

2018 National Blue Ribbon Schools Tips for Completing the Application Narrative

The following suggestions are provided to help schools completing the 2018 narrative section of the National Blue Ribbon Schools (NBRS) application. They provide general tips for completing the application, as well as a deeper explanation of what NBRS would like to see addressed in each question.

General Tips

Audience: NBRS applications become public 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: 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 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.

Word Counts: All word counts in the application are approximate. You will not be penalized for going over the limit by small amounts, but 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.

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

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

Tips by Application Section

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

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 content, learning standards, and how students acquire foundational skills.

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

The response should be distinct from the response to question 3 below (Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments). This response should focus on what the curriculum is, not how it is taught.

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/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 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.

Part IV – Curriculum and Instruction

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, 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 program in place that draws from many sources.
- Describe how activities reflect and align with 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.

Part V – School Supports

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 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.