

# *Bluffton Exempted Village Schools*

## *2024-2025 Spring District Newsletter*

**On May 6, 2025, The Bluffton Exempted Village School District will have an issue on the ballot for the renewal of a ½ % income tax for permanent improvements.**

This is not a new tax; it is a renewal of an existing tax for three years.

- The tax was originally passed in May 2007 for 1/2% income tax.
- The tax generates around \$900,000 per year.
- This tax will be on the ballot on May 6, 2025, as a renewal at the same amount: 1/2% income tax for three years.
- If passed, first collection will begin in calendar year 2026.

### **What is a permanent improvement tax?**

A permanent improvement tax can be used for anything that will last 5 years or more. For example, the District has used this money to replace roofs, buy new busses, and remodel classrooms. We publish the revenue and expenditures of our permanent improvement projects each summer in the District Newsletter sent out to our community.

### **What can the money *not* be used for?**

The money generated by a permanent improvement tax cannot be used for salaries or fringe benefits; these expenses must be paid out of general operating dollars.

As we approach the end of our school year, we extend congratulations to the Class of 2025. Graduation will be on Saturday, May 24, at 7 P.M. in the high school gymnasium, with the senior slideshow starting at approximately 6:30 P.M. We hope we have prepared the class well so they can be successful in whatever career path they choose.

We wish the best to the following employees who are retiring from our school district: Chris Laue, a custodian for 17 years; Robin McDowell, a bus driver for the past 27 years; Jodie Parker, an elementary teacher for 28 years; and Sandy Karhoff, a middle school teacher for the past 31 years. We thank all these excellent employees for their service to our district and wish them the best in retirement.

As you may already know, our students perform extremely well on state assessments and consistently score near the top in the state in performance index. However, beyond test scores, the experiences and relationships we build with our students, parents, and community are what make a huge impact on the education of our students.

It is great to see our students involved in so many different ways in our school district. They excel in cross-country, golf, football, soccer, cheerleading, volleyball, tennis, wrestling, basketball, swim, bowling, track, baseball, softball, quiz bowl, academic team, math team, and e-sports. Our students also are involved in musicals, dramas, honor society, student senate, show choir, jazz band, choir, marching band, concert band, strings, orchestra, Renaissance, flags, art club, Latin club, foreign language club, SADD, Buccaneer, and Ocean Focus. It is exciting to see students find their passion, and examples of this are many: students in musical and drama performances who exude happiness and confidence in their performances; athletes who make a big play or achieve success in a sport where they have worked so hard; musicians earning a high rating in band, choir, and orchestra; or participants performing at a high level in e-sports and academic teams. We thank our students for their involvement in so many different activities, and we encourage our students to be involved in as much as possible.

Please call or stop in if you have any questions regarding the information in this letter. As I have stated before, we have fantastic students, staff, parents, and a supportive community, which make for an

excellent school system and a great community in which to live and work.

Greg Denecker, Superintendent

**District Website [www.blufftonschools.org](http://www.blufftonschools.org)**

### **Important Dates**

<b>May 23</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Last Day of School</b>
<b>May 24</b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Commencement 7:00 P.M.</b>

### **Bluffton Elementary Review** **Kori Bernal, Elementary Principal**

As we approach the end of the school year, it's hard to believe how quickly time has passed. It feels like just yesterday we were welcoming students back, and now we are celebrating their growth and accomplishments. Each day has been filled with learning, laughter, and moments that remind us why this journey is so special. The months have flown by, and while we look forward to a well-deserved summer break, we also cherish the memories we've made along the way.

None of this would be possible without our incredible teachers and families. Our educators pour their hearts into their work, going above and beyond to inspire, support, and guide our students. Their dedication and passion make a lasting impact, shaping the future in ways big and small. Likewise, our families play an essential role, offering encouragement, love, and partnership in their children's education. Together, we create a strong, caring community that makes our school such a wonderful place to learn and grow.

Our kindergarten students have had a wonderful year filled with growth, learning, and exciting experiences. They have loved partnering with their fourth-grade reading buddies and building confidence in their literacy skills while forming meaningful friendships. A highlight of the year was attending a performance at the OSU Theater, where they were captivated by the magic of live storytelling of "The Snow Queen." Another memorable event was the ABC parade, where students proudly showcased their creativity with amazing costumes representing different letters of the alphabet. Perhaps the most remarkable part of kindergarten is witnessing the incredible transformation that takes place from the beginning of the year to the end as students grow in their independence, academic skills, and social development, which sets a strong foundation for their future learning.

