents in this exceptionally supportive community. All these make for an excellent school system and a great community in which to live and work.

Please call or stop in if you have any questions regarding the information in this letter.

Greg Denecker, Superintendent

District Website www.blufftonschools.org

KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION

Kindergarten screening is scheduled for April 25 & 26, 2024. Any child who is five years old before August 1, 2024, is eligible to enroll. To enroll your child, you must complete the registration process through FinalForms; the link is <https://www.blufftonschools.org/parents/student-registration>. After completion of FinalForms, you will receive a link to sign up for screening appt by April 1st. All children are required to have their immunizations before starting school. The Allen County Health Department provides immunizations, but appointments must be made at their website, which is allencountypublichealth.org.

Bluffton Elementary Review **Benjamin Thiel, Elementary Principal**

The first half of the 2023-2024 school year went so fast. Our teachers and students do an amazing job each day. It is a gift to work with a team that takes such pride in the work they do.

When I first became a principal, one of the things that became most clear to me is that what a teacher does each day is so vital. There really are no days off or moments of downtime because we are not dealing with a bottom line; we are dealing with young lives. I know our staff understands that they have an immense responsibility to uphold in teaching our young people. There certainly are days which can be challenging, but our team at Bluffton Elementary handles these days with grace and joy because we know our students and families are so important to us. Thank you all for the time, effort, and support you place in the lives of your children and the school they attend. It truly makes all the difference.

Kindergarten students had a productive start to school. They learned about the life cycle of a pumpkin, which culminated in their yearly trip to Suter's pumpkin patch where each student picked out his/her own pumpkin to take home. One of the best days of the year each year is the ABC letter parade where students are able to dress up as their assigned letter of the alphabet. I have taken great joy in being the musical leader of that parade for the past few years. Our kindergarten team is second-to-none in the way they consistently provide instruction for their students while making kindergarten a fun and inviting experience for each student.

The first graders have been busy. They just finished their animal presentations where they chose, researched, and presented their animal study to their classmates. It is great to see the projects hanging on the walls outside their classrooms and the videos of students standing in front of classmates presenting the facts they have worked so hard to find,

learn, and share. Our first-grade staff has done an amazing job creating a fun, safe, and engaging environment for the students where they've transformed their rooms into different habitats and rotated classrooms to learn about places like the desert, prairies, tundras, and rainforests.

Second graders are having fun this year learning new things and growing every day. As always, the highlight of the year has been the Santa Shop activities leading up to Christmas break. Students took time to learn about economy, finance, and production as they made fun items to sell and share with their classmates. It is always fun to see what the students are able to make and hear about the lessons they learn during the process. Our 2nd-grade team has done a great job developing this lesson over the years, and, despite the work it takes, students always enjoy the process and the end result.

Third-grade students have been working hard. They did an awesome job in the fall on the ELA state testing. It is amazing to see the effort and focus the students put into their first opportunity to show what they know. Students and teachers are hard at work getting ready for the spring testing as well as gearing up for their annual *Little House on the Prairie* unit. Students will get to experience life on the prairie through classroom activities and visits to the Allen County Museum and Sauder Village. Both trips have been great experiences for our third-grade students for hands-on opportunities in some of the challenging experiences of frontier life they have read about in the classroom.

The fourth graders have done an amazing job this year. One of my favorite parts of fourth grade is their partnership with the kindergarten classrooms when they visit and read with their kindergarten buddies. It is great to see the responsibility our 4th-grade students take on each Friday when they share a favorite story with their kindergarten partners.

Fifth graders are taking on the leadership role of the elementary, working hard and setting a positive example. Several students are participating in band and strings, and members of the 5th-grade quiz bowl competed in January and February. Students have been enjoying quarter incentives and AR parties for their hard work and consistent good behavior in the classroom.

Starting last school year, the Bluffton Fire Department presented Fire Safety to the entire school where all students heard from our local volunteer fire department about the importance of having a plan and knowing what to do in the event of an emergency at home.

Thank you to everyone who supported our second annual PTO Bakery Bingo. This year's event was a great success with over 300 donated baked goods and lots of fun to share. It is always fun to interact with our students and their families outside the typical school environment. The support from the community is always amazing. Thank you for supporting our PTO in such an amazing way.

Recently our students were able to enjoy a couple fun events. We had an assembly, thanks to the Elementary PTO, where singer and songwriter "Uncle Charlie," or Charles Opio from Relevant Speakers, shared joy and encouragement in an effort to support students in his home country of Uganda. The students were able to join him in dancing, singing, and learning pieces of the Ugandan language in this energetic and engaging presentation. Students were thrilled to be able to meet someone from across the world and participate in this high energy presentation. On February 9th, we had a school-wide Super Bowl day where students practiced skills they have learned this year while learning about facts related to the Super Bowl.

