

JANUARY 2025



Board of Education Updates

The Board of Education held its first meeting of the new year on Monday, January 13, 2025, at 7:00 PM. Here are some of the key highlights from the evening:

Welcome to New Board Members

- The Board welcomed three newly elected members: Nate Larsen, Melaini Sturm, and Bob Schoby. Each was officially sworn into their roles, and the board looks forward to their contributions in shaping the district's future.

Community Feedback

- A community member expressed their appreciation for the district's fine arts programs, highlighting their positive impact on students and the community.
- A former district employee shared concerns about the use of flashing lights alongside bells in certain areas of the middle school. The district values this feedback and is committed to fostering a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. These lights were thoughtfully installed in high-traffic and noisier areas to ensure that important announcements and safety messages are clearly noticed by both staff and students. They undergo regular testing to meet fire safety and ADA standards, including precautions to ensure the flashing intervals are safe for individuals with sensitivities. The Board is carefully reviewing this practice to ensure it continues to serve the needs of our school community effectively.

Facility Improvements

- The Board approved the installation of a new boiler system at Deerfield Elementary School. This system will heat the water entering the building's heat pumps, ensuring a more comfortable and consistent temperature throughout the school. This upgrade underscores the district's commitment to maintaining safe and conducive learning environments.

We thank all community members who attended the meeting and contributed their insights. The Board remains dedicated to fostering an open and collaborative dialogue as we work together to support our students and schools.

Message from Blair Community Schools Superintendent, Dr. Randy Gilson



Dear Blair Community,

As we begin the new year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the remarkable progress and achievements from our first semester. Across our district, the unwavering dedication of our staff, the enthusiasm of our students, and the support of our families have made this a truly special start to the school year. It is with pride and gratitude that I share highlights from each of our schools.

At South Early Childhood, our educators have been crafting meaningful learning experiences that set a strong foundation for our youngest learners. Through Weekly Team Meetings and Monthly Collaboration Meetings with partners like B-3, Sixpence, and ESU3, teachers are refining lesson plans, sharing innovative strategies, and analyzing GOLD assessment data to ensure every child's unique needs are met. The success of the Birth to 5 Family Engagement Night, which included interactive activities, resources for parents, and a joyful visit from Mr. and Mrs. Claus, exemplifies the power of collaboration between our schools and families.

Blair High School continues to open doors for our students' futures. Events like Future Options Day brought over 70 professionals to campus, providing students with real-world insights into career clusters and post-secondary pathways. Through our partnership with Metropolitan Community College, students are earning college credits at no cost, with a goal to increase dual credit participation to 450 students this year. The school's focus on reducing post-graduation uncertainty, alongside its commitment to achieving a 100% graduation rate within five years, is helping prepare students for success beyond high school.

At Otte Middle School, a thriving culture of academic excellence, artistic achievement, and community service is evident. The Rare Bear program recognized over 445 students in November for their outstanding behavior, while the Student Senate raised over \$1,400 for local charities through initiatives like the Black Out Hunger Event. The girls' wrestling team had an exceptional season, earning multiple championships, while band and choir students shone brightly at performances and honor band events. Otte's recent "Excellent" rating from AQuESTT underscores the incredible work being done by students and staff alike.

Arbor Park has demonstrated excellence in academic growth and community engagement. Teachers are using winter screening data to tailor instruction and interventions for each student, ensuring no one is left behind. The school's Cookies, Cards, and Cocoa event brought families together for an evening of fun and connection, while successful safety drills, conducted with the support of law enforcement, reinforced our commitment to student and staff well-being. A highlight of the semester was the visit from the high school show choir, which inspired students and showcased the power of music and collaboration.

Finally, Deerfield Elementary has made incredible strides in fostering a culture of kindness, inclusivity, and academic success. Through initiatives like Well-Managed Schools and PBIS, students are being consistently recognized for their positive behavior, with over 40% already receiving awards for kindness and grit. Academic progress has been impressive, with the school on track to meet its goal of having 80% of students achieve grade-level benchmarks in reading and math by May. Events like the Veterans Day Assembly, Kindergarten Feast, and PTO Cookies, Cards, and Cocoa have further strengthened the school's community spirit.

These achievements are a testament to the dedication and collaboration that define BCS. From the classroom to the community, your efforts are creating an environment where every student can thrive.

Thank you for your hard work, passion, and partnership.

Randy Gilson, Ed. D.

Blair Dance Heads to Nationals



The Blair High School Dance Team has achieved an incredible milestone by qualifying for the Universal Dance Association (UDA) National Dance Team Championships in Orlando, Florida! This prestigious competition, held at the end of January, brings together the nation's top dance teams to showcase their talent and dedication.

