



APRIL 2025 NEWSLETTER

BLAIR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

WHERE ALL STUDENTS LEARN

Board of Education News

The Blair Community Schools Board of Education held its regular monthly meeting on Monday, April 14, 2025. The evening began with a special moment as members of the Otte Middle School Student Senate led the Board and guests in the Pledge of Allegiance.

One of the highlights of the meeting was the official approval of Katrina Yale as the next principal of Otte Middle School, beginning with the 2025–2026 school year. We are excited to welcome her into this leadership role. The Board also approved Mrs. Erin Field as the district's new Director of Curriculum and Assessment. Erin's vision and dedication to academic growth will be a tremendous asset to our schools.

In a generous show of community support, the Washington County Cattlemen's Association donated \$5,000 to Blair FFA, a gift approved by the Board with appreciation for their continued partnership in supporting student programs.

The Board also discussed the impact of this year's unusually high number of snow days. A motion to reduce teacher contracts by seven days was not approved. Instead, a collaborative team of Board members and representatives from the Blair Education Association met later that week to begin working on a fair and reasonable solution for addressing staff work time impacted by this year's snow days, while honoring existing contracts.

As always, we appreciate the engagement and involvement of our families, staff, and community members in supporting the mission and work of Blair Community Schools.

Message from Blair Community Schools Superintendent, Dr. Randy Gilson



Dear Blair Community,

As we step into the heart of spring, I want to thank each of you for your continued support, energy, and partnership in making Blair Community Schools a place where students grow, thrive, and feel connected. April is always a vibrant time in our district, and this year is no exception—our classrooms, stages, hallways, and athletic fields are full of energy and excitement as we wrap up the year and look ahead to the next.

Over the past few weeks, we've had some incredible events that showcase just how special our schools—and our community—truly are. Our elementary art shows and family nights brought in large crowds and created wonderful opportunities for students to share their creativity and learning with families. The joy and pride on our students' faces as they showed off their artwork or led parents through their classrooms said it all. Thank you to our staff for organizing these meaningful evenings, and to our families for showing up in such strong support.

At the middle school, our music students have been hard at work preparing and performing impressive concerts that highlight their growth, talent, and dedication. These performances remind us that learning happens in many forms—and that the arts are alive and well in BCS.

We were also excited to invite you to our Blair Center for Automotive Technology (BCAT) Open House, which happened this afternoon, at our new BCAT Building. This event showcased the incredible opportunities we're providing students with a space designed to support hands-on, future-focused learning. From skilled trades to technical pathways, BCAT is a game-changer for our students and a source of pride for our community.

As we continue looking forward, we also pause to reflect on where we've been. It's been nearly a year since the tornadoes affected our area—an event that reminded us all just how important safety and preparedness are. Our district has continued to review and assess the safety of all our buildings, identifying areas for improvement to ensure every student and staff member is protected. From physical building upgrades to future planning, this work is ongoing and deeply important to all of us.

April is also a time for athletic pride, and we're looking forward to two special events. The Mike Lehl Invitational Track Meet, hosted at the high school, is a major event that brings together athletes and spectators from across the region. It's a fantastic celebration of student effort, sportsmanship, and tradition. Then, the very next day, we're excited to launch our first-ever elementary track meet for grades 3-5! This is the beginning of what we hope will become an annual tradition. More details will be coming soon from your building principals—stay tuned!

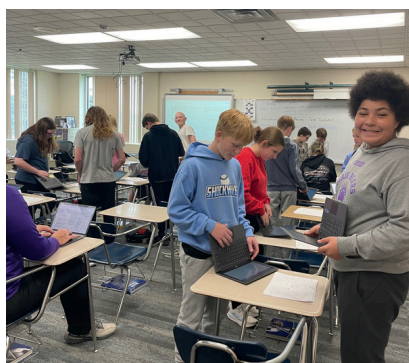
As we head into Teacher Appreciation Week (May 5-9), I also want to recognize and celebrate the amazing educators and staff across BCS. From early mornings and after-school practices to evening events and weekend supervision, our staff consistently go above and beyond for students. Whether it's music teachers running rehearsals, art teachers setting up showcases, or staff volunteering for games and family nights, they do it all with heart—for our kids and our community. Their dedication, passion, and care are what make BCS such a remarkable place to learn and grow.

As we finish out the final weeks of the school year, I want to thank you again for being part of the Blair Community Schools family. Your support, involvement, and trust allow us to give students the experiences, opportunities, and care they deserve. Let's finish strong together and continue building something special for our students and our community.