An upcoming, fun-filled event to note is our annual PTO Science Night to be held on Friday, April 5th, from 6-8pm; organizations from around the community will set up stations throughout the school to help students learn more about interesting science facts and experiments. Then, in May, Field Day is scheduled for Friday, May 17th, where students

from all grade levels will enjoy outdoor activities, fitness challenges, and inflatables for the day.

Thank you for your continuous support. Please visit the school's website, www.blufftonschools.org, for updated information and pictures.

Middle School News Update Douglas Westrick, Middle School Principal

It's hard to believe we're already well past halfway of the school year. These past months have been filled with countless learning adventures, heartwarming moments, and a vibrant spirit of community at Bluffton Middle School. We're thrilled to share some of the highlights, a testament to the dedication of our students, faculty, and families. Our students have been soaring in their academic pursuits. Whether it's mastering complex math concepts, crafting captivating stories in language arts, or delving into the wonders of science experiments, their eagerness to learn and dedication to excel are truly inspiring.

Reading Buddies: This year our 8th-grade students partnered with 1st-grade students to read some stories. Reading aloud can have many positive effects. *For younger students*, this activity *ignites a love of reading*. Hearing stories come alive in the voices of older students makes them more engaging and exciting, and this can spark a passion for reading that lasts a lifetime. This activity also *boosts literacy skills* because older students naturally model fluent reading, pronunciation, and expression. Younger students, then, subconsciously absorb these skills and improve their own reading abilities. Another benefit of this activity is that it *strengthens comprehension*. When older students stop to ask questions or discuss the story, it encourages younger students to think critically and engage more deeply with the text. *For older students*, it *develops leadership skills*. Older students take on a leadership role, guiding and supporting younger readers. This builds their confidence and communication skills. The activity *boosts self-esteem*; helping others and seeing their progress can be incredibly rewarding, giving older students a sense of accomplishment and purpose. Also, this concept *creates positive relationships*. Reading together builds positive relationships between older and younger students, breaking down age barriers and fostering a sense of school community.

Middle school students tackled the exciting world of coding by designing and building their own video games in 8th-grade Maker Space. Their creativity and problem-solving skills were manifest as they presented their interactive creations to the class. Coding in middle school is an exciting opportunity for young minds to unleash their creativity, develop valuable skills, and prepare for the future. It's not just about writing lines of code; it's about learning to think logically, solve problems, and bring ideas to life through the power of technology.

Beyond academics, Bluffton Middle School provided fertile ground for budding artists, musicians, and performers to express themselves. This fall and winter, artistic talents were on full display as our band, choir, and orchestra students performed for parents, friends, and community members.

At BMS, we believe in fostering a spirit of compassion and social responsibility. Our students have engaged in various service projects, making a positive impact on the community around them. Students organized a school-wide food drive and collected donations for local families in need. Their generosity and empathy warmed the hearts of many within the community. Students raked leaves around the community for the elderly or those in need of some additional help.

These are just a few highlights from the first half of our year at BMS. We are incredibly proud of our students, teachers, and families for their unwavering commitment to making our school a vibrant and enriching

environment. We look forward to an even more exciting second half, filled with new adventures and opportunities for growth.

To stay connected, follow us on Facebook at Bluffton Middle School: 4 Houses, One Crew OR visit our website: <https://www.blufftonschools.org> OR contact us at 419-358-7961.

News from Bluffton High School Mike Minnig, High School Principal

It hardly seems possible that we are well past the halfway mark of the 2023-2024 school year. I am constantly amazed by the talents and work ethic that our students, teachers, and staff possess. Throughout the year, our students have been excelling in a variety of ways including academics, music, athletics, and leadership.

Our students have been active in a number of programs. **Ohio Means Jobs of Allen County** has provided a job coach for a few hours each week to work with our students on a variety of topics to further prepare them for life after high school. A volunteer program, B.O.S.S – Bluffton Outstanding Student Services -- gives our students a chance to be recognized for giving back to the community. Sophomores and juniors will participate in a college visitation program and explore some of the more popular institutions which traditionally interest our students. Juniors are exposed to a job shadow experience for a career planning project that goes into their senior year.

Students continue to excel academically. The Renaissance Program has continued to maintain high numbers. Through the students' talents and work ethic, 244 students made either the A/B or All A honor roll during the first grading period. During the fall sports season, 122 student-athletes earned the Northwest Conference Silver and Gold Scholar-Athlete Certificate for maintaining a 3.0 or higher grade point average while earning a varsity letter.

