

Bluffton Exempted Village Schools

2025-2026 Spring District Newsletter

~Superintendent News~

The school year is quickly coming to a close with an early dismissal at 1:00 P.M. on the last day, Wednesday, May 27. We hope all our students had a positive experience in our district.

We congratulate the Class of 2026 and wish them the very best as they leave our high school for the last time as students of BHS. Commencement ceremonies will begin at 7 P.M. on Saturday, May 23, 2026, in the Bluffton high school gymnasium. We hope we have prepared our graduates well to be successful in whatever career path they choose. Congratulations to them!

Each year in this publication, we like to thank our staff members who have been dedicated employees to our district for so many years. We thank Brian Goldsberry, bus driver for over 20 years, and Jackie Bourassa, a teacher for over 37 years, who both retired during the 25-26 school year. In addition, we wish the best to the following employees who will be retiring from Bluffton Schools at the conclusion of this school year: Terri Stechschulte, an aide and librarian in the elementary for 25 years; Julie Inniger, an elementary teacher for the past 29 years; Dave Sycks, band director for 32 years; Robin Ault, middle school teacher for 34 years; and Steve Hardesty, a bus driver for 39 years. When totaling up these years of service to Bluffton Schools, these 7 dedicated employees served over 216 years to our district. We thank Brian, Jackie, Terri, Julie, Dave, Robin, and Steve for all they have done in making a lasting impact on our students and our district and wish them all the very best in retirement.

Over the past several years, families and local financial advisors have asked about ways to support Bluffton Exempted Village Schools through charitable giving. To make this possible, Bluffton Schools has partnered with The Findlay-Hancock County Community Foundation to create the Bluffton School Foundation, supported by The Community Foundation.

The Findlay-Hancock County Community Foundation has a long history of supporting the Bluffton community, including more than \$180,000 in support for Bluffton Pathways and an all-inclusive playground through the Lions Club. The Foundation also administers three endowed scholarships that benefit Bluffton students. Endowed funds are permanent, providing support year after year. The Kyle P. Luginbuhl Memorial Scholarship and the Dominic Francis Memorial Scholarship are awarded annually to a graduating senior. The McGarrity Band Scholarship helps cover

instrument costs so fifthgrade students can participate in band when financial need is present.

Community members can now give to two Blufftonfocused funds held at the Foundation. The Bluffton School Foundation Scholarship Fund supports graduating seniors pursuing higher education, and the Pirates Helping Pirates Fund assists Bluffton students and families facing unexpected hardship, such as medical emergencies or home loss. Once these funds reach endowment level, they will provide ongoing annual support. This is not a traditional fundraising campaign, but an opportunity for those who wish to give to do so in a meaningful and lasting way. For more information, contact Rachel Gerber at The Community Foundation at 4194251100.

Please call or stop in if you have any questions regarding the information in this letter or anything else about our district. As I have stated before, we have fantastic students, staff, parents, and community members. These make for an excellent school system and a great community where people can live and work.

Greg Denecker, Superintendent

Congratulations to the Class of 2026!

**The Bluffton High School
Commencement
will be held on May 23, 2026, at 7:00
P.M.**

2026-2027 School Calendar Bluffton Exempted Village Schools

August 24 – 27	Monday-Thurs.	Staff Pre-Service
August 31	Monday	School Opens
Aug. 31 & Sept 1	Mon./Tues.	Kindergarten Testing
September 2	Wednesday	1 st Day of Kindergarten
September 7	Monday	No School - Labor Day
October 30	Friday	End of 1 st Grading Period
November 24 & 25	Tues./Wed.	No School - (Elem/MS)
November 25	Wednesday	No School - (HS)
November 26 & 27	Thurs./Fri.	No-School – Thanksgiving
December 18	Friday	Last Day of School for 2026
January 4	Monday	School Re-opens 2027
January 15	Friday	End of 2 nd Grading Period
January 18	Monday	No School - MLK Day
February 15	Monday	No School - Presidents' Day
March 25	Thursday	End of 3 rd Grading Period
March 26 & 29	Fri./Mon.	No School - Spring Break
May 28	Friday	End of 4 th Grading Period
May 29	Saturday	Commencement

Elementary Update – Kori Bernal Principal

As the school year rapidly draws to a close, we are incredibly proud to celebrate our students' remarkable growth and accomplishments. Each day has been filled with learning and laughter, creating a journey that truly has flown by. This success is a testament to our dedicated educators, who go above and beyond to inspire their students, and to our families, whose constant partnership is essential to our mission. Together, we have built a strong, caring community that makes our school a wonderful place to learn.

