



Blair Community Schools

Where all students learn.

DECEMBER 2024 NEWSLETTER

BOARD OF EDUCATION

BOE Member Honored for Excellence

Steve Callaghan, a valued member of the Board of Education, was recognized for his dedication to education and social studies. He received the prestigious Paul Beck Outstanding Social Studies Educator Award, presented by Richard Brown of the Nebraska State Council for Social Studies. Congratulations, Steve, on this well-deserved honor!

Parent Concerns Addressed with Title IX Support

The district is aware of a reported teacher concern, as brought forward by a parent at the board meeting. The situation has been escalated to the district's Title IX coordinator for investigation. While we recognize the importance of maintaining communication during such matters, protecting the privacy and well-being of all involved remains our top priority. The district is committed to ensuring a safe and supportive environment for every student.

Reading Curriculum Review Underway

An ongoing review of the district's reading curriculum is being conducted by a dedicated teacher committee. This important process ensures that our instructional materials and strategies continue to meet the needs of our students while aligning with best practices and educational standards. We appreciate the hard work and expertise of our educators in leading this effort.



WISHING YOU A WONDERFUL HOLIDAY SEASON

As we celebrate this special time of year, we want to extend our warmest wishes to you and your loved ones. The holiday season is a time to reflect, show gratitude, and enjoy moments with family and friends, and we are so thankful to have such an amazing school community to share this journey with.

From everyone at Blair Community Schools, we hope your holidays are filled with joy, peace, and cherished memories. May the New Year bring happiness and success to your family.

Happy Holidays and best wishes for a bright and wonderful New Year!

MESSAGE FROM BLAIR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS SUPERINTENDENT, DR. RANDY GILSON



Dear Blair Community Schools Families,

As we approach this holiday season, I want to take a moment to reflect on our shared accomplishments and express my gratitude for your continued support of Blair Community Schools. Together, we have made tremendous strides in providing an exceptional education for our students.

I am thrilled to share that Blair Community Schools has been rated Excellent for the third consecutive year by the Nebraska Department of Education! This recognition reflects the hard work and dedication of our students, staff, and families. Additionally, Deerfield Elementary and Otte Middle School achieved Excellent ratings, while Arbor Park and Blair High School earned Great ratings. These accomplishments highlight our collective commitment to excellence.

For those unfamiliar with Nebraska's AQuESTT system, schools and districts are evaluated using a comprehensive approach that considers academic achievement, student progress, graduation rates, and attendance. This system provides a well-rounded picture of educational success and opportunities for continuous improvement.

Our academic outcomes also demonstrate significant progress:

- College-Going Rate: Our rate has climbed from 70% in 2020 to 81% in 2023-24, which is nine points higher than the state average.
- State Assessment Proficiency:
 - Science: 91% of our students are proficient, compared to 74% statewide.
 - Math: 76% of our students are proficient, compared to 58% statewide.
 - Reading: 73% of our students are proficient, compared to 59% statewide.

Since 2017-18, our students' proficiency rates have shown remarkable growth:

- Reading: From 57% to 74%.
- Math: From 56% to 76%.
- Science: From 72% to 91%.

These achievements underscore the outstanding commitment of our entire school community to excellence in education. As we celebrate these milestones, I want to thank each of you for your role in making Blair Community Schools a place where students thrive. Your partnership is invaluable, and we look forward to continuing to work together to achieve even greater success in the coming year.

On behalf of everyone at Blair Community Schools, I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year filled with peace and joy.

Sincerely,

Randy Gilson, Ed. D.

Superintendent, Blair Community Schools

UPDATED SCHOOL MESSENGER SYSTEM

We are excited to announce the upcoming rollout of our updated School Messenger system! An email with this newsletter and a text message is being sent to all families as part of this system update.

To ensure that you receive future communications, please take a moment to follow the steps below. In some cases, emails from the school may be mistakenly filtered into your junk or spam folder.

If this email was sent to your junk or spam folder please follow these instructions:

1. **Locate the Email:** Open your junk or spam folder and look for an email from the school or School Messenger.
2. **Mark as Not Junk:** Right-click the email and select "Mark as Not Junk" or "Move to Inbox."
3. **Add the Sender to Your Contacts:** Add the school's email address to your contacts to prevent future emails from being filtered.

We highly recommend taking these steps, as this will help ensure that you don't miss any important communication from the school, including reminders about school events, deadlines, and other updates that may affect your family.

We appreciate your cooperation in helping us ensure a smooth transition to our new communication system! Your partnership is vital in staying connected and informed. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact the school office. Thank you for your attention to this update, and we look forward to staying in touch!



SPREADING HOLIDAY CHEER

This holiday season, the Alternative Curriculum Program (ACP) students from the high school teamed up with the middle school ACP students to make a difference in our community. Together, they brought Christmas magic to eight children, demonstrating the true spirit of giving and teamwork!

