

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)
 - 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
 - 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	0	0	0
K	51	46	97
1	57	47	104
2	42	46	88
3	50	44	94
4	38	55	93
5	54	47	101
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	292	285	577

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 96 % 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	15
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	19
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	34
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	577
(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: 1%
7 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 23%
Total number students who qualify: 133

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %
72 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>5</u> Autism | <u>2</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>5</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>24</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>32</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>3</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: 11
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.	26
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	8
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	2
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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 22:1

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	96%	96%	97%	96%	96%
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.

Provide a safe and stimulating environment, meeting student needs to develop individuals who demonstrate problem-solving skills, personal responsibility, and a desire for lifelong learning.

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

Bluffton is a small rural village located in northwest Ohio and was first settled in 1833 by English, German, Irish and later predominantly Swiss immigrants of the Mennonite faith. The current population is approximately 4,125. Bluffton University has been part of the community since 1899. A strong manufacturing sector supports Bluffton, including national and international companies. Sumi Riko is a cooperative venture between Duramax and Tokai Rubber of Japan that makes rubber components for the auto industry. GROB Systems, a division of the German company GROB Group, produces machining and automation systems at its plant in Bluffton. Diamond Manufacturing of Bluffton produces metal work and leases warehousing space.

A 19th century town hall presides over the downtown, which also boasts a Saturday farmers' market from May through October. Bluffton sponsors many annual events, including Blaze of Lights Christmas Festival, Spring Festival & Craft Show, Festival of Wheels Car Show, and a Fishing Trout Derby. Bluffton is the home of Shirley's Gourmet Popcorn, which started out selling their hot buttered and freshly popped popcorn from the Shannon Theatre in Bluffton, Ohio, and has become a "true small-town success story" with franchises throughout Ohio.

There is a strong sense of community, family, and belief in serving others alive in Bluffton. Ten Thousand Villages, the first gift shop in the United States to carry fair trade items, was opened in Bluffton, Ohio in 1972. It sells the handicrafts of artisans in developing countries and provides them with fair, stable income. Two other shops in town are operated by the Mennonite Central Committee and help support their international relief work: the Et Cetera Shop thrift store and Book ReViews Et Cetera. Local service clubs such as The Lion's Club and Shannon Club invest their time and finances in the community and school system.

An extensive bike and pedestrian pathway provides casual exercise for many to enjoy and a Nature Preserve associated with Bluffton University has a famous swinging rope bridge. Bluffton's multi-generational population ensures that people of all ages contribute to the community and make it a vibrant place to live, work and play.

Bluffton Elementary School has a longstanding tradition of excellence. We have met all of the Ohio Report Card indicators since 2006. The current enrollment is 585 students from kindergarten to fifth grade. The racial make-up of the school's student population is 96% White, 3% Multi-racial, and 1% Hispanic. And 12% of the students have a disability and 20% of the students are economically disadvantaged. The attendance rate is 96%. All the teachers are "Highly Qualified" under Ohio's Education Teacher Standards.

Technology is a priority in our school. A chrome book is available for each student in grades 2-5. Kindergarten and first grade have several class sets of chrome books and iPads available. Most classrooms have Smartboards and document cameras. Students visit the Media Center weekly and have access to approximately 15,000 books. We encourage reading with incentives for students to earn AR (Accelerated Reading) points and earn prizes. For accountability purposes, students earn points by taking quizzes over books read.

The school culture supports the belief that collaboration is essential for educational success. Our teachers attend monthly professional development sessions guided by a district team of teachers and administrators. We have facilitated several book studies and hosted professional development sessions focusing on areas such as differentiation, gifted services, engagement strategies, Formative Instructional Practices (FIP), grading, Webb's Depth of Knowledge, Hess Cognitive Rigor Matrix, deconstruction of standards and technology application. Family support is very strong in our school; 98% of parents attend parent-teacher conferences annually. We encourage parents to be involved and will meet whenever necessary.

The community supports the visual and music arts program at the elementary school. General education classes in art (grades 1-5) and music (K-5) are part of our curriculum. A strings program begins in fourth grade and band begins in fifth grade. We hold concerts throughout the year so students can share their hard

work and growth with the community. Our parents support a very active Music Booster Club and PTO.

Bluffton University supports our school in various ways. Education students help provide an after-school literacy intervention program for second and third graders. We also partner with the University to secure student teachers and tutoring support. Bluffton University's The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center provides many cultural opportunities for our students. Bluffton Elementary is very blessed to have such great community support!

