

U.S. Department of Education
2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [] Title I [] Charter [] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Ms. Patricia Lambert

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Blind Brook High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 840 King Street

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Rye Brook State NY Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 10573-1204

County Westchester County

Telephone (914) 937-3600 Fax (914) 937-4509

Web site/URL http://www.blindbrook.org E-mail plambert@blindbrook.org

Twitter Handle _____ Facebook Page _____ Google+ _____

YouTube/URL _____ Blog _____ Other Social Media Link _____

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Dr. Jonathan Ross E-mail jross@blindbrook.org

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Blind Brook-Rye UFSD Tel. (914) 937-3600

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mr. Jeffrey Diamond

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

Part I – Eligibility Certification

The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
 - Suburban
 - Small city or town in a rural area
 - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2015 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	73	58	131
10	69	61	130
11	62	65	127
12 or higher	64	69	133
Total Students	268	253	521

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 4 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 90 % White
 - 1 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2014 – 2015 school year: 1%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	5
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	1
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	6
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	489
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.012
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
3 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Chinese, Portuguese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 1 %
Total number students who qualify: 9

8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %
58 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>27</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>24</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>3</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>1</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>2</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Mental Retardation | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 3
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers	36
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	17
Paraprofessionals	3
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	8

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 14:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	96%	97%	97%	97%	100%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2015.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	107
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	96%
Enrolled in a community college	4%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 1986

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

Cornerstone of community, prepare active, life-long learners with skills and confidence to achieve highest potential. Encourage curiosity, compassion, integrity, ethical behavior and perseverance.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

PART III – SUMMARY

Blind Brook high school is the cornerstone of the community. This small, close-knit community serves approximately 500 students in grades 9-12. With 100% of the student body college bound, the community supports a rigorous, comprehensive program for its young people. The school is relatively new with the first class of four students graduating in 1975. Since then we have grown with the class of 2016 being one of the largest with 133 students. Reflecting the educational innovations of the era, Blind Brook opened as a school without walls. The open concept reflected the values of the community; an educational experience that honored integrated learning, hands on learning, inquiry, and an emphasis on the humanities. The earliest yearbooks provide a glimpse into this intellectual and collegial climate by depicting students and their teachers interspersed throughout the pages with faculty members only identifier being the discipline taught following their name. Teachers were granted extensive freedoms regarding curriculum and learning often took the form of interdisciplinary tasks. Students too were afforded freedoms not often seen in typical public schools. Study halls were non-existent and open periods were dubbed “frees” where students were free to utilize the time in a way they deemed appropriate. This practice continues today.

The growth of the community coupled with the standards movement and the implementation of standardized tests resulted in the school becoming more traditional. When the building became too small for the burgeoning student body, new construction included walls that defined classroom space as subject-specific which served both physically and symbolically to divide disciplines. It is common for alums from the wall-less days to stop by and wax poetically about their time at Blind Brook. Many mourn the loss of the spirit of openness that prevailed.

While we embraced the principles of the Common Core, we struggled with the roll-out and the high stakes nature of the defining assessments. Initially this served to further cramp the innovative spirit of the school. However, we are a resilient community of learners and I am happy to report, we are once again forging ahead with an emphasis on the values that sparked our inception in the 1970s. Once again, we are driven in our desire to provide integrated leaning experiences for our students. Teachers are pooling their efforts and developing courses that are project-based, interdisciplinary, and student driven.

In recent years we have begun a renaissance of learning. Honors Shapers of the World is a class where students examine common threads which link disciplines such as literature, art, music, philosophy, history, and science in the development of human civilization. The course challenges students to explore how human beings have shaped their individual experiences in ways that have a significant impact on society and is structured around the following questions: "What is the good life?" "What is fate?" "What is free will?" and "Why are we here?" Students explore the great works of the “Shapers”, Plato, Homer, Aristotle, Dante, Machiavelli, and Shakespeare, philosophers, writers, and artists who have influenced our attitudes and assumptions. Engineering, robotics, and coding have been added to our curriculum. We encourage students who traditionally shied away from the more rigorous courses by eliminating restrictive pre-requisites and providing support in classes that were typically reserved for high achieving students. Almost a quarter of our student body signed up to take our inaugural coding class that utilizes the MIT app development curriculum. Through differentiated learning and flipped classroom strategies, students of all levels are able to succeed. Next year, many of these same students will go on to take the Advanced Placement Computer Science course. Our S.T.E.A.M. initiative is growing with the district committed to the creation of a Maker Space/Fab Lab. Adding the arts to the traditional STEM subjects of science, technology, engineering, and math is evidence of our commitment to the integration of disciplines. Additionally we have built time into teachers' schedules to allow them to coordinate and support the integration across disciplines. These teachers work with colleagues to identify areas of coordination and support the teachers in developing appropriate applications.

