

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. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2018 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. 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 2012 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: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2017.
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 has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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 (2017-2018) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 2 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
 - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2017 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	14	17	31
K	17	12	29
1	19	14	33
2	18	17	35
3	17	24	41
4	21	15	36
5	19	16	35
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	125	115	240

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 13 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 83 % White
 - 3 % 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 2016 – 2017 school year: 6%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain.

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, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	6
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	8
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	14
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	240
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.06
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 11 %
27 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
The non-English languages spoken in our school by ELL students are Spanish and Quiche.

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 50 %
Total number students who qualify: 121

8. Students receiving special education services: 22 %
53 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>3</u> Autism | <u>4</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>7</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>16</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>42</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>2</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4
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	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	14
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	13
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	13
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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 17:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	99%	96%	96%	95%	95%
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 2017.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
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.

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

The Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart Schools, a community/school/home partnership focused on learning, will challenge all students to strive for excellence by utilizing effective teaching methods, resources, and application experiences with an emphasis on individual student achievement to enable each to become productive members of an ever-changing society.

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

At Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart (BLHS) Public schools, our belief is to center on student achievement.

BLHS Public School's mission is to focus on being a community partnership in learning, challenge all students to strive for excellence by utilizing effective methods, resources, and application experiences, and emphasize on individual student achievement to enable each to become productive members of an ever-changing society.

BLHS encompasses three rural communities: Buffalo Lake (Pop. 740), Hector (Pop. 1051), Stewart (Pop. 525) and surrounding rural area. The main business of the area is farming, primarily sugar beets, corn, and soybeans. Most families are two-income earners, with the median yearly salary being at \$27,000. These communities are governed by an administrator-led council, with all members being voted upon by the public in their respective towns. The communities of BLHS are proud of their Scandinavian heritage and their strong work ethic.

BLHS elementary was recognized as a Minnesota Reward School in 2014-15 and 2015-16. This designation is awarded to the top 15% of schools in Minnesota. The vision at BLHS elementary is to continue to build on our successes and to innovate our methods to achieve additional achievement increases of 5% in math and 5% in reading on state-wide proficiency tests. BLHS does this by evaluating, reflecting, and adapting best practices and professional collaboration, while searching for better student-centered outcomes.

Many other elementary staffs come to observe and connect professionally at BLHS. We are often imitated in what we do in relation to our PLC's, committees, and attention to detail and purpose in honing in on student outcomes. These practices did not come easily and are challenged every day by our 50% free and reduced student population, as well as our 20% Special Education population. Due to BLHS's rural setting, we also experience declining enrollment, resulting in less funding from the state, placing more reliance on local funding and grants. Fortunately, our school district's stakeholders have supported three operating levies over the past 5 years, allowing our students to enjoy a 17:1 student to teacher ratio, updated structures, and cutting-edge technology and curricula.

Adding to these successful processes at BLHS, our district has formed partnerships with local and regional agencies to connect professionally with other communities and districts. BLHS has professional relationships with the Regional Center for Excellence, Southwest/Southcentral Cooperative, Southwest Initiative Foundation, BLHS Foundation, Chamber of Commerce agencies of Hector, Buffalo Lake, and Stewart, Regional Principal's Collaborative, Regional Superintendent's Collaborative, BLH Area Ministerial Association, district-wide Lions organizations, and district-wide city councils.

Notable accomplishments to date include:

Re-focused Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) and defined meeting times and outlines, which focus on purpose and achievement of our students. In these sessions, teachers and staff are challenged to reflect on their teaching methods and processes to identify best practices to create positive learning environments for achievement and to close achievement gaps of our three main subgroups: Special Education, English Language Learners, and Free/Reduced Lunch populations. All decisions are based on daily, classroom assessments, and normalized, district-wide testing. Based on this data, teachers have the flexibility to customize their teaching to better suit the needs of their students.

An updated, district developed mentor program allows for new teachers and staff to the district to learn our systems and curricula, understand our expectations, and to give positive pathways and feedback to support them to becoming master teachers. Our staff had been fairly veteran and BLHS experienced a number of retirements in a short period of time. To keep moving forward on our improvements and accomplishments, BLHS wanted to ensure success, methods, and curricula were duplicated and properly communicated with new incoming teachers and staff. Our locally developed mentor program allows us to do this by compiling

many different sources and theories and then adapt these to the expectations, beliefs, and vision of BLHS.