The mission of the Bluffton Exempted Village School District is to provide a safe and stimulating environment in which flexibility is encouraged in meeting the needs of every student, and to value all persons and learning to develop individuals who demonstrate problem-solving skills, personal responsibility, and a desire for lifelong learning. We depend on parental support to provide the best possible education for each child. As a holistic community, we pull together to provide opportunities that develop self-esteem, self-motivation and a sense of responsibility while mastering grade level required state learning standards.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Bluffton Elementary ensures alignment with Ohio’s Learning Standards. Teachers use researched-based best practices to engage all students.

The foundation of our reading and language arts program is the McGraw-Hill, “Treasures” reading/language arts series. The program integrates comprehension, phonics and writing. We supplement our core curriculum with additional supports such as: the Phonics Dance, Daily Mountain Language, Writer’s Workshop, Comprehension Connections, and Accelerated Reader (AR). Online resources such as Starfall, Fun Brain and Info Ohio are relatable and relevant to our students’ education environment.

Students are encouraged to meet AR point goals for reading books. Printed “dog tags” are given to collect for meeting point goals. Students’ names are announced and posted for recognition. We promote extensive reading by providing high interest books in easy access areas. We measure progress through STAR Reading assessments. Teachers can dissect 52 different literacy skills from this data. Tests are administered at least three times per school year. Other sources of data include running records, repeated readings and grade level checklists. Progress measurement is the key to modifying our instruction for the individual student.

In grades 3-5, the web-based program, “Study Island” helps improve attention to detail, use of context clues and test taking skills. Our Title I intervention teachers use the Leveled Literacy Intervention system (LLI) to increase ability levels in struggling readers. Our special education teachers use LLI, Barton Reading and Spelling System, and web based programs (Lexia and AIMSweb) to provide additional reading skills analysis. Our “at-risk” students in grades 3-5 attend an assessment prep class to enhance their test taking skills.

Our K-2 math program is Saxon Math by Pearson. Saxon provides the repetition needed for mastery and builds on previously learned skills. Grades 3-5 utilize the “My Math” program by McGraw-Hill which builds upon skills and has a sensible progression sequence. With the “reteach” and “enrich” homework, we are challenging children at all levels. Our teachers have created supplementary lessons to enhance these programs to ensure student success. Instructional methods that support and expand understanding include: math manipulatives, learning stations, graphic organizers, daily math facts, assignments and visuals. Teachers provide formative and summative tests to measure growth and comprehension. Students are assessed with STAR Math twice a year. In grades 3-5, the “Study Island” program strengthens concept understanding and test taking skills. We offer an assessment prep class for at-risk students. BES is fortunate to have an after-school grant program called “SOS” (Saving One Student). Identified students in grades four and five receive one-on-one math support provided by high school mentors. On-line resources such as Facts4Me and Cool Math, provide an interesting and fun way for our students to learn.

Our science program consists of lesson and unit plans developed by our teachers to meet state standards. The teachers provide many hands-on activities for our students. Fourth graders participate in “Scientist of the Day” which teaches preparation, presentation and time-management. COSI-On-Wheels and SESA presentations provides “science in action” type stations for active learning. Activity themes have included: Acids and Bases, Animal Habitats, Make Yourself Slime, and Water Pollution and Solutions. Teachers build upon these themes with classroom activities. The Johnny Appleseed Park District partners with our teaching on conservation, wildlife, and the ecosystem. Students can also access sites such as: Discovery Kids, INFO Ohio, and National Geographic Kid. Study Island is used to prep for the Ohio Science assessments in Fifth grade.

Our students take great pride in their community and school and our social studies curriculum reflects that priority. Students are educated in citizenship and civic participation from the required Ohio Learning Standards. Our schoolwide program, “Caught Being Good” reinforces students’ positive actions. Our kindergarten students attend a Safety City program aimed at self-awareness and safety. Kindergarten and first grade teachers are trained in a PAX behavior program to promote good decision making and

teambuilding. The third grade annually takes a walk noting the historical buildings and town landmarks. The Town Hall does a presentation about local government and a question/answer session with village employees. The third graders time-line, history study culminates with an experience in how life was in the mid-1800's to the turn of the century in Northwest Ohio, by way of a visit to Sauder Museum and Village. The fifth grade D.A.R.E. program educates students about making healthy life choices.

