

OCTOBER 2026 NEWSLETTER

BLAIR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

WHERE ALL STUDENTS LEARN

Photo taken by Mason Lau

Board of Education News

The October meeting of the Blair Community Schools Board of Education kicked off with a wonderful showcase of student leadership. Officers from the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) led the room in the Pledge of Allegiance and delivered an excellent presentation on their upcoming projects and conferences. The district extends a huge thank-you to sponsor Vicki Schrick for the immense time and dedication she pours into these students, making student presentations a consistent highlight of the monthly meetings.

The generosity of the Blair community was on full display as the Board gratefully accepted three significant donations. The Blair Kiwanis Organization contributed $6,683.06 directly to the FBLA program, while the Washington County Cattlemen's Association donated roughly 365 pounds of ground beef valued at an estimated $2,500. Additionally, the Logan Family and the Blair Wrestling Club generously teamed up to donate $1,605 to purchase brand-new singlets for the High School Wrestling Team.

The Board also approved two exciting requests celebrating fine arts achievements across the district. Congratulations go out to Victoria Umland and her theater students, whose Varsity Play was selected to perform at the prestigious Nebraska State Thespian Festival at the Holland Center this January 7–9, with local public performances scheduled for Sunday, December 13, at 3:00 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. The Board also extends its congratulations to Patrick Hays and the Honor Choir, who were selected to attend the Midland University Honor Choir Festival on October 18.

District business wrapped up efficiently with the approval of several operational updates and a message of gratitude from the leadership. The Board officially approved a new policy regarding the Community Use of School Facilities, alongside Frontline to streamline HR systems and Schoology as the official Learning Management System. Finally, Vice President Courtney Tabor shared a note of deep appreciation for district staff following a busy conference week, thanking teachers for their hard work in connecting with families and wishing everyone a well-deserved long weekend.

Message from Blair Community Schools Superintendent, Dr. Don Johnson



Bringing the Community Back to Blair Community Schools

When I accepted the opportunity to serve as Superintendent of Blair Community Schools, I believed I had a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead. What I have discovered, however, has been even more meaningful. I have found a community that is proud of its history, values its schools, and is ready to work together to build an even stronger future.

I have had the privilege of working alongside building and district leaders who are committed to excellence and willing to do the hard work necessary to move our schools forward. I have seen staff members who genuinely care about our students and consistently go above and beyond to help them succeed. I have watched our students represent Blair with talent, character, and pride. I have also witnessed community organizations, businesses, families, and individuals who are eager to be part of positive change and who have demonstrated their support through their time, effort, and financial contributions.

For all of this, I am incredibly grateful.

Blair Community Schools has tremendous strengths, and I believe we are building positive momentum. At the same time, we recognize that meaningful progress takes time, continued effort, and a willingness to listen to one another. Our work is far from finished, and one of our most important priorities must be strengthening the partnership between our schools and the community we serve.

It is time to continue bringing the community back into Blair Community Schools.

Opportunities to Be Involved

November provides several important opportunities for community members to participate, share their perspectives, and support the future of our district.

First, Tuesday, November 3, is Election Day. Voting is an important opportunity to exercise your civic responsibility and make your voice heard. I encourage everyone who is eligible to participate in the election process.

Second, on November 11, we have an opportunity to recognize and honor the men and women who have served our country in the armed forces. Whether you attend a Veterans Day program, participate in a community event, or simply take a moment to thank a veteran, please join me in expressing our gratitude for their service and sacrifice.

Third, members of our community will have an opportunity to observe the interviews for our next superintendent on November 11 and 12. Selecting the next leader of Blair Community Schools is an important decision that will help shape the future of our district. I encourage community members to take an interest in this process and support the Board of Education as it works to identify the right leader for our schools.

Once our next superintendent is selected, I hope our community will extend that individual the same encouragement, partnership, and support that so many of you have shown me. Leading a school district is a significant responsibility, and a strong partnership among the superintendent, Board of Education, staff, families, and community members is essential to success. We may not always agree on every issue, but we can remain united in our commitment to doing what is best for our students.

Finally, later this month, you will have an opportunity to provide feedback through a district communications survey. One of our goals is to improve how we share information about the work taking place throughout Blair Community Schools. We want to ensure that families, taxpayers, staff members, and community organizations receive timely, meaningful, and accessible information about our schools.

Your feedback will help us better understand what is working, where we need to improve, and how we can communicate more effectively with the people we serve. Please take a few minutes to participate when the survey becomes available. Your perspective matters, and your input will help guide our efforts moving forward.