Having earned Blue Ribbon distinction in 1986 served Blind Brook well. It enhanced our reputation as an innovative school and likely contributed to our growth in the 80s and 90s. Each year we are acknowledged by Newsweek, and US News and World Report along with numerous other school quality evaluators as being among the best in the state and always within the top 100 schools in the country. During the budget caps of this decade, we were able to attract tuition students who looked to Blind Brook for a public

education that closely resembled that of a private school. We continue to be driven by our desire for continuous improvement and welcome the process of self-evaluation that this distinction requires. We will be a better school simply by going through the process.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The BBHS English department’s mission is to foster the practice and mastery of those communication skills that are essential for success in today’s society. Additionally, the English department believes that from the study of great literature, as well as the study and improvement of one’s own written work, students can improve writing, reading, and listening skills. Our teachers have worked diligently each summer to align our curriculum to the Common Core. Working in tandem across grade levels, the teachers developed units fashioned on essential questions and targeting the development of critical skills. Exploring “Social Class” in America: “...All men are created equal... (Sort of),” and What does it mean to be an “American?” are examples of units that teachers use to teach critical skills. Our students engage in close reading for textual details, analyze a variety of texts to identify each author’s perspective, craft claims using specific textual evidence, develop counterclaims, and engage in discussions supported by textual evidence. Writing is emphasized daily to help students gain confidence in their ability to write for a variety of purposes.

The math department includes the college preparatory courses of algebra, geometry, precalculus, calculus, and statistics. Early alignment to the Common Core has elevated our math instruction and shifted the emphasis to deep understanding rather than test prep. Cognizant of the fact that students develop mathematical competencies in different ways and at varying stages of development, the department offers a myriad of courses with varying levels of support. Math labs are available to support students who require additional instruction and students are able to advance when proficiency is demonstrated. This year we introduced Advanced Mathematical Decision Making that teaches math exclusively using real-world situations. Students work throughout the year on simulations that assume the attainment of individual goals and then they are guided through the launching of their adult life. The cost of a college education or job training, the impact of student loans, professional salaries with regional variations, gross and net pay, living expenses, credit card interest, taxes and other life realities are investigated. Students develop and maintain budgets in Excel and utilize Google docs to chronicle their progress. Math is real and purposeful for these students!

The mission of the science department at Blind Brook High School is to help students develop their science skills to become independent thinkers and problem solvers. Through all course offerings they strive to meet the needs of all learners through the mastery of basic science skills and enrichment. They hope to instill in their students an appreciation for the beauty of science while fostering an awareness that science is not an isolated discipline, but interrelated to other disciplines. The department emphasizes personal responsibility and self-discipline in class and in the lab that carries over into later life. Our science offerings move beyond the traditional sampling of earth science, biology, chemistry, physics, and AP courses to include forensics, Science and Society, and a four year sequence of independent science research. Our students take advantage of the medical schools, research universities, pharmaceutical companies, independent labs, and local practitioners to find mentors to assist them in their specialized interest. Each year our students are recognized through the Intel Science Talent Search, and numerous other science foundations for their innovative work.

Social studies courses at BBHS aim to help students become reflective thinkers and active citizens. Skills are taught developmentally, with significant emphasis on research, critical thinking, and geography. They inspire intellectual curiosity in a continuing desire to understand the increasingly interconnected world. Each course employs primary and secondary sources to help students develop the skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Tolerance and respect are emphasized as students investigate the perspectives, opinions, needs, and customs of others. Our courses are aligned to the New York State Social Studies Framework and incorporate the Common Core Reading and Writing Standards for Literacy and the Common Core Standards for Speaking and Listening. Required study of global history, United States history and government, New York history, and economics are supplemented with electives in psychology, European history, law, and courses in ethics. Advanced study is available through AP courses in macroeconomics, psychology, government and politics, US history, and European history. Next year,