In preparation for Nationals, the team will be participating in two special showcase events:

- Sunday, January 26th: Nationals Send Off Performance at Elkhorn South from 3:30 to 6:30 PM. This event features performances by metro area schools heading to Nationals, and includes a \$5 donation to Make a Wish. This is a great chance to cheer our dance team on and support a great cause!
- Monday, January 27th: Nationals Showcase at Blair High School in the Main Gym at 7:00 PM. This local performance is another opportunity to see the team's routines before they head to Orlando.

The district is incredibly proud of the team's hard work, passion, and accomplishments. Let's rally together to support these talented dancers as they embark on this exciting journey! Go Blair Dance Team!

DeSoto Visits

Throughout the school year, our 5th-grade students in Blair Community Schools get to participate in a unique educational experience: a series of visits to the DeSoto Wildlife Refuge Center. These visits offer an exceptional opportunity for students to connect classroom learning with the natural world while fostering curiosity and a love for lifelong learning.

Over the course of the school year, students will visit the refuge eight times, with each trip focusing on a specific topic tied to 5th-grade standards. The primary focus is on science concepts, but the visits also provide opportunities for cross-curricular learning. Students practice critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills as they engage in hands-on activities that bring their lessons to life in meaningful, real-world contexts.

The highlight of this program is the culminating full-day outdoor education experience at the end of the school year, where parents are invited to join us. This special event allows families to witness firsthand the excitement and learning their children experience throughout the program. It's always a memorable day filled with exploration, discovery, and a celebration of nature.

These visits are consistently a favorite for our students, and we're thrilled to provide them with such an enriching opportunity. We love seeing their enthusiasm, curiosity, and sense of wonder as they engage with the natural world. Thank you for supporting programs like these that make learning dynamic, hands-on, and unforgettable for our students!



School Spelling Bees



Last week, Spelling Bees were held at Arbor Park, Deerfield, and Otte Middle School, showcasing the impressive spelling abilities of students from across our district. After several rounds of intense spelling, the winners from each building emerged. At Otte Middle School, Brandt Jensen was named the winner, with Jacob Quick finishing as the runner-up.



At Deerfield, the winners were Abby Lord and Harish Kodeeswaran, and the Arbor Park Spelling Bee winners were Daphne Forsung and Isabella Foged. Their hard work and preparation paid off, and we are so proud of their accomplishments. We look forward to seeing them continue to shine in future academic endeavors. The top two winners from each of these buildings will represent their school at the Washington County Spelling Bee which will take place at Fort Calhoun High School on February 06.



We congratulate all the students who participated in these events, as their efforts reflect the dedication and commitment to excellence that we value in our school community. These Spelling Bees are a wonderful way to highlight our students' academic achievements, and we are thrilled to see so many of our young learners excelling. We also want to thank the teachers and staff who supported our students in preparing for the competition, as their encouragement played a key role in the success of these events.

Congratulations again to all the winners and participants! We are proud of you and look forward to celebrating more academic successes in the future.

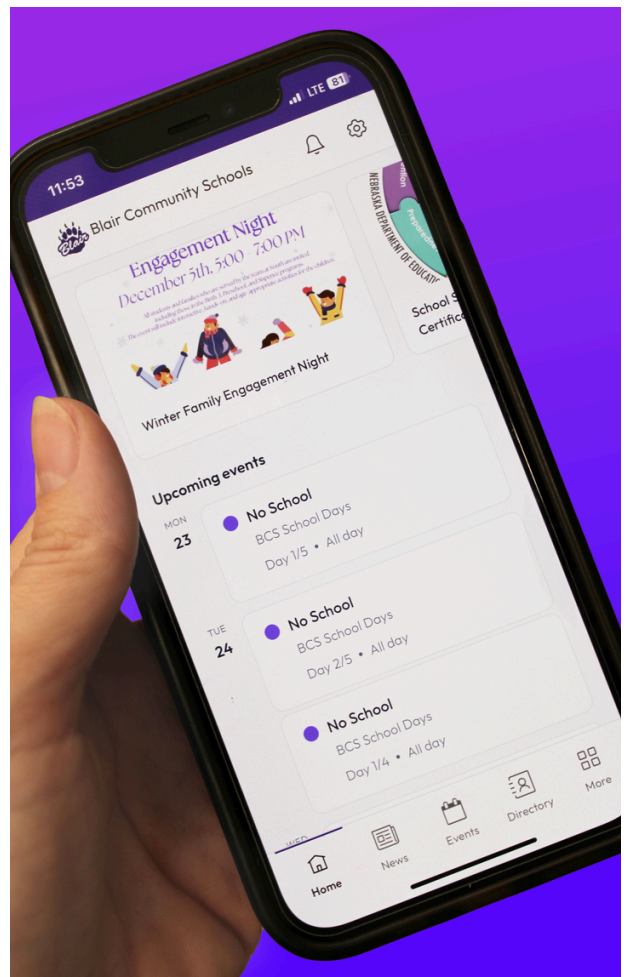
BCS App - Now Live!