Celebrate Our Students and Schools

Another important way to bring our community together is by showing up for our students.

Blair is fortunate to have so many talented, dedicated, and hardworking young people. Throughout the past month, I have had the opportunity to see firsthand the many ways our students excel both inside and outside the classroom.

I watched our band members represent Blair at the state band competition. I have seen our student-athletes compete with determination and sportsmanship on the fields, courts, and courses. I have enjoyed watching our choir perform and seeing the number of students who have committed their time and talents to the program. I also look forward to celebrating the hard work and creativity of our students and staff through the school musical on October 30.

These experiences are reminders that our schools offer so much more than academic instruction. They provide opportunities for students to discover their talents, develop confidence, build relationships, and learn the value of teamwork and perseverance.

Our students work hard to represent Blair well, and they deserve an audience that celebrates their efforts. Whether it is a concert, a musical, an athletic competition, an academic event, or another school activity, I encourage you to attend when you can. Bring your family, invite a friend, and take pride in what our students are accomplishing.

Every time a community member fills a seat in the stands, applauds a performance, or recognizes a student's achievement, we send a powerful message: **Our students matter, our schools matter, and our community is behind them.**

There are wonderful things happening throughout Blair Community Schools. I invite you to be part of them.

A Special Thank You to Our Veterans

As we approach Veterans Day, I want to close by expressing my sincere gratitude to all the men and women who have served our nation.

The freedoms we enjoy each day are made possible, in part, by the courage, commitment, and sacrifice of those who have worn our nation's uniform. The opportunity to serve our community, lead our schools, and share our thoughts and ideas freely is something we should never take for granted.

When I began serving as Superintendent in January, I reached out to Leon Haith to join me in the important work of strengthening Blair Community Schools. Leon had previously served this district as a leader and developed a strong appreciation for its people and its mission. Beyond his connection to Blair, Leon has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to service through more than 35 years in the military, including deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

His dedication to our country and our community is something I deeply respect. Leon's service also reminds us that the values of leadership, commitment, perseverance, and service extend well beyond the classroom. These are values that strengthen our schools and our community.

Leon is one of many individuals whose service deserves our recognition and appreciation. To all our veterans, thank you for your willingness to serve, for the sacrifices you and your families have made, and for the freedoms you have helped protect. We are grateful for you, not just on Veterans Day, but throughout the year.

Moving Forward Together

Bringing the community back into Blair Community Schools is not the responsibility of one person, one group, or one organization. It is a shared commitment that requires all of us to participate, listen, communicate, and work together.

We will not always see every issue the same way, and there will be challenges along the way. However, I believe we can accomplish great things when we approach those challenges with respect, a willingness to listen, and a shared focus on the success and well-being of our students.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve Blair Community Schools. Thank you for the encouragement you have offered, the work you have contributed, and the support you have shown our students and staff. Most importantly, thank you for caring about the future of our schools.

Let's continue working together to make Blair Community Schools a source of pride for our students, our families, our staff, and our entire community.

Thank you for being part of bringing the community back to Blair Community Schools!

Dr. J.

Blair Community Schools

Where all students learn.

Novonesis Field Trip



Last week, Blair High School students stepped outside the classroom and into the cutting-edge world of biotechnology during a field trip to the local Novonesis facility. Walking the floor of the massive 37-acre plant, the students got a firsthand look at how advanced enzymes and microbial technologies are developed right here in their own backyard. The Novonesis team did a fantastic job of breaking down complex biochemistry into everyday terms, showing the teenagers how these locally produced solutions are shipped worldwide to improve everything from food production to clean energy.



The visit wrapped up with an interactive session focused on the future of STEM careers and upcoming local opportunities. Students learned about the facility's biomanufacturing partnership and scholarship pathways with Metropolitan Community College, opening their eyes to high-tech career paths available right after graduation. Everyone left the campus with a renewed excitement for science and a proud appreciation for the world-class innovation happening just down the road from their high school.

Girls State Golf 2026

The Blair girls golf team fought through freezing winds and a long rain delay at districts to crush their biggest goal of the year. Teammates Madi, Kora, and Lauren all stepped up at the perfect time, shooting personal bests to bring the team's total score to 396. Breaking that 400-stroke barrier was a huge milestone for the program and showed just how much work the girls put into their game all season.