BLHS implemented Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to address individual student needs and close achievement gaps. Twice a month, our Student Assessment Team and Child Study Groups meet to investigate and implement intervention strategies to assist our students in better achievement. This process has allowed teachers to take ownership in the teaching and learning process and develop methods to better meet the needs of our students PreK-5. An additional benefit is that it catches students that might be considered “at risk” of falling behind prior to the slide in achievement. Additionally, BLHS will be opening a learning center/daycare in the summer of 2018. This facility will house children in a daycare/learning center environment from ages 6 weeks through PreK. This facility will further enhance our MTSS processes and allow for better pathways to learning for our students. Since we are a Title I school, these funds can be utilized by teachers and paraprofessionals in providing the interventions and enrichments with the aforementioned tools in assisting BLHS close its achievement gaps and with a steady increase in overall test proficiency.

In maintaining a safe learning environment, BLHS has installed controlled entry systems based on voice and visual recognition, cameras in every hallway, and elevated personnel presence in the halls and buses. BLHS has a full-time social worker on staff who teaches weekly lessons on character and self-learning skills. Bullying prevention and identification lessons are taught during these times.

Lastly, devotion to low student:teacher ratios. Currently, BLHS provides a 17:1 student to teacher ratio. We departmentalize our upper elementary to allow for better teacher and student mastery. Additionally, our Special Education teachers co-teach with the regular classroom instructor when warranted.

In summary, BLHS elementary should be a National Blue Ribbon School because of its innovation, planning, and follow through, which drives the school’s clarity of purpose in student-centered decisions and achievement.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The core curricula at BLHS are intertwined. Every day, each student receives 120 minutes of reading/language arts instruction and 90 minutes of math instruction. Social studies and science are both related back to the reading and math strategies that are taught. These strategies are introduced and focused on in math and reading/language arts, and are further enriched and utilized in social studies and science.

We attribute several factors to our success at BLHS. Focusing on the individual learner in the core areas, each student is "interviewed" to set their own goals for achievement. Based on these goals and the data-investigating of the teachers via Professional Learning Communities, teachers are better able to better differentiate their instructional methods across the curricula to the students.

Coming from these sessions, teachers in PreK-5 reading/language arts can identify skills and strategies with students that suit them best. These are practiced weekly and are made readily available to each of the students in their own individual resource folder. Having these folders, which is an accumulation of items as the year progresses, allows each student to go back and research or study important strategies and examples. Additionally, each classroom has their own leveled reader library. By having these in each of the classrooms, students have books based on their level of reading at their fingertips. Students can move between reading levels and know what level they are at, due to teachers utilizing district assessment data, as well as weekly and unit assessments in the classroom, to determine their abilities.

Common across all core curricula is a process that prepares each student to do well on any test that they will encounter during the school year. In all core curricula, students must "prove it" or show how or where they got their responses to questions. What this does is foster a positive confidence in each student that becomes a habit as the year progresses. By the time state assessments are taken in the early spring, each student is confident of the test taking strategies that have been utilized all year long.

These processes and strategies are communicated to the parents in weekly and monthly announcements that each teacher sends home. In allowing to see how these take place, the district has entered into agreements with online vendors directly related to our curriculum choices so that practice in competition/game format can take place at home.

None of this would make sense if our curricula were not aligned to the state standards. Every seven years on a rotational basis, every content area goes through a scope and sequence process and re-mapping of standards to ensure that the standards are placed in the correct grade level and sequence. This process at BLHS has gotten so fine-tuned that the curricula that have been chosen are those that use the actual vocabulary and processes utilized on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA's). The utilization of PLC's has allowed for this process to become what it has. Because of this and the dedication of teachers, each student is known individually by each classroom teacher and the teachers know how each student learns best.

Our math curriculum follows a similar fashion in that the strategies and processes that are used on the MCA's in the spring are implemented every day in the classroom. Our math curriculum focuses on process and how answers are found. Much of this has been attributed to brain research and how the student best learns. Just the same as in other core areas, a portfolio of student work is built as the school year progresses. Students have the advantage of having these available to them and add to them during the school year.

