



BEARDEN HIGH SCHOOL
8352 KINGSTON PIKE
KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE 37919-5489

IN REPLY REFER TO:
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From: Principal Debbie Sayers
To: Area Eight Manager, Lieutenant Commander Alex Baker, U.S. Navy Retired
Subj: **ENDORSMENT FOR MOST OUTSTANDING UNIT IN THE NATION**

1. It gives me great pleasure to provide my highest endorsement for the Most Outstanding Unit in the nation to the Bearden NJROTC Bulldog company. Our cadets have set a high standard regarding academic excellence, servant leadership, school support, physical fitness, respect for others, professional appearance, and community service. They continue to be the example in school, at home, and in their service to numerous organizations in the Knox County area.
2. Their impact to our school and the surrounding community is unprecedented and commendable. I have had the honored privilege of observing their transformation to become responsible, patriotic, articulate, and determined young adults which is a highlight for any administrator, teacher or counselor in a school environment.
3. I have also read the **Bearden NJROTC Summary of Achievements** for 2025-2026 and can firmly state that their significance to Bearden's culture and climate can never be expressed in words. These cadets are consistent, dependable, hardworking, selfless, resilient, determined, trustworthy, and highly respected by all. Our NJROTC program is exceptional, and we will continue to do everything possible to support their facility, recruitment, fundraisers, competitions and field trips.
4. As a result, I enthusiastically recommend and nominate the Bearden NJROTC Bulldog Company for selection as the best program in the nation.
5. If you have any questions, please contact me at debbie.sayers@knoxschools.org or 865-539-7800.

Debbie Sayers

SUMMARY OF BEARDEN ACHIEVEMENTS

Enclosure (1): Photos

1. Basic Unit Information:

The Bearden NJROTC program -consisting of 53 cadets- is built around Naval Service Training Command's command philosophy, mission, purpose, vision, and institutional values. Moreover, the program is designed to reinforce the key tenets and ethos of citizenship, academic excellence, community service, ethics, teamwork, discipline, resiliency, humility, physical fitness, and servant leadership. Through active participation in community service, team events, school sponsored programs, color guard details, veteran advocacy, the cadets learn to embrace the lasting values of selfless service regarding their transformational journey to becoming a patriotic, responsible and law-abiding citizen. This mindset is broadened through guest speaker visits from the military, public and private sectors. These speakers impart their leadership, life experiences, lessons learned, and wisdom through healthy dialogue and exchange with the Bulldog cadets.

2. Academic Achievements:

The average GPA was 3.01 for academic year 2025-2026. The cadets reached the second round of the JROTC Leadership Academic Bowl (JLAB) and achieved their highest score in 25 years of **81**. The highest score recorded was 83 in the year 2000. Additionally, two of our three National Academic Exam teams qualified in the top 30%.

3. Field Meets:

Competed in the Secret City Quad County field meet hosted by Union County and placed 2nd Overall.

4. Orientation Activities:

Visited Naval Station Norfolk, U.S. Coast Guard Portsmouth, Old Dominion University's Army and Navy ROTC, Washington D.C., and the U.S. Naval Academy.

5. Summer Training Activities:

- 12 cadets attended Basic Leadership Training and Sail Academy at Camp Davy Crockett,
- Eight cadets and one cadre graduated from Leadership Academy at the Riverside Preparatory Academy in Gainesville GA,
- 37 cadets attended NJROTC Freshman Orientation at Bearden high school
- 20 cadets attended NJROTC Drill Camp at Bearden high school
- SNSI attended Nationals SNI Drill Camp in Kerrville TX

6. School Service Projects:

- Six group of cadets participated in the HERO Card project which highlighted the lives and career of six veterans that were killed in combat. Once group advanced to the Knox County finalist competition which was spearheaded by the Mayor Glenn Jacobs and Superintendent Jon Rysewyk.

7. Community Service Activities:

- Accumulated 5377 community service hours and 1653.5 school support hours.
- Key events included the following:
 - Empty Stocking Fund
 - Wreaths Across America at East Tennessee Veteran's Cemetery
 - Prime, Pinnacle, Parkview & Senior High elderly living facilities
 - "A Hike to Remember" by Quest Movement for Veteran Suicide Prevention and Awareness
 - Gold Star family ceremony
 - Asian Festival volunteers
 - 9/11 Stair Climb to support National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
 - Eastern Tennessee Veteran Honor Guard
 - **Bearden High School Support:** Escort Details, Ushers, Mentors, Open House, Sports, Homecoming Sword Arch, Bearden's Best Ceremony, Educator Aid Volunteer, Key Club (Honor Society), senior graduation, Eight Grade visits, Pathway Fairs and set up / clean-up for school sponsored events
 - **Color Guard Details:** Color Guard details for the Bearden H.S. football games, Bearden's Best ceremonies; UTK Female/Male basketball games; Austin East H.S. Reunion; Cedar Bluff, Bearden, and West Valley middle schools; A.L. Lotts elementary school; Sherill Hills, Pinnacle, Parkview and Prime senior / assisted living facilities; Veterans Day, Rocky Hill Christmas Parade, Ice Bears, Daughters of

