

2024 National Blue Ribbon Schools Additional Information and Tips for Completing the Application

General Information

Audience: NBRS applications become public and are posted on the program’s website if a school wins the award. Please keep in mind that your eventual audience will likely include many people who are unfamiliar with your school. Readers may include the media, parents (from your school and other schools), and other education professionals.

Previous Applications: While it can be helpful to read applications from previous years to see how schools responded, the application changes each year. Older applications should be used for reference only, not as guides for how to respond to questions. **Also note that if your school was a previous awardee, your old application will be displayed online along with your current application**, which will make it obvious to readers if large sections of the old application were copied into the current one. While NBRS expects that some information may remain unchanged over time, applicants are strongly encouraged to refresh how those parts of the school are described.

Process and Timing: Consider if one person or multiple people will respond to questions. If multiple people will be writing, allow extra time for each section to be edited so the application reads smoothly. Consult the Application Pacing Guide for help setting deadlines and ensuring each section is complete and proofread.

Word Counts: **All word counts in the application are approximate.** You will not be penalized for going over the limit by small amounts, but you will be asked to rewrite if you are under or over significantly. Please try to be succinct and to the point.

Important Notes:

- Questions must be answered in narrative format. **Bulleted responses, no matter how the bullets are formatted, are not acceptable.**
- School personnel should always be referred to by their titles/roles, rather than by their names.
- All acronyms must be spelled out the first time they are used.

Editing and Proofreading

The NBRS Program strongly encourages schools to **have an outside reader with excellent grammatical skills edit and proof** the final application before it is submitted, especially if several people contributed to writing application sections. This is a public, professional document and should reflect the care and dedication you give to your school.

Grammar/Spelling: NBRS strongly recommends first writing your responses in Word or another word processor, copying that text into a plain text editor (see Formatting below), then cutting and pasting your responses into the online application. This will assist you with proofreading since not all internet browsers have a built-in spell check.

Style Sheet: Use the attached style sheet for assistance with common grammatical errors and misspelled and/or misused words.

Formatting and the Online System

Formatting: Do not copy and paste directly from a word processing program into the online form. Word and other word processing programs replace real characters, such as quotation marks, with proprietary “curly” quotation marks that can only be read by the specific word processing software. These characters show up on web pages as little boxes or nonsensical characters such as ““”. **To avoid this problem, please use a standard text editor** such as <https://notepad-plus-plus.org> or [windows notepad](#) to “translate” your word processing document into plain text. Copy any text from a word processing program into one of these notepads, then copy the text from the notepad into your online application. This will allow you to print out your application without strange characters or missing material.

Printing: Please note that when you print a copy of the application for your records, the cover sheet will not print with signatures. This is normal.

As always, if you have questions or need assistance in accessing the online application, please contact the NBRS technical assistance team for help.

Email: ContactUs@NationalBlueRibbonSchools.com

Phone: 800-258-0802 or 603-422-8888

Tips by Application Section

NBRS strongly recommends reading through the entire application before writing any responses. Your responses to questions should rarely overlap, except in cases where one question allows you to respond in more depth to a topic briefly mentioned in another (e.g., mentioning the success of an afterschool tutoring program in the School Overview and then providing more information in the question on Engaging Students or Strategy for Excellence).

Part II – Demographics

- **District information for charter schools ONLY:** If a charter school operates within a public school district/LEA, include all schools within the district. If the school is considered a separate district/LEA, include only your school. If it operates within a charter school network/LEA, include all schools within the network.
- **Prekindergarten enrollment:** Schools should only include prekindergarten students if the school is responsible for the program. If a district-wide prekindergarten program is housed at the school, but it is administered separately, it should not be considered part of the school.
- **Racial/ethnic composition:** If exact percentages are unknown, the school should do its best to estimate. If the school believes some students do not fit into the provided categories, the best available fit should be chosen.
- **Non-English Languages and Number of ELL:** Only list the language represented by students receiving services for English Language Learners (ELLs). If you do not serve any ELL students, leave it blank.
- **Students receiving Special Education Services with an IEP:** Provide the total number of students served. Use the table to indicate the designation for each student according to the categories provided. Some students may have more than one designation.
- **Students with a 504 Plan:** Only include the number of students who have receive accommodations with a formal 504 plan.
- **Number of FTE staff:** Read the examples provided in the application for assistance with choosing the most appropriate category. If it is still unclear which category a staff member belongs in, the school should choose the category that seems like the best overall fit.

Part III – School Overview

- While addressing the bullets in this question, think about how you would like to present your school to someone who has never visited. This question is an opportunity to describe your school and the community, its history, and the population it serves. It's also the chance to highlight the programs/techniques/approaches that make your school successful and contribute to its unique character. Why do you stand out? What do you do that's exciting and innovative?
- Be conscious of the fact that many people may read this question if your school is awarded, including people from your school and community. Do not use people's names or describe a student(s) in such a way as individuals could be identified. Beware of using language that could be taken negatively, particularly about the community.