We are thrilled to announce that the Blair Community Schools app is officially live and available for download on both the Apple App Store and Google Play! Just search Blair Community Schools to find us. This exciting new app offers an easy and convenient way to stay connected with all things happening at Blair Community Schools.

With the Blair Community Schools app, you can customize your settings to receive updates and notifications from the buildings that matter most to you. Whether it's important announcements, school closings, or upcoming events, you'll be the first to know, right at your fingertips.

In addition to keeping you informed, the app also makes it simple to stay organized. You can easily track the lunch schedule, check out the activities calendar, and access other essential resources—all in one place. This new tool is designed to keep you in the loop and make navigating school life as smooth as possible for parents, students, and staff.

We encourage you to download the app today, personalize your settings, and take full advantage of the convenience it offers. Staying connected with your child's school has never been easier! Download the Blair Community Schools app today from the Apple App Store or Google Play and start receiving updates directly on your phone.



Celebrating 40 Years of Service: Mark Kwikkel



Blair Community Schools recently had the privilege of celebrating Mark Kwikkel and his incredible 40 years of service as a Certified Athletic Trainer. Mark's unwavering dedication to the health and success of student-athletes continues to leave a profound impact on Blair High School and beyond, touching the lives of countless individuals throughout his career.

Throughout his four decades of service, Mark has been an integral and trusted presence in the athletic department, offering expert care, guidance, and support to athletes, coaches, and staff. His in-depth knowledge, compassion, and commitment to injury prevention and rehabilitation have earned him the respect and admiration of everyone who has had the opportunity to work with him. Mark's ability to remain calm under pressure and provide exceptional care has been a steady source of reassurance for all those he has served.

Beyond his day-to-day responsibilities, Mark has been a mentor and educator, playing a vital role in shaping the athletic training profession. His commitment to fostering a culture of health, safety, and resilience has had a lasting influence, not just on Blair High School, but on the many communities he has been part of. Mark's influence extends far beyond the sidelines—he has been a positive force in the lives of athletes and staff alike, always going above and beyond to ensure the well-being of others.

As we reflect on this monumental milestone, we extend our deepest gratitude to Mark for the immeasurable difference he has made over the past 40 years. His tireless efforts and dedication have shaped Blair High School's athletic programs and left an indelible mark on our school community. Mark, thank you for your passion, your leadership, and your unwavering commitment to excellence. We are truly fortunate to have had you as part of the Blair High School family for so many years.

Please join us in recognizing and celebrating Mark for his outstanding service and incredible contributions to our school and beyond.



Blair K-5 PTO Updates

Thank you to everyone who attended Cookies, Cards, and Cocoa! We had a wonderful time seeing the families and making cards for Police Officers, Firefighters, and Healthcare Workers in our community that do so much for us. A special shoutout to everyone who helped make the event happen, we wouldn't be able to do it without our amazing volunteers!

First semester was also filled with Bear Packs for teachers, teacher treat days, Trivia Night, Trunk or Treat, and so much more!

Be on the lookout for more upcoming events, including Bear Cub Ball on February 8th! We hope to see you there! Please reach out to blairk5pto@gmail.com with any questions!



BEAR CUB BALL

Arbor Park
February 8th, 2025
2-4 pm

Join us for our annual Bear Cub Ball!
Open to ALL children preschool-5th grade,
with their accompanying adult(s).

SNACKS
FACE PAINTING
DANCING
RAFFLES
& MORE!

\$30 prepay/\$35 at
the door for 2
attendees
-\$10 each additional
family member

QUESTIONS?
CONTACT BLAIR PTO
BLAIRK5PTO@GMAIL.COM

RSVP HERE:



HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS



Photo courtesy Joe Burns

Blair High School

January has been an exciting month for our show choir, Ovation! On January 8th, they toured South, Deerfield, Arbor, and Otte, performing four times in one day. Despite the challenges, their energy inspired younger students, many of whom showed interest in joining choir in the future.

January 11th brought our annual Show Choir Workshop, where we hosted 10 schools for an exciting day of music and performance. Groups participated in hour-long clinics with esteemed clinicians Dan Hays and Leighton Ware and delivered stunning performances at the end of each session. Our Ovation ensemble capped off both sessions with impressive showcases.

At the Ralston competition on January 18th, Ovation delivered a strong performance in a tough field, narrowly missing finals. Mark your calendars for our future events, and don't miss our March 18th POPS concert, featuring the "Fortune Teller" theme!