Our students also continue to shine in the musical arts programs. The band and choir students did an excellent job with their concerts as did the Drama Club with its production of The Little Town of Christmas. These students are currently preparing for future performances, including the play Elf this April. These various music groups are also featured at the senior citizen breakfasts held in the middle school cafeteria. All performances start at 8:30 on the following dates: Mar 13 – concert band, Apr 10 – musical, and May 8 – jazz band.

Athletically, our students developed numerous qualities to help them be successful now and in the future. A group of our student-athletes attended a NWC Sportsmanship Conference where they met and worked with student-athletes from other schools in our conference to discuss ways to improve character and sportsmanship.

Many of our teams and individuals achieved successes and accolades in the fall as evidenced when the academic team and both boys and girls soccer teams earned NWC championships.

Boys and girls basketball teams, the wrestling squad, and the swim team excelled during the winter season.

Parents and community members are able to help our students in two school drives. The Ball Metal Aluminum Can Challenge is a drive that can earn money for the school. A Red Cross Blood Drive will be held at the high school on May 9. Each donation helps us qualify for a **Young Minds Change Lives** scholarship from the Red Cross; the award will be given to one of our seniors.

With March approaching, students will be asked for course requests for the upcoming school year. Parents are encouraged to talk with their sons/daughters on their course selections and contact the office with any questions. Students interested in taking College Credit Plus courses

need to turn in the application for acceptance into the program by April 1.

The junior class took the ACT test on February 27 to meet the college and career readiness requirement. This test was free of charge and given at Bluffton High School. Students may take the ACT as many times as they wish, using their top score for their college entrance exam. To register for a test date other, go to actstudent.org.

As the school year continues, please visit our website to find upcoming events and activities at our school and to access the Progressbook link to monitor your son's/daughter's grades. The support our students receive from parents, peers, and the community plays an important role in their development and success.

Technology Coordinator Courtnee Morris

The school's technology department continues with innovations to provide the best educational resources for students and support for teachers. Morris' Minions, the technology department's student workers, collaborated with Mrs. Liberato's Makerspace class. By using game development platforms like Scratch, Roblox Studio, and Gdevelop, students designed video games centered around themes in The Hunger Games. This cross-disciplinary project merges ELA, critical thinking, creativity, and technology.

At the October staff in-service day, teachers had the flexible option to attend either in-person tech training workshops or self-guided tutorials on Google Workspace, BenQ display tools, and Artificial Intelligence. This personalized approach empowers educators to effectively leverage AI, digital content, and other EdTech in their classrooms. To continue with ongoing professional development, the district also provides one-on-one support for teachers to seamlessly integrate technology into their instructional materials and lesson planning.

With the continued focus on adopting innovative educational technology, balanced with robust training and infrastructure upgrades, Bluffton schools prepare students and staff for success in the digital world. Collaborative tech projects teach invaluable, future-ready skills, while added upgrades to the technology infrastructure aid the district's highest priority – providing a safe, inclusive learning environment for the students and staff.

Music Department

Nearly 300 students were part of the vocal music program during 2023-2024. The high school symphonic choir (juniors and seniors), concert choir (freshmen and sophomores), chamber choir (by audition), and show choir participated in fall, the Blaze of Lights, Christmas, BBQ, and spring concerts. Students from both the high school and middle school participated in solo and ensemble contest, and all earned superior or excellent ratings. In April, students will perform the musical Elf. The choirs from 6th-12th grades are fortunate to have many talented members.

The bands have had a very successful year. The 62-member marching band performed for the Allen County Fair Band Show, the Bath Band Spectacular, all the football games, and the Blaze of Lights parade; they will perform at the Memorial Day parade in May. The 58-member concert band performed at Christmas and will perform at the annual BBQ and spring concerts. The group continues to grow musically each year. The 32-member pep band performed for all of the boys and girls league basketball games this season. They had a great time and sounded good. The 24-member jazz ensemble performed at Christmas and will perform at the BBQ and end-of-the-year concerts. Our Jazz Combo class played a run-out gig for the MMH in January, and it was well received.

The 30-member junior high band plus the 28-member 6th-grade band and 54-member 5th-grade band performed in the fall and at Christmas; they will again perform at the BBQ. Eight musicians represented Bluffton in our high school district honors ensembles this past year, and we hope to have as many in the junior high festival groups. We also have a handful of high school students playing in the Bluffton University concert band as well. The band department was well-represented in the community. Combining it all, we again performed well over 50 times this year.