With Gratitude,

Randy Gilson, Ed. D.

Randy Gilson, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Blair Community Schools



Skills USA Competition Results

We're excited to share the results from last week's SkillsUSA State Convention, where Blair students showcased their talents in a variety of career and technical competitions. Events included Precision Machining, Culinary Arts, Baking and Cake Decorating, Restaurant Service, Firefighting, CSI, CO2 Car Racing, Technical Team Problem Solving, and more.

Of the students who represented Blair, three brought home medals:

- Mason Stoddard – 1st Place in Precision Machining
- Riley Konek – 2nd Place in Culinary Arts
- Asa Harvey – 3rd Place in Precision Machining

In addition, Josh Armendaiz and Luke Raymond attended the conference through the Metro Community College (MCC) Career Academy. Josh competed in Collision Repair Estimating and earned 2nd place, while Luke competed in Diesel Technology. A huge thank you to Mr. Cogan, whose guidance helped Josh succeed in his event. We are proud to continue our strong partnership with Metro Community College, which allows our students to gain real-world, high-demand skills in fields like automotive technology and diesel mechanics.

A special thank you to Mr. Mills for his outstanding leadership and commitment to our students. His dedication to preparing students for success—both in competition and in life—is deeply appreciated.

Congratulations to all of our Blair SkillsUSA participants—we're proud of your achievements and the way you represented our school!



FBLA State Success

We're thrilled to share that our students had an incredibly successful showing at the FBLA State Leadership Conference, with six students qualifying for Nationals so far! Please join us in congratulating the following students on their outstanding achievements:

National Qualifiers

- AnnaSophia Petersen – 1st Place in Journalism (State Champion)
- Riley Batenhorst, Maddie Walters, and Karlie Dewitt-Dodd – 3rd Place in American Enterprise Project
- Logan Baker and Paul Friberg – 3rd Place in Management Information Systems

Additional Award Winners

- Jaron Zurek – 4th Place in Intro to Financial Math and Intro to Information Technology
- Izzy Hartvigsen, Claire Locken, and Jonathan Foged – 4th Place in Local Chapter Annual Business Report
- Jonathan Foged, Mia Kern, and London Woodard – 5th Place in Intro to Business Presentation
- Jonathan Foged, Claire Locken, and Riley Batenhorst – 5th Place in Business Ethics
- London Woodard – 6th Place in Intro to Business Communications
- Kieran Flynn and London Woodard – 4th Place in Intro to Event Planning
- AnnaSophia Petersen and Mia Kern – 5th Place in Intro to Event Planning
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We are so proud of all of our competitors for their hard work, teamwork, and professionalism. We're now looking ahead to the National Leadership Conference this summer in Anaheim, California, and can't wait to see our Deerfield students shine on the national stage!

Blair Community Schools Rated “Excellent” for Third Year in a Row



Blair Community Schools is proud to announce that we have once again been rated “Excellent” by the Nebraska Department of Education—for the third year in a row. This top-tier classification places BCS among just 29% of schools and districts across the state recognized for outstanding academic performance, student growth, graduation rates, and overall educational quality.

This recognition reflects the incredible work of our entire school community—from our talented educators and support staff to our dedicated leadership and engaged families. We are deeply grateful to be recognized for what we already know to be true: Blair Community Schools is a place where All Students Learn.

Academic Excellence, Fiscal Responsibility

In every measurable area—attendance, graduation rates, college-going rates, and state testing performance—Blair Community Schools exceeds both the state average and our peer districts. Our students outperform the state by 6% to 18% across all academic areas, showing that our focus on meaningful learning and student growth is making a real impact.

Just as important, we are achieving these results with a strong commitment to fiscal responsibility. Our per-pupil expenditures remain well below both the state average and similar-sized districts—proof that our district can do more with less, while never compromising on quality.

Investing Wisely in the Future

While keeping costs low, Blair Community Schools has also made significant investments in our facilities over the last five years. Every school building in our district has seen improvements—with a particular focus on enhancing student safety, functionality, and learning environments. These upgrades have been thoughtfully planned and carefully implemented, ensuring that we provide safe, modern spaces where students and staff can thrive.

We are proud of what we’ve accomplished so far, and we remain committed to being responsible stewards of the community’s trust and resources. Our ongoing focus is not only on today’s needs but on preparing for the future—ensuring that our schools remain strong, safe, and ready to meet the demands of tomorrow.