An example of this is a process is in how a student answers a question. At times, teachers will have students go through a problem and explain how they would go about setting up a problem and then solve it, all without using numbers. This process has produced great results in that the students can identify important information needed to solve a problem and eliminate incorrect processes and answers. This process is similar to that of what is used in science as the process can also be identified as a type of scientific method.

To summarize why BLHS has become so proficient on its testing results, the focus on the individual student has to be emphasized. Great care and diligence has been taken on by teachers to use data on district and state results to find the best curricula that not only fit the standards, but also the learning characteristics of our students. The allowance to have PLC's take place on a weekly basis allows for teachers to break this data down and to generate lessons with methods that have purpose to each student. These practices are conducted with the thought that they will be needed on the test and we don't want any of the students to be surprised or have anxiety when the spring MCA's come. A lot of effort is put into communicating this with parents on a weekly and monthly basis, including making sure the parents are aware of test dates and strategies that can be used in the home to make for a successful test taking experience.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The same cross-curricular processes that is seen in the core content areas can be found in the support content areas as well.

Via professional development with the Southwest/South Central Cooperative, our PE classes incorporate brain games during their lessons. This goes along with the belief at BLHS that a fit and well-nourished brain is the foundation for a successful learning experience. An emphasis on everyday decisions is incorporated in each lesson, whether that be in situations of peer pressure, diet, or exercise. The brain games incorporate academic problems while exercising. This has been incorporated because research has shown that higher academic achievement can be related to higher levels of fitness. An interesting part of all of this is that you can see the regular classrooms incorporating fitness routines into their teaching methods, further demonstrating the cross-curricular theme. Ensuring that these goals are seen in all students, these same methods are used in our Developmental Adapted Physical Education (DAPE) students. Even though these students do not accomplish their standards the same as regular education students, it was important to ensure every student was able to develop healthy habits.

Each day, our students are offered breakfast, with all Kindergarten students receiving free breakfast. As the day progresses, every PreK-5 classroom is allowed a milk break with a healthy snack being provided. In doing so, BLHS ensures that it is following USDA food guidelines.

A second area that BLHS has seen cross-curricular methods is that in our technology/computer classrooms. The vocabularies and reading strategies taught in reading/language arts are the same ones that get utilized in teaching computer. Additionally, as previously mentioned the abilities and techniques needed on our weekly, unit, district, and state assessments are the ones that are taught and utilized in the computer lab. Additional skills are taught with the use of our iPads in computer class. By doing these activities and methods, the student-centered theme is continued.

Along with other technologies in our school, it was previously mentioned that every classroom incorporates SMARTBoards. In each of these classrooms, the SMARTBoard is used to not only show students a technique or to give information, but to also have the student interactively become involved in the lesson as it takes place. By doing so, more of the five senses can be drawn upon to allow students to better learn the lesson. This has been a very positive area in having our students become more proficient in all content areas.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

BLHS administers district-wide assessments which allow for diagnostic assessments to determine district, grade-level, subgroup, and individual performance goals to be formed. This process is something that is modeled beginning with the Kindergarten class and continues on through the entire elementary (Grade 5). Every year, every teacher, Professional Learning Community, and resulting school performance goals are identified based on the initial testing performance conducted at the beginning of the year in both math and reading. All grades K-5 conduct individual "interviews" where students are met with to set goals for the upcoming test and to go through the results of their most recent test to explain what each part means. By doing this break down, testing situations become more routine and students are better able to perform at their expected level.

Due to the use of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), students are divided into groups based on their results of this initial assessment. Since expectations at BLHS are that 100% of our students will read well by 3rd grade, the percentages for groups are set at 25%, 50%, and 75% proficiency levels to give a broad category of groups and allows for identification of potential assistance needed by each student. These goals are utilized to set achievement expectations for the District. On average, the annual growth in proficiency has been set at 5% each year.

Since BLHS is a school-wide Title I school, every one of our students has the opportunity to work with our Title I program on a daily basis. In this program, substrands can be more intensely worked on to better our students' reading abilities. Additionally, BLHS has employed a Reading Specialist to further break down groups to focus on reading needs by each individual student.

