



WE
Can



OHIO CROSS COUNTRY
STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS
Where Legends Are Born!



Quality Profile

for the 2020-21 School Year

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Lak@ta
Local Schools

WE are
vators



WE ARE LOOKING BACK

Everything WE do is designed to provide a future-ready, student-centered learning experience for every single child.

This is the mission of Lakota Local Schools and is at the center of every decision we make. It's why we worked tirelessly throughout the summer of 2020 to create a plan to reopen our schools for in-person learning, while also offering a brand new, Lakota-created virtual learning option for the 2020-2021 school year. And it worked.

In this year's Quality Profile, we look back at a school year like no other. One where, despite the many obstacles that COVID-19 presented, WE were able to persevere. WE continued to meet the diverse needs of our students under extenuating circumstances, all while remaining

personalized, future ready, fiscally responsible and in this together.

The 2020-2021 school year is a testament to how WE were able to come together as a school, as a district, and as a community, to support our students and staff. This annual publication is an opportunity for us to share highlights and information from the previous school year with you, our community. As you look back on the last school year, you'll also get a peek at what's to come this year.

I hope that you find this Quality Profile informative and celebrate with us all the achievements that our students, teachers and staff accomplished last year.

As always, WE are grateful for the support that you give Lakota Local Schools and our kids.

Matthew J. Miller
Superintendent/CEO

State, National and International Awards



Lakota Schools Receive Purple Star Designation

The Ohio Department of Education selected Adena Elementary and Lakota East High School as 2021 Purple Star designees for their outstanding commitment to serving military-connected students and families in their schools.



Step Up to Quality

Lakota's preschool program continued to be awarded five stars by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Ohio Department of Education's Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) rating program.



Student Work Featured at OSBA Capital Conference

The Ohio School Boards Association's Capital Conference featured three Lakota videos showing student achievement/experiences during its virtual Student Achievement Fair. The videos highlighted personalized learning options, the Lakota Work Study Program and the Cyber Academy.



OHSPRA Achievement Awards

Lakota received four top awards from the Ohio School Public Relations Association for exemplary work. Lakota's communications plan for the 2020-2021 school year won the "Best of the Best" award. Entitled "WE are Prepared: A Responsible Reopening Plan," the report covered all aspects of the school year that was highly impacted by the COVID pandemic.

The district's e-newsletter (A Look Around Lakota) also earned a "Mark of Excellence" award. Lakota won two additional "Mark of Excellence" awards for its videos: "We Can: Persevering through a Pandemic" and "Super in 60."



Lakota's executive team pictured with Team Inspire, the district's innovation specialists.

Technology & Innovation Award

Lakota Local Schools was one of just three school districts worldwide to earn the "2020 Distinguished District Award" from the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). The award recognizes districts that are moving the needle in big ways by demonstrating effectiveness and innovation in the application of educational technology.



Treasurer Jenni Logan accepts Auditor of State Award.

Auditor of State Award

Fewer than 5 percent of all entities that are audited annually earn the "Auditor of State Award with Distinction" – and Lakota has received the honor six years in a row. The award recognizes the district's commitment to fiscal responsibility and transparency.



WE are Achieving Excellence

LAKOTA SNAPSHOT

Lakota is the largest suburban public school district in southwest Ohio serving West Chester and Liberty townships.

24 schools, grades pre-K-12

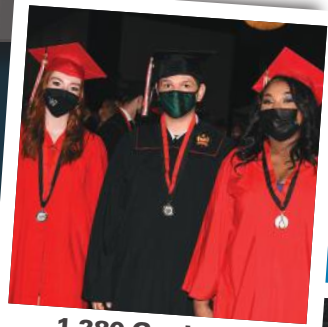
63 square miles

OUR EMPLOYEES

64% Worked at Lakota 5+ years

78% Teachers with advanced degrees

13 Average years of teaching



1,280 Graduates
- Class of 2021 -



38% of students are non-caucasian or of a different ethnic background



1,872 Employees



98.3% Graduation Rate



16,800 Students

LAST YEAR IN REVIEW

Last year, Lakota Local Schools was one of very few districts statewide to maintain in-person learning for the entire school year.

The year's challenges and "WE Can" attitude among students and staff set a tone of perseverance and innovation that will carry the district into the future.