With \$800 in hand, students headed to Walmart to put their shopping and budgeting skills to work. Each gift was chosen with care, ensuring the holidays will be extra special for these kids.

But the day didn't stop there! After their shopping adventure, students dropped off the presents at the bank, and made a special stop at the animal shelter to donate some puppy treats—because our furry friends deserve some holiday cheer too! To celebrate their successful day, students enjoyed a pizza party and a movie back at the high school.

This unforgettable day showcased the power of collaboration and the importance of giving back. A huge thank-you to everyone who supported this initiative—this experience was truly magical for everyone involved!



UNIFIED BOWLING TEAM

Our Unified Bowling team has been having an extraordinary season, showcasing both skill and spirit. With a current record of 2-0 at meets—including a quad in Elkhorn and a dual with Gretna—we are thrilled with how far we've come. Recently, the team secured an impressive third-place finish at districts, a testament to the dedication and teamwork of our athletes.

While the scores are worth celebrating, what makes this team truly special is the joy and connection they share. Watching them come together, support one another, and create lasting memories has been nothing short of magical. One parent summed it up best: "Wow, this is my favorite varsity sport—there's no yelling, no refs, and all love. It's all about the kids."

The achievements of the team were celebrated at their banquet on December 10th, where each team member received a varsity letter—a meaningful recognition of their contributions to this incredible season.

Thank you to our athletes, families, and supporters for making this team such a joy to watch and cheer for.



BLAIR FFA EXCELS AT LEADERSHIP EVENT

On Wednesday, November 20th, thirty-five Blair FFA members traveled to West Point to compete in eleven different Leadership Development Events (LDEs). These events are designed to foster student growth in public speaking, interview skills, and teamwork.

This year marked an exciting milestone for Blair FFA, as middle school members participated in LDEs for the first time in the program's history. Their involvement highlights the organization's commitment to cultivating leadership skills at all levels.

Blair High School seniors Mason Stoddard, Kathryn Picton, and Somer Schultz earned purple ribbons in their respective events, a testament to their dedication and hard work. Additionally, the Parliamentary Procedure Team placed third, securing a coveted spot at the State FFA Convention, which will take place in Lincoln at the beginning of April. Congratulations to all participants for their outstanding achievements and for representing Blair FFA with excellence! We look forward to seeing continued success at the state level.

HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS



BLAIR HIGH SCHOOL

From our students' academic achievements to their participation in sports, arts, and extracurricular activities, there is so much to be proud of at Blair High School. December is always a special time of year, and this month is no exception. In addition to final exams and winter performances, we are celebrating the holiday season with our annual Door Decorating Contest! This fun tradition brings creativity and teamwork to the forefront as students and staff collaborate to transform our hallways into a festive wonderland.

Along with the joy of the season, it's also a time to focus on finishing the semester strong. Please remind your student to stay organized and prepared as we approach final exams. Our teachers and staff are here to provide support. As we look forward to winter break, I want to thank each of you for your continued partnership and support. Together, we are creating a school environment where every student can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Wishing you and your family a joyful holiday season and a Happy New Year! We'll see you in January, ready for another great semester at Blair High School.



OTTE BLAIR MIDDLE SCHOOL

Our students have been diligently preparing for their MAP testing, and we were excited to witness their growth from fall to winter! This assessment helped us understand each student's academic journey and identify areas for improvement.

We were pleased to welcome **Jay Martin**, the School Safety & Security Director from the Nebraska Department of Education. Mr. Martin engaged with our students during their exploratory classes and also held an informative session for parents after school. His presentation focused on the challenges that digital platforms, apps, and social media posed in educational settings and at home. With extensive experience in law enforcement and as a national speaker on this topic, Mr. Martin emphasized the need for digital wisdom to enhance students' behavioral, mental, and emotional well-being. We encouraged all parents to join us for this important discussion on improving our school community's digital culture.

Additionally, we were excited to host Hailey Carlson from Perry Law, who addressed our students during exploratory classes about bullying. This session aimed to define bullying, educate students on effective responses, and promote a collaborative environment among students and staff.

HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS



ARBOR PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

As we approach the end of the first semester, I am excited for the many opportunities our students have to showcase their growth and talents. With the winter reading and math screeners, students will have the chance to demonstrate what they've learned so far this year. These assessments not only highlight individual progress but also help us as a school continue to support and guide every child's learning journey. It's truly inspiring to see how much our students have grown since the beginning of the year!

We are also looking forward to our upcoming music concerts for kindergarten, 1st, and 5th grades, where our young musicians will have the chance to shine on stage. These performances are always a highlight, and it's wonderful to see the hard work and dedication of our students and music staff come together in such a meaningful way. To wrap up the semester, the PTO is hosting the delightful "Cookies, Cards, and Cocoa" event, bringing our school community together for a fun and festive celebration. It's the perfect way to celebrate the accomplishments of the semester and create lasting memories as we head into the winter break.