Part IV – Curriculum and Instruction

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

- The overview is where you should include an overarching philosophy or approach about how the school selects a curriculum and/or handles instruction and assessment. It should cover any information that is common across all areas (e.g., curricula are selected by the district to align with state standards). If you would otherwise be repeating the same information across areas, it probably belongs in the overview.
- For every core area, describe the general education curriculum (what is taught), instructional methods (how it is taught), and assessments (formative and summative). Even if social studies and/or science are taught within the reading curriculum, the content, instruction, and assessment still need to be addressed individually.
- Interventions and specialized supports should NOT be covered in this section. That information will be covered in Academic Supports.
- The response should NOT describe a commercial curriculum, although mentioning one by title is okay.
- **Schools with secondary grades (7 and higher)** must make connections between the core curriculum and college/career readiness. This pertains to schools of any grade configuration if grade 7 or higher is part of the school.
- **Schools with prekindergarten** (see note in Demographics) must discuss the pre-K curriculum, alignment with elementary grades, and impact on school readiness.

2. Other Curriculum Areas

- For each non-core curriculum area offered by your school, provide a general overview. At a minimum, responses should include which grades take the subject, how often, and how the course supports the acquisition of essential skills.
- If your school does not offer an area, write Not Applicable or NA.

3. Academic Supports

- This question, not the Core Curriculum question, is where interventions should be discussed.
- Provide a comprehensive overview of how the school meets the needs of diverse learners, including additional/non-standard instruction and assessments, as well as interventions.
- If your school has only a few English language learners and no formal program in place to support them, you should still describe the supports that *are* offered. If your school has no ELLs, write Not Applicable or NA.
- Achievement gaps of more than 10 points between all students and the populations must be addressed.

Part V – School Climate and Culture

1. Engaging Students

- Provide the key strategies (you may include specific examples) of how the school keeps students engaged and motivated. Consider the academic, developmental, cultural, and social and emotional supports your school provides to engage students in meaningful ways that are aligned to their needs.
- Include information on how the school ensures students of various backgrounds are made to feel safe, supported, and welcome.
- Make a clear connection between a positive environment for students and how the environment makes the school successful.

2. Engaging Families and Communities

- Include clear examples of family and community engagement, and make the connections between those examples and student achievement. Communities may include businesses, organizations, and/or education partners.
- It is not expected that a school would partner with multiple types of communities, nor is one type of community preferable to another.

3. Creating Professional Culture

- Provide an overview of how the school supports teachers and other staff. This should include professional development, but also how the school creates an environment that values teachers and staff overall.
- When discussing professional development, do not include just a list of activities. Demonstrate the thoughtfulness of the approach and how it contributes to student learning and school culture.

4. School Leadership

- Explain the school's leadership philosophy and how it relates to success.
- Outline the overall leadership structure, including the principal's role as well as additional teams or roles.
- The response should NOT be a biography of the principal.
- The response should NOT use names to identify people.

Part VI – Strategy for Excellence

- Describe a single practice that stakeholders believe has been the most influential in the school's success. Focus on how the practice has been used and draw connections between the practice and student success.
- The practice could be academic, behavioral/cultural, family-centered, or staff-centered. It could be an innovation that's unique to the school or a standard practice that was adopted with great success.
- Consider that your audience for this question will be other schools who are looking for ideas and guidance, and share what schools would need to know or do to adopt a similar practice. This is another chance to really share what makes your school stand out.

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Application Style Sheet

Grammar/Punctuation

Capitalization: Course titles are capitalized (e.g., Algebra I), but subjects are not capitalized (e.g., math).

First grade students have 90 minutes of reading practice each day. High school students take American Literature in tenth grade.

Numbers: Should be written out if the first word in a sentence. Numerals can be used elsewhere.

One hundred percent of the staff agreed to stay late. In reading, 90 percent of students are proficient.

Quotation marks: Place periods and commas inside closing single or double quotation marks.

Spacing: One space after a period.

Serial (Oxford) commas are preferred. Commas should separate each element in a series of three or more.

The school offers reading, mathematics, and science.

Semicolons: Link two connected sentences. They do not precede lists; that's a colon (:).

Word Choice

affect versus effect

Affect: to influence (verb); emotion (noun)

Effect: to cause (verb); result (noun)

after-school: adjective

after school: preposition

assure, ensure, insure

Assure: to promise

Insure: to guarantee against risk

Ensure: to make certain or protect

center around: a center is a point; by definition nothing can be *centered around*; use *centered on*

course work: two words

curricula: plural of curriculum

districtwide: adjective and adverb, one word

evidence-based: adjective

home, hone

Home: to return or target, as in *home in*.

Hone: to sharpen, as in *honing a skill*

impact: only a noun; never a verb

kindergarten: lower case, except in pre-K or K-12

multimedia: one word

online: one word

schoolwide: one word

website: one word, lowercase