While the Bears missed out on qualifying for state as a full squad by just a few strokes, freshman Anna Stirek kept her postseason going with a spectacular individual performance. She stayed loose despite the brutal weather, landing a top-ten finish and punching her wildcard ticket to the NSAA Class B State Championships. The rest of the team immediately rallied around her, celebrating the achievement and helping her get ready for the biggest tournament of the year.

Anna and her teammate Sophie then made the long drive across Nebraska to Scottsbluff so Anna could take on the challenging Monument Shadows course. Sophie came along for support and to help read the greens during practice rounds, turning the long trip into a fun road trip. They even took a break from golf to explore Western Nebraska, making memories by hiking up to the top of the iconic Scotts Bluff National Monument.

Facing the best high school golfers in the state, Anna held her own through two intense rounds under beautiful, sunny skies. The tournament wrapped up a milestone season for the Blair program and gave the younger players a real taste of what it takes to compete at the highest level. With almost the entire varsity lineup returning next year, the Bears are walking off the green with a ton of confidence and plenty of momentum for next fall.







Bear Tracks Launches First Issue of the Year

The Blair High School Newspaper staff dropped their first issue of Bear Tracks on October 22. The student-led crew kicked off the school year with a sharp, professionally designed edition that proves just how hard these student journalists have been working. The team put countless late hours into tracking down stories, designing pages, and polishing the final layout, and all that effort definitely paid off—the issue looks incredible.

This edition covers a little bit of everything, starting with a breakdown of the upcoming Midterm Elections and a sneak peek at the hilarious Fall Musical: Something Rotten. Readers will also find a feature on the high-energy Overture Show Choir and a thought-provoking In-Depth piece mapping out how growing up in Gen-Z compares to past generations. On the entertainment side, the staff shares their takes on Lizzy McAlpine's track "Angel" and what to expect from Marvel's upcoming Avengers: Doomsday.

Of course, Bear Tracks wouldn't be complete without celebrating our local student stars. This issue gives a well-deserved shoutout to Blair Softball's seniors as they wrap up their final season on the field. The staff also named Ty Tessendorf as the Athlete of the Issue for his leadership on the field, and Josie Kros as the Artist of the Issue, showcasing her amazing creative talents around campus.

The newspaper crew is already shifting gears to hit their goal of putting out two issues per semester. You can look for the next edition to come out in late December, right before Winter Break. Until then, copies of the current issue are available at distribution tables all around BHS, so grab one today and support our student journalists!







Deerfield Student Wins Snow Plow Naming Contest

Deerfield Elementary student Esme Von Loh has won the Blair Community Schools snow plow naming contest with her creative entry, "Sir Plows-A-Lot." Students across the district participated in the fun competition, but Esme's witty submission won over the judges. Her clever name will now be permanently decaled onto one of the district's primary winter plows.



To celebrate, the grounds crew brought the truck to Deerfield Elementary so Esme could climb into the cab and honk the horn for her cheering classmates. Blair Community Schools congratulates Esme for her great school spirit, and everyone looks forward to seeing "Sir Plows-A-Lot" clearing the roads this winter.

Happening In Our Schools







Blair High School

Blair FBLA had a busy October, kicking off the month with a pumpkin patch visit, volunteering at the recycling center, presenting to the School Board, and hosting their annual member installation. Meanwhile, the Blair High Marching Band made history at the Nebraska State Marching Contest in Lincoln, earning a Division II Excellent rating overall, while the Color Guard secured a top-tier Division I Superior rating.

At the High School, Mr. Mills' construction students delivered two student-built sheds and earned OSHA-10 safety cards, with the new class now seeking buyers for their next shed projects. Community spirit continued as Skills USA and the PTO hosted a successful Trunk or Treat won by the cheer team, and the volleyball team partnered with MCH for their Pink Out game, raising vital funds for local cancer patients.







Otte Blair Middle School

Otte Middle School staff continue to focus on creating positive, supportive learning environments for all students. Staff members are participating in training on Well Managed Schools, with an emphasis on building positive relationships, establishing clear expectations, and supporting student success. Administration has also been providing feedback to all teachers through classroom visits and observations, helping staff reflect on their practices and continue to grow in their instruction and classroom management.

As fall sports come to a close, we are excited to welcome the start of winter sports and another season of student participation and school spirit. Our music students have also been busy sharing their talents! The seventh and eighth grade choir recently held its first concert of the year, showcasing the hard work and preparation of our students. We look forward to the sixth grade band and choir concert on November 17. Thank you to our staff, students, and families for continuing to make Otte Middle School a great place to learn and grow!

