

WE *are* Personalized

Whenever Ridge Junior School teacher Meghan Lester says, "It's not about perfection . . ." her students are quick to finish her sentence. "It's about growth," they all chime in.

Singularly, to witness that exchange is a signal of Meghan's strong connection with her students - a piece that any educator will tell you is critical to teaching and learning. But that shared growth mindset also has a lot to do with the immense success of all her students.

In her first couple years of teaching, Meghan was hit with a hard reality. In any given class, her students' achievement levels for English language arts (ELA) ranged anywhere from the fifth to the 90th percentile.

"I just didn't feel OK delivering a lesson built for just those 10 kids landing right in the middle," she recalls, referencing her class's wide range of learning levels.

And so began her own journey of personalized learning. Combining her second love for math with the professional development encouraged by Lakota's curriculum team, she began to witness the power of using data to move every student forward - no matter their starting point.

That meant using regular assessments to gauge their understanding of each learning standard - then tailoring everything from their grouping to the rigor of their work. For every unit, her students are accustomed to moving between emojis, the unique system she's developed to help group together similar level learners. Those groups change regularly

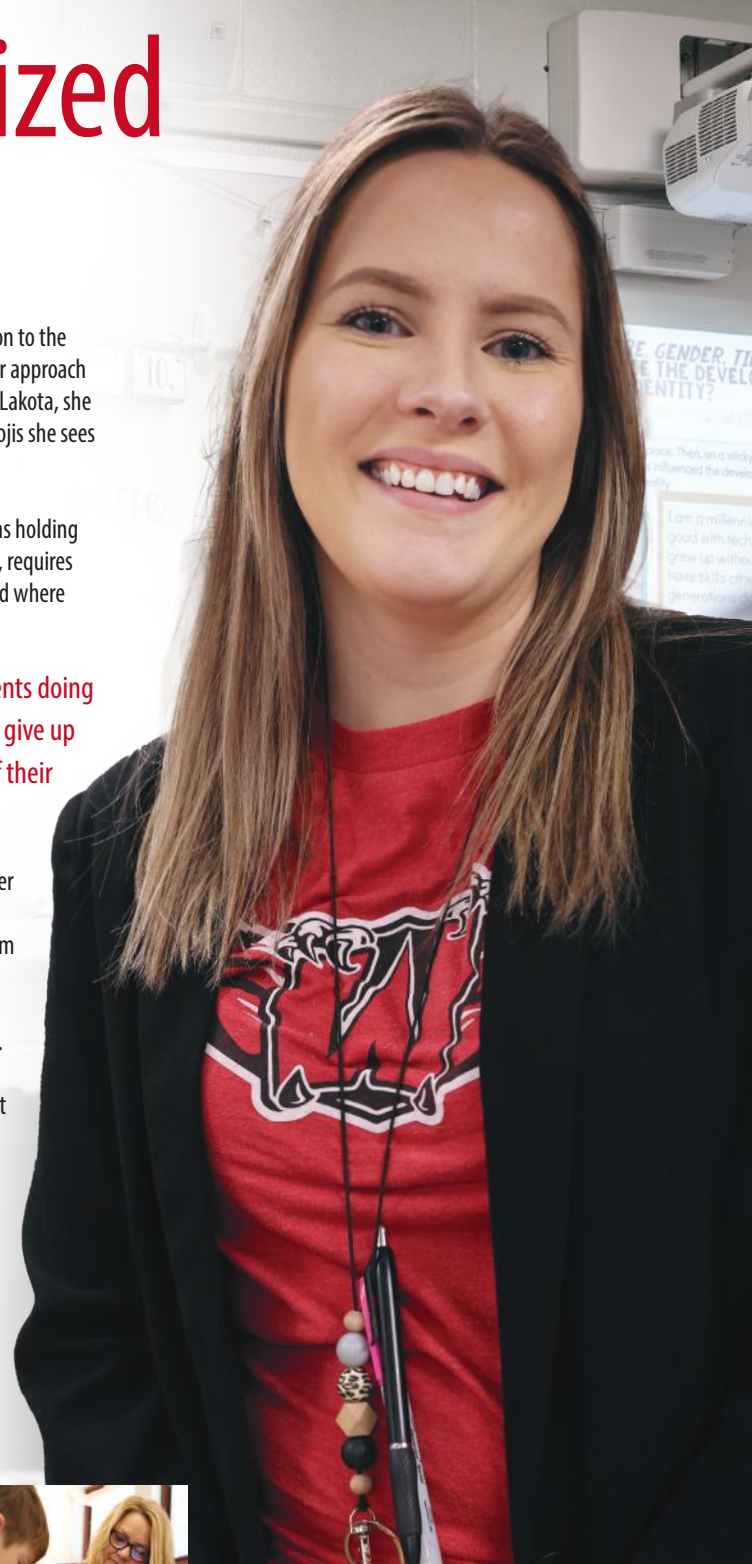
as students master one level and move on to the next. (As someone who loves sharing her approach with colleagues at Ridge and all around Lakota, she also relishes the growing number of emojis she sees popping up in other classrooms.)