Otte Blair Middle School

Our students have enthusiastically returned for the second semester, diving back into classroom routines and winter sports.

The highlight of our second week was the middle school spelling bee, where 15 students showcased their spelling prowess. Brandt Jensen, an eighth-grader, emerged as the champion by correctly spelling "narwhal", with Jacob Quick securing the runner-up position. Both Brandt and Jacob will represent our school at the Washington County Spelling Bee.

Winter sports are in full swing, with our girls basketball and wrestling teams preparing for an exciting season. We look forward to watching our students compete!

Coming back from break, we had to celebrate our students. We are proud to recognize our December Rare Bear recipients, with over 200 students earning this honor. We love celebrating our students at Blair! Go Bears!

HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS



Arbor Park Elementary

January has been filled with excitement here at our Arbor Park. We were thrilled to host the high school show choir for a performance that had our students engaged and dancing along. We also held our annual school spelling bee, where students showed off their impressive skills and perseverance. Congratulations to all participants for their hard work!

This month, we were proud to recognize twelve students with the "Arbor Kind of Kid" award. These students were celebrated for their exceptional kindness and responsibility, and they continue to set a positive example for their peers. Whether it's lending a helping hand or demonstrating leadership, these students remind us of the importance of creating a caring school community. We look forward to continuing to highlight these wonderful acts of kindness throughout the year!



Deerfield Elementary

The first two weeks back after winter break have been filled with excitement and energy at Deerfield Elementary! Students and staff have quickly settled into their routines, embracing the new year with enthusiasm. Classrooms are buzzing with engaging activities, and it's been wonderful to see everyone reconnecting and diving back into learning with such a positive spirit.

In addition to academics, students have enjoyed participating in winter-themed activities and special assemblies designed to foster community and teamwork. Teachers have been working hard to ensure a smooth transition back to school, and it has been great to get back into a routine. As we move further into January, we're excited to continue building on this momentum and making 2025 a year to remember!

HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS



South Early Learning Center

Early Childhood staff is busy revisiting building and classroom procedures and routines with children. We have seen some exciting growth in kid's developmental milestones already from the start of the school year to now. Our preschool studies are Building Investigations in two classrooms and Music Making in two other classrooms. Our January theme is RESPECT. We will embed and reinforce what it looks like and how we treat each other in our classrooms and throughout our building.

The Early Childhood Expansion grant is due on February 3rd. A 25-26' Preschool Enrollment Google Form includes question fields that explore parent interest in programming options, including the possibility of ALL DAY Preschool. The 25-26 Preschool application form with QR code is at the BCS District website under South EC Center and also posted in the community.

K-5 Teachers commit to the Nebraska Literacy Project



A group of 22 BCS K-5 teachers have joined the Nebraska Literacy Project's Early Literacy Workshop, marking a significant step towards enhancing foundational literacy skills in our schools. This professional development opportunity, facilitated by University of Nebraska Omaha personnel and a BCS educator, aims to equip K-3 educators with evidence-based strategies for teaching critical literacy components.

The Early Literacy Workshop will concentrate on three key areas of foundational literacy: phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency. Our dedicated K-3 educators have committed to a series of meetings throughout this semester, which includes graduate-level coursework. This cohort-based approach will allow for collaborative learning and the sharing of best practices among participants.

By participating in this workshop, educators will gain in-depth knowledge of evidence-based early literacy instruction, develop skills supporting student learning in foundational literacy, and access resources to enhance instruction aligned with Nebraska State Standards.



Photos courtesy Joe Burns

Activities & Athletics

The Blair girls wrestling team has been on a roll, winning the EMC Duals tournament and securing an impressive 2nd place out of 26 teams at the Schuyler Invitational. Their dedication and hard work continue to set the bar high for our student-athletes. Looking ahead, the boys wrestling team will kick off their meets on January 27th, 2025. The full meet schedule is available on the district website, and we encourage everyone to check it out and support our athletes throughout the season.

In other exciting news, Blair hosted a Show Choir Clinic that brought together both middle and high school show choirs to perform. It was a wonderful opportunity for students to collaborate, share their talents, and showcase their hard work to a supportive audience.

At the middle school, the Show Choir for OMS has officially begun, with students preparing for their contests on February 1st and February 15th, 2025. It's sure to be a fun and exciting season for the talented students involved, and more information is available on the district website.

The 7th and 8th grade girls basketball teams have also started their season, with games scheduled this week. The 7th grade team will play at home on January 21st, and the 8th grade team will play at home on January 23rd. Full schedules for both teams can be found online, and we encourage our families to come out and cheer on our young athletes.

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 current activities and events.](#)**

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