

2019 National Blue Ribbon Schools Tips for Completing the Application

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program is providing the following suggestions to help schools complete the 2019 application. They include general tips, as well as a deeper explanation of what NBRSS would like to see addressed in each question.

General Tips

Audience: NBRSS applications become public and are posted on the program's website if a school wins the award. Please keep in mind that your eventual audience will likely include many people who are unfamiliar with your school. Readers may include the media, parents (from your school and other schools), and other education professionals.

Grammar/Spelling: NBRSS strongly recommends first writing your responses in Word or another word processor, then cutting and pasting your responses into the online application. This will assist you with proofreading since not all internet browsers have a built-in spell check.

Formatting: Do not copy and paste directly from a word processing program into the online form. Word and other word processing programs replace real characters, such as quotation marks, with proprietary "curly" quotation marks that can only be read by the specific word processing software. These characters show up on web pages as little boxes or nonsensical characters such as "€". **To avoid this problem, please use a standard text editor** such as <https://notepad-plus-plus.org> or [windows notepad](#) to "translate" your word processing document into plain text. Copy any text from a word processing program into one of these notepads, then copy the text from the notepad into your online application. This will allow you to print out your application without strange characters or missing material.

Previously Winning Applications: While it can be helpful to read applications from previous years to see how schools responded, the application changes each year. Older applications should be used for reference only, not as guides for how to respond to a given question.

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

Word Counts: All word counts in the application are approximate. You will not be penalized for going over the limit by small amounts, but you will be asked to rewrite if you go over it significantly. Please try to be succinct and to the point.

Additional Notes:

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

The NBRSS Program strongly encourages schools to have an outside reader with excellent grammatical skills edit and proof the final application before it is submitted, especially if several people contributed to writing application sections.

As always, if you have questions or need assistance in accessing the online application, please contact the NBRSS technical assistance team for help.

Email: ContactUs@NationalBlueRibbonSchools.com
Phone: 800-258-0802 or 603-422-8888

Tips by Application Section

Part II – Demographics

Prekindergarten enrollment: Schools should only include prekindergarten students if the school is responsible for the program. If a district-wide prekindergarten program is housed at the school, but it is administered separately, it should not be considered part of the school.

Racial/ethnic composition: If exact percentages are unknown, the school should do its best to estimate. If the school believes some students do not fit into the provided categories, the best available fit should be chosen.

Number of FTE Staff: Please read the examples provided in the application for assistance with choosing the most appropriate category. If it is still unclear which category a staff member belongs in, the school should choose the category that seems like the best overall fit.

Part III – Summary

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

Stand-out responses:

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

Part IV – Curriculum and Instruction

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

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

The response should **NOT** describe a commercial curriculum, although mentioning one by title is okay.

Secondary schools must make connections between the core curriculum and college/career readiness.

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

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

Stand-out responses:

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

Part IV – Curriculum and Instruction

2. Other Curriculum Areas

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

Stand-out responses:

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

3. Special Populations

What NBRS is looking for: A response that provides a comprehensive overview of how the school meets the needs of diverse learners. The response should focus on instruction, interventions, and assessments. At a minimum, every school should discuss the needs of students who are performing below and above grade level. Students with disabilities, English language learners, migrant students, or students with unusual/exceptional needs (e.g., a highly mobile military population) should also be addressed when they form a significant part of the student body. Determination of how many students represent a significant portion is up to each school, but the NBRS program suggests 10 percent as a minimum. Any achievement gaps of more than 10 points between all students and the populations discussed must also be addressed.

Stand-out responses:

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

Part V – School Supports

1. School Climate/Culture

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

Stand-out responses:

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

2. Engaging Families and Communities

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

Stand-out responses:

- Provide concrete examples.
- Encompass family **and** community.
- Provide connections between activities and student success and/or school improvement.

Part V – School Supports

3. Professional Development

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

Stand-out responses:

- Demonstrate the school has a thoughtful approach in place that draws from many sources.
- Describe how activities reflect and align with the school's goals and challenges.
- Use clear, concise examples of how activities impact staff capacity, student achievement, and/or school improvement.
- Focus on teachers and administrators.

4. School Leadership

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

Stand-out responses:

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

Part VI – Strategies for Academic Success

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

Stand-out responses:

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

**2019 National Blue Ribbon Schools
Application Style Sheet**

Grammar/Punctuation

Numbers: Should be written out if the first word in a sentence. Numerals can be used elsewhere.

One hundred percent of the staff agreed to stay late. In reading, 90 percent of students are proficient.

Quotation marks: Place *periods and commas* inside closing single or double quotation marks.

Spacing: One space after a period.

Serial (Oxford) commas are preferred.

Semicolons: Link two connected sentences. They do not precede lists; that's a colon (:).

Word Choice

affect versus effect

Affect: to influence (verb); emotion (noun)

Effect: to cause (verb); result (noun)

after-school: adjective

after school: preposition

assure, ensure, insure

Assure: to promise

Insure: to guarantee against risk

Ensure: to make certain or protect

center around: a center is a point; by definition nothing can be *centered around*; use *centered on*

course work: two words

curricula: plural of curriculum

districtwide: adjective and adverb, one word

evidence-based: adjective

home, hone

Home: to return or target, as in *home in*.

Hone: to sharpen, as in *honing a skill*

impact: only a noun; never a verb

kindergarten: lower case, except in pre-K or K-12

multimedia: one word

online: one word

schoolwide: one word

website: one word, lowercase