

2015 National Blue Ribbon Schools Tips for Completing the Application Narrative

The following suggestions are provided to help schools completing the 2015 narrative section of the National Blue Ribbon Schools (NBRS) application. They provide a deeper explanation of what NBRS would like to see addressed in each question.

As a general tip, NBRS strongly recommends first writing your responses in Word or another word processor, then cutting and pasting your responses into the online application. This will allow you to check the word count for each question to make sure your response is within the guidelines, and assist you with proofreading since not all internet browsers have a built-in spell check.

Also, please note that 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 a given question.

If you need assistance in accessing or using the online system, please contact the NBRS Technical Assistance Team, by email: contactus@nationalblueribbonschools.ed.gov or phone: 800-258-0802 or use our [Online Help Desk](#).

Narrative Question Tips

- **These sections must be answered in narrative format only. BULLETED RESPONSES ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE.**
- **Refer to personnel by role, rather than by names.**
- **Avoid duplicating responses from one topic section to another.**

Part III – Summary (800 words)

What NBRS is looking for: A response that addresses the bullet points identified in the question, and that provides a thorough overview of your school and what makes it successful. Your school should be placed in a historical and geographical context, and its educational philosophy explained.

If your school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, you **must** explain how students are selected. If your school is a previous NBRS award recipient, you must describe how the award has been leveraged to the school's benefit.

Stand-out responses:

- Provide concrete examples of how the school helps students develop in all aspects of their lives. Curriculum, supports, unique initiatives, etc. are all welcome to be included, but the response should show how these examples contribute to success.
- Provide an overview of the student and community demographics, and what challenges or opportunities they provide.
- Highlight special programs offered, unique school day features, etc.

Part IV – Curriculum and Instruction

1. Core Curriculum (700 words)

What NBRS is looking for: A response that provides a general overview of your school's core curriculum (reading/ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies/history). For each subject, the response should address learning standards and how students acquire foundational skills. The response should NOT describe a commercial curriculum, although mentioning one by title is okay.

Secondary schools must make connections between the core curriculum and college/career readiness (100 words). Schools with preschools must discuss the preK curriculum, alignment with elementary grades, and impact on school readiness (100 words).

Stand-out responses:

- Fully describe all four core subjects.
- Provide information on learning standards and unique features of the curriculum when applicable.
- Draw clear connections between curriculum and college/career readiness (secondary schools).

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- Draw clear connections between the preK curriculum and school readiness.

2. Other Curriculum Areas (700 words)

What NBRS is looking for: A response that provides a general overview of your school's non-core subjects (at a minimum that includes the arts, PE/health/nutrition, foreign language, and technology). For each subject, the response should address which grades take the subject, how often, and how the course supports the acquisition of essential skills.

Stand-out responses:

- Provide an overview of all non-core subjects.
- Make it clear who studies the curriculum, and if it is an elective, approximately how many students choose it.
- Draws connections between the curriculum and essential skills and knowledge.

3. Instructional Methods (300-400 words)

What NBRS is looking for: A response that provides a comprehensive overview of the various instructional methods used at your school. Examples should be clear, and responses should explain how differentiation is used to meet the needs of multiple groups, not just those performing below grade level.

Stand-out responses:

- Provide a well-rounded assortment of techniques with clear descriptions.
- Use examples to demonstrate how and when techniques are used.
- Address the use of differentiated instruction for a variety of instructional needs.

Part IV – Indicators of Academic Success

1. Assessment Results (300 words)

What NBRS is looking for: A response that describes your school's performance in an easy to follow but thorough manner and that addresses any weaknesses/gaps in assessment scores provided in the data tables. If there is an achievement gap of 10 or more percentage points between the test scores of all students and the test scores of any subgroup, the response **must** describe what is being done to close it.

Stand-out responses:

- Describe the school's data without tedious repetition of what is contained in the data tables.
- Provide thoughtful analysis of results, considering fluctuations or trends over time, cross-grade level trends, and/or trends among subgroups.
- Provides enough of a description of the school's (and/or state's) assessment system that readers unfamiliar with it can understand the data presented.

2. Assessment for Instruction, and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results (300 words)

What NBRS is looking for: A response that includes the entire range of how assessments are used, how the school analyzes and discusses results, how instructional decisions are made based on them, and how they are communicated to stakeholders (students, parents, community members).

Stand-out responses:

- Describe a systematic process for reviewing results in the school, grade, and/or classroom.
- Use specific examples to show how results are used to inform instruction.
- Cover a variety of types of assessments.
- Describe not just how results are shared with stakeholders, but how their meaning is communicated.

Part V – School Supports

1. School Climate/Culture (400 words)

What NBRS is looking for: A response that provides a general sense (and may include specific examples) of how the school keeps students engaged and motivated, not just academically but also socially and emotionally. The response should also address how the culture supports the needs and development of teachers.

Stand-out responses:

- Describes how the culture supports student academics, social needs, and emotional growth.
- Describes how teachers fit into the culture and are supported at the school.
- Makes a clear connection between a positive environment for students and staff, and how the environment makes the school successful.

2. Engaging Families and Communities (400 words)

What NBRS is looking for: A response that includes clear examples of family and community engagement and that makes connections between those examples and student achievement.

Stand-out responses:

- Provide concrete examples.
- Encompass family and community, including businesses, non-profits, or institutes of higher education.
- Provide connections between activities and student success and/or school improvement.

3. Professional Development (400 words)

What NBRS is looking for: A response that provides a broad overview of the school's professional development approach and focuses on its impact. Examples should be given. Responses should be analytical, not just a descriptive list of activities, nor should they focus on just one aspect or idea.

Stand-out responses:

- Demonstrate the school has a thoughtful, cohesive program in place that draws from many sources.
- Describe activities that reflect the nature of the school's challenges and how they are being addressed.
- Use clear, concise examples of how activities impact staff capacity, student achievement, or school improvement.
- Focus on teachers and administrators.

4. School Leadership (400 words)

What NBRS is looking for: A response that details the school's leadership philosophy and how it relates to success. The structure should be outlined and include the principal as well as additional teams or roles. The response should NOT be a biography of the principal, and should NOT use names to identify people.

Stand-out responses:

- Describe a coherent philosophy and explain how it impacts the school's success.
- Demonstrate the school has a unified, well-functioning team of school leaders.
- Show direct connections between leadership decisions and student learning, if applicable.