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- the American Revolution, Sew Fine Memorial, Dixie High Garden Club, Downtown West Blvd, Habitat Restore, Smoky Mountain AAA Baseball, Freshman Pathway, 8th grade visit, East Tennessee Volunteer Honor Guard, and others.
- **Community service donations to local charities / nonprofits totaled \$15,129.**

2025-2026 NJROTC Bulldog Community / School Donations	
Rock-the-Row for Cancer Survivors	\$3,470.00
Mountain Man Memorial Hike - Gold Star Families	\$2,810.00
Smoky Mountain Service Dogs - Goal	\$2,500.00
National Fallen Firefighter Foundation 9/11	\$1,029.00
Quest Movement - Veteran Suicide Prevention	\$1,000.00
Parkinson's Disease "Sit to Stand"	\$1,000.00
Street Hope Tennessee for Orphans	\$910.00
Terry Brodeur Breast Cancer Foundation	\$600.00
East TN Military Affairs Council (ETMAC)	\$500.00
Bearden High School Band	\$300.00
Bearden High School Football Team	\$280.00
Daughter's of American Revolution: Samuel Frazier Chapter to support 5K Veterans Heritage Run	\$250.00
Tunnels to Tower (T2T) - May 2026	\$240.00
St Jude Children's Hospital - May 2026	\$240.00
Total Fall and Spring Semester Donations	\$15,129.00

Note: Bearden NJROTC has given \$47,500 to Smoky Mountain Service Dogs since its inception:

<https://www.smokymountain servicedogs.org/>

8. Recruiting Program:

Bearden does Color Guard details for the surrounding middle and elementary schools. We also performed Armed Exhibition and Color Guard for the 8th grade visits. Here are our social media accounts and videos:

- Website: <https://bhsnjrotc.org>
- Shared google calendar: [Bearden NJROTC Calendar](#)
- Facebook Page (430 Followers): Bearden NJROTC Boosters INC
- Facebook Page for Parents Only: Bearden NJROTC Parents
- Instagram Page (338 Followers): bearden_njrotc_
- Bulldog Marketing Video: [2025-2026 Bulldog Company MOTO Video](#)
- SECWAR and HHS Fitness Challenge Video: [Area 08 SECWAR/HHS Fitness Challenge](#)
- 52-page cruise book: [2025-2026 Bulldog Company Cruise-Book](#)
- 220 Parent / Student Square Post to synchronize communication efforts. NJROTC had the 2nd most posts of any Bearden H.S. program or teacher.

9. Extracurricular Activities:

- **Team Competitions:**
 - 1st Place Overall in the Area 08 SEC Regional Drill Competition
 - 1st Place Overall in the Area 08 Drill Competition Championship
 - 20th Place overall at 2026 Navy Nationals in Pensacola: recipient of the CAPT Jim Harvey "Spirit" Award
 - 2nd at the Area 08 Orienteering Championship; 1st time in school history in qualifying for Navy National Orienteering Championship
 - Competed in the Area 08 Drone Championship
 - Competed in SEC Academic Brain Brawl at Oak Ridge H.S.
 - Made it to the 2nd Round of JLAB; second highest JLAB score (81) since 2000 (83)
 - Competed in the National Academic Exam: two teams were top 30%
 - Competed in Air Rifle Postals at West, Union County, Farragut and Central H.S.
 - 2nd in SEC Air Rifle Qualifier; disqualified due to improper use of sling in standing position.
 - Competed at Daytona, FL JROTC Nationals in Color Guard Novice

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- Fundraised \$44,112.88 since Aug 2025:

Fall 2025 / Spring 2026 Fund Raising Efforts	
Online donations	\$17,127.00
Field Trip Donations	\$7,840.00
Football Varsity Concession / Clean up	\$6,000.00
VFW Legion 107 fm Virginia	\$5,500.00
Ham 'N Goody's - FALL 2025	\$4,470.00
Ham 'N Goody's - Spr 2026	\$2,265.00
Vietnam Veterans - Knoxville	\$500.00
Wreaths Across America	\$205.88
Krispy Crème	\$205.00
Total	\$44,112.88