Our kindergarteners enjoyed a wonderful year of growth, learning, and new friendships. Highlights include building literacy skills with fourth-grade reading buddies, watching “Mariposa” at the OSU Theater, and showcasing creativity in the ABC parade. It has been remarkable to witness the transformation of the students into independent, confident learners. This progress establishes a strong foundation for future academic adventures.

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 also exploring fascinating facts and developing their presentation skills. Throughout the year, they also have been strengthening their academic foundations and 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.

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 and making thoughtful purchases.

Third graders enjoyed a fantastic year of hands-on discovery. They explored the states of matter and mineral properties through SESA presentations and visited the Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center to learn about kindness. The year wraps up with an immersive *Little House on the Prairie* unit. Students enjoyed field trips to Sauder Village and the Allen County Museum and benefited from local history walks through Bluffton. It has been a rewarding year of growth and curiosity.

Fourth-grade students successfully transitioned into upper elementary during a year packed with growth and discovery. They tackled academic milestones like long division, STEM challenges while expressing their voices through letters to elected officials, and scientist-of-the-week experiments. Beyond the classroom, students mentored kindergarten buddies and explored the community through trips to the Lima Symphony, MVP Dairy, and a football factory. The year will conclude with the operation of a student-run store where they will apply hands-on economic concepts. It has been an enriching journey to prepare students for challenges ahead.

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. Students also geared up for their three weeks of state testing by completing many different review activities in each of their classes.

Middle Schools News – Doug Westrick, Principal

Spring is in full swing, and we are excited to share the many outstanding events and accomplishments taking place at our school. As we enter the final months of the school year, our students continue to have meaningful opportunities to learn, grow, and showcase their talents.

The 6th and 7th-grade Night at the Museum, held on May 6, provided students the opportunity to present their projects and share their learning in a creative and engaging format. We appreciate all families who attended and celebrated the students’ impressive work.

The 8th-grade boys basketball team enjoyed an outstanding season. Their hard work, dedication, and teamwork resulted in an NWC Championship, an incredible accomplishment. They represented our school with excellence.

The 8th-grade students participated in the second annual *Shark Tank* event on May 5. During this event, students pitched innovative business ideas in a competition-style setting. Hopefully, parents and community members enjoyed supporting our young entrepreneurs and experiencing their creativity firsthand.

We are looking forward to our annual Washington, D.C. trip, scheduled for May 12–14. This memorable experience allows our 8th-grade students to explore our nation’s capital, visit historic landmarks, and deepen their understanding of

American history. Please ensure all required forms and payments are submitted prior to departure.

Bluffton Middle School will host a Coin Drive to support organ donation awareness. All funds raised will be donated

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in memory of our dearly missed teacher, Katrina Riepenhoff. We appreciate your support in honoring her legacy through this meaningful cause.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership. We look forward to seeing you at events and celebrating our students' accomplishments together.

To stay connected, follow us on Facebook at Bluffton Middle School: 4 Houses, One Crew; **OR** visit our website at <https://www.blufftonschools.org>; **OR** contact us at 419-358-7961.

Bluffton High School - Mike Minnig, 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. College visits, job shadowing, and researching opportunities, either in person or virtually, can help students gain a 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 Eli Jones Memorial Scholarship and will continue with its annual school grounds clean-up and mulching in May. The Leo Club has been actively involved in numerous community service projects. The SADD Club has 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 250 students each quarter being rewarded for good

grades, attendance, and behaviors. Additionally, 129 students have been taking post-secondary courses, whether in the high school, on college campus, or online and mostly in partnerships with Bluffton University, University of Findlay, and Rhodes State College. Recent academic honors include the induction of 19 new members into the National Honor Society and the awarding of academic letters to 158 students for maintaining a 3.5 GPA or higher.

Student creativity has been on full display, with a senior art show that was on exhibit at Gallery 323 from April 23-May 2.

The success of our music program is evident through performances at concerts throughout the year, the production of *Dare to Dream*, 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 an excellent rating at the state orchestra competition. Music groups were featured each month at 8:30 AM at the senior citizen breakfasts in the middle school cafeteria. The last breakfast of the year will be on May 13 with a jazz band performance.

