

Bluffton Exempted Village Schools

2014-2015 Winter District Newsletter

~~ News from the Superintendent ~~

The first semester has come and gone, and our students and staff are settling into the second semester. As always, our students and staff are working to maintain and exceed our "A" rating on the performance index of the Ohio Department of Education report card and striving to stay in the top 30 of all districts in the state with regard to performance index.

In addition, our staff has been preparing our students for the new assessments that will be taking place this spring. Over four years ago we were approved as a Race-to-the-Top Grant School, which meant our district received \$25,000 per year over a four-year period in order to phase in the new standards and incorporate technology into our teaching. As a result, we have been sending staff members for professional development opportunities and conducting in-house training sessions in order to efficiently transition staff and students to these new standards and its assessments, which will be taken officially for the first time this spring. The new state assessments will be more challenging and will demand increased critical thinking skills among students. Our district was a pilot school last spring for some of these new assessments; fortunately, this gave us some initial insight into what to expect. We know these tests will be challenging, and we will continue to prepare our students for those challenges.

Next school year we will be implementing all-day kindergarten in tandem with our existing two-year, half-day program. There are several reasons for moving to an all-day format for our students. First, research suggests that all-day kindergarten helps to bridge the gap between kindergarten and first grade. The all-day format will more than double the academic time our kindergarten teachers will have with their students. Second, research indicates that early intervention for at-risk students yields higher academic benefits for those students. Again, the increased teacher-student contact time will allow these students more opportunities for academic success. Third, the Ohio Department of Education and our state legislature continue to increase the number of standards and assessments that apply to our elementary students. As a result, more time is needed to prepare our students for these assessments and standards so that students may achieve the skill and knowledge-levels needed to move onto the next grade. The all-day format helps fulfill that need.

While some may have mixed emotions with this decision, please note that Bluffton is one of the last districts in the area to change from a half-day to an all-day kindergarten format. About ninety percent of all Ohio schools have implemented all-day kindergarten. And while that is not reason enough to change to the all-day format, it is imperative that our students are given every opportunity to succeed, especially as the new assessments are implemented. We know these assessments will be more rigorous than in the past and that there will be a need for higher critical thinking skills at all grade levels tested. With that said, parents who strongly oppose the all-day format will still have the option of picking up their children after the half-day is over.

As mentioned above, we will continue to offer the two-year kindergarten program in a half-day format as it currently exists. This program has been successful, and we will continue to offer it as long as there is a need in the district.

Finally, the Ohio Department of Education has notified us that our district is eligible (based on current enrollment numbers) for a funding increase to cover the cost of any additional teachers needed to implement the all-day kindergarten program.

Our district has an extremely strong academic record and tradition; it is in our students' best interests to continue to prepare them to excel among their peers across the state and the nation.

If you have any questions or concerns about all-day kindergarten, please contact Mr. Closson, Elementary Principal. You can also contact me at the Superintendent's office.

In closing, we want to thank Bob Holt for his hard work and dedication to our district as our maintenance supervisor over the past 17 years; he retired at the end of December. He leaves with our facilities in very good shape. Mike Wilson is our new maintenance supervisor, and we look forward to having him for many years in this position.

I want to thank you for being supportive of our school district, and, as I have said many times, we have such great parents, students, staff, and community members that it is an honor to be a part of this district.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns about the district. Either stop in or call me at 419-358-5901.

Greg Denecker, Superintendent

Important Dates

February 16	Monday	No School-Presidents' Day
March 20	Friday	End of 3rd Grading Period
April 3 & 6	Friday/Monday	No School-Spring Break
May 23	Saturday	Commencement 7:00 P.M
May 25	Monday	No School-Memorial Day
May 28	Thursday	Last Day of School.

The make-up days, if cancellations exceed the state allotment, will be February 16 and April 6, 2015.

District Website

www.blufftonschools.org

Bluffton Exempted Village Schools District Board of Education

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KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION

It's time to think about Kindergarten for the 2015-2016 school year. Kindergarten Screening is scheduled for April 13-15. Any child who will be five years old by August 1, 2015, is eligible to enroll. In order to develop a kindergarten mailing list, please contact the elementary office at [419-358-7951](tel:419-358-7951). We will need the following information: child's name, birth date, parents' names, address, and phone number. You may send the information via email to marquartt@blufftonschoools.org. All children are required to have their immunizations before starting school. The Allen County Health Department provides immunizations, but appointments must be made. Their website is allencountyhealthdepartment.org. More information will be mailed home to future kindergarten students on our mailing list and in future student newsletters.