BES students enjoy a partnership with Bluffton University which provides programming offered by The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center. Multicultural speakers introduce the students to understanding and resolving conflict, appreciating diversity and cultures, addressing prejudice, choosing nonviolent responses, confronting bullying, and the need for kindness. Students and staff also choose an annual service project which provides personal involvement for the entire elementary school.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Grades 1 through 5 attend one 40-minute art class per week. The curriculum is aligned to the Ohio State Visual Arts Standards. Students gain hands-on experience with various art techniques in different media. Print making, weaving, sculpture, ceramics and castle box structures are some of the planned activities. Students are challenged to develop an enduring understanding of personal choice and vision by expressing themselves through visual art, critical and creative thinking, authentic application and collaboration and art literacy. Students combine and apply artistic and reasoning skills to imagine, create, realize and refine artworks in conventional and innovative ways. Students work individually and in groups to focus ideas and create artworks that address genuine local and global community needs. Students construct and solve problems of personal relevance and interest when expressing themselves through visual art.

Student artwork is displayed within the school and at local businesses such as the public library and grocery store. This past fall, after an author/artist assembly from Christopher and Jeannette Canyon, students had artwork displayed at the Mazza Museum located in Findlay, Ohio.

All students attend two 30-minute general music classes every week. Children are actively engaged with hands-on learning and challenged to use critical and creative thinking, authentic application, and collaboration while improving their music literacy. The skills learned in class prepare them for the opportunity for them to join the strings program as fourth graders or the band program in fifth grade.

General music students perform at an annual Christmas concert held in the high school gymnasium for a "standing room only" crowd. During the concert, all grades sing songs that have been learned in class. Fourth graders play recorders which are provided by the Music Boosters at the beginning of the school year. The band and strings groups perform during the Christmas season in a separate demonstration concert to display their growth and accomplishments. In the spring, the elementary strings, recorders and band students all perform at a second concert. The Bluffton Elementary music program enjoys a strong connection to the community and surrounding universities. Early in the school year, fifth graders who are interested in beginning band, try out and listen to instruments through a "Band Petting Zoo" with the assistance of Bluffton University students. The Ohio Northern University, Ada, Ohio, college students visit and share about music and cultures in school assemblies. Our second graders travel to the Lima Civic Center to attend a Young People's Concert where the performers are top student musicians from local Allen County High Schools.

Bluffton Elementary creates an encouraging environment and provides the groundwork for students to pursue an interest in music. Exposing them to many different kinds of musical programs allows students to see music as a life-long passion.

Students in kindergarten through fourth grade attend two 30-minute physical education classes per week. The fifth-grade attends one 50-minute session per week. The students are challenged to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful, physical activity. Students learn the skills necessary to participate in a variety of activities and to develop camaraderie and teamwork. Games and activities are geared toward learning these skills through fun. It is important that our students exhibit responsible, personal and social behavior that respects self and others. We also believe in the importance of

physical activity throughout the day. BES students have recess time in all grades. Students participate in a “Field Day” every spring to celebrate S.M.A.R.T. Week. The acronym letters: S-Social Studies, M-Math, A-Arts & Fitness, R- Reading, and T-Technology & Science. Students participate in special activities each day to celebrate this fun-filled, special learning week.

Technology is promoted throughout the school day by our classroom teachers. We see the value of digital learning tools to help students understand, evaluate, apply and communicate ideas and information. As mentioned earlier, there is a chrome book available for each student in grades 2-5. Kindergarten and first grade have several class sets of chrome books and iPads available for every student. The classrooms have Smartboards and documents cameras which enable teachers to engage students in research and learning. Our primary grades utilize a keyboarding program called, “Typing Without Tears.”

Our district is committed to providing useful tools for teachers and students. Technology is constantly being evaluated to make sure it is up-to-date and relevant.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Bluffton Elementary uses many different researched based practices to provide all our students with a strong academic program. Our goal is to provide a stimulating environment in which flexibility is encouraged in meeting the needs of every student. There is an emphasis on instructional practices that creates appropriate learning experiences that are academically engaging. We follow the Formative Instructional Process (FIP) which was incorporated five years ago. Further explanation is provided in the professional development section.

