

## **2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Tips for Completing the Application Narrative**

The following suggestions are provided to help schools completing the 2017 narrative section of the National Blue Ribbon Schools (NBRS) application. They provide a deeper explanation of what NBRS would like to see addressed in each question.

As a general tip, NBRS strongly recommends first writing your responses in Word or another word processor, then cutting and pasting your responses into the online application. This will allow you to check the word count for each question to make sure your response is within the guidelines, and assist you with proofreading since not all internet browsers have a built-in spell check.

Also, please note that 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.

Finally, please keep in mind the following:

- 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.

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

Email: [ContactUs@NationalBlueRibbonSchools.com](mailto:ContactUs@NationalBlueRibbonSchools.com)

Phone: 800-258-0802 or 603-422-8888

### **Tips by Application Section**

<b>Part III – Summary</b>
<p><b><i>What NBRS is looking for:</i></b> 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.</p> <p><b><i>Stand-out responses:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li><li>• Provide an overview of the student and community demographics, and what challenges or opportunities they provide.</li><li>• Highlight special programs offered, unique school day features, etc.</li></ul>

## Part IV – Curriculum and Instruction

### 1. Core Curriculum

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that provides a general overview of your school's core curriculum (reading/ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies/history). For each subject, the response should address learning standards and how students acquire foundational skills. The response should NOT describe a commercial curriculum, although mentioning one by title is okay. Civic learning and engagement need to specifically be addressed.

Secondary schools must make connections between the core curriculum and college/career readiness. Schools with preschools must discuss the preK curriculum, alignment with elementary grades, and impact on school readiness.

**Stand-out responses:**

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

### 2. Other Curriculum Areas

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that provides a general overview of your school's non-core subjects (at a minimum that includes the arts, PE/health/nutrition, foreign language, and technology). 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 who studies 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. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that provides a comprehensive overview of the various instructional methods and interventions used at your school, the assessments used, and how these parts align to inform high quality instruction and learning. Examples should be clear, and responses should explain how differentiation is used to meet the needs of multiple groups, not just those performing below grade level. Any achievement gaps of more than 10 points between all students and subgroups of students should be addressed.

**Stand-out responses:**

- Provide a well-rounded assortment of instructional techniques and assessments with clear descriptions.
- Use examples to demonstrate how and when techniques and assessments are used.
- Address the use of differentiated instruction for a variety of instructional needs.

## Part V – School Supports

### 1. School Climate/Culture

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that provides a general sense (and may include specific examples) of how 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 student 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.

### 3. Professional Development

**What NBRS is looking for:** A response that provides a broad overview of the school's professional development approach 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 program in place that draws from many sources.
- Describe activities that reflect the nature of the school's 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 structure should be outlined and include 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 NBRIS 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.