American History through Pop Culture will offer students the opportunity to analyze how critical factors of ethnicity, race, gender, class, age, and sexuality are shaped by popular culture.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The Blind Brook community is devoted to the arts. Despite our diminutive size and budget cuts that threaten offerings, our visual and performing arts department continues to thrive. 18 % of our student body is active in our music program. Next year we are committed to expanding our instrumental and choral programs through the offering of college level performance ensembles. A relationship with local colleges under the S.U.N.Y. system has permitted us to offer college credit through a dual enrollment program. We have ventured into new dimensions of music that have revolutionized the way we make music with a music production course. Students create music utilizing technology and generate accompanying videos that reflect current trends in contemporary music. Specialized ensembles encourage students to pursue individual interests in jazz, chamber music, and rock. The department responds to student interest in a cappella groups and male and female trios and quartets as needed. Students elect to accompany our musical productions through participation in the theater orchestra. Working alongside professional musicians, our students gain valuable insight into the life of a musician. Courses including Theater Arts and Cabaret Performance: Story Through Song, engage students interested in musical theater. Strong relationships with professionals from Broadway provide exposure to all aspects of the theater.

Students develop their minds and bodies through participation in our health, physical education, and family and consumer science program. Physical activity, wellness, and life activities dominate our program. Courses emphasize problem solving, cooperation, and team building. Units on nutrition and healthy living are at the core of the program. The health teacher and the FCS teacher work in collaboration to provide a common message regarding positive life choices. Ingredients and food processing practices are analyzed. Students develop individual fitness goals and strive for their personal best. Cooking courses stress healthy choices and students experiment with recipes that represent high nutritional value and flavor. Learning occurs in the context of real-world situations with hands-on learning that develops fine motor skills, problem-solving, and resource management.

The vast majority of students at Blind Brook High School pursue five years of the study of a foreign language. Completing level one of a language by the conclusion of middle school, students continue their study through to either an Advanced Placement course or through participation in SUPA (Syracuse University Project Advance) that offers four college credits upon successful completion of the course; Italian and Spanish are offered. Additionally, many students opt for the study of a second language. Latin is offered at three levels while other students supplement their course work with the addition of the other major language offered. We are currently exploring the possibility of offering Mandarin and/or Arabic. Online courses are also under consideration.

Interest in engineering and computer science has increased exponentially at Blind Brook High School in recent years. When an introductory course in coding was introduced last year, twenty-five percent of our school population signed up! The course which utilizes the MIT Application Inventor tool has paved the way for the AP Computer Science course which will be offered in 2016-2017. Principles of Engineering, Robotics, and Honors Engineering Design have also grown to the point where they are driving the creation of a fab lab/maker space. We are rapidly acquiring laser printers, wire bending machines, and robotic arms to advance the program.

Honors Student Leadership Seminar is designed for students who are in leadership positions, aspire to be leaders and/or have an interest in making Blind Brook High School, the community, and society a better place. Students study the seven habits of highly effective teens, leadership paradigms, and principles, practices of exemplary leadership, specific leadership qualities, skills, and styles, group dynamics, and communication skills. Students plan meetings, set agendas, develop meeting strategies, identify and solve problems relating to the school, and evaluate the efficacy of the changes they initiate. Motivating people, delegating tasks, resolving conflicts, managing committees, building teams, and communicating assertively are all skills that the students attempt to develop.

The Senior Options program gives motivated seniors the opportunity to explore an area of interest outside of the classroom. Seniors are encouraged to pursue an internship in a field of interest, conduct independent research, or perform community service beyond the hours required for graduation. The goal is to foster independence and decision-making skills to aid in the transition from high school to college or the work place.

Eighty hours of community service are a graduation requirement at Blind Brook High School. Our school established and runs the BBHS Soup Kitchen which has been feeding the homeless for fifteen years and serves more than 100 meals a week. Students have established a Community Learning Partnership with more than sixty-seven students providing one-to-one tutoring after school and on Saturday at the local library. Our students engage in a Pen Pal program that serves to establish mentoring relationships with low-income students in a neighboring community. The year-long association culminates with our mentors taking their learning partners to the Bronx Zoo for an annual outing. Many of these relationships extend into adulthood!