Even with masks and at least three feet or a screen between them at all times, teachers and staff discovered unique ways to continue providing a personalized education. A staggered start gave teachers more time to build a solid foundation with their students. Many classrooms turned to more outdoor learning, which doubled as a mask break and new options for learning and exploring. Even options like daily lunch gatherings, virtual celebrations and family read-alouds, for example, helped virtual learners stay connected.

For the first half of the year, quarantines among both students and staff were a major line of defense against the spread of COVID-19 and became a regular occurrence in our community and our schools. Yet staff came together and found ways to overcome staff shortages and keep students learning even while in quarantine. Lakota joined eight other districts across the state to participate in an evaluation that proved the effectiveness of masks in a school setting to prevent spread and ultimately loosened quarantine requirements for all Ohio schools.

Before the school year started, Lakota began the massive undertaking to develop a fully-online K-12 education option for families, better known as the Virtual Learning Option (VLO).

Some of Lakota's teachers worked with the curriculum team to design online materials for all K-6 core courses and 30 model courses for grades 7-12. The process used district resources and Lakota's curriculum instead of the popular alternative of a third party software. Some of the tools and resources proved useful for in-person learning too.

All year long, Lakota schools and the district reinvented events like open houses, coffee chats, fundraisers and the district's "State of the Schools" to continue virtually. Although different, they brought people together and kept them engaged in our schools.



June 26, 2020
Virtual Learning Option (VLO) launches. VLO served over 4,000 students during first semester.

July 31, 2020
Board approves Plan A. Plan allowed for full-time, in-person option with added safety precautions.

September 3, 2020
Meal program for VLO students kicks off. Lakota distributed nearly 58,000 meals to VLO students last year.

September 12, 2020
All students eligible for USDA free meal waiver.

June 30, 2020
"WE are Prepared" ABC plan announced. Lakota's mask requirement preceded the state mandate.

August 17, 2020
School year begins. Staggered start eases students and staff into new procedures.

September 8, 2020
COVID-19 dashboard launches.

LAKOTA SELECTED FOR STATE COVID EVALUATION

Last fall, Lakota was one of nine districts statewide selected to participate in a public health evaluation about classroom spread of COVID-19.

The Ohio COVID-19 School Evaluation (OCSE) testing program, led by The Ohio State University, provided public health experts and elected officials with more scientific data regarding school-related quarantines. More specifically, the study assessed whether students identified as close contacts to an individual testing positive for COVID should be required to quarantine when wearing masks correctly.

THE FINDINGS

- 728** student participants
- 1,494** tests performed
- >97%** of children who wore masks correctly in the classroom avoided COVID-19



Ultimately, the evaluation proved the effectiveness of masks in controlling the spread of COVID-19 in schools. Children who were close contacts and appropriately masked had rates of COVID-19 that were similar to children with no known COVID-19 exposure in school.

As a result, beginning in January 2021, the quarantine requirement for properly masked close contacts in school was lifted, allowing Ohio schools to keep more students in the classroom learning.



January 4-15, 2021
Remote learning and staggered start following return from winter break.

February 3, 2021
Lakota staff offered first dose of COVID-19 vaccination.



May 19-21, 2021
East and West hold in-person graduations.

November 16, 2020
Lakota begins state evaluation reviewing school quarantines. One of nine districts statewide selected to participate.

January 6, 2021
Findings of state evaluation on school quarantines lifts mandates for close contacts wearing a mask.

March 11, 2021
Continuation of VLO in 2021-2022 announced.

May 20, 2021
Last day of school. Lakota one of few districts statewide to be in-person all year.

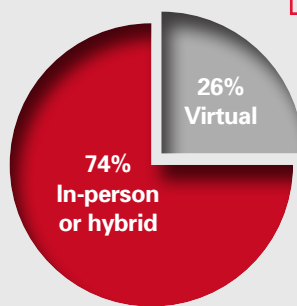
FACTORING IN FREQUENT FEEDBACK

As always, parent, student and staff feedback was one factor in Lakota's continuous decision-making process in response to COVID-19. The district followed up a series of spring 2020 surveys focused on remote learning and fall reopening plans with a summer ThoughtExchange to gauge opinions on Lakota's preparations for the new school year. The momentum continued during the new school year with a series of weekly and then monthly surveys about the return to learning both in-person and virtually. Questions ranged from safety to the impact on learning in light of current protocols.

