

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Blue Ridge Elementary School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 5778 NC Highway 88 W PO Box 229  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Warrensville State NC Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 28693-0229

County Ashe County

Telephone (336) 384-4500 Fax (336) 384-4512

Web site/URL https://www.asheschools.org/bres E-mail joallen.lowder@ashe.k12.nc.us

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. Eisa Cox E-mail eisa.cox@ashe.k12.nc.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Ashe County School District Tel. (336) 246-7175

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Josh Roten  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

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

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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The electronic signature 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. 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, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 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.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

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

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	23	18	41
1	31	19	50
2	39	32	71
3	29	31	60
4	34	25	59
5	44	35	79
6	33	27	60
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
<b>Total Students</b>	233	187	420

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 0.2 % Asian
  - 0.5 % Black or African American
  - 7.1 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 90.8 % White
  - 1.4 % 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 2019 - 2020 school year: 7%

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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	17
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	16
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	33
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	446
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Spanish

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2 %  
8 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 53 %

Total number students who qualify: 222

8. Students receiving special education services: 15 %  
65 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. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>4</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>10</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>3</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>13</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>33</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>1</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: 2
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
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.	12
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
Student support personnel e.g., school 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 16:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	96%	93%	95%	94%	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 2020.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
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 vision of Blue Ridge Elementary School is to encourage dreams, inspire hope, fulfill needs, and prepare for success. We are committed to education, nurturing, and challenging our students by using data to drive systematic and explicit instruction, holding high expectations of students and staff, meeting individual student needs, and building meaningful relationships.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

On August 17, 2020, our students began school under North Carolina's Plan B restrictions. Under this plan, students attended school two days a week for in-person instruction and three days per week of remote instruction. Students with the last name beginning with A-K attended on Monday and Tuesday, and students whose last name begins with L-Z attended school face-to-face on Thursday and Friday. Wednesday has been a day for remote instruction, teacher professional development, compensatory services for EC students, and deep cleaning for COVID-19 safety. In October, our schools transitioned to Plan A for grades K-5. Students attended school four days per week, with Wednesday remaining remote instruction with specialized in-person services. Grades 6-12 remained on Plan B. Due to an uptick in Covid cases, grades K-12 transitioned to remote instruction for three weeks in January. After a decrease in community cases, we once again pivoted back to Plan B for three weeks. We then shifted back to Plan A on March 1, 2021, for K-5 students. When restrictions were lifted for grades 6-12, we transitioned all students to Plan A on March 23.

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



## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Blue Ridge Elementary School (BRES) is a rural, Title I school nestled in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of Ashe County, North Carolina. Tucked away in the northwest corner of the state, bordering Tennessee and Virginia, our school serves approximately 420 students from kindergarten through 6th grade. We are one of three elementary schools in our district, with one middle school, a traditional high school, and an Early College. Our proud mountain community is rich in traditions and values that have been developed over time and wrought through experience and struggle. Many of our families work in low-wage jobs, such as manufacturing, fast food, farming, and commercial retail chains, while other families receive government funding and support. We partner with community organizations to provide snack sacks and food bags for students weekly. During COVID-19, our school worked daily to prepare and deliver hot meals to our families, not only for those in school but also to any individual in our district from preschool up to age 18. Whether it was by bus, car, or pickup, we ensured that each family had the food they needed during the school closures and summer break. BRES has many students who are considered homeless, living in single-parent homes, or living with grandparents, relatives, or other caretakers. Nevertheless, we have persevered by partnering with our families and continue to raise the bar of education for our school community.

In the past, our school struggled to increase student performance on North Carolina End of Grade assessments. Students were performing below state norms, and our school became stagnant in growth. We knew something had to change. In 2013, we were provided with the opportunity to implement the Leader in Me program (LIM). This program was introduced to our faculty, and we quickly became hooked! We attended intensive trainings and started our journey by changing the language and mindset of our faculty and staff, which quickly infiltrated the classrooms and the students of Blue Ridge. LIM is grounded in the belief that building cooperative relationships and nurturing responsibility, kindness and good judgment is the basis for creating a successful community of learners. By developing the whole child – socially, emotionally, academically, and ethically – the program fosters a climate of principle-centered and personal leadership. The principles of Dr. Stephen Covey, internationally renowned consultant and author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, are embedded in the school's culture and guide the students, families, and staff in building this leadership model. As students learn about goal setting with LIM, they begin to set personal and academic goals. Students grow to meet the challenges they set for themselves and become more invested in their learning. Our NC School Report Card performance grade grew from 59 in 2013-2014 to 77 in 2018-2019. We have been able to witness students blossom into confident, young leaders. Students' strengths have been brought to light that we never knew existed until we started working with LIM. Students have participated in theatrical productions, overcome fears of speaking in public, helped academic teams win competitions, and become motivators for their peers.