Bluffton Elementary Review Tim Closson, Elementary Principal

The first half of the 2014-2015 school year has been filled with numerous fun and educational events. Many enriching activities have taken place inside and outside our classrooms.

October was an exciting month. Art Beat began its 30th year with students in grades two through five. Artists featured for this year were Joan Miro, Frida Kahlo, Vincent Van Gogh, Rembrandt Van Rijn and Georges Seurat. We celebrated Red Ribbon Week to promote a drug-free life. Students were entertained by a Crime Scene Science assembly. Kindergarten through second grade enjoyed a Safety Pup assembly, provided by the Bluffton Police Department.

Numerous events occurred through all the grade levels. Kindergarten students enjoyed many firsts. They took their annual field trip to Suter's pumpkin patch. They participated in the Apple Program, which introduced students to a variety of materials that children with disabilities use to learn and play. Students learned about the five senses during a SESA program (Science Enhancement for Science Advancement - a partnership between Allen County Schools and their industry partners). K-1st graders enjoyed opportunities, too. The Bluffton Fire Department gave presentations to them for Fire Prevention Week. Keeping with tradition, students enjoyed a ride on the old fire truck. The children participated in a drug awareness program, which was presented by ONU pharmacy students. The first graders toured the Swiss Historical Homestead. As part of their study of long ago, the children walked to the Bluffton University Historical Library to learn about the life of that time. Carrie Phillips showed them artifacts and pictures for comparing the past to the present. Students enjoyed a SESA program about animal habitats and are currently working on their first-grade animal reports. The second graders visited the Lion and Lamb Center and, by doing a drumming session with different beats and rhythms, they discussed differences in people. They attended the Young People's Concert at the Lima Civic Center,

visited the McElroy Science Center in Findlay, and learned about worms and their habitats with Beth Theisen from the Johnny Appleseed Park District. Third-grade students visited the Allen County Museum to learn about local history and enjoyed two SESA presentations (States of Matter and Forms of Energy). Fourth graders, along with Louise Matthews, visited Maple Crest as part of their Lion and Lamb series of "What It's Like to be Me." John Murray, joined by several of his friends, spoke to them about growing up in Bluffton. Afterward, the students had a chance to play their recorders and sing carols with the residents. The fifth grade classes recently began the popular DARE program, which lasts several weeks. They also participated in a hands-on SESA presentation pertaining to Newton's Laws.

November was a busy month. Parent Teacher Conferences were held, and 95% of our students were represented by at least one parent, which is an outstanding show of parental support. We are grateful for the veterans who gave presentations to our students in honor of Veterans' Day. The elementary library and the P.T.O. sponsored a Book Fair which helped raise funds to purchase additional library and classroom books. COSI-On-Wheels, an annual opportunity funded by Allen County's SESA program, presented "Current Conditions" to students in grades three through five.

A flurry of activity could be found in our building during the past Holiday season. Second graders worked hard in their Santa's Workshop to make gifts. Our students displayed their musical talents with an instrumental concert (grades 4 & 5) and an elementary choir concert. Both were well-attended and supported by family and friends. We are very proud of our students. For their annual service project, the elementary staff and students collected many items for the local food bank. This was a great opportunity for our students to help others during the Christmas season. Thank you for your support.

We are grateful for the many volunteers in the elementary school. On any given day, we have parents and community members helping our staff by tutoring or assisting in various activities or projects. We appreciate the tutors involved with the Pirate-2-Pirate reading program. Twenty-seven volunteers serve 17 children for this program. We also receive invaluable support from our P.T.O., which helps organize volunteers for events such as COSI-On-Wheels, special-event meals for teachers, and popcorn for the Christmas movies. They also raise funds through various sources such as Bakery Bingo, BoxTops for Education, and Market Day.

Finally, I would like to congratulate all teachers, staff, parents, and students for achieving all positive marks on the District Report Card. It is the ninth consecutive year that all indicators of the elementary report card have been achieved. We received "A's" in our Performance Index and Value Added scores. Those ratings are similar to "Excellent with Distinction," which we received the past six years. Our staff, students, and community are very proud of these achievements. Thank you for your continuous support. For updated information and monthly student newsletters, please visit the school's website, www.blufftonschoools.org.