A Shared Commitment

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our exceptional staff. Their passion, professionalism, and care for students are the foundation of everything we do. They are the reason our schools continue to succeed—and the reason families choose Blair Community Schools.

We are honored by this “Excellent” rating, but even more so, we are proud to be a school district where students are known, supported, and challenged every day. Thank you to our staff, families, and community for your continued support of Blair Community Schools.



Blair Community Schools

Where all students learn.

Happening In Our Schools



Blair High School

As we head into the final stretch of the school year, BHS has lots of upcoming exciting events and celebrations! On Tuesday, April 30, we'll kick things off with our Honors Convocation at 9:50 AM, a special time to recognize the hard work and achievements of our amazing students. Then, on Wednesday, May 1, there will be no school for BHS students as we proudly host the Mike Lehl Invitational Track Meet, welcoming schools from across the region to our campus.

Looking ahead, we're thrilled to host our Hall of Fame Ceremony on Tuesday, May 7 at 3:00 PM, honoring individuals who have made a lasting impact on Blair High School. And on Monday, May 13, students will be dismissed at 1:30 PM as we host the District Track Meet. Thank you for your continued support as we celebrate our students and showcase the pride and spirit of BHS! Go Bears!



Otte Blair Middle School

Mrs. Erin Field has been honored as the Assistant Principal of the Year for Region 2 by the Nebraska State Association of Secondary School Principals, recognizing her outstanding leadership and dedication to Otte Middle School. Over spring break, new weight racks and weights were installed for PE classes, enhancing students' fitness opportunities. Our High Ability Learner (HAL) students recently explored international cuisine through a tour and workshop at the Institute for the Culinary Arts in Omaha, led by Chef James. Congratulations to the HAL team—Sam Kunkle, Connor Leehy, Kelton McCombs, Bentley Wolff, and Liam Warren—for winning the ESU#3 Spring "Mad Hatter" Quiz Bowl among 20 competing teams.

We also celebrated our March Rare Bear recipients on March 31, awarding a total of 308 Rare Bears across grades 6-8, with a raffle prize of a Walmart gift card for one lucky winner. The Golden Sower Program recognized 119 students who read and completed activities for four novels, culminating in a fun voting party with snacks and prizes. Additionally, our One School, One Book program featured *Slugfest* by Gordon Korman, with WIN classes engaging in daily trivia and a Kahoot competition to promote literacy and school-wide participation. Thanks to the Student Senate for sponsoring prizes that made the reading celebration even more exciting!

Happening In Our Schools



Arbor Park Elementary School

Arbor Park has had an exciting month full of fun and meaningful learning experiences. Our 2nd and 3rd graders wowed families and staff with a lively music concert that highlighted their hard work and growing confidence. At the same time, every Arbor Park student had their work on display throughout the halls at the Arbor Park Art Show, giving our young artists a chance to shine. We also celebrated Read Across America Week with read-alouds, buddy reading, and special guest visits, all designed to help students discover the joy of reading.

Alongside these events, students and staff took part in some great learning opportunities. Our students earned a visit from the "Animal Encounters" assembly by showing respect, responsibility, and safety—giving them the chance to interact with live animals and learn about their habitats in a fun, hands-on way. We wrapped up the month of March with our Arbor Park Kindness Assembly, reminding everyone about the importance of empathy and positive choices. Plus, several of our teachers are working with UNO to strengthen early reading instruction through professional development. The rest of the school year at Arbor Park will be packed full of fun and learning opportunities, too!



Deerfield Elementary School

Spring is in full swing at Deerfield, and we're wrapping up the year with lots to celebrate! We recently hosted our annual Golden Sower Party to honor students who read at least eight Golden Sower-nominated books this school year. It was a joyful celebration of reading and a great way to recognize the dedication and enthusiasm of our young readers.

Looking ahead, our grades 3-5 students will participate in the first annual Elementary Track Meet on Friday, April 2—a fun-filled day of running and field events, school spirit, and support from our high school track team volunteers. Then, on Monday, May 5, all students will attend a special assembly at the high school. We're excited for this opportunity to come together as a broader school community.

As we prepare for these upcoming events, we'd also like to remind families that Teacher Appreciation Week is right around the corner. We are incredibly proud of the amazing staff at Deerfield, and are so grateful for the work they do everyday to make Deerfield an amazing place to be!