First-graders have been busy. They had an exciting Glow Day, where all their activities revolved around fun, glow-in-the-dark learning experiences. The classrooms and hallways came to life with glowing colors and engaging activities. Students have been hard at work on their animal research projects while exploring fascinating facts, and developing their presentation skills. Throughout the year, they have also been strengthening their academic foundations, building the reading, writing, and math skills needed for a successful transition to second grade. It has been amazing to see their curiosity, creativity, and confidence grow.

Our second-grade students have had an exciting and enriching year filled with hands-on learning experiences. They participated in SESA (Science Enhancement for Science Advancement) presentations, where they explored the fascinating world of worms and discovered the principles of force and motion through interactive activities. In addition, they took part in our annual Santa's Workshop, a special event designed

to teach valuable life skills with a focus on economics. This experience allowed students to learn about budgeting, making thoughtful purchases, and the value of money, all culminating in a meaningful trip to the First National Bank. These activities have not only expanded their knowledge but have also helped them develop important critical thinking and real-world skills.

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Third-graders have had a fantastic year filled with achievements and hands-on learning experiences. We are incredibly proud that 83% of our students passed the fall English Language Arts OST, showcasing their hard work and dedication. They also participated in engaging SESA (Science Enhancement for Science Advancement) presentations, where they explored the properties of matter through interactive lessons. Looking ahead, they are eagerly preparing for their annual *Little House on the Prairie* unit, where they will dive into pioneer life and make meaningful connections through classroom activities and field trips to Sauder Village and the Allen County Museum. It has been a year of growth, curiosity, and exciting learning opportunities.

The fourth-grade students have had an enriching year filled with meaningful experiences and opportunities for growth. They have enjoyed being role models through their Kindergarten Reading Buddies program while fostering a love of literacy in our youngest learners. A highlight of the year was attending the Lima Symphony, where they experienced the beauty of live orchestral music. Looking ahead, they are excited for Entrepreneurs Week in May, where they will dive into the world of economics, learning about business, innovation, and financial responsibility. As they continue to develop their academic and leadership skills, they are building a strong foundation for a smooth and successful transition into fifth grade.

Students in fifth grade are building on what they've learned in previous years, tackling more complex math problems, diving deeper into reading and writing, and exploring science and social studies in exciting ways. We have celebrated good behavior and work completion by going to a Walleyes hockey game, the movie theater, and the bowling alley. Looking forward, we are excited to attend the zoo for our final quarter incentive. Currently, students are gearing up for their three weeks of state testing by completing many different review activities in each of their classes.

The elementary library has been buzzing with activity all year as students eagerly checked in and checked out books, totaling around 5,000 each month. They've been excited to find the right books to help them meet their Accelerated Reader(AR) goals. In January, first graders explored the library to find books that supported their animal research projects, diving into fascinating facts about their favorite animals. Fourth graders especially enjoyed selecting an extra easy reader each week to share with their kindergarten buddies, fostering a love of reading across grade levels. March was an exciting time as students became true bookworms, competing in their classes' March Madness challenges. It has been a wonderful year of reading, learning, and growing, and we look forward to even more literary adventures ahead.

Thank you to everyone who supported our third annual PTO Bakery Bingo. This year's event was a great success with over 300 donated baked goods and lots of fun to share. It is always fun to interact with our students and their families outside the typical school environment. The support from the community is always amazing. Thank you for supporting our PTO in such an amazing way.

Our annual PTO Science Night was held on Friday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, from 6-8pm. Organizations from around the community set up stations throughout the school to help students learn more about interesting science facts and experiments.

Then, in May, Field Day is scheduled for Friday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, where students from all grade levels will enjoy outdoor activities, fitness challenges, and inflatables for the day.

Thank you for your continuous support. Please visit the school's website, [www.blufftonschools.org](http://www.blufftonschools.org), for updated information and pictures.

### Middle School News Update Douglas Westrick, Middle School Principal

Spring is in full swing, and we are excited to share some fantastic events and achievements happening at our school. As we move into the final months of the school year, there are many exciting opportunities for students to learn, grow, and showcase their talents. Please take a moment to review the important dates and details below.