The string orchestra department had another busy and wonderful musical year. Our numbers are close to 140 students. All orchestra groups participated in several school concerts with upper grades also participating in solo & ensemble and large group/state orchestra contests. Both junior and senior high orchestras had successful outreach field trips where they entertained audiences of ages 3-103. I am happy to celebrate my 40 years of teaching with amazing students and music colleagues.

Alex Hanna; Athletic Director

Bluffton Athletics enjoyed another very successful fall season. Over 200 athletes from grades 7-12 participated in a variety of sports. First, a huge THANK YOU must be extended to Mike Wilson and his staff for maintaining our football and soccer game and practice fields; at the end of the season, the fields still looked immaculate. Both the boys and girls soccer teams won the Northwest Conference. Girls soccer coach Jamie Mehaffie was named NWC coach-of-the-year, and assistant girls soccer coach Haley Hoffer was named Division III assistant coach-of-the-year by the Ohio Soccer Coaches Association. The Pirate football team experienced an historic season by finishing 12-2 with 9 shutouts and advancing to the regional championship game. Coach Richards was named All-Ohio co-coach-of-the-year. Also, Bluffton had seven players named to the All-Ohio team, which is a school record. These talented players are Landen Worcester, 1st-team linebacker; Garret Bogart, 3rd-team quarterback; Hayden Dearth, honorable mention tight end; Jacob Granger, honorable mention offensive line; Kyle Basil, honorable mention kicker; Brody Sommers, honorable mention defensive line; and, Carson Kruse, honorable mention defensive back. We had a group of athletes attend the Northwest Conference Sportsmanship meeting, where the topic was student sections and spectator decorum. These athletes worked with students from all the Northwest Conference schools to develop strategies to encourage positive and unified cheers from the student section during interscholastic competition.

Over 100 athletes in grades 7-12 participated in wrestling, cheerleading, swimming, and basketball this winter. The Pirate cheerleaders continue to display their unmeasured athleticism, discipline, uniformity, and spirit, making them a fantastic squad. The Pirate swimmers have had a very successful season, and swimmers Jackson Bowlus and Jenna Downey broke meet, league, and school records. The boys and girls basketball teams are finished their regular seasons and their tournaments. Marek Donaldson, with 9, recently tied a record for the most 3-pointers made in a game. The boys and girls basketball seasons finished with losses in the sectional semi-final. Boys basketball player Marek Donaldson, Blake Sommers, and Wade Ginther were named to the ALL-NWC team. Ayla Grandey and Blair Utendorf were named to the girls ALL-NWC team. Kyle Basel and Branden Cross won the NWC in their weight class at the NWC wrestling tournament in Ada. Wyatt Knauss, Branden Cross, Jeff Blackburn, Evan Grothouse, Kyle Basil, and Mason Shank qualified for the district wrestling tournament at Rossford High School and will compete for a chance to go to state competition.

Our spring sports will be kicking off practice at the end of February.

Bluffton Exempted Village Schools
102 S. Jackson St.
Bluffton, Ohio 45817

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Bluffton, OH 45817
Permit No 157

Postal Patron

With the cold and wet weather, practice will likely be indoors until drier, warmer weather arrives. Any athlete who wants to participate in a spring sport must have an up-to-date physical on Final Forms, <https://bluffton-oh.finalforms.com/>. Athletes are not allowed to practice or play without this.

In the 2024-25 school year, we will continue to offer FREE livestreams of our home football, soccer, volleyball, basketball, and selected wrestling matches. Unfortunately, we've encountered some copyright issues using YouTube to livestream sporting events, specifically with the pre-game music. As a result and starting next year, we will livestream through the HUDL Fan app, and this will be FREE to download and FREE to watch. The HUDL Fan App can be downloaded on your phone, tablet, or smart T.V., again for FREE. Similar to YouTube, you'll be able to subscribe to the sports you want to watch, for FREE.

Finally, thank you to our Bluffton Athletic Boosters. Their fundraising and donations continue to directly impact our athletes, offset considerable costs to the athletic department, help keep ticket prices low, and help keep our LiveStream free. Thank you, also, to all those who contribute to the Boosters through the 300 Club, Reverse Raffle, and donations.

Bluffton Exempted Village Schools
District Board of Education

Wes Klinger	President
Roni Kaufman	Vice President
Alice Basinger	Board Member
Brad Dailey	Board Member
Jeremy Scoles	Board Member

Important Dates

March 22	Friday	End of 3rd Grading Period
March 29 & April 1	Fri/Mon	No School-Spring Break
April 8	Monday	No School – Solar Eclipse
May 24	Friday	Last Day of School
May 25	Saturday	Commencement 7:00 P.M.

Pirate Pride!!!