3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Teachers at Blind Brook High School employ a variety of methods to meet the needs of their diverse learners. Science and math teachers have embraced the “flipped” classroom. Lessons are videotaped, posted on YouTube and made available to students and parents. Students are introduced to concepts prior to the class and have access to the lesson 24/7 for personal use as needed. Students are provided “choice” in their homework tasks with tiered problems that range from remedial to enrichment. Student selection and ownership of their practice work is utilized to guide subsequent instruction and monitor independence and grit. Students are encouraged to challenge themselves and persevere. A 1:1 iPad initiative has provided social studies students the ability to build a variety of products to demonstrate their learning and the “published” nature of their work has resulted in students taking greater pride in their work. Students utilize SPERMG to guide their study of history. Social, Political, Economic, Religious, Military, and Geographic features of civilizations and historical periods are analyzed to help students identify the universal factors that impact history and draw connections over time and place. All departments have embraced Google Docs that permit teachers to view student work in real time. Teachers are able to monitor student responses, essays, and other assignments as they are being produced. Immediate feedback is possible, allowing teachers to monitor student mastery, identify misunderstandings, and redirect as indicated. Teachers create Pod Casts to engage students directly, provide re-teaching and reinforcement of critical learning concepts. Socratic seminar dominates the teaching of English skills. Lessons focus on questions, not answers. Students are taught to focus on elements of reasoning, probing deep into a subject area with thoughtful, purposeful questions. Logical relationships are formed resulting in the acquisition of more defined critical thinking skills. Teachers schedule individual conferences with students to monitor their progress and connect on a personal level. Engaging students in self-assessment, purposeful peer-editing, and the analysis of student work deemed exemplars, helps foster personal investment in learning.

Perhaps it is a luxury of our small size that permits faculty to be keenly aware of their students’ struggles. Extra help is provided for sixty minutes a day by each teacher. Departments schedule staff members throughout the day to be able to serve the largest number of students. Students have access to all teachers in the department. Teachers are available after-school daily to re-teach or reinforce concepts as necessary. As high stakes exams loom (AP, Regents) teachers offer study sessions in the evening for interested students. Math labs are scheduled every other day to assist students in mastering Common Core Algebra.

4. Assessment for Instruction and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results:

Recognizing that we are often “data rich but information poor” our faculty has embraced the use of assessment data to drive instruction. We begin the year with a systematic review of Regents performance from the June administration and Advanced Placement results. Faculty meetings and Professional Learning Communities are utilized to review individual student performance. An item analysis of each test question is conducted to help teachers determine curricula gaps in the program or discrepancies in individual teacher results. Action plans are created. Teachers are given access to the state reports that provide detailed information about the content and skills that were tested. Teachers self-reflect and set personal and

department goals to address issues gleaned from the process. Teachers generate reports that are shared with the Superintendent and Board of Education.

All teachers utilize pre and post test data. Baselines are established for individual students and goals are set. Teachers monitor progress at the midpoint of the year and rate progress for each student. These data contribute to their Annual Professional Performance Review and if necessary, action plans are established for teachers to promote improvement.

We have experimented with commercial programs that track student growth in reading and math. Achieve 3000 helps determine student reading lexiles and provides valuable information for teachers to use in the selection of appropriate reading materials. As a result class reading assignments are differentiated to provide appropriate challenge for individual students. STAR is used to supplement information regarding a students' reading comprehension and math proficiency. The assessment is given several times throughout the year to chart student progress. An unintended outcome of these assessments is information gleaned regarding a students' perseverance in taking these assessments. Teachers gain valuable insight into a student's ability to maintain focus and the skills necessary to persevere. As a result, teachers provide opportunities for students to practice sustained reading, writing, and focus techniques.

In recent years we have begun to utilize the reports generated by the College Board. PSAT results which track performance in reading, writing, and math skills provide valuable data that predicts a student's possible success in advanced placement classes from a 60% chance of success to a 90% chance of scoring a 3 or better. This has resulted in a much more informed process in guiding students with course selections. The end result is that we have recognized that the anecdotal evidence that had previously prevented many students from challenging themselves with more rigorous coursework has been usurped by data that is statistically significant. More students are now enrolling in the once restrictive advanced courses.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

We have an advantage in that the vast majority of our students are highly motivated and want to achieve. We have benefitted by the ability to provide support in the form of teaching assistants, and instructional aids in rigorous classes that enable students with special needs or challenges to succeed. This inclusive climate has created a safe environment where teachers and students are encouraged to take risks and engage fully.