A truly personalized approach also means holding her students accountable. That, she says, requires them to always know where they are and where they're headed next.

"For the first time, I saw my students doing something that they either didn't give up on or that didn't bore them out of their mind," she beamed.

But perhaps the biggest difference-maker of all is Meghan's trademarked tradition for celebrating success with her classroom communities. Whenever she starts class with the big red button, her students know something big is about to happen.

"It's more than the candy or pen they get when they get to hit that button," she explains, recalling a recent student she celebrated for growing by 20 points on his latest assessment. "Some students never get celebrated and sometimes you just need to let them know that they are rocking it!"



WE are Lakota



Meghan Lester | 7th Grade Teacher, Ridge Junior School

See pages 4-5 for other stories of personalized learning at Lakota.

MAZIMIZING STUDENT GROWTH

Teachers across Lakota are committed to helping their students meet their full academic potential.

Under the guidance of Interim Superintendent Elizabeth Lolli, Lakota is deeply invested in making a significant difference in student progress, or the measure of academic growth over time. This means identifying challenges and implementing both short- and long-term action steps to support student learning.

Scan to read the full summary of Lakota's report card action plan.



FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

"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.

One of the ways we achieve our mission is through personalized instruction. But what does that mean?

Every week, I spend time visiting classrooms throughout Lakota Local Schools. I see teachers shifting their instruction to meet the academic needs of their individual students. They are using assessment data to determine small-group instruction and differentiate lessons based on their individual students' learning. Not only have I seen this work in action, I've seen the results.

Lakota's overall third grade reading proficiency has increased by nearly nine percent over last year and five elementary schools have increased by more than 10 percent, including Adena, Endeavor, Freedom, Independence and VanGorden. We have also seen a more than 10 percent increase in the K-3 literacy scores

and the performance index in third-grade reading has increased from 77.8 to 83.4 this year. All of this is great news for the district, the schools and, most importantly, the students.

Throughout this mailer you will get a glimpse at how our teachers use data to make instructional decisions that best support their students' learning. They use assessments to determine the areas where a student needs more support and then go about providing it through small-group instruction, adjusting their teaching methods and intervention support.

ELIZABETH J. LOLLI, Ph.D.
Interim Superintendent



JULIE SHAFFER
President

ON BEHALF OF THE LAKOTA BOARD OF EDUCATION

"WE are Personalized" has been a pillar of Lakota's strategic plan since 2019. Everyone who visits our schools sees that our teachers, staff and administrators take this statement to heart by building relationships with students and doing all they can to meet their academic needs.

Every student learns at a different pace, and sometimes in different ways. Our teachers know this and are able to determine what works and what doesn't work. They are constantly looking for ways to adapt and make any necessary adjustments to meet each child where they are. We've already seen many positive results this school year.

As a board, it is our responsibility to focus on our role of governance and creating policies for our district while

letting our administrators manage the day-to-day operations of our schools. We have much work to do this year, including the superintendent search and bringing the master facilities work back to the forefront.