In addition to LIM, the implementation of a master schedule coupled with more rigorous core instruction has contributed to our school's success. To begin each day, students are immersed in a protected LIM block in which they receive direct instruction on LIM principles and work on goal setting. Students are energized and focused on learning and working towards individual goals. Each grade level is also provided protected math and English language arts (ELA) core block, so all students receive consistent grade-level instruction with no interruptions. In addition, all students are provided supplemental, differentiated support in ELA and Math Flex blocks. Students who receive related services such as Exceptional Children, occupational, and speech therapies, are served during Flex time rather than missing vital core instruction. The beauty of flex scheduling is all students receive instructional support based on current data and performance levels. The Flex model allows students to move fluidly among learning groups according to their needs. Teachers regularly analyze data during Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to determine if students have achieved mastery and guide further instruction for each group.

In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic hit our country, and schools nationwide were faced with government shutdowns. We entered an unprecedented time for education. Despite closures, we still utilized our Master Schedule as the foundation for remote instruction. Students continued to receive grade-level and differentiated instruction and Enrichment classes in a virtual setting. As a result of our dedication to core/flex scheduling, the transition to remote learning went smoothly. Our students felt a sense of normalcy in this different and unique situation.



## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

BRES adheres to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) for reading, math, science, and social studies. Highly qualified teachers deliver best-practice instruction using a district-wide pacing guide to ensure every standard is taught systematically and to fidelity. Teachers are trained in Reading Research to Classroom Practice and Math Foundations, which enables them to reach all students' diverse needs. A balance of whole class, small group, and independent instruction creates a rich environment where every child feels engaged, curious, and eager to learn. Instruction is tailored, so individual student needs are addressed and their confidence and abilities soar. We utilize the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (also known as I Do, We Do, You Do) to support learner diversity in a scaffolded approach.

Teachers meet monthly with the instructional coach, literacy specialist, and administration in PLCs to discuss data from common reading and math assessments. Formative and summative assessments are derived from multiple data sources, such as NC End-of-Grade tests, NC Check-Ins, iReady diagnostics, and progress monitoring measures. From these data discussions, teachers collaborate to plan core instruction, differentiated instruction (Flex time) and utilize a multi-tier system of support (MTSS) for students in academics, behavior, social and emotional, and attendance.

We utilize a master schedule that offers every student rigorous core instruction, plus more! Students receive a protected core block in reading and math daily that focuses on grade-level standards. Students also receive supplemental time in math and reading, allowing the teachers to meet students at their instructional level. The differentiated Flex schedule allows teachers to work on a variety of standards simultaneously. Grade-level teams collaborate with school support staff to plan differentiated instruction based on student ability to ensure mastery of objectives and student growth.

BRES is dedicated to reading excellence. K-3 teachers follow the 90-minute block framework. This approach includes modeled, shared, guided, and self-selected reading, phonics, and writing instruction. Letterland is our primary phonics program incorporating the Science of Reading; building a strong literacy foundation is crucial to overall academic success. Teachers in grades 4-6 focus on reading to learn in whole and small groups using resources such as novel studies, ReadWorks, and CommonLit. Thinking Maps are implemented in all subject areas to enhance higher-order thinking and writing. Morphology and vocabulary are directly taught in grades 3-6 using Letterland, Wordly Wise, and McKeown's Bringing Words to Life framework. BRES motivates students to read by organizing read-a-thons, Accelerated Reader challenges, author visits, and poetry recitals.

Math instruction is based on the NCSCOS. Teachers have worked diligently to develop a schoolwide math plan to ensure vertical alignment, common vocabulary, spiral review, and Concrete, Representational, and Abstract (CRA) models in every lesson. Professional development, including a CRA workshop led by Dr. Bradley Witzel, has been the foundation of our implementation plan. Funding was used to purchase manipulatives and much-needed materials for all classrooms. Teachers utilize best practices, including guided, hands-on, and direct instruction, within their daily lessons.