DEERFIELD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

It is hard to believe that we are reaching the end of our second semester at Deerfield Elementary. It has been exciting to see all of the learning, progress, talent, and leadership that our scholars at Deerfield possess. Reflecting on the past month, we are proud of our Student Senate for organizing an incredibly successful Food Drive for the Washington County Food Pantry. Through their leadership and our community's contributions, we donated over 1,000 pounds of food! Our scholars continue to give us their best every day by demonstrating safe, respectful and responsible behaviors. So far this school year, they've earned over 13,000 tickets! We are proud of everything our staff and scholars have accomplished so far this school year and we look forward to continued growth and progress in the next two semesters ahead.

Looking ahead, we are excited for the PTO to join us in hosting their "Cookies, Cards, and Cocoa" event where our families and school community will have an opportunity to come together to enjoy some treats and spread some holiday cheer! We are also excited for our upcoming 5th grade band and choir program where our scholars will have an opportunity to showcase all of their hard work during early band and choir rehearsals so far this school year.

HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS



SOUTH EARLY LEARNING CENTER

South EC Center had a terrific turnout for our Birth to 5 Family Engagement Night. The event included photos with Mr. and Mrs. Claus, Fine/Gross Motor Activities, Music and Movement, Blair Public Library Book Activity, and a lot more. Parents were especially impressed by the organization and thankful for the efforts in supporting the children's skills. We handed out approximately 120 sacks with a Family Engagement Activities Map, 25-26 Preschool Application Flyer, and Early Development Network Handouts with Developmental Parent Tips. We were especially excited to display announcements on our 2 new T.V.'s and class and building activity photos featured on iPads near teacher's informational boards. The night was a great success!

The 25-26 Preschool Application Google Form is open for enrollment for next school year, and linked here. We look forward to welcoming your child to Blair Community Schools!

HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

The holiday spirit is alive and well throughout the Blair Community Schools this December! From creative projects in the classroom to community service initiatives, students and staff are embracing the season with enthusiasm and generosity.

In their annual Holiday Door Decorating Contest, high school classrooms are showcasing their creativity with festive designs. Teachers and students have been working together to craft imaginative displays that reflect holiday themes, winter wonderlands, and messages of kindness. The elementary schools are hosting Cookies, Cards, and Cocoa events, bringing families together to spread holiday cheer. Students and parents will enjoy warm cocoa and sweet treats while decorating holiday cards for members of the Blair community.

In addition to the holiday festivities, BCS is making a difference in the community. Schools are hosting donation drives to collect toys, food, and warm clothing for local families in need, and multiple student groups have volunteered as bell ringers in the community. These efforts are a powerful reminder of the values that bring our district together—compassion, generosity, and a commitment to supporting one another.

The season wouldn't be complete without our talented students sharing their skills and creativity. Winter concerts, art showcases, and performances are lighting up stages across the district, offering families an opportunity to enjoy the hard work and dedication of our young performers. Check the district calendar for event dates and come celebrate with us!

As we approach the close of the year, we want to thank our families, staff, and community partners for making Blair Community Schools a wonderful place to learn and grow. From all of us at BCS, we wish you a joyful holiday season and a Happy New Year!





ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

The past few weeks have been filled with music, athletic achievements, and community spirit showcasing the incredible talents of our BCS students. The 6th Grade Band and Choir kicked off the season with a wonderful concert on November 19, delighting a packed audience. The 7th and 8th Grade Band will take the stage on Thursday, December 12, at 6 PM in the OMS Gym, starting with a performance by the Jazz Band.

Choir students have also been shining brightly, with five OMS students earning the honor of performing at the Nebraska All-State Choir concert on November 20 at the Lied Performing Arts Center. Their dedication and hard work truly paid off. The 7th and 8th Grade Choir will round out the season with their Winter Concert on Monday, December 16, at 7 PM in the OMS Gym.





OMS girls' wrestling team has had a season to remember. They finished undefeated in duals, going 6-0, and dominated both the Winnebago and Oakland-Craig tournaments. At Oakland-Craig, they not only earned nine individual championships but also secured the team title, scoring 119.5 points to lead a field of 15 teams. With a win percentage of over 65%, these athletes have made us all proud.

In high school activities news, our school community's generosity was on full display this season with four tables of toys donated for Joseph's Coat at our recent basketball games. Our community also participated in our recent choir concert, with community members joining our choir on stage to perform!

In other news, we are thrilled to congratulate Brooke Janning, who was recently named the Omaha World-Herald Class B All-State Softball Team Captain. What an incredible honor for a talented athlete! With Show Choir and Robotics gearing up for their seasons and the recent success of our students at the EMC Choir Clinic, there's much to celebrate at BCS. We look forward to sharing even more highlights in the coming weeks as we wrap up the year with pride!

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

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