Pirate Pride!!

Middle School Update

Kyle Leatherman, Middle School Principal

Our students and teachers are again achieving great things this school year. To do this, great effort must be given. Pirates are daring, adventurous, and willing to set forth in uncharted territories with no guarantee of success. Our students and staff, along with constant parent and community support, embrace the Pirate code to be creative and embark on new adventures in and out of the traditional classroom. This is what separates Bluffton Middle School from other middle schools.

In October, our seventh-grade class experienced Outdoor School at Camp Berry for three days, two nights. Joining the Bluffton students were students from Findlay City Schools. The students were engaged in many educational activities at camp that enhanced not only skills in science, math, history, and Language Arts, but also strengthened other abilities. This venture required many volunteers from teachers and parents to education students from the University of Findlay.

In December, the middle school hosted its first annual Teach-Like-A-Pirate Day, a fantastic day. Our teachers created lessons/experiences appropriate for all middle-level ages. The students were able to create their own schedule and attend any experience once that day. Students were very anxious to go from class to class to see what was waiting for them. The entire day was memorable for students, staff, and curious spectators.

Each month teachers select two students from each grade for Pirates-of-the-Month. These students put forth extra effort, show respect for their peers, and demonstrate potential. The Pirates-of-the-Month receive a t-shirt and Shannon Theatre movie tickets. At this time, recognition goes to the following students: Bella Angel, Eden Nygaard, Libby Schaadt, Carson Krupp, Raychel Avila, Chad Veit, Grace Myers, Simon Derstine, Sophia Gott, Tucker Neff, Mara Minnig, Shon Beach, Julia Smallcombe, Collin Oglesbee, Lilly Campbell, Kyle Koontz, Amanda Speicher, Zach Cornell, Clara Matthews, Tayton Kleman, Courtney McLaughlin, Xavier Dunifon, Makenna Swaney, and Caleb Mikesell.

Student senate members have been very busy this school year. Along with providing concessions for the home volleyball and basketball games, they organized a food drive during the holiday season to help the local food pantry. This effort brought in over 1,900 items. They also collected items for Toys for Tots and pop tabs for the Ronald McDonald House.

The local Lions Club organization held a Peace Poster contest and three entries were chosen for awards. Congratulations to Danielle Novak, who took first place and will have her poster submitted for the state competition. Kylee Staley earned second place, and Bailey Edwards placed third.

Congratulations again to Danielle Novak, who took first place in the school spelling bee. Isaac Pimentel was the runner-up. The Allen County Spelling Bee took place on January 24th at OSU-Lima.

The middle school band, strings, and choir gave excellent performances in October and December. The strings performers also traveled to Allen County Head Start, the Mennonite Memorial Home, and Allen County Museum to play Christmas music. They will perform again at the Music Boosters Chicken BBQ on March 20th.

On the athletic playing fields, the middle school saw many successes during the fall months. The girls cross country team had

runners place in the top 20 of the Northwest Conference meet. The jr. high football team finished off a 6-2 season as they won their final four games. The 7th-grade volleyball team won seven games while the 8th-grade girls advanced to the semi-final of the Northwest Conference tournament and finished the season with a 9-6 record.

The winter sports teams are in full swing and in competitions. Soon the teams will be competing in their respective year-end tournaments. Congratulations to all student-athletes, who competed in the fall and are currently competing this winter, for demonstrating sportsmanship throughout the season.

As we move toward spring and into the second half of the school year, students will be receiving information about scheduling classes for next year. Parents and students should carefully review the information provided in order to build a solid student educational plan for next school year and beyond.

Again, the middle school wishes to thank the parents and community for the continued support in helping our students exceed educational goals and prepare for the future.

News from Bluffton High School

Mike Minnig, High School Principal

The first half of the 2014-2015 school year had our students and teachers focused on growth. The implementation of Ohio's new learning standards and teacher evaluation system was put into place last year. This year our teachers have focused on improving assessments through formative instructional practices to further meet the needs of their students. They have been participating in on-going professional development throughout the year to meet this goal. Likewise, students have tracked learning targets, helping them to monitor and self-assess their progress.

New graduation requirements have been implemented with the Class of 2018. The main change rests with new testing requirements. Starting with our freshmen class, students will take end-of-course exams in English 9, English 10, Algebra 1, geometry, American history, American government, physical science, and biology. These will replace the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT). These new exams include a performance-based test and an end-of-year test that will be spread out from February through May.