The introduction of the staggered start; Lakota's Virtual Learning Option (VLO); and increased mask breaks and transitions between classes are just a few examples of Lakota's direct response to survey feedback.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

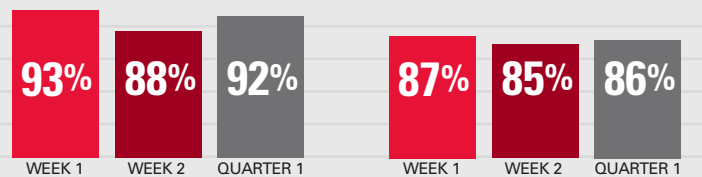
8 Surveys **38,500** Total Responses



Plans to return (spring 2020)

94% AGREE

Lakota has done a great job preparing for in-person learning or is going in the right direction (first quarter).



Students felt very safe or pretty safe with new safety protocols

Student learning impacted not at all or a little bit by new safety protocols

WE are Future Ready

REAL WORLD LEARNING

Lakota's "Portrait of a Graduate" defines the skills, characteristics and attributes that every Lakota graduate should possess, guiding the student learning experience from kindergarten through high school. Real world learning is the foundation of that student experience, preparing graduates to pursue one of the 4Es: Employment, Enrollment, Enlistment and Entrepreneurship.



EMPLOYMENT

Cyber Academy

The Lakota Cyber Academy is a first of its kind high school program designed alongside industry partners to develop a local pool of talent in the lucrative field of cybersecurity. Last year, Lakota had more CyberStart America national qualifiers than 33 individual states, with 13 students earning national scholarships and 24 seeking industry internships.

P&G Partnership

A new partnership between P&G and Lakota called "P&G Te De La Mano" provided 35 Hispanic students with technical knowledge and mentoring to help make decisions to shape their futures.

ENROLLMENT



Seniors participated in the annual Parade of Graduates in May.

Butler Tech Partnership

Lakota is proud to partner with Butler Tech to offer unique learning experiences that support both college- and career-readiness. Last year, more than 2,800 Lakota students attended a Butler Tech campus or participated in a satellite course offered in Lakota's schools. Seventy-eight percent of all Lakota graduates pursued higher education.

COMING UP...

We value our partnerships with area businesses that bring our students real world learning experiences. Coming up this year is a continuing video series in which we sit down to have a conversation with a few of our business partners.



Scan to check out Episode 1!



Arin Singer-Bonk
Delicious Designs
Cookies



Michelle Hopkins
Cincinnati Children's
Hospital Medical Center



Chimdi Ifeakanwa
Lakota Cyber Academy
Advisory Board



Randy Wilhelm
ThinkHorsepower

ENLISTMENT



We celebrated 27 students who committed to a branch of the U.S. military.

Military Commitment Ceremony

Lakota was proud to host its fourth annual Military Commitment Ceremony in person last year for students and their families. The program was live streamed for the larger community in partnership with West Chester Township.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP

INCubatoredu@Lakota

100 budding entrepreneurs enrolled in the inaugural INCubatoredu@Lakota, a unique class mimicking "Shark Tank." The top three teams won \$2,000 in seed money to help turn their ideas into reality.

"This was different than any other class I've taken. There are a lot of life skills that I'll take with me and use even if I don't go into business."

– East junior **Mia Hilkowitz**



CHAMPIONSHIP ATHLETICS

Lakota high schools have 53 varsity athletic teams, and 65 scholar-athletes committed to play their sport at the collegiate level.

State Champs: East Junior School Boys Cross Country Team (pictured on cover), West Boys Cross Country Team (pictured above), West 4 x 8 Relay Team (indoor title/best time in nation), West Dance Team (Hip Hop Large School Division); Ridge Junior School's Evelyn Prodoehl set middle school record at Cross Country USA Meet of Champions.

ENCOURAGING EXPLORATION THROUGH EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

While navigating the challenges of COVID-19, Lakota continued to offer a wide range of extracurricular experiences to encourage exploration and learning beyond the classroom. These activities allow students to explore their passions and gain important skills like teamwork, communication and creativity.



