

Part IV: School Support

1. School Culture/Climate:

The culture of Bethlehem is faith based. Weekly chapels are offered and the students and staff are involved in the worship service. Students in 6th-8th grade have the option of choosing praise band as an elective option. Chapel offerings are taken weekly and dispersed both globally and locally per semester. Each class is responsible for a Wednesday chapel where they lead the school in worship. During the annual Lutheran Schools Week, the Speech and Drama class present a variety of skits and activities as they lead the students throughout the weekly morning devotion time. Each classroom teacher is responsible for leading a devotion in class on non-chapel days. In several of the upper grades, this devotion may be read by a student.

As people enter Bethlehem, there are Bible verses displayed throughout the halls and in the classrooms. Students are continually reminded of their faith as they walk through the halls and work at their desks. This is also evident in the athletic programs at Bethlehem as student athletes pray together before games. They also have a weekly progress sheet that is turned into their coaches. This progress sheet monitors their grades and their citizenship. Coaches and teachers work together to ensure that the students are able to achieve these goals.

Bethlehem recognizes the students that have strived for academic excellence. Starting in sixth grade the principal keeps a record of grade point average in the core subjects. When the students graduate at the end of their eighth-grade year, the students that achieve a GPA of 3.5 or higher are awarded the “Schola cum Laude”, (learning with distinction), medal for academic excellence. They wear this medal throughout the graduation ceremony. For the students that achieved the highest GPA in their class, we award valedictorian and salutatorian awards.

The spirit of giving is very prevalent at Bethlehem. Throughout the year, the students are encouraged to give by raise funds and collect goods to meet the needs for various organizations throughout our community. For example, during the fall, the students collect cans for our local food pantry. During the Christmas season, the students collect Toys for Tots. Bethlehem students are encouraged to give as we also hold penny war for various charity organizations. Also, students are encouraged to give chapel offerings each week. Students are reminded throughout these activities that they are giving to help others, just as Jesus gave His life that we might live with Him in Heaven.

2. Engaging Families and Communities:

Family involvement is extremely important at Bethlehem Lutheran School. Bethlehem has a group consisting of parents and teachers called Christian Parent Teacher League (CPTL). The purpose of this group is to foster relations between the school families and staff of the school. They provide additional funds for various improvement projects around the school. They do this by having fundraising events such as Bethlehem Bowling Night, Oktoberfest, Bike-A-Thon, Scholastic Book Fair, and coordinating Box Tops for Education. Bethlehem students and staff look forward to these events.

Bethlehem also encourages parent involvement in academics. Teachers post grades and assignments on RenWeb. With this on-line program, parents can view assignments for each class on a daily basis, grades that the students have received for each assignment, and any comments that the teacher leaves on a grade for an assignment. Bethlehem also sends out a weekly

newsletter, "The Crusader", to keep parents informed about the events that are happening throughout the year. In grades K - 5, parents are given a behavioral assessment for their child along with all the graded work, on Thursday for the week. In grade 6-8 all graded work is also sent home on Thursday of each week.

3. Professional Development:

All teachers at Bethlehem Lutheran School are licensed by the State of Nevada. They are required to maintain those state licenses at all times. The administration and school board have placed significance on helping the teachers attend district conferences and teacher in-service days. With our Lutheran district office being out of state, the school board has budgeted appropriate funds to make sure that teachers have every opportunity to attend workshops.

Three of the current staff members have completed the LCMS's School Leadership and Education program (SLED). This program is a yearlong program geared toward improving leadership skills with the eventual hope of creating an interest in administration.

The teachers complete a yearly First Aid/CPR class to refresh and maintain their CPR requirements. The teachers have been using staff meeting time to work through Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement by Ceri B. Dean, Elizabeth Ross Hubbell, Howard Pitler, and BJ Stone. The teachers have also worked through several other professional development programs such as FISH, Passing the Baton and 212. Each teacher is required to set a minimum of 3 goals for the school year. They send a copy of their goals to the administrator. Toward the end of the school year, the teachers along with the principal spend some time in self-evaluation to reflect upon their completion of said goals.

When new members are added to the staff at Bethlehem, they are assigned a mentor teacher. This mentor can help with anything and everything they need. Acclimating to a new school culture can be tough at times, and the administration at BLS wants to ensure that each member of the staff feels valued and appreciated. There are small ways to feel included among a new staff. BLS administration tries to encourage staff friendships outside of school.

The school calendar has 5 built in professional development days. These days are important to educators as it gives them the chance to evaluate their own ministry. These professional development conferences are also a good team building opportunity. The administration places teachers in different vehicles to ensure that they are interacting with fellow staff members that they might not converse with during a regular school day.

The students benefit from teachers that are regularly exposed to new and updated technology and curriculum programs. As teachers continue to educate themselves on the best and current practices in education they are providing the opportunity for students to see what a lifelong learner looks like. Students in junior high especially understand what their teachers are doing when they have professional development days off, and some look forward to what their teacher will bring back to the classroom. Student test scores have benefited from the continuing education of their teachers.

4. School Leadership:

The school leadership at Bethlehem is demonstrated every day in a variety of ways at Bethlehem. While some might say that school leadership is only administration, that is not the case at Bethlehem. All teachers take ownership of their school as they greet students/families at the door and help with parking lot duty at the end of the day. Each teacher takes pride in helping their students grow and become lifelong learners.

Each teacher sets their yearly goals and spends time in self-evaluation during the spring. The staff meets for morning devotions and announcements 4 days a week. This is a time to touch base and make sure that everyone is on the same page for assemblies and the general well-being of the school. As students are in two different buildings, teachers make every effort to ensure that recess times, lunch schedules, and elective times are running smoothly and if there are any schedule changes the proper teachers are notified.

The students are gathered once a week for chapel. This can be used as a time of celebration as a school when sports or academic teams are honored. Chapel can also be used for student leadership as each classroom is responsible for one service each year. Students in the eighth-grade class are the ushers each week and spend time interacting with the younger grades as they pass out hymnals and collect offering. Students in the sixth grade are responsible for being the weekly acolytes. Teachers have seen the excitement from the students as they get to lead their fellow students. Creating student leaders has been a by-product of the students assisting the teachers in chapel.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church has been supporting the school since its inception. The congregation participates in school events such as attending the Christmas Program, Speech and Drama programs and End of the Year Choir Concert. The church members have a chance to interact with the school families when each choir performs at the church. The church members consider themselves stake holders in the wellbeing of the school and several of them serve as school board members.

As the board members evaluate the curriculum and test scores each year, they work in conjunction with the principal to make the best educational decisions for the school. The board members also verify that each teacher is maintaining their state license to remain current with state accreditation.