We are thrilled to announce the 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup>-grade **Night at the Museum** event to be held on **May 7<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM**. This special evening will give students a chance to display their projects and presentations, highlighting their hard work and creativity. We encourage all families to attend and celebrate the students' accomplishments.

Our 7<sup>th</sup>-grade students will have an unforgettable experience at **Leadership Camp** at Camp Wilson in Bellefontaine. This trip is designed to help students build leadership skills, teamwork, and confidence through engaging outdoor activities and challenges. More details will be shared with students and parents as the trip approaches.

The 7<sup>th</sup>-grade boys basketball team deserves huge congratulations for their outstanding performance this season. They worked incredibly hard and proudly brought home the NWC championship title. Their dedication and teamwork have been truly inspiring, and we are so proud of their success.

The 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students are excited to present the first annual **Shark Tank** event on **May 6<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM**. Parents and community members are invited to witness students pitch their innovative business ideas in a competition-style format. This is a great opportunity to support our young entrepreneurs and see their creativity in action.

Finally, we are eagerly preparing for the much-anticipated **Washington, D.C. trip, scheduled for May 13-16**. This annual trip provides 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students with an incredible opportunity to explore our nation's capital, visit historical landmarks, and deepen their understanding of American history. Please ensure all necessary forms and payments are completed before departure.

Thank you for your continued support and involvement in our school community. We look forward to seeing you at these upcoming events and celebrating our students' achievements together.

To stay connected, follow us on Facebook at Bluffton Middle School: 4 Houses, One Crew **OR** visit our website: [www.blufftonschools.org](http://www.blufftonschools.org) **OR** contact us at 419-358-7961.

### News from Bluffton High School Mike Minnig, High School Principal

As we enter the final stretch of the school year, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our students, parents, teachers, aides, cooks, custodians, bus drivers, nurse, and everyone else who plays a vital role

in our educational system here at Bluffton. Your dedication and hard work are truly appreciated.

With summer on the horizon, I encourage parents to help their children stay focused on finishing the year strong. Many students are balancing academics with extracurricular activities and jobs, and managing time effectively is key. Setting aside time for studying, homework, final projects, and exam preparation will ensure a successful conclusion to the school year.

The summer months provide an excellent opportunity for students and parents to reflect on future plans. Whether considering college, military service, or the workforce, students can take advantage of the summer to explore their options. Visiting colleges, job shadowing, and researching opportunities, either in person or virtually, can help students gain a

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clearer vision for the future. As more colleges reinstate the ACT/SAT admissions requirement, incoming sophomores and juniors should begin planning and preparing for these tests.

Throughout the year, many students have engaged in community service projects. The student senate raised funds from the Ironman Volleyball tournament for the Memorial Scholarship and will continue with its annual school grounds clean-up and mulching in May. The Volunteer Club and the newly added Leo Club have been actively involved in numerous community service projects. The Positive Peer Advocates and Positive Vibes Club have participated in activities promoting a positive culture and better mental health for our students.

Academically, our students continue to excel. Renaissance program participation remains strong, with around 225 students each quarter being rewarded for good grades, attendance, and behaviors. Additionally, 131 students have been taking post-secondary courses, whether in the high school, on college campus, or online, mostly in partnerships with Bluffton University, University of Findlay and Rhodes State College. Recent academic honors include the induction of 23 new members into the National Honor Society and the awarding of academic letters to 162 students for maintaining a 3.5 GPA or higher.

Student creativity has been on full display with 19 pieces of artwork showcased at Artspace in Lima and in the Governor's Youth Art Exhibition. A senior art show will be displayed at Gallery 323 from April 23-May 7.

The success of our music program is evident through their performances at concerts throughout the year, the production of *Bringing Down the House*, the qualification of multiple students for the District III Honors Concert, and top ratings at the solo and ensemble contest. The strings orchestra also earned a superior rating at the state orchestra competition. Music groups are featured at the senior citizen breakfasts in the middle school cafetorium at 8:30 AM. The jazz band will perform on May 14.

Our students continue to work hard in spring sports. During the winter season, many varsity athletes were named NWC Scholar Athletes for maintaining a 3.5 GPA or higher, and we anticipate similar achievements this spring. Thank you to all who contribute to the Athletic Boosters Reverse Raffle, which will be held on Saturday, May 3. This fundraiser plays a crucial role in supporting our student-athletes and programs.