We are grateful for the dedication of our staff as they work to ensure that each and every one of our students receives a high-quality education, one that helps them reach their full academic potential.



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ISAAC ADI
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EMPOWERING EDUCATORS: LAKOTA'S NEW PERSONALIZED LEARNING ACADEMY



Lakota Director of Professional Learning Krista Heidenreich leads a Personalized Learning Academy meeting.

When teachers use personalized learning strategies in their classrooms, students become more engaged and invested in deeper learning experiences.

That's why the district launched the Personalized Learning Academy (PL Academy) this school year, where teachers earn a "WE are Personalized" teaching credential.

"The Personalized Learning Academy embraces the instructional framework that is already in place in our classrooms," said Krista Heidenreich, Lakota's director of professional learning.

"Station rotation, flexible playlists and the flipped classroom are part of this framework and are strategies that our teachers have been successfully using to engage our students," Krista continued. "Incorporating the (research-based Dr. Robert) Marzano techniques will only elevate this work, which benefits our students."

The 15 members of the Academy's inaugural class are committed to diving deeper and practicing for continuous improvement.

"It's been rewarding to watch teachers learn from one another, even if they teach in different grade bands," said Assistant Director of Professional Learning Sheri Simpson. "They are naturally putting themselves into groups during our collaborative time."

"There are so many commonalities across grade bands and subjects," said Becca Striet, a kindergarten teacher at Shawnee Early Childhood School. "We have so much in common because we're working toward a common goal," she said, referring to student success.

Miranda Cockrell is an English as a second language (ESL) teacher at Lakota West. As the only non-traditional teacher in the group right now, Miranda is helping her



Lakota teachers Miranda Cockrell & Becca Striet (left to right) collaborate during a Personalized Learning Academy session.

peers apply strategies in the instructional framework to their classes. "Others are now saying, 'I think this is the type of thing that could work for my (ESL) students,'" she explained. She also agrees wholeheartedly saying, "Yes it could!"

Just a few meetings in, Miranda is already implementing strategies to help her students push themselves academically. For example, when she shares her grading rubric, she doesn't just stop at the minimum needed to

receive a 90 percent; she also gives examples of what students can do to push themselves and earn a higher score, thus improving their academic growth. "It's building independent skills," said Miranda. "They're motivating themselves and pushing themselves."

Through the Academy, each teacher will choose three growth goals for themselves, applying concepts and strategies learned into their instruction. How will they know if they're reaching their goals? The students will tell them. "The teachers will gather feedback from their students," Krista explained. "Even kindergarteners have opinions and know what's working in the classroom."

Becca is already being intentional about this, asking for feedback and having her students take ownership of their learning. For example, after demonstrating a concept in math and working on problems together, she gathers feedback. "Do you feel like you're ready to go off on your own or do you need to stay with me?" This empowers her students to decide whether they're ready to move on or need additional support.

Members of the PL Academy will become "model teachers," and open their classrooms to other teachers throughout Lakota over the next two years, as well as assist in professional development.

"I'm a lifelong learner," Becca said. "I want (my students) to be lifelong learners, too."

Scan for a look back at different personalized learning strategies.





Sheila Grammer | 2nd Grade Teacher, Wyandot Early Childhood School

Spend a day with Wyandot Early Childhood School teacher Sheila Grammer and there's no question her students are happy and at ease in their second-grade classroom. And chances are, they're even working on something that stretches their thinking.

"It's important to me that they get comfortable with the uncomfortable," says Sheila who believes strongly in the power of a good challenge. That very mindset is one driver behind the 28-year teacher's long streak of exceptionally high academic growth among her students.

But when asked what's in her "secret sauce," the ingredient list is lengthy. Two for which there are no substitutions though: data and her teaching partner.

A spreadsheet with countless tabs of numbers - for all four content areas she must cover - is proof enough of her reliance on data to help group her students accordingly. She and her neighboring teacher do this work together and regularly "trade" students throughout the day to better match the content to each group's level of understanding.