Our students continue to work hard in spring sports. While many varsity athletes were named NWC Scholar Athletes for maintaining a 3.5 GPA or higher during the winter season, we anticipate similar achievements this spring.

Thank you to all who contributed to the Athletic Boosters Reverse Raffle, which was held on Saturday, May 2. 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. A Red Cross Blood Drive was held at the high school on May 8. Each donation helps us qualify for a Young Minds Change Lives scholarship from the Red Cross, with awards given to one of our seniors.

Seniors in the Class of 2026 should have received information regarding their end-of-year schedules and commencement. Any questions about graduation, which will take place on May 23 at 7:00 PM, should be directed to the high school office.

The last day of school is May 27 with final exams taking place during the last three days of school. These exams are crucial, as they account for half a quarter grade. Report cards for the final grading period will be available on ProgressBook on Friday, May 29.

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 !

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Music Department

Over 300 students were part of the vocal music program during 2025-2026. 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 the high school participated in solo and ensemble contest, and all earned superior or excellent ratings. In April, students performed the musical *Dare to Dream* to over 900 audience members. The choirs from 6th-12th grades are fortunate to have many talented members.

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, the 2nd and 3rd graders put on a wonderful holiday program, "The Grumps of Ring-a-Ding Town". The 4th graders have been working hard on recorders all year, and 5th graders have been busy learning ukulele. Throughout March, the entire elementary school participated in a Music March Madness, based on songs selected from the years teachers began working at Bluffton.

The orchestra program includes 130 string orchestra members in grades 4-12. All string orchestras continue to learn new notes, more bowing articulations, and more difficult music. The 7th- and 8th-grade string orchestra took the annual Christmas field trip and visited Allen County Head Start, the Christmas Tree Festival at the Allen County Museum, and the Mennonite Memorial Home. Currently, students are preparing for an OMEA large adjudicated event. Grades 5 and 6 are fiddling and learning music for the following school year. The high school strings fiddled at the Swiss House in the fall and at the Swiss Open House for Christmas. This group not only participated in the OMEA state orchestra adjudicated event and received an excellent rating in class B but also experienced a field trip of around-the-world music. All string groups performed for the fall concert, Christmas concerts, and the BBQ.

The bands have had a very successful year. The 53-member marching band performed for all 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 50-member concert band performed at Christmas, the annual BBQ

concert, and the spring concert. The group continues to grow musically each year. The 19-member pep band performed for all 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 33-member junior high band, the 22-member 6th-grade band, and the 46-member 5th-grade band performed in the fall, at Christmas, and the BBQ.

Bluffton Exempted Village Schools
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Four musicians represented Bluffton in the high school district honors band this past year, and 3 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.

Athletics Year in Review - Alex Hanna, Athletic Director

Bluffton high school sponsored seven sports during the fall season. At the high school level, opportunities for female athletes included cheerleading, cross country, volleyball, tennis, and soccer. Male athletes participated in soccer, cross country, golf, and football. In total, approximately 200 high school students were involved in fall athletics.

At the middle school level, four sports were offered—football, volleyball, cheerleading, and cross country—with approximately 70 students participating.

Winter athletics showcased approximately 100 high school athletes competing across multiple programs. Boys sports included basketball, swimming, bowling, and wrestling while girls sports included basketball, swimming, bowling, and cheerleading.

The middle school had approximately 70 athletes participating in basketball, wrestling, and cheerleading for the winter season.

As is often the case, early spring weather can present challenges for baseball, softball, tennis, and track, and this year has been no exception with cold, rainy conditions. Tournament play for baseball, softball, track, and tennis began in May.

For the spring season, approximately 140 high school athletes competed across baseball, softball, and boys tennis while nearly 60 middle school athletes competed in track.

Looking ahead, the Bluffton Athletic Department will continue using FinalForms for registration and storing athletic physicals, which are valid for one year. Families can access FinalForms at <https://bluffton-oh.finalforms.com/>.

We will hold our mandatory OHSAA Player/Parent meeting on July 22 at 6:00 PM in the high school gym. This meeting is required for all students in grades 7–12 who plan to participate in a fall 2026 sport; the student's parent or guardian must also attend.