CLUBS & ACTIVITIES

Nearly 80 after school clubs and activities are offered at Lakota's two high schools. Lakota West's Hope Squad held a district-wide "Walk 4 Hope" to underscore the importance of mental wellness at all ages. Ridge Junior School students were champs in the Technology Student Association state competition, and East and West students took top state honors in the Health Occupations Students of America competition.



AWARD-WINNING ARTISTS

Lakota artists earned 10 gold or silver medals in the National Scholastic Art Awards, representing the top one percent of 320,000 submissions nationwide. Four photos from Lakota high school students were part of a special national projection series. A Lakota West artist was the grand prize winner in the Congressional Art Competition.



INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Over 800 students took part in Lakota's high school band programs. While usual competitions were canceled the marching bands were still able to perform in their football stadiums. Other concerts went on as well, with some live streamed, allowing family and friends to watch from all over the world.

CHORAL MUSIC

More than 500 students participated in Lakota's high school choir programs, creatively finding ways to practice and perform in-person and via virtual concerts.



WE are Future Ready

SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS

Sources of Strength

Partnering with the nonprofit organization 1N5, Lakota continued to bring a number of prevention programs to the district, including a new pilot at Plains Junior School. Called Sources of Strength and designed to be a companion to the high schools' Hope Squads, it empowers students to promote a positive school culture, healthy decision making and suicide prevention. Members of the peer leader group are nominated by teachers and receive special training about topics such as mental and physical health, healthy activities, family support and positive friendships.



Therapy Dogs

Lakota's partnership with nonprofit Circle Tail continued to grow as the district's therapy dog program supports students with social and emotional needs. Lakota now has seven four-legged members of the district's crisis team. Six are assigned to specific buildings and one is a traveling dog, providing support at five different schools during the week. In addition to helping students at their schools during the day, as members of the crisis team, the dogs and their handlers are called in to provide support for students and staff as needed.



Since 2018, Lakota Local Schools has been proud to partner with MindPeace to provide students access to high-quality and affordable mental health services. This partnership helps to place a licensed therapist in our schools without any financial obligation from the district. At the end of the 2020-2021 school year, all schools had a licensed therapist on site.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT STATS

682
total hours of individual or group prevention services provided to

943
students

115
total education hours provided to staff, students or teachers

836
students received school-based treatment services

WE are Personalized

COMING UP...

Expanding Sources of Strength

Sources of Strength will expand to all four Lakota junior schools during the 2021-2022 school year. This program is part of a broader prevention effort for seventh- and eighth-graders. The district has partnered with NAMI to present the "Ending the Silence" suicide prevention and mental health awareness program to all seventh-graders, as well as Cincinnati Children's Hospital to offer "Adjusting to Life" to eighth-graders.

Updating Gifted Services

Changes to the structure of Lakota's elementary gifted services for the 2021-2022 school year means the number of students supported will more than triple. The gifted intervention specialist team will now join the classroom teacher where there are clusters of gifted students. In addition, targeted professional development will enable classroom teachers to instruct gifted students as well. The district will also introduce ELA Plus for students identified as gifted in English Language Arts.

Scan the QR code to watch a short video outlining the changes.



New Bell Schedule

A daily seven-bell schedule will be introduced to all students in grades 7-12 in the new school year. Students in seventh and eighth grade, and those not electing to pre-register for seven bells at the high school, will have a dedicated academic advisory period. During this time, teachers from core subjects will rotate daily to provide added academic support. Scan the QR code to watch a video for more information.



EMBRACING DIVERSITY



The mission of the Lakota Outreach Diversity and Inclusion (LODI) department is to promote a welcoming and equitable learning experience for every student in a culture that values all forms of diversity. The three key components of achieving this are: student engagement, Champions for Change and parent engagement and community outreach.

- **Student diversity groups** at each secondary school meet monthly with Senior Director of Diversity and Inclusion Elgin Card to discuss what is going well throughout the district and in their school, in addition to helping build a positive school culture.

“I’m excited to see the continued drive by our staff, students and community to build a more inclusive learning environment for our students. Lakota has always believed in giving our students a voice, and I am proud to provide an avenue for our students to lead in this way.”