Parents and community members can support our students through two school drives. The Ball Metal Aluminum Can Challenge, a fundraising initiative that can earn money for the school, will hold its last drive in May. Also, a Red Cross Blood Drive will be held at the high school on May 9. Each donation helps us qualify for a *Young Minds Change Lives* scholarship from the Red Cross, with award(s) given to one (or more) of our seniors. If you would like to donate, sign-up on the Red Cross app or call the high school office.

Seniors in the Class of 2025 should have received information regarding their end-of-year schedules and commencement. Any

questions about graduation, which will take place on May 24 at 7:00 PM, should be directed to the high school office.

The last day of school is May 23, with final exams taking place during the last week. These exams are crucial, as they are weighted half a quarter grade. Report cards for the final grading period will be available on ProgressBook on Thursday, June 5.

Once again, thank you to our incredible community and parents for your continued support. I wish our students the best for a strong finish to the school year.

## ***Pirate Pride!!!!***

**Technology Coordinator  
Courtnee Morris**

Bluffton Schools continue to integrate cutting-edge technology to enhance learning experiences for students and support teachers in the classroom. A major milestone this winter was the successful rollout of new laptops for freshmen, equipping students with access to essential digital tools, including Microsoft Office. This upgrade ensures students are prepared for coursework that integrates technology into daily learning.

In addition to expanding student access to technology, Bluffton's student-led tech team, Morris' Minions, plays a key role in supporting district events. These students work alongside staff to provide technical assistance during performances and events, ensuring smooth operation of lights, sound, and other essential technology. Their efforts help create seamless productions while giving them valuable hands-on experience in technology and leadership.

Bluffton Schools remain committed to fostering future-ready skills through student leadership, hands-on tech experiences, and ongoing support for teachers. By continuously enhancing digital infrastructure and offering professional development opportunities, the district ensures students and staff are equipped for success in an evolving digital world.

### **Music Department**

Nearly 300 students were part of the vocal music program during 2024-2025. The choirs from 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades are fortunate to have many talented members. The high school symphonic choir (juniors and seniors), concert choir (freshmen and sophomores), chamber choir (by audition), and show choir participated in fall, the Blaze of Lights, Christmas, BBQ, and spring concerts. Students from both the high school and middle school participated in solo and ensemble contest, and all earned superior or excellent ratings. In April, students performed the musical *Bringing Down the House*.

The elementary music program has been having another fun and educational year. Kindergarten and 1st graders have been working hard

learning rhythm basics and singing in the classroom. In December, 2nd and 3rd graders put on a wonderful holiday program, "Fa La La Land". The 4th graders have been working hard on recorders all year, and 5th graders are about to begin learning ukulele. Throughout March, the entire elementary school has been participating in a Music March Madness driven by teachers' song favorites.

The orchestra program includes 140 string members in grades 4-12. All string orchestras continue to learn new notes, more bowing articulations, and more difficult music. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade string orchestra took the annual Christmas field trip and visited Allen County Head Start, Christmas Tree Festival at the Allen County Museum, and Mennonite Memorial Home. Strings in grades 6, 7, 8 are currently preparing for OMEA large adjudicated event. The high school strings fiddled at the Swiss House in the fall and at Christmas at the Swiss Open House. This group also participated in the OMEA state orchestra adjudicated event and received a superior rating. Junior high and high school string students also participated in solo and ensemble contests. All string groups performed in the following concerts throughout the year: fall concert, Christmas concerts, and the chicken barbecue.

The bands have had a very successful year. The 45-member marching band performed for all of the football games, the Allen County Fair Band Show, the Bath Band Spectacular, and the Blaze of Lights parade. They will perform at the Memorial Day parade in May. The 43-member concert band performed at Christmas and the annual BBQ concert; they will

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perform at the spring concert. The group continues to grow musically each year. The 17-member pep band performed for all of the boys and girls league basketball games this season. They had a great time and sounded good doing it. The 21-member jazz ensemble performed at Christmas and the BBQ; they will have their own end-of-the-year concert. The 34-member junior high band, the 25-member 6<sup>th</sup>-grade band, and the 46-member 5<sup>th</sup>-grade band performed in the fall, at Christmas, and the BBQ. Seven musicians represented Bluffton in the high school district honors band this past year while 6 students participated in the junior high festival band. The band department was well-represented in the community. Combining it all, we again performed well over 50 times this year.