Happening In Our Schools







Arbor Park Elementary School

October has been a great month at Arbor Park! We had the opportunity to connect with nearly 98% of our student families during conferences. These conversations are such an important part of building strong partnerships between home and school, and it was wonderful to reflect on the great start our students have had and look ahead to the rest of the year. We are grateful for the time families took to connect with teachers and celebrate their students' growth and learning.

Our students have also been busy learning beyond the classroom through some great hands-on experiences. Fourth graders traveled to the State Capitol, kindergarten students visited the pumpkin patch, and third and fifth graders explored DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge. We also celebrated Fire Prevention Week with our kindergarten through third-grade students alongside our wonderful Blair Volunteer Fire Department. Experiences like these give our students opportunities to connect what they are learning in the classroom to the world around them.







Deerfield Elementary School

October has been a busy and exciting month at Deerfield! Our students had the opportunity to learn about fire safety thanks to a visit from the Blair Volunteer Fire Department. We appreciate our local firefighters taking the time to teach our students how to stay safe! We also had a special visitor when Melton John, the Nebraska snowplow named by our very own Esme Von Loh, made a stop at Deerfield! Esme was the winner of Nebraska's statewide snowplow naming contest, and we are so proud of her!

We've also been busy making some updates to our front office! Thanks to a Berry Merry Grant from the Blair Schools Foundation, we've been able to purchase new furniture to help make our office a more welcoming space for students, families, and visitors. We are grateful for the continued support of our community and all the wonderful things happening at Deerfield!

Happening In Our Schools







South Early Childhood Center

Excitement continues to radiate from South Early Childhood Center as our preschoolers celebrate the spooky season. This past month, our students benefited from wonderful community visits, including age-appropriate fire safety lessons from the Blair Volunteer Fire Department, oral hygiene education and gift bags from Dr. Boyd at Heartland Family Dentistry, and a hands-on animal care experience with a local family's pet guinea pigs.

Inside the classroom, teachers remain focused on laying a strong foundation for future academic success by helping students develop essential early literacy, foundational handwriting, and vital social-emotional skills.

Finally, our staff recently concluded fall Parent-Teacher Conferences. These meetings provided an invaluable opportunity to share individual progress, align on educational goals, and deepen the collaborative bond between home and school. We sincerely thank our families for investing in this experience and our teachers for their meaningful time and effort.

Emma Himes Qualifies for State Cross Country

What a season it was for Blair cross country. From those hot summer miles to grueling hill workouts, every single runner on the team stepped up, crushed their personal records, and left everything on the course. The growth from day one was awesome to watch. A huge thank you goes out to our seniors—your leadership and energy completely set the tone for the team this year and left a lasting mark on the program.

The ultimate highlight came when Emma Himes ran an absolute gem of a race at districts to punch her ticket to the Class B State Championships. All that hard work paid off big time, earning her a spot to compete against the best at the Kearney Country Club on Friday, October 23. We are all incredibly proud of Emma and the entire squad for putting together such a phenomenal year.






Your Voice Matters!
LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK OF SCHOOL LUNCH
Survey:
www.surveymonkey.com/r/SRWCCMB
TAHER





Photo taken by Jay Jensen



Photo taken by Jay Jensen

Activities & Events

October was a massive month of hard work and school spirit for Blair Community Schools. Our fall athletes put in an incredible amount of effort, and the entire community is so proud of how they represented the Bears from start to finish. From those early morning practices in the cold to the high-intensity game nights, every single team gave it their all and showed what Blair pride is truly about.

As October winds down, most of our fall seasons are naturally coming to a close. Our golf, softball, and cross country teams did an amazing job this year, crushing personal goals and wrapping up fantastic seasons on the course and fields. Now, all eyes are on the football and volleyball teams as they push through their final stretches of the season. We are so excited to watch them finish strong, and before we know it, November will be here, meaning it's time to switch gears and get ready for winter sports to kick off.

The talent on display outside of athletics was just as impressive this month. The school theater department performed Something Rotten! and it was absolutely phenomenal. The cast and crew were hilarious, the energy was through the roof, and the whole show was incredibly fun to watch from the audience.

To top off a great month, the choir held their very first concert of the school year. The students sounded amazing, and it was great to see all of their rehearsal time pay off in such a beautiful performance. It has been an awesome October for our students across the board, and we can't wait to carry this exact same momentum right into the winter season!

Please click here for a full list of events.

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