– **Elgin Card**,
Senior Director of Diversity & Inclusion

- A **mentoring program between high school and elementary students** has begun to help show younger students what is possible in the future.
- Lakota’s **Champions for Change** share strategies and skills with their building staff to better meet the needs of all students. This begins by creating a culture of inclusiveness, understanding barriers to learning students might face and partnering with families.
- LODI’s **parent engagement and community outreach** strives to actively engage all families through communications and events. Providing opportunities for Lakota and families to work together will lead to the best support for our students.

Scan the QR code to learn more about how LODI is working to celebrate the diversity of Lakota students.



neighborhood bridges

In the spring of 2021, Lakota Local Schools partnered with neighborhood bridges to involve the community in meeting the essential needs of at-risk and underprivileged students. As a complement to other partnerships the district has with relief organizations, neighborhood bridges Lakota provides another way to support students. Follow #WEareBuildingBridges on social media to help.

Kinship Connections

In response to the feedback district leaders received through the Community Conversation program, LODI introduced Kinship Connections. This monthly program launched virtually in Oct. 2020, connecting kinship caregivers with one another and providing them with new tools and strategies for supporting their student(s) through their educational journey.

38% of students are non-Caucasian or of a different ethnic background



8% of students identify English as a second language



12% of students speak a language different than English at home

56 languages are spoken by Lakota families

15% of students are economically disadvantaged*



Over **55,000** meals provided during Lakota’s summer meal distribution program

*During the 2020-2021 school year, the USDA provided free breakfast and lunch meals for all students. This resulted in fewer free and reduced meal applications being received by the district, translating to a lower percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged.

Students with Disabilities

Nearly 2,100 Lakota students with disabilities were supported by intervention specialists, school psychologists, instructional aides, a behavioral specialist and a parent mentor during the 2020-2021 school year.

11 social communication classrooms

13 multiple disabilities classrooms

1 classroom focusing on behavioral and emotional disabilities

52 students with special needs were placed at 31 local businesses, including Lakota schools and Central Office, as part of the district’s Work Study program.

Gifted Learners

More than 3,000 students were supported through gifted acceleration, cluster grouping, Math Plus and advanced coursework.



32% of students in grades 2-12 were identified as gifted

145 students were accelerated in grades K-12

126 students were in 1st and 2nd grade gifted clusters

365 students in grades 3-5 were in Math Plus

386 sixth grade students were in advanced courses

1,183 students in grades 10-12 were enrolled in Advanced Placement courses

WE are Personalized

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

COFFEE CHATS

The superintendent continued hosting monthly coffee chats, giving parents and residents a direct link to leadership and the opportunity to ask questions or share feedback. In light of the pandemic, these sessions continued virtually via Facebook Live, attracting significantly higher participation rates. The addition of a ThoughtExchange in advance of each session helped prioritize questions and feedback.

THOUGHTEXCHANGE

ThoughtExchange became an especially valuable online platform to regularly gather input on different topics, especially COVID-19, and help inform district decisions. The unique tool encourages participants to respond to a single question and then rate others' thoughts according to how strongly they agree.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

For the ninth consecutive year, Community Conversations gave the Lakota school board and district leaders an opportunity to get feedback and lead discussions about important topics like diversity and inclusion, district finances, resiliency and lessons learned throughout the pandemic. The district continued these conversations virtually on Zoom, giving participants an opportunity to interact in smaller breakout rooms.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN 2020-21



17

community listening sessions



227

articles posted to the district website



3.7 million

email messages delivered



34,631

social media followers



85

videos published



423

unique Peachjar e-flyers delivered



29,600

participants in 25 ThoughtExchanges or surveys

PHILANTHROPY

Lakota schools partner with countless local and national causes all year long. Last fall's district-wide food drive stuffed two school buses with more than 15,000 pounds of donations for our partners at Reach Out Lakota.

Lakota's annual staff giving campaign, "Casual for a Cause," amounted to nearly \$20,000 in donations for local causes.

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY EVENTS

Like countless others, Lakota found non-traditional ways to safely continue community traditions last year. State of the Schools, canceled in the spring just days before the statewide shutdown, was rescheduled for December and relocated to Zoom.