Many departments sponsor clubs that are associated with their discipline. Through interactions with students beyond the classroom, teachers are able to connect with students and establish relationships based upon mutual respect and shared values. Human Relations, Mock Trial, Model UN, P.R.I.D.E. (People Respecting Individual Diversity and Equality) Human Rights, language clubs to name but a few, all provide opportunities for students to pursue interests beyond the academic environment, develop leadership skills, and experience the world beyond our small community. The vast majority of our teachers advise, mentor, or coach extra-curricular activities.

A strong guidance department with relatively low student to counselor ratios enables students to develop strong and long-term relationships with their students. Alumni return annually to serve on panels that advise current students on their school experience, college decision process, and the impact that BBHS has had on their life. Former students are featured speakers at graduation reinforcing the life-long relationships that characterize this small community.

Our teachers are honored and revered often. Their contributions are often recognized. This week a teacher was recognized for her impact on a former student. The student, now a junior in college majoring in education, wrote a paper that analyzed the qualities of a great teacher. Using a BBHS teacher as her model, the student wrote poignantly: "...was constantly demonstrating genuine care and consideration for her students, and encouraged all students in her class to achieve their highest potential by placing high yet achievable expectations each of us. ...is an exceptional model of a 'good teacher,' as well as professional excellence. Not only did ...teach me a great deal of information ... she also taught me a number of valuable life lessons. She constantly pushed me to do my best work, even when I did not feel that I was capable of it. She created a classroom atmosphere that was 'conducive to teaching and learning, [and] built on a foundation of mutual respect,' 'Good teaching is personal,' and ... was certainly able to embody this quality of good teaching."

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Blind Brook High School emphasizes strong relationships with our families and community. We strive to keep parents informed regarding the program, individual student progress, and social and emotional development. Technology has helped improve our open communication. Email blasts keep parents informed about school sponsored programs, activities, and important happenings during the school day. Remind 101 is used by teachers to provide notification regarding class assignments, field trips and other pertinent information. Teachers chronicle their assignments, tests, and projects in detail using Edline to provide parents and students with a comprehensive record of daily course requirements. Testing calendars are posted to prevent over-testing students on a single day. Grade level meetings are held at the start and midpoint of the year providing grade specific information. All parents receive a Naviance account and training to help them guide their students' decision making regarding course of study, college selection, and career aspirations. Our website is comprehensive and includes the daily announcements, sports and activities, coming attractions, and links to policy, important forms, and highlights of student achievements. Video recordings of meetings, presentations, and school programs are available for people who were unable to attend the actual event. Quarterly newsletters are sent to families to provide the latest initiatives, showcase student work, and spotlight teachers, programs, and activities.

Our school is the cornerstone of the community. Our building is open to local residents for community

meetings. We encourage open access to our fields and facilities and many town recreational activities take place without restrictions. We promote the concept of shared responsibility and accountability and we have been fortunate that our faith in the community has not been misplaced. Partnerships with the local communities have resulted in increased opportunities for our students to become involved in areas of interest including local government, social agencies, religious institutions, and other community organizations. Our students have earned accolades for their volunteerism and community activism. Internships with local agencies help our students pursue individual interests and gain experiences that are not possible within the school walls. We are currently expanding our relationships with local colleges to permit our students to take and audit classes and participate in clubs. Recently several students were invited to join the Philosophy club at Manhattanville College. These opportunities significantly expand our students' world view.

3. Professional Development:

We believe that to be effective, Professional Development has to be a grass roots movement. As a result, our PD committee consists of members of each constituency group that comprises our community. The committee plans all staff development based upon survey results that identify areas of interest and need. There has been a concerted effort to recognize the expertise that many of our members have developed. Teachers provide workshops in the use of technology, differentiated instruction, curriculum writing, and alignment to the Common Core, stress reduction, wellness, and many other areas of identified need. An initiative in “looking at student work” has helped teachers develop a consistent approach to grading and evaluation. An emphasis on the creation and evaluation of formative and summative assessments has helped teachers discern the importance of standards-based grading and teaching for mastery. Teachers have become less rigid in their approach to defining learning as performance on a specific day and are more likely to structure assessments by concept area, allow for re-teaching and “do overs” in assessment. This has impacted the learning environment in ways we have not seen previously. For example, student writing assignments, currently being completed using Google Docs or other technology applications, permit teachers to provide targeted feedback throughout the writing process. Teachers are able to offer concrete suggestions that cause the student to revise and edit repeatedly throughout the process. The result has been a significant increase in the quality of student writing. The totality of the writing process is easily appreciated including the students' investment in the process. The final grade tends to be a more precise reflection of the learning that has taken place over the duration of the instruction.