And while larger groups may be the norm for delivering new content, you're more likely to find Sheila's students working individually or in pairs. "I'm a big believer in individual

work," she says, explaining that everything from her math stations to book pairings are meticulously selected to challenge each student at just the right level.

But Sheila also empowers her students to challenge themselves. Each day starts with an open academic choice time where students immediately go to work on whatever task most demands their attention. Sheila's found most students relish the opportunity to prioritize their learning and make a choice. It's also a time when another one of her favorite sayings kick in: "Boredom is a choice."

"There's always another book to read, a paper to flip over and practice math, a learning game to play," Sheila says.

It's a philosophy she takes to heart in her own professional growth, too - and perhaps another critical ingredient to her success. "I'm all about learning new things, especially if it means helping just one of my students."



Larry Morrison | U.S. History Teacher, Lakota West High School

"Be there." One of the takeaways from a decades-old training still has a place in Larry Morrison's history classroom at Lakota West High School. In fact, the phrase above his door matches this year's school-wide theme and is a daily reminder of how personalized learning plays out in his classroom.

"It's not so much what happens behind the scenes," Larry explains, "but about being in the moment with your students."

For Larry, that looks like regular conferencing with his students. That's where he not only gets to know them personally, but also slows down and re-teaches - or speeds up and adds an extra challenge - to meet them wherever they are in their learning.

He also values open conversation and open-ended questions to give students the flexibility to reflect and make their own personal connections to the content.

And while assessments are another way he tracks student progress, Larry holds one test in particular above all others. "It's important that my students understand that how they learn best may look different than the person sitting next to them," explains

Larry, who on day one administers a personal learning style test.

This gives his students a blueprint for the rest of the year, in his class and others, he explains. Larry makes it a point to give his students a space to "show what they know in a personal and meaningful way." In other words, they choose the learning method that best matches their style. He recalls, for example, a former student whose grades jumped from Cs to As after Larry encouraged him to leverage his auditory learning style and study by talking to a friend about what he learned.

Behind the scenes, Larry also has very strong data to validate his approach. In fact, his consistency in above expected growth scores places him among the top 20 percent of U.S. History teachers in Ohio. And to think it all started with a simple commitment to "be there."



Stacey Lane | Biology Teacher, Lakota East High School

To have 156 students with different needs tackling different parts of a unit at different times, Lakota East biology teacher Stacey Lane has no choice but to live by her own words: “You have to be comfortable in the chaos.”

For the 19-year teacher, that mantra is relatively new. And yet, the results it’s producing are remarkable.

Technically, Stacey has COVID to thank for her decision to pause and question the way she’d always done things. In the end, that meant reinventing her teaching style to encourage self-paced learning. In other words, she explained, “It’s about kids owning their own learning.”

That approach is best depicted by an eye-catching display that swallows one corner of Stacey’s classroom. Color-coded clothespins, each with a different name, indicate where students are on the current unit’s “gameboard.” It’s the first stop for her students each day.

Also drawing on the reality that both her own children – one an honors student and the other with special needs – fit the profiles of students who could land in her class, Stacey models her class to challenge *all* learners. “It gives them the freedom to self-pace and explore the content

to the best of their abilities,” Stacey says.

That means students get tested when they are ready to test – once they’ve proven their understanding at checkpoints along the way. And oftentimes, those tests are blank papers where students simply tell Stacey what they know.

“Multiple choice tests don’t tell me when a student has given it their all and learned the best that they can learn,” Stacey explained. “But that also requires me to really know who’s sitting in my classroom.”

And Stacey knows. She’ll tell you it’s because she literally never sits down. But it’s also because she cares and wears more hats than just their teacher. And if that isn’t proof enough, look no further than her students’ growth scores, which doubled from 2021 to 2022 and then doubled again from 2022 to 2023.

“I can grow any student as long as they try,” Stacey said. Clearly, she’s figured that part out, too.



Erin Maddox | 5th Grade Teacher, Cherokee Elementary School

One might expect a math teacher to approach personalized learning in a calculated manner. But Cherokee Elementary teacher Erin Maddox takes that school of thought to the *n*th degree and is a textbook example of why it works.