As always, the event spotlighted student and staff voice, giving panelists an opportunity to speak candidly about their return to learning both in-person and virtually. Lakota even found a way to transform the Summer Fun Fair into a virtual expo, thanks to a partnership with the West Chester Liberty Chamber Alliance.



GOOD FINANCIAL STEWARDS

Balancing the way we must protect our taxpayers' investment in our schools while meeting the needs of our students during the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging. We were determined to reopen our schools for in-person learning while also building our own Virtual Learning Option because that was how we would meet the needs of our students. And WE did it in a fiscally responsible way.

HONORED

Lakota once again earned the prestigious Auditor of State Award with Distinction for the sixth consecutive year, one of the highest financial honors at the state level for outstanding financial accountability.

HIGHLY RATED

Strong financial decisions made by the district during the last several years have earned Lakota Local Schools one of the highest possible bond ratings of Aa1 by Moody's Investors Service and AA+ by Standard & Poor's (S&P).

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The short-term injection of federal dollars in the form of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds has helped offset the additional expenses our district has incurred due to COVID. The district was able to end the year in a better financial position than was initially forecasted.

By the end of Fiscal Year 21 (FY21), the district had already spent \$3.7 million, which included funds from ESSER I and II, along with the Corona Relief Fund and the BroadbandOhio Connectivity grant.

GRANT DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT AWARDED	AMOUNT SPENT
Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF)	795,414.86	\$795,414.86
BroadbandOhio Connectivity Grant	144,597.23	144,597.23
ESSER I	1,368,379.08	1,244,308.77
ESSER II	5,324,803.02	1,585,664.43
ESSER III	11,967,245.23	—
TOTAL	\$19,600,439.42	\$3,769,985.29

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

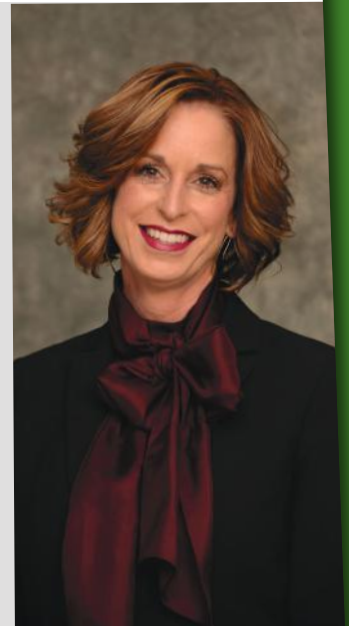
Following Board policy, the district is in the position to add \$2 million to its rainy day fund. This was a direct result of tightening our spending across departments in the face of the pandemic, spending cuts not as severe as we anticipated and aid from the federal government.

The district has refinanced its debt several times over the past few years, decreasing its interest payments by \$4.1 million. By taking advantage of low interest rates, the district will be able to pay off its debt sooner than forecasted, which means our community members will pay less to Lakota Local Schools in taxes.

"WE are committed to operating our district in a fiscally responsible way in order to protect our taxpayers' investment in our schools.

Ending fiscal year 2021 in a better position than forecasted puts us in a better position to weather the financial storm of this pandemic."

– Jenni L. Logan,
Treasurer/CFO



WE are Fiscally Responsible

COMING UP...

ESSER funds will be used to support students in a variety of ways: Expanding the "WE are Empowered" one-to-one device program to third- through fifth-graders and the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS); implementing the district's recovery plan for learning loss; and purchasing supply kits for students in grades K-8.



Understanding school finance can be confusing. Let second-grader Leo break it down for you.



Scan the QR code to learn all about how Lakota's finances work.



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WE Can: Persevering through a Pandemic

Our "WE Can" attitude got us through last school year.



Celebrating Diversity

Why we embrace diversity and support all our students.



Words of Wisdom

A monthly series featuring student voice.



Super in 60

All the latest Lakota news from our superintendent in 60 seconds.



Search for "Lakota Local Schools" on YouTube to watch more Lakota stories unfold.



All About Your School Board

Learn about the role of school board members.



A Peek Behind the Curtain

Get an inside look at life around Lakota.



Inside Lakota's VLO

Life as an elementary (left) or secondary (right) VLO student.



Class of 2021: A Trip Down Memory Lane

Seniors reflect on where it all started.