Teachers employ many resources to broaden knowledge within the social studies curriculum, such as Let's Find Out, Scholastic News, and NewsELA. Social studies standards are mastered by utilizing high-quality learning activities extending beyond the classroom walls. Wax museums, debate teams, Indonesian shadow puppet performances, and field trips to historic attractions provide first-hand experiences and different perspectives from local and world cultures. As a LIM school, empowering students to make a difference in the community and our world is essential. Trees for Troops, Wishing Well Pocket Change Drive, and other outreach programs provide opportunities to advocate for those in need of economic and social support.

We not only teach students science but to think like scientists! Various materials such as Seeds of Science and Discovery Education supplement instruction. Annual STEM day allows students to actively participate in various experiments and activities. Students code robots, use spheros, build boats, design circuits, and more! Student impact is evidenced by earning the state's highest science proficiency scores for two

consecutive years. BRES has a strong partnership with community organizations such as the State Parks, local businesses, and agencies to provide field trips and lessons about a variety of topics. A local weather provider chose BRES to house a weather station on our beautiful campus, providing data to the surrounding area.

BRES became a one-to-one school for fair and equitable access when schools went remote during the Covid pandemic. We implemented Seesaw (K-2) and Canvas (3-6) as our universal learning management systems (LMS). We found these management systems worked well for grade-level collaboration, cohesive lessons, and a consistent technology tool for students and families. Students can easily find and complete their assignments. These adopted LMS's also allow for creative and varied options for students with diverse abilities and different grade levels to finish and turn in their assignments. Students have choices for proof of content knowledge through app integration and multimodal tools.

**1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):**

**1b. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:**

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

BRES employs a rotating enrichment schedule providing equitable access to all grade levels. Within this schedule, students are provided daily enrichment activities, including art, music, media/technology, and physical education. To create a holistic climate, BRES utilizes a school-wide collaborative, cross-curricular standards course of study map. Teachers are encouraged to record standards they are currently teaching and will be covering to foster school-wide planning. This map is centrally located outside the media center, thus creating school-wide shared goals and visions. This initiative has also ensured that enrichment teachers are active participants in all students' educational progression.

Enrichment teachers integrate standards and activities from collaborative curriculum planning with classroom teachers and the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. Therefore, lessons not only incorporate essential standards from each enrichment area but also branch out to connect the core classroom standards. Students' participation in enrichment classes promotes character development, instills confidence, and builds resilience while creating a culturally rich education.

At BRES, the visual arts extend beyond paper and crayons. Students are encouraged to explore diverse mediums to learn and develop form and function. Experiences include weaving, ceramics, portraiture, 3D sculpting, paper and printmaking, watercolor, and pastels. Examples include: Fourth graders molding clay into Appalachian-influenced pottery; fifth graders sculpting theatrical masks for the production of "The Lion King;" and sixth graders creating portraits of school leaders using continuous line contour drawing.

At BRES, the performing arts is an all-encompassing experience bringing notes on paper to life. Starting in kindergarten, students are immersed in multiple opportunities and musical experiences to grow as performers. From caroling in first grade to self-composing in second, students are given the opportunity to explore composition. Third graders visit the community and provide instrumental performances for assisted living centers. Fourth graders are exposed to their Appalachian heritage and traditions and perform a community Christmas program. Fifth graders step onto the stage in a musical theater performance, while sixth graders leave the community and perform at the county festival and the Dollywood Festival of Nations.

At BRES, the physical education program is not left on the court. As they learn and grow in their physical development, students are provided opportunities to develop soft skills such as self-monitoring, conflict resolution, and stress management through reflection. Students participate in pacer tests throughout the year to show their growth in physical fitness. Games are played that incorporate cross-curricular objectives.

At BRES, the media/technology program has left Dewey in the past. The welcoming environment fosters students to explore a love of reading through inquiry and trial and error. Students are invited to experience literacy through a variety of modes. Individuality is fostered through self-selection and student choice. Maker stations are positioned throughout the library to encourage curiosity and problem-solving. Current technology provides students with opportunities to create and build their own products through 3D printing, Spheros, Robotics, Google Tools, etc. The media program ensures that all students are given STEAM and 21st Century challenges within their education.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

Blue Ridge uses a combination of screening, diagnostic, benchmark, summative, and progress monitoring assessment data to tailor core and intervention instruction for all students. The Reading and Math Flex times built into our master schedule allows teachers to provide every student with customized supplemental instruction. BRES uses data to drive all instructional decision-making using the MTSS framework. Students' performance levels determine if they receive interventions or accelerated instruction during the 45-minute daily Flex times. During this time, students receive high-quality instruction from a trained teacher, specialist, or small group leader in research-based (RB) instructional programs. Examples of RB programs implemented are NumberWorlds, Reading Mastery, Corrective Reading, Hill Rap Reading, and Language! Live. The programs are taught to fidelity and students are monitored regularly for response to instruction.