Our district is also committed to helping all members of the learning community grow. Annual evaluations include the professional's personal commitment to self-improvement. The district approves teacher and administrative requests to attend regional, state, and national conferences that enhance the skills necessary for their roles. Teachers are encouraged to present the “best practices” they have developed to the wider community. Our teachers provide workshops for parents to help them understand the issues that they face. We offer a scheduling workshop for parents so that they might better understand the course offerings, graduation requirements, and the choices that students make that impact their college acceptances. Teachers meet with parents and students to outline the various requirements associated with specific courses so that together, the family may plan the student's schedule. As a result, our students are making more informed course selections. This has substantially reduced the number of “dropped” courses and helps keep class size stable.

4. School Leadership:

Blind Brook High School has been plagued by a revolving door of administrators. A demanding community, a strong teachers union, and past Boards of Education overly involved in building management have been cited as the reason. The current administrative team is interrupting this cycle. Strong, experienced leaders, a new Superintendent appointed from within, and a committed BOE that trusts the administrative team to lead the school is responsible for the shift.

The approach is simple. All decisions are made in the best interest of the students. Following the example of Heidi Hays Jacobs who begins her workshops with an empty chair prominently displayed, all constituents are challenged to imagine a student for whom they share responsibility. Actions are proposed

not on what is best for teachers, administrators, or individual parents, but determined by the best interest of the students. This approach has far reaching implications for programs and practices.

The administrative team, consisting of a principal and a shared assistant principal, acts with a common voice seeking greater participation from all stakeholders. The question is continually asked “How will this benefit students?” Teacher department coordinators have been increasingly involved in the school decision making process. Currently under review is our schedule and the impact it has on students. By involving teachers in the construction of the master schedule, they have come to realize the limitations imposed by a traditional day consisting of nine, forty-minute periods. Teachers became acutely aware of the challenges in offering a variety of rich core courses and electives. With only 520 students, a teaching staff of 35, and restrictions imposed by the facilities available, it becomes difficult to provide all the opportunities that our students are interested in pursuing. Teaching assignments, inevitably the result of certification and the way the master schedule falls into place, were often the cause for consternation on the part of the faculty. Their involvement in the process now provides greater insight into the resulting schedule. Teachers are more likely not to challenge a schedule that has them teaching several classes in a row or alternates the teaching of various subjects within their discipline. Their colleagues are able to better explain the limitations of room availability or other constraints that impact the schedule.

Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The biggest impact on student achievement may be attributed to a change in how students can access courses. For years, Blind Brook High School relied heavily on a strict practice of teacher recommendation for course placement. This process prohibited many students from taking on the challenge of our more rigorous courses. Students and parents were unaware of the courses for which they were recommended until their scheduling conference with the counselor. The criteria used were not disclosed and students were often at a loss to understand the recommendation. Students who objected to the recommendation were required to follow a detailed process to “appeal” the decision that would have prevented them from challenging themselves. Students were required to first meet with the recommending teacher to establish the reasons for the placement. Secondly, students were made to meet with the teacher currently teaching the course in which they wished to enroll. It was often the case that the teacher and student did not know each other and the meetings were often described as “awkward.” Upon fulfilling the requirement to meet with both teachers, the appealing student would then schedule an “appeals” meeting with their guidance counselor, current teacher, potential future teacher, department coordinator, and parent. The meeting reiterated all the reasons why the student was not recommended and solicited information from the student as to how he/she would compensate for the deficiencies in order to be successful in the requested course. The process was described as demeaning and deflating, serving to often undermine a student’s confidence and motivation. After completing the process, parents were able to “waive” their student into the course after ensuring that they understood that the selection would be permanent and that the student would not be able to drop the course, regardless of their performance.

Several years ago we began to research student achievement in courses in which they were not recommended. One study revealed that 48% of the students in an AP English class had not been recommended yet 100% of the students had earned a 3 or better on the AP exam. Teachers began to analyze their class performance data and the procedures were finally called into question. Our protocols have changed resulting in student-teacher conferences where students are encouraged to think critically about their strengths, weaknesses, and interests. Recommendations are made in partnership with students and are not binding. Students currently enrolled in the classes hold assemblies for students interested in taking the course where the requirements and expectations of the course are discussed from the students’ perspective. The end result is that students have open access to courses and the performance of the vast majority of students has validated the process.