Our PreK-5 math and reading curricula are directly in line with the state standards for the state of Minnesota. It has been found while using these curricula across grades PreK-5, that even vocabularies are the same when it comes to the language of the standards and that of the curricula being used. Everything BLHS does is centered on each individual student's achievement and this process is intentioned not only in the "testing years" of which begins assessing in Grade 3, but it is a process based on data-driven decisions beginning with students in our PreK setting.

The State of Minnesota uses a Multiple Measures Rating (MMR) through the proficiency achievement and proficiency gap closing based on scores on the statewide Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). There are four performance levels concerning these assessments which include: (D) Does not meet state standards, (P) Partially meets state standards, (M) Meets standards, and (E) Exceeds state standards.

Although this award process mentions the 2016-17 school year, it is important to note the achievement results of the past three school years, which shows that the results at BLHS are not a "one-year wonder" and that our intentional processes at BLHS produced the results that we wanted. Additionally, further provided evidence that our processes that were put in place prior to "testing years" (Grade 3) were also producing positive results in the preparation of our students in PreK-Grade 2.

The three-year proficiency in reading for BLHS Elementary beginning in the 2014-15 school year and ending with the 2016-17 school year trended as follows: 75%, 82%, and 85%. That 10% increase occurred during this same 3-year window in which the state of Minnesota's average trend in reading increased only by 1%. The pinnacle of this is the 2016-17 testing achievements, in which the overall reading proficiency of our 3rd Grade was 88%. It has not gone unnoticed that since BLHS' intentioned focus on individual student achievement and data-driven decisions in curriculum, employment of teachers, re-focus of PLC's, student-centered teaching, and allocation of funding, there has been a very noticeable increase in reading proficiencies.

During the same 2014-15 to 2016-17 time span, BLHS has also seen an increase in the overall proficiencies in math. The same data-driven and student-centered processes and methods described for reading are also employed in math. Respectively, BLHS's proficiencies in math increased by 9% while the State of Minnesota's proficiency increased by 1.6%. Respectively, during that time span (2014-15 to 2016-17), BLHS' overall proficiencies were 79%, 78%, 88%. Highlighting the 2016-17 school year, 3rd Grade attained a proficiency of 90%, 4th Grade was at 93%, and 5th Grade achieved 81%.

During that time frame, BLHS achieved "MN Reward School" status in 2014-15 and 2015-16. These designations were taken out for the 2016-17 school year due to the change in public policy due to the Every Student Succeeds Act. However, if it would have been awarded, BLHS would have been a Reward School for the 16-17 school year as well.

In using the assessment results at BLHS, one should envision that of a grand chemistry experiment where different vials and tubes are connected together, convening with a single tube into a distillation resulting in one single beaker of product. The "scientist" in control of this experiment is the administration of the school.

The initial different beakers on the outside of this “experiment” are all of the inputs the school receives. These inputs are going to come from student data, best practices from PLC meetings, intervention and testing strategies, thoughts and wishes of the parents, state standards, year-round testing methods being practiced, and other community agencies. Each of these, on some level, provide very valuable data that we filter and mix into one final product in that final beaker. The amount that comes from each of these groups is a working effort of the administration and PLC groups with expectations set by the School Board. The result is distilled down into one single beaker for the benefit of all involved. It is truly a positive, but strong mixture, at BLHS when it comes to instruction and testing at our school.

Every week, parents are given evidence of weekly and unit assessments (every 4-5 weeks), which demonstrates summative data to that point. These reports contain data from both math and reading assessments. These data points are brought into PLC meetings to be further broken down and utilized to dictate instruction in the classroom. Twice a school year, Parent-Teacher conferences are scheduled and conducted, with the expectation that the parents/guardians will be in attendance.

The school board receives these data points twice a year, which is further published to the public via our website and local newspaper. Additionally, committee meetings are conducted four times a year concerning curriculum, staff development, and student services for dissection and discussion of instruction and curriculum.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

On a daily basis, each student that comes to BLHS recognizes their importance from the second they walk into the building. Students are routinely met upon entering the building with a "good morning" by an adult and made sure that they know what is going on for the "before school" sessions. During the warmer months, Grades 3-5 get 15-20 minutes of outdoor play time or can stay inside and eat breakfast and complete any work. At the same time the younger students are able to come in and get their day situated, complete any work, and have breakfast. During the winter months, all students have the opportunity to eat breakfast, complete work, take advantage of extra time in the library, or complete enrichment activities in the computer lab. From then on, every classroom goes about telling what is going on for the day in presenting the schedule to each of the homerooms.