We use the iReady Diagnostic comprehensive assessment in reading and math as a screener and diagnostic three times per year. This data is heavily used in PLC meetings to make school-wide core instructional plans, as well as classroom-based small group and Flex Plans. K-2 grade levels use the core phonics program, Letterland, as a screener and diagnostic assessment at the beginning of the year to determine student knowledge and ability in phonics and foundational reading skills. Other screeners include the Social Skills Improvement System for Social-Emotional Learning to identify students in need of additional social and emotional assistance. BRES is considered a Targeted School of Improvement in math for our EC subgroup due to state test scores. Our EC department administers the Acadience Math and Reading and CORE Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures three times per year for extensive diagnostic data to assist them in planning specially designed instruction for students with Individual Education Plans (IEP). Our regular-ed and EC teachers are trained to implement research-based math strategies, as well as, NumberWorlds to fidelity in an attempt to close the achievement gap in this area. The English Learner department administers the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) to determine eligibility and instructional plans for our English Language Learners.

The Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAt) is administered to 4th graders to determine eligibility for the Academically and Intellectually Gifted program. Academically advanced students are given opportunities for enrichment and supplemental/compacted coursework to meet them at their current level and push them to their educational potential. The Primary Education Thinking Skills program is used for nurturing talent development in early grades. Upper grades students delve into advanced topics through the use of the Jacob's Ladder program and compacted math classes. Benchmarking occurs three times per year. These assessments include iReady Standards Mastery, SchoolNet, and program-based measures. Teachers use these assessments to determine mastery of specific content standards in reading and math. Benchmark data is used to plan reteaching and further instruction in whole and small group settings. The NC End-of-Grade assessments are used as initial and historical data to assist administrators and teachers in school improvement decisions and monitoring of student achievement. Finally, formative assessments, like skill-based progress monitoring and curriculum-based assessments, are regularly administered to determine if students are responding positively to the instruction and making expected progress toward specific academic goals.



## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

As a school, we use the habit “Begin with the end in mind” to make our school is a better place for our students. One of the Wildly-Important Goals (WIGs) for the adults at BRES is that students will leave our school prepared for middle school and will be successful in their academic careers. Our school improvement goals support this WIG based on past data in the areas of academics, behavior, and social and emotional learning. This year, our goals focus on maintaining a high level of growth on EOGs, continued implementation of LIM, and meeting both student's and staff's social and emotional needs. These goals help provide students with a positive elementary school experience, which will, in turn, keep them motivated to learn. Goal setting is used by students as early as kindergarten, where students are making academic and personal goals for themselves through the LIM program. Students' creation and ownership of these goals help make the goals important to them. Through their teacher's and peer's support, students strive to meet and sometimes exceed these goals.

One academic goal all students at BRES have is an Accelerated Reader (AR) goal. We have activities and competitions throughout the year to help students reach this goal. We hold book fairs giving families the opportunity to come into the school and purchase books to take home, which helps our library purchase new books. During Read Across America Week, our librarian arranges for community guest readers, student versus staff games, and administrators getting a pie in the face if certain goals are met. This year we adapted to our district's restrictions and had readers Zoom into classes, and students watched the pie in the face activity via Zoom. We also pair with local sports teams to promote reading through sporting event ticket giveaways and class reward parties.

Our events and behavior team works hard to plan fun rewards for students in the areas of attendance and behavior. Every nine weeks, students are rewarded for reaching an attendance goal and a behavior goal. Students get to voice their ideas for rewards in Google surveys. Past rewards have included dance parties, cookie decorating, pajama days, and bowling and arcade trips. This year we have found ways to give these rewards to our online students as well. When the students in the building were rewarded with a movie, students online also zoomed into the movie. Online students also participate in our dress-up days and show up to Zooms in their hats, school colors, or other themed attire.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