Happening In Our Schools



Blair Preschool

It's been a busy and exciting time at South Early Childhood Center! This morning, students enjoyed a hands-on experience with the Animals on the Go event. Children had the chance to meet, learn about, and interact with a variety of animals. For those who wanted to, there was even an opportunity to pet the animals—sparking lots of curiosity, smiles, and great questions from our young learners. These types of experiences help build not only knowledge but also confidence and compassion.

In addition, families joined us for our Birth through 5 Family Engagement Night, which was full of energy, fun, and meaningful activities that brought our youngest learners and their caregivers together. Events like this strengthen the connection between home and school, and we loved seeing everyone participate.

We also want to share a reminder about the Additional Preschool Instructional Hours that were added to make up for sessions missed due to inclement weather. These sessions will take place during regular class times on the following Fridays:

- AM Preschool: May 9
- PM Preschool: May 2 and May 16



Assistant Principal of the Year

We're proud to share that Mrs. Erin Field, Assistant Principal at Otte Middle School, has been named the Assistant Principal of the Year for Region 2 by the Nebraska State Association of Secondary School Principals. This honor recognizes her exceptional leadership, dedication, and unwavering support for students, staff, and families.

Erin has made a lasting impact through initiatives like the PASS Program and BEAR Room, which support student success, and by leading building safety and positive behavior programs. As Activities Director, she helped launch the girls' wrestling program and secured new weight room equipment for student fitness. Her leadership in school improvement, discipline, and student support reflects her deep commitment to the Blair community.

Mrs. Field received her award on April 23 at the NSASSP Region II meeting. We are incredibly grateful for her passion and the difference she makes every day!

BCS: Prioritizing Safety Today, Preparing for Tomorrow



At BCS, the safety and security of our students and staff is more than a checklist—it's a promise. Over the past several years, we've worked with purpose and care to enhance the safety of every school in our district. From physical upgrades to long-term planning, we remain committed to creating secure environments where students can thrive.

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What We've Accomplished

With the support of our community, we've made and have plans to make meaningful safety improvements district-wide:

- Blinds Installed in Every Building to improve lockdown preparedness
- Upgraded Indoor and Outdoor Lighting to increase visibility and deter unwanted activity
- Enhanced Fencing to secure school perimeters
- Modern Security Cameras to monitor activity and support quick response
- Repaired Handrails and Bleachers to ensure safer shared spaces
- Updated Locking Systems in high school, plan for remaining campuses for consistent emergency readiness

These upgrades have made a difference—but as our district continues to grow, so do our safety needs.

What's Next: Identified Priorities

We're actively planning additional projects to strengthen safety across our schools:

- New Entryways at Arbor Park and Otte Middle School to bring front offices to the main entrances, improving access control and visibility
- Updated Entry at South Preschool to better protect our youngest learners with a secure, child-centered design
- Deerfield Elementary Addition that includes storm-rated classrooms to meet current tornado shelter codes based on student enrollment
- High School Safety Upgrades including new storm shelters and improved locker room facilities that better support student safety and function

Why This Matters

School safety is not a one-time fix—it's an ongoing responsibility. As threats evolve and student populations grow, we must remain proactive. These projects are more than facility updates; they're about making sure every child walks into a building that is prepared, protected, and designed with their well-being in mind.

Families should never have to worry about whether their school is safe. Staff should be equipped to act confidently in emergencies. And our students—whether they're in preschool or high school—deserve to learn in buildings built for both inspiration and protection.

This is our shared mission, and together, we are building schools that reflect the value we place on every student's safety and future. Thank you for continuing to support the vision of safe, strong schools at BCS.



Activities & Events

Spring has been an exciting season for Blair Community Schools Activities and Athletics, filled with student success and strong community support! At the high school level, our Speech team had a fantastic showing at Districts, with Avalon Morgan placing 4th and Kayleia Chesson earning 2nd place to qualify for State. Kayleia went on to represent Blair proudly at State Speech, finishing 8th overall—a remarkable accomplishment!

In the fine arts, our middle school and 5th grade band concerts have been wonderful showcases of student talent and growth. Families were also treated to the 5th grade musical, which was a huge success, highlighting the creativity and teamwork of our young performers. These events remind us how valuable the arts are in helping students build confidence and express themselves.

Looking ahead, we're excited to offer even more opportunities for student engagement this summer. Youth sports camps are being added to the Blair High School website under the "Activities & Athletics – Youth Activities" section. Be sure to check regularly for updates and registration info.

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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