Differentiation instruction is provided in every classroom to ensure students receive the support needed for their success. We have spent several sessions on differentiation strategies to impact all learners. Book studies from Carol Ann Tomlinson, well-known author on differentiation, have been provided. Teachers are instructing students in different ways based on their learning abilities and styles. Some of the strategies consist of flexible grouping, adjusted questions, learning centers, independent study, tiered assignments and choice activities. Our current professional development book study, *Differentiation for Gifted Learners - Going Beyond the Basics* by Diane Heacox and Richard Cash focuses on differentiation strategies to challenge our gifted students. We are working on improving lessons that will challenge our highest performing students.

Assessment data provides regular valuable insight into student progress and it informs how interventions and enrichment opportunities are implemented. Data that impacts student learning come from teacher created formative data (such as exit slips, quizzes, rubrics, and marker boards), Early STAR Reading, STAR Reading, STAR Math, Study Island, AIMSweb, Lexia, on-line resources and assessments provided by the teachers. In addition to those supports, we receive summative data from state testing KRA (Kindergarten Readiness Assessments), Iowa CogAt and Achievement (second grade), OCBA (Ohio Competency Based Assessments-grades 3-5), and psychologist testing supports (all grades as needed). The Iowa CogAt is our main tool utilized to identify gifted students and to identify intervention needs.

Bluffton Elementary follows the Response to Intervention Model (RtI) to identify students with targeted or intensive needs. RtI allows levels of support as teachers implement research-based interventions and continually monitor student progress. For our struggling students in reading, we begin with the utilization of various data sources such as KRA, Early STAR and STAR Reading scores, teacher checklists, and achievement tests provided by our school psychologist. We begin with teacher intervention, to specific pull-out intervention such as Title services and or Special Education services. Students identified with an IEP (Individual Education Plan) or 504 Plan are given accommodations to support within the regular classroom or pull-out depending on their plan.

The intervention specialist works closely with the classroom teacher and parents to provide the needed support. Our special education teachers monitor growth from STAR scores, AIMSweb, Lexia and reading checklists. Our Title I program offers support from the LLI (Leveled Literacy Intervention) program by Fountas and Pinnell. This is a powerful intervention program that provides daily, intensive small-group

instruction which supplements classroom literacy teaching. LLI engages students into leveled books and delivers fast-paced, systematically designed lessons. Benchmark Assessments are a valuable tool in LLI to measure student growth and to design curriculum to meet individual learning needs. These short tests administered throughout the school year gives the teacher immediate feedback on how students are meeting academic standards. When possible, we try to double up our Title intervention students so that they are receiving two class periods of intervention per day. We believe it is vital to provide needed intervention as soon, and as often, as possible. With this emphasis, we may prevent students from being placed on an IEP. Karl's Club is an after-school intervention program that involves struggling second and third graders. The program is led by a Bluffton University education professor and the students majoring in education. They spend time playing literacy oriented games to improve skills.

Bluffton Elementary is a high performing school because of the dedication and communication of teachers, staff, and parents. Our school environment is flourishing because of parental involvement and expectations. Parents encourage their children to come to school prepared to learn. Most parents assume responsibility to ensure that their students do daily work and strive to complete assignments to the best of their ability. Students who have no parental involvement are mentored by volunteers and staff. Our teachers concentrate on the required state learning standards and look at each individual child and expect growth. Teachers are data driven and allow their formative assessments to guide them for the next lesson and to provide additional supports that are needed. As a team, we strive to follow research-based strategies that engage students in daily learning. We work to provide many hands-on learning activities and meaningful practical activities so that children will see value in learning.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Bluffton Elementary is committed to providing a safe, clean and attractive environment where learning is encouraged. Student engagement is paramount to achieving growth. Research-based strategies are incorporated in every lesson to promote engagement. We provide highly qualified and caring teachers in every classroom that support our mission statement: to develop students who demonstrate problem-solving skills, personal responsibility and a desire for lifelong learning.

The learning opportunities we provide promote a positive environment for student academic, social and emotional growth. We offer a special education pre-school program that serves students with speech and learning disabilities through our county Education Service Center. BES offers a two-year kindergarten program for students that may need additional time for developmental with academic, social and emotional growth. Based upon data results from kindergarten screening, parents are given the option to place their child in the two-year program. Emotional and social growth is encouraged in kindergarten and first grade through a researched based behavioral “Pax” game. Kelso’s Choice, a conflict management program that is incorporated in second grade, gives students tools for conflict resolution and self-monitoring. A 10-week bullying program is an important part of each student’s school year. School assemblies reinforce the negative effects bullying behavior and teach positive alternatives. Our fifth-grade D.A.R.E. program also teaches about unacceptable behavior and life choices. Students tour a juvenile jail facility and courtroom to put perspective on these lessons. As mentioned previously, our partnership with The Lion and Lamb Peace Center offers many opportunities for the social and emotional growth of our students and gives them an international view of the world.