When it comes to parent involvement, the common phrase, “There is no ‘I’ in team,” helps us remember the importance of collaboration and working together. LIM is a whole-school improvement model and process that helps educators and families collaborate to develop students as life-ready leaders. As administrators and staff work to grow a leadership culture at school, parents and guardians can reinforce what is being taught at home with shared paradigms and principles. The result of a partnership between home and school will be students who are prepared for college, career, and life. To prepare and teach our families about the LIM framework, parents are given a copy of the Parent's Guide for the Seven Habits to become familiar with the program. Teachers also provide links to the LIM website and share information monthly about each habit. One of our school goals is consistent communication with families using various methods, including weekly newsletters and school-wide use of the Remind App. The Remind App has been an effective, reliable, and vital tool for communication during the Covid-19 pandemic. Remind allows teachers to send messages and announcements to the whole class, groups of people, or individual parents. Teachers also have the ability to call parents through the app so that personal phone numbers can remain anonymous. A transcript of all announcements and messages is available at any time. These messages can never be edited or deleted, so an accurate communication history is always available for reference.

BRES has also established community partnerships with local agencies to address student and family needs during this unprecedented time. Ashe Outreach ministries collaborates with our school to send home food bags with any child who needs food every week. These food bags contain nutritious items such as canned goods, pasta, fruits, and vegetables. Local area churches prepare and distribute snack sacks to send home

with children and donate items to classroom teachers for any student who does not have a snack during the day. Our school is fortunate to house a shoe closet that provides new, name-brand shoes to students in need. Donations from members of our community provide these shoes. By fostering close-knit relationships with our families and community partners, BRES attends to the whole student's needs rather than just the educational needs.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

School culture refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions. Positive school culture is more than a curriculum or participating in team-building activities. Culture goes a lot deeper into the perspectives staff members have of themselves, of each other and the students. When entering the doors of BRES, it does not take long to “feel” the underlying culture and value of our school. Our culture is one of leadership, respect, collegiality, and love. Many people equate leadership with a formal position of authority. However, at BRES, we believe anyone can be a leader by intentionally leading oneself to work with and encourage greatness in others.

To ensure our teachers feel valued and supported, our school promotes emotional bank account deposits among the staff. A small bucket is placed in the front office, where people drop in complimentary or encouraging notes about one another. Our principal shares the deposits with the entire faculty every Friday afternoon, along with updates and important information for the following week. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the transition to remote and virtual learning, the School Lighthouse and Hospitality Action Teams (HAT) collaborated to create BRES Buddies. This initiative is our own version of secret pals, implemented to boost morale and bring love and positivity during a very stressful time. Notes of encouragement, small gifts, and treats are delivered to our buddies at least once per week to brighten their day. The HAT works to spread positivity around the school, boosting school culture and morale. The team plans and provides monthly activities, special treats, and social events for staff. For example, the team recognizes staff appreciation days, special life events such as births and weddings. They also provide sweet treats monthly, stress reliever activities, and holiday and end-of-year celebrations. Our goal is to spread joy, kindness, and love to our staff, so they feel less stressed and more appreciated each day. During school closures, the HAT continued this leadership service for the staff. Taking care of one another is our passion and what makes our staff a family. As we navigated uncharted territory, BRES relied on teacher leaders to provide professional development opportunities for the staff. Teachers shared their technological expertise with faculty by recording help videos or providing mini-trainings for colleagues. BRES persevered through each challenge presented to us because we support and trust our colleagues. We are a true team.

### **4. School Leadership:**

As a LIM school, our philosophy is everyone is a leader, and everyone has “genius.” This paradigm of belief allows administrators, teachers, and support staff to embrace leadership roles in various leadership action teams. The School Lighthouse Team is responsible for implementing LIM and improving the overall school academic and behavioral environment. During meetings, data is reviewed and used to create school goals. The Behavior Team establishes behavior policies, procedures, and student celebration activities. This committee progress monitors discipline data and adjusts behavior goals as needed for whole groups or specific students. The Hospitality Team oversees staff functions, including social events, staff recognition, and condolences. Every staff member contributes to the hospitality fund, which helps provide staff celebrations and appreciation activities. The Events Team oversees the formation of school and community events such as Fall Festival, Field Day, EOG Pep Rally and plans a Winter Wonderland celebration. Each action team recognizes that every member has unique strengths and talents and values open communication to ensure that every decision positively affects student achievement.

Having a focus on leadership doesn't end with staff. Our LIM program emphasizes how students can lead in the school and community beginning in kindergarten. With that in mind, our school has a Student Lighthouse Team. The members are chosen by their classmates and meet with the school counselor weekly. During these meetings, they plan school events such as the annual Leadership Day Program, Red Ribbon Anti-Drug and Bullying Program, and dress-up days for school-wide celebrations. This team participates in service-learning projects to help local organizations within our community, such as the homeless shelter,

Operation Christmas Child, and animal shelters.