- **Parades:** Marched in the Farragut (July), Veterans Day (Nov) and Rocky Hill Christmas (Dec) parades.
- **Physical Fitness Events:**
 - Veteran's Heritage 5K Run in Sharp's Ridge Veteran Memorial Park
 - 9/11 Stair Climb to support the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
 - A "Hike to Remember" to support Veteran Suicide Prevention, Care, and Awareness
 - The Marine Corps Mud Run sponsored by the Marine Corps League and Young Marines Company
 - Army and USMC Combat Fitness Tests
 - Daniel Boone Leatherneck Challenge
 - 18th Annual Mountain Man Memorial Hike (13.1 miles) in Gatlinburg to honor "Gold Star" families
 - 26-mile Bearden NJROTC Bataan Death March Memorial hike in memory of the 500+ Americans who lost their lives in the Philippines during WWII
 - DEKA Strong, Mile, and Fit competitions
 - Area 08 SECWAR / HHS Fitness Challenge of 50 pull ups and 100 push ups for time
 - Lieutenant Michael Murphy (US Navy Seal) Memorial Day "Murph Challenge"
- **26 Guest Speakers from the Military, Public, Private Sector and former ROTC/Military graduates:**
 - Colonel Steve Zotti, USMC Retired, SgtMaj Vince Mancini, Alan Hasenmeyer, Civil Air Patrol, Kumi Alderman, Asian Festival Lead Coordinator, Knoxville Fire Department, UTK Law Dept and others. USN, USAF, USMC, USA, USCG, West Point, ROTC, and Air/Army Guard Enlisted Recruiters.

10. **Unit Goals:**

- **Achieved:**
 - Distinguished Unit for the 17th consecutive year
 - Most Outstanding Unit for the 3rd consecutive year
 - Donate over \$10K to various charities and veteran support organizations: \$15,129 donated.
 - Accumulate 5K+ in community service hours and average 130 hours per cadet
 - Ensure 75% of cadets are CPR certified through CPR Choice
 - Earn at **Top 5 National** ranking for the 2nd time in school history: To be determined
 - Earn an overall outstanding on the Area Manager's Inspection
 - More Instagram followers: 338 in 2026 vs. 269 in 2025
 - 50% of seniors have selected a Military Pathway in the Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force. Three ROTC scholarships and one enlistment. Three of four remaining seniors are not medically qualified for the military and one senior is attending a vocational school to become a welder.
- **Not Achieved:**
 - Raise \$50K from fundraising efforts: we raised **\$44,112.88**
 - Qualify for three Navy Nationals (Drill, Athletics, & Academics), Drone, and Orienteering: We qualified for Navy Nationals for Orienteering and Drill/Athletics/Academic only.

11. Unit Significance:

The Bulldog Company has 11 sponsored teams with 11 team commanders. We participate in numerous field-meets, drill competitions, parades, NJROTC sponsored summer events (e.g., Basic Leadership Course, Sail Academy, Leadership Academy, Freshman Orientation & Drill Boot Camp), and extracurricular activities (i.e., Fundraisers, veteran sponsored events, Spartan/DEKA/HYROX competitions, strenuous hikes, etc.). Principal Debbie Sayers and the Bearden H.S. faculty are very supportive of our program and although we don't have the prestige (i.e., football, soccer, honor society, etc.) of the other teams and key organizations, we have earned their respect by **setting the example in terms of service, professional conduct, and community support**. One of the highlights of this semester is when our Company Commander, Cadet Amelia earned the SSG Ryan Knauss scholarship for her 750-word essay on the life of SSG Knaus and the importance of servant leadership to **faith, family, and country**.

In summary, the Bulldog Company is honored and privileged to support NSTC, LCDR Alex Baker (USN-Retired), Area Eight, Principal Sayers, Bearden H.S., our veteran organizations, local and nationwide charities, and our local community. Our ultimate goal is to strengthen the character ethic, moral values, and overall transformational development of our future leaders as proud, patriotic and servant leaders of society. We are proud of our cadets, privileged to have the great support from Principal Debbie Sayers and the Bearden faculty, and fortunate to have a proactive Booster/Parent team.

- **Instructor Collateral Duties:**

- SNSI serves as Lead Drill Coordinator for Area Eight
- School Department Head and Leadership Team members
- Co-Lead Coordinator for Volunteer Security for the Asian Festival which supports ~ 60K patrons
- Reunification Co-Lead for Emergency Evacuation and Active Shooter Plan.

- **School Support from Principal Debbie Sayers:**

- Provided NJROTC with a designated 100'x 100' area for drill, drone, and color guard practices
- Funded and maintains a Porta-Jon for NJROTC due to infrastructure challenges
- Paying for the NJROTC building to be repainted
- Partially funded the travel cost to attend Navy Nationals in Pensacola
- Recognizes the achievements of the Bulldog cadets at every senior graduation
- Meets with the NS2-4 cadets annually for a 360-leadership review on school policies.

12. Unexpected Challenges:

- **NJROTC Booster / NJROTC Audit:** Findings revealed four discrepancies which led to unfavorable media coverage. No theft, fraud, waste, abuse, counseling, or administrative / disciplinary action resulted from the inquiry...all procedural errors have been reconciled and corrected. Despite the findings, the booster team and parents rallied together and have doubled our booster membership since the report aired in late March.
- **Instructor Retention:** NSI voluntarily resigned due to unforeseen circumstances. Despite the unexpected loss, the cadets remained resilient regarding their commitment, dedication, and support for the program.

13. If you have any questions, please contact Colonel Andre Harrell at 951-541-7486 / andre.harrell@knoxschools.org .