“It’s always a balancing act to make sure you’re pushing enough that they’re growing, but also not feeling overwhelmed,” says Erin, whose growth scores for her 75-plus students consistently exceed the state’s expected growth benchmark.

The former gifted intervention specialist now leads several sections of fifth-grade math – each one crossing multiple levels of comprehension. To complicate matters, each class’s breakdown can shift just by moving from improper fractions to geometry, for example. That’s precisely why Erin relies on what she knows best – numbers and data.

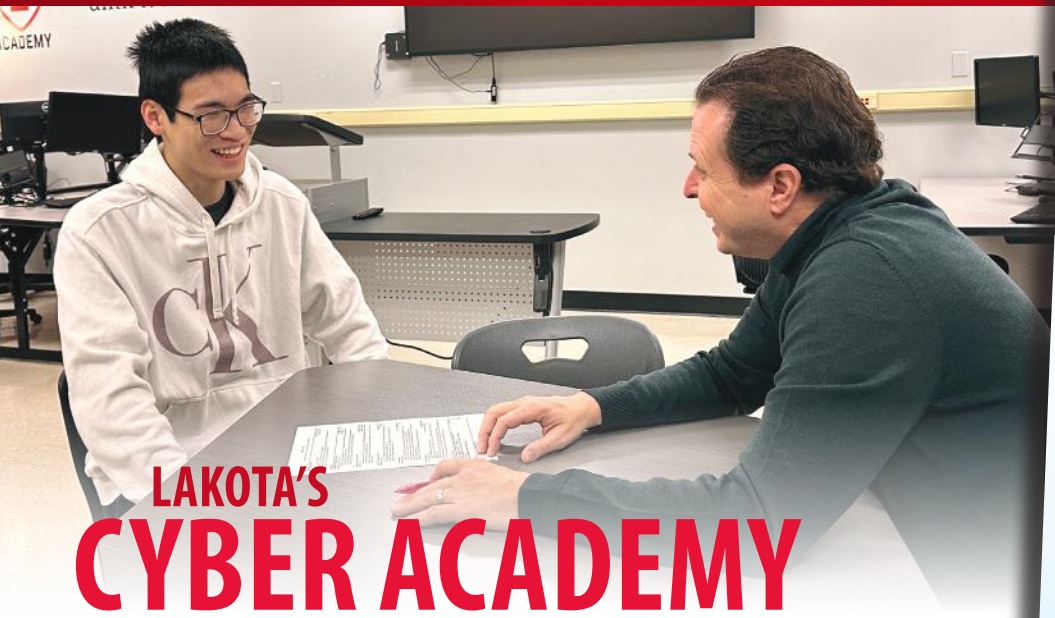
While the delivery of a concept might look identical from one student to the next, the layers of personalization after that are complex. In their station rotations, students choose the activities that best fit their learning style. They are grouped according to their understanding. Students always spend some time working directly

with Erin and they complete games and assignments that zoom in on just the right concepts. Some might even apply what they’ve learned to a final project.

Behind all the methodology, however, is flexibility too. “You have to know what motivates each student and who needs that extra push or even that extra space,” Erin says of her occasional decision to deviate from the data.

And sometimes it’s not about the data at all, but about building community. Erin starts every class with a fun exercise that requires her students to do nothing but talk about numbers. “It’s good for them to see that math may have one endpoint, but that the path there might look different,” she says.

Ironically, it’s an explanation that could double as her own approach to teaching math.



LAKOTA'S CYBER ACADEMY

Since its inception in 2019, Lakota's Cyber Academy has been garnering national attention. With over 240 students, it is the Midwest's largest high school cybersecurity program.

The curriculum combines industry-recognized courses with in-demand certification opportunities to prepare students for either a post-graduate career or continued training in higher education. In national cyber competitions, Lakota teams excel.

"Their accomplishments are especially impressive when you consider they are going up against college-level students and cybersecurity professionals," said Cyber Academy teacher Moriah Walker, who received the national CYBER.ORG Educator Award.