In aforementioned sections, it has been noted that everything we do is centered on each individual student's success. Throughout the day, lessons are planned and conducted in those manners in order to prepare our students to be as successful as they can on any assessment. But there are additional bonuses.

Each day, homerooms go through the schedule for the day. There isn't any guessing by the students on what is going to happen during the school day. These moments are also when we recognize students in K-5 for their Random Acts of Kindness. This program has become such a positive that it motivates all of our students to do as well as they can and to go the "extra mile" for their fellow classmates. It isn't uncommon to see an older elementary student helping out a younger student. At the end of the day, all students are brought out by school personnel to the bus stops and each and every student is greeted with a "high five" or a "have a great night" as they step on to the bus or leave with their parents.

Weekly, our student support staff, social worker, and teachers engage in lessons about character taught from these persons, which allows for a personal touch to the lessons. The stuffed teddy bears from the social worker's office are "world famous" on how they can tell stories of encouragement, trustworthiness, being a good friend, and other areas of personal development. With the older elementary students, the lessons are a little more focused on the facts of peer pressure and the everyday demands that they encounter and what might be the best possible solution or answer for them to make.

Every month we have an awards session called "Mustang Time". During these lyceums, students are recognized for their outstanding efforts for the month, recognize our school patrol members of the month, and also recognize our "Character Counts" student of the month. During these lyceums, we will recognize any student or student groups that have been involved in either school related or community related events and any of their awards they may have earned. Our school has a state-wide awarded school patrol group who ensures all students and adults are able to cross to the school safely. In the past four years, we have had two of the state school patrol members of the year come from our elementary. Our "Character Counts" recognition program recognizes students who have been exemplary in areas such as trust, honesty, caring, etc. This entire lyceum process, focusing on Character, has been a highlighted program and widely duplicated in the four county region around us. Every year, our staff is asked to come present on this lyceum process and how it has benefited our school.

Throughout the year, we make sure we have special days like "mix it up" day where either students are taught by teachers from another grade level or "buddy day" where older elementary students are paired up for the day and we have special activities for them to participate as a partnered group during the school day. This has assisted our students in recognizing the importance of everyone and to learn about the individual differences each of us has. From this, students can understand each other better.

As "testing" season begins, the lower elementary students will conduct hallway pepfests for the older students that are getting ready to take the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA's). Previous it was mentioned about "buddy day". During the testing sessions, buddies will write inspirational messages to their older buddy, cheering them on to do as well as they can.

As mentioned, many of these events and processes that we utilize at BLHS are commonly requested to be presented by area school districts. Our service cooperative mentions to us about how we can assist the other districts in the cooperative.

All of this comes with the fact that we allow our teachers to take leadership roles inside the building. They are members on decision-making committees like curriculum development, District council, staff development, among others, in which the licensed staff, along with parents, get to make decisions on the direction they'd like to see our school go. Through these decisions and committees, employees and parents are able to put their "stamp" on the expectations, processes, and methods that are utilized in the school. These committees meet regularly 4-5 times during the school year, depending on the committee.

In other areas, teachers are asked for their input on the school calendar which gives them the opportunity to express their needs and wants from their various PLC's they are involved in. As well, it gives them a chance to have a feeling of some control of their own work environment. Employees can give their input from the standpoint of when they know breaks are needed, as well, what professional development they are needing.

Through all of these processes and events, one thing comes to mind and that is "family". We want every single one of us to be as successful as we can. Our focus is on the student, but we also focus on the needs of each and every employee. The resulting environment from all of this is that it is fun. A common statement in our school is "What we do is serious, but the daily process and planning allow it to be fun!" This last statement is a very good example as to why our teachers and support staff often are with us for over 25 years or more!