#### Alex Hanna; Athletic Director Athletic Review – Alex Hanna

As we reflect on the fall and winter sports seasons, we extend our gratitude to many individuals. Mike Wilson and our outstanding maintenance staff are exceptional. Their unwavering dedication to maintaining our athletic facilities ensures a safe and well-kept environment for our athletes to train and compete. We also would like to give a special thank you to James Grandey, the Voice of the Pirates, for his dedication and enthusiasm in announcing varsity volleyball, football, and boys and girls basketball. His passion and energy make game days even more exciting and memorable for our community. Additionally, we want to recognize and thank the Bluffton Pirate cheerleaders for their unwavering support of our football and boys basketball teams. Their spirit, enthusiasm, and dedication play a vital role in creating an electric atmosphere at our games, and we truly appreciate all they do to energize our athletes and fans.

The fall sports season was filled with remarkable achievements and outstanding efforts from our athletes. Congratulations to Rory Youngpeter for advancing to the district tennis match at Port Clinton and to Levi Fenzl and June Essinger for advancing to the regional cross country meet at Tiffin. We want to commend Evan Speicher for advancing to the district golf match, and the members of both the boys golf team and the boys soccer team for claiming the NWC championships. The volleyball team and girls soccer team earned

NWC runner-up honors. Special recognition goes to Grace Yarnell for achieving all-state honors in volleyball.

Our football program made history by winning the Division 6, Region 22 championship with a victory over Patrick Henry at Findlay's Donnell Stadium. Although the season concluded with a hard-fought loss to Coldwater in the state semi-finals, the team's success brought immense pride to our community. Individual football honors include Landen Worcester as First Team All-Ohio Linebacker, Griffin Stackhouse as All-Ohio Wide Receiver, Xavier Diller as All-Ohio Offensive Lineman, and Quinn Eachus as All-Ohio Defensive Back. Additionally, Landen Worcester will compete in the North-South All-Star game alongside Coach Richards on April 26, 2025, at Paul Brown Tiger Stadium in Massillon.

Our winter sports season brought equal excitement and success. In their inaugural season, boys bowlers Matt Piehl, Colby Dailey, Emmitt Kidd, Xavier Navarro, Josiah Salazaar, Eli Nye, Brady Montgomery, and Weston Johnstone advanced to the district bowling tournament. In swimming, several athletes qualified for the district swim meet at BGSU, with Jackson Bowlus and Jenna Downey breaking records and advancing to the state meet. Wrestling also proved successful as the team secured NWC and sectional championships, with numerous wrestlers qualifying for districts at Rossford. Special congratulations go

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to sophomore Mason Shank for qualifying for the state wrestling meet. In basketball, standouts Ayla Grandey and Marek Donaldson earned All-Ohio honors and surpassed the 1,000 career point milestone with Ayla also becoming Bluffton's all-time leading rebounder.

As we gear up for the spring sports season, we are excited to welcome the largest track team in Bluffton history, with over 100 athletes eager to compete.

Due to cold and wet conditions, some baseball, softball, and tennis practices and games may be impacted.

Please remember that all athletes must have up-to-date physicals submitted through Final Forms (<https://bluffton-oh.finalforms.com/>), and no athlete may practice or compete without current documentation.

We are fortunate to have a number of dedicated coaches who invest their time and passion into helping our athletes succeed both on and off the field. Coaching requires long hours and a commitment to developing not only athletic skills but also character and leadership. We are incredibly grateful for all the coaches who sacrifice time away from their friends and family to support our community. Appropriately, how do you spell "love"? T.I.M.E.

Looking ahead to the 2025-26 school year, we are committed to continuing free live streaming of our home football, soccer, volleyball, basketball, and selected wrestling matches. Due to copyright issues with YouTube, particularly related to pregame music, we will be transitioning to the HUDL Fan App for our live streams. This platform is free to download and can be used on your phone, tablet, or smart TV, allowing you to subscribe to the Bluffton sports you want to follow, all at no cost.

We also extend our sincere gratitude to the Bluffton Athletic Boosters for their unwavering support. Their fundraising efforts, particularly through the 300 Club and Reverse Raffle, directly benefit our student-athletes by offsetting costs, keeping ticket prices low, and ensuring that our live streaming remains free.

Thank you for your continued support of Bluffton Athletics. We look forward to seeing you at our spring events as we cheer on our student-athletes together.

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**Bluffton Exempted Village Schools  
District Board of Education**

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