

# BLAIR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

September 2024



Photo Credit: BHS Student, Morgan Archer

## K-5 Fun Run

The Arbor Park and Deerfield elementary school students have been raising funds over the past two weeks for new playground equipment. The students held a Fun Run and had a blast!

Thank you to all of our volunteers who made this an awesome experience for our students. The elementary students have raised over \$55,000 towards their new playgrounds. MyBooster.com, our fundraising platform, will remain open for 1 more week for any last minute donations!

Thank you again for your support of our K-5 Fun Run fundraiser!



# Message from Blair Community Schools Superintendent, Dr. Randy Gilson

Dear Blair Community Schools Families,



I want to take a moment to share important updates from last night's September School Board Meeting. There were several key discussions that will shape the future of our district.

A significant part of the meeting focused on the 2024-25 school budget. One of the most exciting developments is a proposed Total Levy Decrease of \$0.071873 for the upcoming fiscal year. This means that we will be utilizing only \$0.702407 of the maximum \$1.05 Levy Lid for the General Fund and Building Fund. Over the past several years, Blair Community Schools has steadily decreased its total levy from \$1.05 in 2013 to 77 cents in 2024-25, making our district one of the two with the lowest levies in the greater metro area.

Despite the levy decrease, this year's budget reflects some necessary adjustments to cover an increase of \$1.8 million in salary and benefits. These increases are necessary to maintain the high quality of education our community expects and values.

Part of these adjustments includes the addition of eight new teaching positions across various departments, including High Ability Learners (HAL), Grade 3, Computer Science, Spanish, Social Studies, Agriculture, Special Education, and Physical Education. We are also implementing pay increases as part of a negotiated agreement signed in January, which includes a \$1,500 base increase and the addition of a new pay column for teachers with a Master's degree plus 45 credits (MA+45). This year, we saw 88 horizontal movements for teachers, 38 of which were in the new MA+45 category, compared to a typical range of 20-30 movements in past years.

The budget also reflects increased compensation for extracurricular activities and longevity pay, along with approved pay raises for classified staff and administrators. There is also a modest increase of 1.99% in health and dental insurance costs, which has been factored into our financial planning.

In addition to addressing immediate needs, we have made strategic decisions to support long-term sustainability. We've allocated \$174,000 in savings for future replacements of student technology, desks, and furniture. Furthermore, the Activity Fund has been increased by \$20,000, and an additional \$200,000 has been added to our budget for facility maintenance and upkeep. These adjustments ensure that we continue to prioritize both the present and future needs of our district.

Another highlight of the meeting was the presentation by our Reading Task Force, which has spent the past year reviewing student data to evaluate the effectiveness of our elementary reading, writing, and language arts programs. The task force's findings identified several areas that require attention, including the need for in-depth phonics and phonemic awareness instruction, lessons that are more cohesive and connected, and stories that engage students while building knowledge. The task force also emphasized the importance of texts that develop strong vocabulary and enhance understanding of different writing styles, as well as the need for instruction that focuses on parts of speech.

To address these findings, the task force has proposed advancing the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum adoption cycle to 2025-2026. They are requesting the adoption of a new curriculum that includes comprehensive professional development and the purchase of all necessary materials. Additionally, they are asking for time during the school day to evaluate materials with third-party research. The task force hopes to present the top two curriculum choices to the Board of Education before January and begin professional development during the spring semester with materials in hand. To facilitate this process, they are also seeking a clear timeline and guidelines for curriculum adoption from the board.

As always, I want to express my gratitude to our families, staff, and the entire community for your ongoing support of Blair Community Schools. Your dedication and commitment are what make our district thrive, and together, we are creating a bright future for our students.

Sincerely,

*Randy Gilson, Ed. D.*



**Blair Community Schools**

Where all students learn.



# HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS



Photo Credit: BHS Student, Morgan Archer

## *Blair High School*

High school students have had a wonderful start to the school year! We love seeing our students back in the building, focused on their classes and learning, and engaged in extra-curricular activities, athletics, and clubs. We encourage every student to find a group to join as this enhances their high school experiences, improves academic performance, and is a great way to make new friends!

We have had some exciting updates as our new BCAT Building is getting finished and ready for students. In addition, our BHS Student Senate donated two new water bottle filling stations to the school, which were installed recently.

Finally, Homecoming is coming up the first week in October. Stay tuned for more fun information!



## *Otte Blair Middle School*

Greetings from Otte Middle School! We are excited to share that the school year has begun on a positive note, thanks to the efforts of our students, teachers, staff, and community supporters. In the initial weeks, we have concentrated on reinforcing school expectations, and our students are adapting remarkably well. We appreciate your support from home as well!

To recognize those who exceed expectations, our teachers and staff have been distributing Rare Bears. We celebrate these outstanding students at the end of each month during our Rare Bear Celebration. This marks our third year of this rewarding initiative, which effectively reinforces our school values and encourages positive behavior. We have a lot to celebrate at Otte!

# HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS



## *Arbor Park Elementary*

We have had a fantastic start to our school year! We're thrilled to see our hallways and classrooms bustling with energy and enthusiasm as we kick off another school year. Our students have quickly settled into their routines, and it's wonderful to witness their eagerness to learn and grow. We're committed to creating a positive and supportive environment where every child can thrive.

All students have successfully completed our initial reading and math screenings. These assessments help us understand each student's current levels and guide our instructional planning. With this information in hand, we'll be rolling out personalized intervention and extension activities to ensure that every child gets the support and challenge they need to excel.

Our Fun Run fundraiser is winding down, and funds will go directly toward upgrading our playground, providing a safer and more engaging space for our students to play and explore.



## *Deerfield Elementary*

September at Deerfield has been filled with learning and excitement! Our scholars celebrated reaching their first PBIS milestone with popsicles! Our Fun Run on September 13th was a big highlight of the month. We are overwhelmed with the generosity of our families as we've received over \$27,000 in donations, exceeding our goal of \$25,000.

Looking ahead, we will start drawing a ticket from each grade-level for our scholars to select a book from our vending machine for being safe, respectful and responsible. Their names will also be announced over our morning announcements each Friday, they will have their picture taken and their names will be displayed in our Coffee Bean Club case in our main entryway. This is our way of acknowledging these scholars for transforming our school with their positive behavior, just like coffee beans!



# HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS



## *South Early Learning Center*

Preschoolers and staff are off to a good start with adjusting to the building and classroom. Little Bears have been busy learning routines, procedures, and developmental skills through the Creative Curriculum. You are a valuable partner in the communication and success of your child and our program. Our Preschool Teachers and Support Staff are grateful for your snack donations. Our USDA guidelines require us to make sure your child is getting recommended servings from at least two different food groups from fruits, vegetables, grains, and dairy. If you are able to donate with this in mind, it will help contribute in meeting these requirements. We will still have special occasions like birthdays where additional treats or foods can be brought.

A reminder in teaching our children important Safety Practices. Please make sure that you are using the "Crosswalk" and that your preschooler is holding your hand. A Crossing Guard will be at the "Crosswalk" to assist you 10 minutes before each session and 5 minutes after each session.

## **BCS FOUNDATION FAMILY FUN NIGHT**

The Blair Community Schools Foundation hosted its annual Family Fun Night on August 23rd, and it was an incredible event! The foundation honored distinguished alumni and service award winners Mick Jensen and Mary Beth Hunt.

BHS Volleyball, football, cross country, dance, cheer, band, and choir were all showcased at the event. Food trucks, bounce houses, face painting, balloon animals, and even a virtual gaming station were all available for families throughout the evening.

Thank you to our amazing community sponsors and the Blair Schools Foundation for all you do to support our students and schools, and for making Blair a great place to be!



# COMMUNITY UPDATES

## MULTICULTURAL PROGRAM

The Multicultural Parent meeting was held on September 5, 2024. Our multilingual program (also known as ESL or EL) is for students from Kindergarten through high school. At all levels our English learners work on improving reading, writing, listening, and speaking English. Each spring our multilinguals in the program are re-assessed with the ELPA-summative which indicates English proficiency.

This year there is an opportunity for parents or grandparents to learn English for free through the Rosetta Stone program. This program uses speaking, listening, reading and writing practices. Schools want to encourage reading in your homes: reading in your home language for 20 minutes each day, telling stories, and communicate together.

Parent-Teacher Conference Dates: Week of October 9-10, 2024. Interpreters will call soon and schedule appointments with families.



**DINE AT  
RUNZA**

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17TH

10% OF SALES DONATED TO

**TEAMMATES**  
MENTORING

## TEAMMATES FUNDRAISER

Join Blair TeamMates on September 17th at Runza! All day long, 10% of sales will be donated to TeamMates of Blair, which helps support our students to reach their full potential. We love Runzas, and we love a good cause! See you there!

Be sure to follow Blair TeamMates on Facebook [@BlairTeamMates1](https://www.facebook.com/BlairTeamMates1)

# ACTIVITIES & EVENTS



Photo Credit: BHS Student, Morgan Archer

Otte Blair Middle School has a new Cross Country team, and two runners placed at the first XC meet in Plattsmouth! Sohpie Lyon placed 9th and Adalee Field placed 3rd. Congratulations, girls! Show choir Auditions have started for the Middle School, and Marching Band has started with a parade coming up on September 28 in Waverly.





Our high school fall sports season is off to a fantastic start. Our Unified Teams recruited community partners at the recent BHS activity fair and are ordering new jerseys. Football has a current record of 1-1, volleyball is 7-4, and softball is at 14-4. Softball Head Coach Jenn Fangmeier was selected as Nebraska Coach of the Year for Softball last year, and had an article published in Nebraska Coach. [Click here to read her article!](#)

#### Upcoming events:

- 9/16 Blair Golf Invite
- 9/19 Blair Cross Country Invite

We appreciate your support of our students, and encourage you to join us to watch our students shine! **[Please click here for a full list of events.](#)**

*Follow us on social media!*

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