Our teachers are empowered to lead professional development activities. Our district professional development team is composed of teachers and administrators and any teacher is welcomed to be part of this team. A major goal in our professional development is to make sure the professional time is job embedded, and applicable, so that it gives teachers tools to provide student learning growth. The district leadership team meets once a month as well as the grade level and/or building teams. Grade level teams meet weekly and/or daily depending on needs. It is vital that the principal is involved in the daily operations of the school and maintains availability and visibility.

Our staff maintains a caring, family atmosphere. If a student/family has a need, the principal and staff will either find community resources to alleviate hardship or assume personal responsibility for providing for the family. We have provided clothing, furniture, shelter and pest control for our students and their families.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Family and community support are very important to Bluffton Elementary. We provide an annual “Meet the Teacher” before the start of the school year. This gives students, parents and community time to get familiar with the elementary school and staff. Individual tours from the principal and superintendent are provided upon request. An “Open House” is annually scheduled in September to give adults another opportunity to be involved in their child’s education. An open lunch time for students encourages parents, grandparents and community members to attend lunch with a child. Parent/Teacher conferences are scheduled annually in November. Title I and special education services hold annual meetings in November and May that promote parental involvement. The Title I program sends out parental and teacher questionnaires to help increase value in services and sends a monthly newsletter communicating how parents can be involved in their child’s learning. Classroom newsletters go home regularly with the students. The elementary school staff has an open-door policy and we will meet with parents upon their request.

A positive communication tool used in grades 1-5 is Progress Book. This web-based program allows parents to view their child’s grades at any time of the day. Teachers input the data from their grade books.

Progress reports are sent home with each student at the mid-point of each quarter. Students in need of extra accountability are placed on “work completion.” Assignments are written on a form that gets daily approval from the teacher. This promotes two-way communication between parent and teacher. Our district and school’s website provides valuable information to parents. It contains our school’s monthly newsletter as well as our bi-yearly district newsletter. Parent forms such Student/Parent Handbook, school calendar, lunch menu, bus pass, supply list, free and reduced lunch application, medication and vacation can be found on the website. Parents can sign up for “Parent alerts” so they can be aware of up-to-date school delays and/or emergencies. EZpay is our lunch payment system which parents can purchase, via credit card, meals for their children. This provides equality, as free and reduced children are not singled out. We strive to communicate openly to our constituents.

Volunteerism is an important part of Bluffton Elementary. A Pirate-2-Pirate reading program helps provide one-on-one reading support to our special education students. They receive daily support at least four times a week. Many volunteers help teachers with intervention support, field trip chaperones, copying and preparing needed student supplies. Our dedicated P.T.O. is very active in fundraising and providing fun activities for our students including Bakery Bingo, Movie Night, assemblies and popcorn for classroom parties. They have provided many items for the students and teachers such as: smart boards, document cameras, books, playground balls and equipment, classroom supplies and games. We are very fortunate to have the active support of our community.

3. Professional Development:

Bluffton Exempted Village Schools demonstrates a commitment to continual professional growth and development for the staff. For the past several years, the District Leadership Team (DLT) has led our professional development program. The DLT is comprised of teachers, our superintendent and administrators. We meet to discuss and shape our professional development for the school year. The Allen County Educational Service Center provides additional curriculum support. The Building Level Teams (BLT) meet for inservice days and monthly meetings to work on specific professional development. Staff members average 25–30 hours of in-house professional development each year. Over the past several years, teachers have been part of book studies and have used foundational ideas from authors such as John Hattie, Rick DuFour, Mike Smoker, Carol Ann Tomlinson, Robert Marzano, and Ken O’Connor. For example, John Hattie’s meta-analyses of studies show 250 influences on student achievement. It is important that we implement practices that have a high impact on learning. Teachers are encouraged to visit other schools and observe skilled teachers. They are encouraged to further their education and attend additional professional trainings. Our district provides additional funds for teachers to obtain their Masters’ degree and attend professional conferences and/or workshops. A major goal in our professional development is that learning is job embedded, applicable, and time considerate so that it gives teachers tools to accelerate student learning growth.