2. Engaging Families and Community:

The entire BLHS district engages in several community and family events throughout the school year in order to build and improve rapport between the parties involved. We welcome parents and stakeholders of all three communities to become involved in our processes through being involved in our committees, attendance at Title I and III nights (twice a year), ECFE parenting classes, classroom get togethers and field trips.

The school district has taken on the "Back the Pack" program in which area churches and persons donate time and food for underprivileged families. This food is then divided and placed in students' backpacks to take home to their families. No one knows why they get that food placed in their back packs, and no one knows who gets that food. Research didn't have to tell us that a student who has proper nutrition performs better in school because we see it everyday. We wanted a way to better ensure that was taking place in our district households.

The BLHS School District is in the final stages of building a learning center/daycare inside the district. This will provide much needed daycare needs in the district. It is with hopes that with this and our having our PreK inside that building, earlier determination of SPED needs can be addressed, hoping to slow down or eliminate the need for SPED in the future. Again based on the data we have and when we compare it to our processes already in place, we feel very strongly that this will only enhance our MTSS, as well, give an earlier presence to our parents to reinforce the importance of education at an early age.

BLHS enjoys a positive relationship with all of its outside groups. This ranges from the local rod and gun club, to lions clubs, and the area Ministerial Association. We have all recognized that we depend on each other for the betterment of our communities and school and have collaborated on several events to better meet the needs of our students. Our Ministerial Association began a program for students after home football games so that they had a safe place to attend with friends after the conclusion of games. In pairing with the school, the local rod and gun club secured funds for a target range and developed a trap shooting team which provided a positive outlet for students that had interests in outdoor-related events.

Lastly, BLHS conducted a strategic planning session in the spring of 2017 during which public meetings

were held in all three communities as well among the teachers and staff. During these sessions, BLHS came up with a strategic plan that is amendable over the years which can only better our communication with the communities and our employees, which benefits the overall educational experience of our students.

3. Professional Development:

BLHS elementary recognizes the value of collaboration and seeks out opportunities to grow and share. At the front of this thinking is that everything we do addresses the individual student needs through differentiated curricula and instruction, better adapt students to social situations for better decision-making, mental health needs are properly assessed and addressed, make sure that our students feel safe in coming to school, and that technology is properly integrated to enhance the education of our students.

Our telecommunications and internet systems are linked by fiber-optic cable with 15 other members of the Little Crow Telemedia Network, which allows effective teleconferencing. This benefits the district in that it reduces travel costs and time, but most importantly allows for our teachers, staff, and administration to learn locally and keeps them in front of the students instead of hiring a substitute.

Our elementary conducts twice a week “homework help” sessions during the school year. During these two 1-hour sessions, students at the elementary can receive assistance from teachers and support staff after school, at the school. Transportation is provided after, which allows students from all three communities to participate and not have a concern on how they will return to their respective homes.

The North Central Collaborative provides a critical outlet which provides structure and meeting times with other content-area based curricula across the entire SW corner of Minnesota. Certain areas where BLHS has taken advantage of include:

Administrative collaboration, a meeting of Principals and Superintendents to discuss timely and effective staff development and think-tanks to assist with school processes and students;

Primary and Intermediate elementary math collaboration during which best practices and test data from across the region is discussed;

Primary and Intermediate elementary reading collaboration during which best practices and test data from across the region is discussed;

Health and Physical Education: created and provided support for brain gym training which incorporates math and reading into the Health/PE curricula.

Our teachers have presented on Character Counts with the local 4-county agency, PACT for Families and have hosted area schools in the process and implementation of this program which focuses on student character education and bullying prevention. This has also been asked to be a featured presentation for the Minnesota Brain Conference during the spring of 2018.

Over the past three school years, elementary school representatives from not only area school districts, but from across the state of Minnesota have been hosted to allow for observation and discussion on our processes and curricula utilized at BLHS. Additionally, several requests from area colleges and universities for student teacher placements have been made. These schools note that “...if there is a way to mentor and indoctrinate proper teaching methods, procedures, and expectations among prospective new teachers...”, which has helped build our employment and substitute pool.