Even while working through these changes, our students continue to excel academically, and our Renaissance program, which rewards students for good grades, behavior, and attendance, has continued to maintain high numbers. Through the students' talents and work ethic, 172 students made either the "A/B" or "All A" honor roll during the first grading period, and we are expecting similar results during the second. Also, during the fall sports season, 78 of our student-athletes were awarded Northwest Conference Silver and Gold Scholar-Athlete Certificates for maintaining a 3.0 or 3.5 grade point average while earning a varsity letter.

Our students also continue to excel in our musical arts programs. The band and choir students did an excellent job with their concerts as did the drama club with its production of In Praise of Miss Brown. These students are preparing for future performances, including the musical The Music Man, in the spring. These various music groups are also featured at a **Senior Citizen Breakfast**, which is held in the middle school cafeteria. These performances begin at 8:30 on the following dates: Feb 11 – freshmen choir, Mar 11 – concert band, Apr 8 – musical, and May 13 – jazz band.

Athletically, our students have learned numerous characteristics to help them be successful now and in the future. The boys golf team completed an undefeated season and earned a Northwest Conference championship. Currently our boys and girls basketball teams and wrestling squad are working hard to excel during the winter season.

In November, a group of our student-athletes attended a NWC Sportsmanship Conference. These students interacted with student-athletes from other schools in our conference to discuss ways to improve character and sportsmanship. In a representation of these ideals, three of our students were selected to appear with other students from the conference in student-led commercials. These can be seen on TV 44.

Many of our students are involved in Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD). These students have pledged to stay drug and alcohol free. One of their main events in the winter during the basketball season is to host after-game parties for high school students. These have been well attended and continue to be a positive activity for our student body.

Besides being involved in extra-curricular activities, our students are involved in several volunteer service projects. The Peer Facilitation group, which organized a cancer awareness project, colored pumpkins and distributed them throughout the community. Student senate members also donated their time and efforts for a Community Service Day in December. As in previous years, SOS (Students for Other Students) has high school students tutoring elementary students after school.

As many of you may have noticed, we have a new website for the district, www.blufftonschools.org, which was developed and is maintained by the computer technology class. The new format makes our site more user-friendly, most notably with devices such as smartphones. Use our website to look up upcoming events and activities at our school, and check the Progressbook link to monitor your son/daughter's grades. The support our students receive from parents, peers, and our community plays an important role in their development and is why our students continue to be so successful.

Technology Update

Mardy Herr, Technology Coordinator

Our school website has officially been updated. You will find more images displayed covering various activities of our students as well as updated information. Keeping the school website up-to-date is a daunting task that is now more manageable with the new system. Thanks to Mr. Boblitt and our high school technology students for making this ongoing project a reality. You also will notice the newer technology makes viewing the website on mobile devices much more feasible.

With the addition of chromebooks in our elementary and middle schools, the need for wireless access infrastructure became a priority. Both elementary and middle school buildings are now configured with wireless access throughout as well as having the framework to expand as necessary. Our upcoming goal for the high school is to establish a wireless network there so we can implement wireless devices in the classroom to supplement and increase student learning opportunities.

Bluffton Exempted Village Schools
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Listed below are the addresses and phone numbers for each of the buildings in the Bluffton School District. Please write or call our offices with any questions and concerns you might have about the schools. We appreciate any input you might have in helping maintain a quality education for our students.

Administrative Office **419-358-5901**
 Superintendent, Greg Denecker
 Secretary, Julie Steiner
 102 S. Jackson St.
 Bluffton, OH 45817

Treasurer's Office **419-358-5901**
 Treasurer, Paula M. Parish
 Assistant Treasurer, Jessica Grandey
 102 S. Jackson St.
 Bluffton, OH 45817

High School **419-358-7941**
 Principal, Mike Minnick
 Secretary, Julie Oberly
 106 W. College Ave.
 Bluffton, OH 45817

Middle School **419-358-7961**
 Principal, Kyle Leatherman
 Secretary, Karen Phillips
 116 S. Jackson St.
 Bluffton, OH 45817

Elementary School **419-358-7951**
 Principal, Tim Closson
 Secretary, Teresa Marquart
 102 S. Jackson St.
 Bluffton, OH 45817