The staff at Bluffton received training in Formative Instructional Process (FIP) five years ago. We took two years of professional development to study this process and the study was led by certified instructors of the FIP process. We believe in the four elements of shared learning and student achievement. First, clear learning targets are to begin the intended instructional learning. Second, accurate documentation is collected as evidence. Third, effective feedback fosters independent thinking. Finally, students (after reflecting and sharing their learning) set their own goals for ownership and lifelong learning. We believe the FIP process has been the fundamental support that has molded the professional development for our staff. We need to provide support in best practices and research to our staff. This also supports the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) and Ohio Principal Evaluation System (OPES) in producing high achieving teachers and administration. We will continue to work on ways to become better educators so that we make an impact on student learning.

4. School Leadership:

The philosophy of the administration is one of a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The main tenets of a PLC are to ensure that students learn, create a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results transformed with hard work and commitment. Ensuring that students learn engages teachers in an ongoing

exploration of three crucial questions that drives the PLC: What do we want each student to learn? How will we know when each student has learned it? How will we respond when a student has trouble learning? How we respond and react to learning difficulty is crucial. We need to identify and then immediately address student needs and what solutions the PLC can provide. Collaboration is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work at grade levels and engage in an ongoing cycle of questions that promotes reflective team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement. With a focus on results, teachers can analyze data and how it impacts daily planning.

The Bluffton Exempted Village Schools Continuous Improvement Plan involves three areas: community involvement and communications, academic excellence, and learning environment. The three goals are a.) Continue to build and enhance positive relationships with community, b.) Exceed student achievement expectations through innovative instruction, made to improve student learning, and c.) Provide staff and students with PD opportunities to create a learning environment that meets the social and academic needs of students. Action steps regarding communication are: to update our website information such as Progress Book (student grades), increased communications through various media, and to promote partnerships with community members and organizations. Administrators are members of local organizations and are active at community events. Action steps in academic excellence involves creating reliable assessments, providing intervention services using research-based instructional strategies and increased-learning through data and technology. Action steps with the learning environment emphasizes the use of differentiated instruction to improve student learning, teachers sharing strategies, and continuing to identify ways to improve behavior of our students. We encourage students to “do their best” through assemblies, recognition and incentive programs.

Administration and Board members understand it is crucial to provide the tools needed for the staff to achieve our mission. Our goal to provide a safe and stimulating environment in which flexibility is encouraged to meet the needs of every student. The value of continually researching new ideas, tools, and strategies are paramount for improvement. The technology director is always seeking new ways to support student learning. The structure to get teacher input in PD is an important part in sharing leadership and empowering staff to help make continual change.

School leadership believes that establishing relationships using open communication is vital. Administrators circulate throughout the school and communicate with staff and students daily. We promote an “open-door” policy to students, staff, and community. Leadership views itself as part of a schoolwide team dedicated to helping students reach their potential.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Bluffton Elementary School has been successful over the years due to the collaboration of our teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members. The foundational belief is that we must determine and then meet each child's need in order to produce growth. We must have continuous, cross-team communications to produce the best possible results.

Our teachers are committed to communicating daily with their peers. Teachers team up by grade level and can often be overheard discussing learning strategies in the hallways. They have common planning time during the school day but put in many extra hours after school. During district professional development sessions time is given to discuss curriculum vertically with teachers between the upper and lower grades. Conversations regarding the strengths and weaknesses of our curriculum are openly discussed.

Collaboration with students is paramount to our success. Clear and accurate expectations are communicated daily. Students convey their learning styles and interest through various means such as interest inventories, surveys and class discussions. Prior knowledge data is important to gain before learning takes place. It is extremely important to know each child so we can meet his/her individual needs.

Teachers collaborate with parents to receive input and understand a child's background in order to support their instruction. Questionnaires/surveys are sent home to give additional information. Parents are invited to the school several times throughout the year. Parents may eat with their child any given day. Staff will meet with parents when requested and/or suggested. Progress Book is available 24/7 so parents can view student grades.

Our community partners are an integral part of our school success. As mentioned throughout this application, many partnerships have been fostered. These organizations help provide so many hands-on, practical activities which helps students connect our curriculum to everyday life. Volunteerism is an important component of our successful model. Our volunteers supplement the work of paid staffers by increasing the amount of one-on-one support students receive.

Bluffton Elementary School understands that collaboration is the key to our academic success. Collaboration, shared with staff, parents, students, and community members, creates this unique atmosphere of positive accountability which promotes our students' success.