What has resulted with all of these experiences is that our professional development practices are centered around our curricula and how we can enhance those methods in line with our chosen curricula to better meet the needs of each individual student. There is no “one size fits all” model in what we do in curriculum, social situations, mental health, school safety, or technology. All of these areas are carefully

considered by all employees of the school, of which our professional development opportunities are available to. The approval process and subsequent reflection process has ensured each employee that takes advantage of our professional development opportunities has an opportunity to enhance their abilities and to make sure that they either fit what we are currently doing or improve upon those processes and methods.

4. School Leadership:

Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart (BLHS) upper leadership is headed by a combined Superintendent/elementary principal position. The leadership philosophy is such that we bring in great employees to exude their talents and knowledge to our students knowing that education is always in perpetual change. But in support of hiring excellent employees, leadership will go through great lengths to ensure that our employees' toolboxes will always be given an opportunity to be filled with new knowledge and tools in order to meet that expectation of change.

Leadership continuously challenges employees to impart not only knowledge, but everyday positive models of how to treat others, live life, and to accept differences.

The Superintendent/Principal, in their dual role, makes sure that there are persons at each level of the elementary aware of the goings on of the day through daily announcements. There isn't any guessing on what is going on. In all instances these are general reminders from previous bi-monthly faculty meetings and support staff meetings that are conducted. Much of the procedures and processes that govern the daily events and activities throughout the year are gained from these bi-monthly meetings. It is understood that what we do is a collaborative effort and that no one idea is better than the rest. In making those decisions, the Superintendent/Principal is able to delegate responsibilities with great confidence, as well, be able to have great confidence from the employees in the decisions that are being made.

The committees and PLC's are essential to the discussion, decision-making, and communication of the policies, programs, relationships, and focus of resources. From the very beginning of the school year throughout the summer, employees are made aware of not only the daily goings on of the school, but also areas such as finance and policy and law.

Our state nationally awarded Principal/Superintendent, continuously and positively makes us aware of our efforts and results, ensuring to celebrate them. These accomplishments are always emphasized in that we are a "part of the puzzle" in educating our kids and that someday they will move on to junior and high school and it is our foundations of success and positive views of education that can make life-long learners out of all of our students.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

There are many things that go on at Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart (BLHS) to ensure success with our students. We understand and have a philosophy that the whole child matters. Not just in one area, but in all, and this would have to be our response...it is the process from beginning to end.

In today's test-ruled world, it is easy to get caught up in the idea that education is "teaching to a test". However, with the unique blend of curricula at BLHS and the processes and methods that our teachers have incorporated, we are actually setting up our students to be the absolute best in becoming life-long learners. Discussed throughout all of these responses are the fact that BLHS focuses on individual needs and their resulting achievement.

Our methods focus on thinking about solving problems, sometimes without even having all of the information provided. This is a real-world process that every student needs. However, in the unique ways that we go about teaching them, it is evident that this skill can be done in any content area. What this allows is to educate across curricula. Methods and standards needed for success in math and reading/language arts are incorporated in other core areas and supported by other content areas that might be considered outside of the core contents. In really focusing on this on an everyday basis, each student can develop their own process to gain success and achievement with the overall result being that as successes for the entire school. By gaining this confidence on an individual basis, each student gets to shine in taking their assessments.

Our curriculum choice involves a year-long process where teachers are allowed to explore different curricula to ensure that they best match our standards and the scope and sequence are in line with those standards. Once the curriculum choices are narrowed, additional time is spent to see how they can be used in all content areas so that they can be repeated in any content area, thus getting mastered at times when a student isn't actually expected to learn the standard. An example of this is the Brain Games mentioned in physical education. Students are actually learning about reading standards while they are in a game used in physical education.

Additionally, these processes are done everyday in the classroom that allow for them to build upon each other, culminating on effective thinking and test-taking strategies that every student can be successful with. Through out the process, each student is presented with these methods and are able to try them out, eventually settling on the methods that best work for them.

These methods wouldn't be possible if we didn't allow the teachers and staff to make the decisions that affect student learning, nor without an administration process that not only expects, but asks for input and implements the thoughts of the teachers and staff.

Lastly, it is a culture. Whether it's the employees or it's the students. Value to the individual self and seeing their growth is important. An understanding of what we do is serious, but a greater understanding is in that we must celebrate our accomplishments and hold these in high regard. By doing so, a model of expectation by everyone can be made and utilized in an everyday method.