

## 2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools Tips for Completing the Application

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program is providing the following suggestions to help schools complete the 2020 application. They include general tips, as well as a deeper explanation of what NBRS would like to see addressed in each question.

### General Tips

**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.

**Grammar/Spelling:** 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 assist you with proofreading since not all internet browsers have a built-in spell check.

**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 "â€". **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.

**Previously Winning 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 a given question.

**Style Sheet:** Please use the attached style sheet for assistance with commonly misspelled and/or misused words.

**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 go over it significantly. Please try to be succinct and to the point.

### Additional Notes:

- Questions must be answered in narrative format. **Bulleted responses are not acceptable.**
- School personnel should always be referred to by their roles, rather than by their names.
- Avoid duplicating responses from one topic section to another.
- Acronyms must be spelled out the first time they are used.

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.

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](mailto:ContactUs@NationalBlueRibbonSchools.com)  
Phone: 800-258-0802 or 603-422-8888

## Tips by Application Section

### 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 it 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.

**Number of FTE staff:** Please 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 – Summary

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that addresses each of 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 geographical context and its educational philosophy explained. This is an opportunity to highlight what makes your school special, especially any innovations or unique programs offered.

**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, Instruction, and Assessment

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that provides an overview of your school's core curriculum and instructional approaches, plus specific descriptions for each core subject listed. That is, **what** is taught and **how** it is taught and assessed. This includes content and learning standards, instructional techniques and interventions, and how assessments/data are used to improve student learning.

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.

Schools with prekindergarten (see note in Demographics) must discuss the preK curriculum, alignment with elementary grades, and impact on school readiness.

If a school does not have secondary grades or prekindergarten, those sections should be left blank.

**Stand-out responses:**

- Fully describe each aspect (what and how) of all four core subjects. Even if social studies and/or science are taught within the reading curriculum, the content, instruction, and assessment still need to be addressed individually.
- Provide information on unique features of each curriculum area when applicable.
- Draw clear connections between curriculum and college/career readiness (secondary schools).
- Draw clear connections between the preK curriculum and school readiness (if applicable).

### 2. Other Curriculum Areas

**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(s) if offered, and technology/library/media). 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 which students participate in the curriculum, and if it is an elective, approximately how many students choose it.
- Draw connections between the curriculum and essential skills and knowledge.

### 3. Academic Supports

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that provides a comprehensive overview of how the school meets the needs of diverse learners. The response should focus on instruction, interventions, and assessments. At a minimum, every school should discuss the needs of students who are performing below and above grade level.

Special education students, English language learners, migrant students, or students with unusual/exceptional needs (e.g., a highly mobile military population) should be addressed when they form a significant part of the student body. Determination of how many students represent a significant portion is up to each school, but the NBRS program suggests 10 percent as a minimum. If a school does not have significant size subgroups, those sections should be left blank.

Any achievement gaps of more than 10 points between all students and the populations discussed must be addressed.

**Stand-out responses:**

- Provide a comprehensive overview of how the school differentiates instruction for each student population.
- Demonstrates how and when intervention techniques and assessments are used.
- Shows how the school works to ensure that all students perform at NBRS levels of excellence.

## Part V – School Climate and Culture

### 1. Engaging Students

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that provides key strategies (and may include specific examples) of how the school keeps students engaged and motivated, not just academically but also socially and emotionally.

**Stand-out responses:**

- Describes how the culture supports students' academics, social needs, and emotional growth.
- Makes a clear connection between a positive environment for students and how the environment makes the school successful.

### 2. Engaging Families and Communities

**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, community, and partners in education.
- Provide connections between activities and student success and/or school improvement.

### 3. Creating Professional Culture

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that provides a broad overview of how the school provides support for teachers and other professional staff. Responses should include professional development, but also how the school creates a welcoming environment that values teachers overall. When discussing professional development, responses shouldn't include just a list of activities but demonstrate the thoughtfulness of the approach and how it contributes to both student learning and the school culture.

**Stand-out responses:**

- Describe how the school supports teachers and other staff professionally.
- Describe how activities reflect and align with the school's goals and challenges.
- Use clear, concise examples of how activities impact staff capacity and well-being, as well as student achievement and/or school improvement if applicable.

### 4. School Leadership

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that details the school's leadership philosophy and how it relates to success. The overall leadership structure should be outlined, including 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.

## Part VI – Strategy for Academic Success

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that describes a single practice that stakeholders believe has been the most influential in the school's success. The practice should be thoroughly described, but the response should primarily focus on how it has been used and draw connections between the practice and student outcomes.

**Stand-out responses:**

- Focus on only ONE practice so it can be described in depth.
- Provide thoughtful analysis of how the practice is used.
- Clearly show the connection between implementing the practice and student outcomes.

**2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools  
Application Style Sheet**

**Grammar/Punctuation**

**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. That is, a comma will 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