BRES has taken the idea of a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) to a new level and added students. As a LIM school, it's important that students have opportunities to lead in new areas. The Parent-Teacher-Student Organization (PTSO) focuses on student, staff, and community needs. This organization hosts a huge back-to-school bash at the beginning of August and provides backpacks filled with school supplies for those in need. This organization helps promote school spirit and unity.

At BRES, we believe that a high level of collaboration among staff and school administrators helps create a culture that improves teaching and learning. Our school district implements professional learning communities (PLCs), promoting collaboration among grade levels and vertical alignment. During these meetings, teachers share best practices that are responsive to student needs, reflect on their teaching experience, and respond to the needs within their shared community.

## **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

At BRES, we value education and build on the premise that all people, regardless of their cultures or special circumstances, are entitled to a quality education so they can become productive, contributing citizens in our society. Inside our school, we allow our students to transcend social, physical, economic, and cultural barriers to pursue their dreams and become functioning global citizens. Our teachers are sensitive to their students' cultural and academic differences and create culturally sensitive learning communities, develop positive teacher-student-parent relationships, design lessons that motivate all students to learn, and implement those lessons using differentiated instructional strategies to maximize student learning.

At the beginning of the year, teachers invest a lot of time getting to know each student and family. This sets a positive, professional tone and forms a friendly foundation for ongoing home-school communication throughout the year. Because our school uses the LIM program, we spend the first 10 days of school focusing entirely on leadership habits, leadership roles, and learning styles. These lessons allow valuable insight into each child and help the teacher uncover the students' different learning needs and preferences. Once this information is obtained, teachers design lessons that motivate and encourage students to succeed. At BRES, we do not believe in the "one-size-fits-all approach." BRES teachers adjust their delivery of content by offering a variety of instructional techniques suitable for diverse learners, such as peer group learning, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, community problem solving, and self-directed learning.

With the multitude of social movements and current events going on around our world at BRES, we know students need to learn about the world around them. We believe that part of our job as educators is to prepare them for the realities of the world outside the classroom walls. We want students to leave classrooms knowledgeable and critical, and hopeful for the future. Our teachers offer a classroom of positivity, so students have a place where they feel safe and educated about the events taking place around them. Our teachers utilize resources such as Newsela, which differentiates informational reading levels and filters news stories not by topic but by grade level so that articles are suited to the students' emotional stages. Newsela helps to adjust levels so stories are age-appropriate without shying away from particular topics and allow teachers to help students read critically to tease apart the true from the questionable and the false.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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The most instrumental socio-emotional practice that has helped Blue Ridge continue to educate and support our students through Covid-19 closures successfully is The Leader in Me Program. This program is based on Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. The seven habits are Be Proactive, Begin with the End in Mind, Put First Things First, Think Win-Win, Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood, Synergize, and Sharpen the Saw. The use of The Leader in Me Seven Habits has been propelled from good practice to being vital for survival.

Being proactive and putting first things first was essential for remote and online learning. The students had to become more self-reliant in logging in to Zoom sessions as well as completing assignments at home. We taught students to begin with the end in mind and make a plan of what they needed to accomplish each day. As stakeholders in a child's life, thinking win-win, seeking first to understand, and synergizing for the benefit of the child had to be done. Families, faculty, and staff became a team and came together to make things happen for our children. We not only had to provide them a quality education but also ensure that more basic skills were addressed. Our cafeteria staff and bus drivers worked hard to deliver much-needed meals to students while they were unable to leave their homes. They synergized with teachers to be certain that every child had that fundamental need taken care of – we were not going to let one child slip through the cracks. Our administration, school nurse, and school counselor worked around the clock to provide emotional and physical support to students facing uncertain home situations. Our enrichment team stepped up to provide children and families opportunities to sharpen the saw. They provided choice boards that incorporated art, music, and exercise while students were at home.

Despite all the stress and uncertainty, you can always find a silver lining. Never before has our school been such a team. People are stepping out of their normal roles and taking on whatever task needs to be accomplished to ensure our school's health and well-being. Resilience, integrity, and perseverance are at the heart of the Leader in Me program. During this pandemic, those virtues have become more important than ever. That is the heart of Blue Ridge Elementary School.