Design LAB

Several Lakota elementary schools are teaming up with non-profit Design LAB (Learn + Build) to give students a real world learning experience alongside real world experts in architecture and design.

Endeavor Elementary fifth-graders gifted in math, for example, are working with an industry expert from Turner Construction to tackle a real world design problem. After exploring where people or animals experience food, they are designing improved future food spaces.

At the end of the challenge, the projects will be displayed during Design LAB Week, where students will present their methodology and solutions. The process teaches students several skills like research, critical thinking, financial literacy, problem solving, creative expression, collaboration and more.

CYBER BY THE NUMBERS

#4 and #12

Out of 400+ schools nationally, East and West placed high in the National Cyber League's fall 2023 Power Rankings.

Top 2%

Lakota's best performing teams in the fall competition landed in the top 2% of 4,700 high school, college and professional teams. Eight Lakota teams placed in the top 10%.

100

Students have earned cyber scholarships since the program's inception in 2019.

54%

More females enrolled this year.

1 of only 2

National "Women in Cybersecurity" high school chapters are at Lakota.

1 of 6

East senior Jeff Zhu was one of just six students recognized at the National Cyber Signing Day.

75+

Business partners and mentors support the Lakota Cyber Academy.

A FUTURE READY CYBER SUCCESS STORY

"I graduated from Lakota West on a Friday and went to work as a full-time security operation center analyst that next Monday," said Lakota Cyber Academy 2023 graduate Colin Kline.

It's not typical for Belcan, a global technology company, to hire a high school graduate for that role. Most of Colin's co-workers are college graduates, college co-ops or have prior experience in the military. In fact, his co-workers are surprised at the technical knowledge and certifications he gained in high school.

Colin had always had an interest in computers, but didn't find much joy coding in his computer science class. Cyber 1 was a different story entirely.

He especially liked participating in cyber competitions and seeing how organizations run their security operations.

Before graduating, Colin was able to earn his Security + certification and his Certified Ethical Hacker certification, as well as land a summer internship at Belcan. After the internship, Belcan asked Colin to become a part-time employee until he graduated from high school. "With all of the knowledge I received and with a little bit of luck and

grit, I was able to prove myself valuable to the Belcan security team," Colin said.

Colin handles phishing tickets, termination reviews, incident triage, digital forensics, endpoint detection and incident response. Ironically, he also helps run Belcan's high school outreach program, while continuing to earn additional certifications.

His advice to those interested in cyber security: "Keep studying and expanding



Colin Kline, Lakota West Cyber Academy 2023 Graduate

your knowledge. Get hands-on experience if possible because that's where the stuff you learn starts to make sense."

WE *are* Fiscally Responsible

FROM THE TREASURER



Lakota Local Schools, like our community, continues to grow. With this growth, we must determine how to best support our students' learning while maintaining our commitment to our taxpayers to operate in a fiscally responsible way.

Our most recent five-year forecast reflects our commitment to the educational success of our students, which is always our primary objective. We are working very diligently for the district and the community to maximize our operating revenues in order to fund educational initiatives that will add to the academic success of our students.

BUTLER COUNTY TRIENNIAL UPDATE

It's important for our taxpayers to understand that, although there may be an increase in property values based on the recent triennial update, Lakota's effective millage will decrease due to House Bill 920.

House Bill 920 adjusts a school district's millage so that the district does not collect more in taxes than voters have approved. This is done by recalculating the effective millage against the new tax base and is why the Butler County Auditor's office may increase or decrease the millage Lakota collects. The exception to this is called inside millage, which is established by the Ohio constitution.

As a result of House Bill 920, the impact of the triennial update has decreased the effective millage for residential and agricultural property (Class 1

property) in the Lakota school district by approximately 7.8 mills to 26.5 mills, a 23 percent reduction from tax year 2022. This millage goes to permanent improvements for building upkeep and technology, debt payments for buildings and the general operating fund.

In tax year 2023, which taxpayers will pay in 2024, Lakota Local Schools receives 57.7% of the Class 1 property tax payment for residents of West Chester and 61.4% for Liberty Township.

ADAM ZINK
Treasurer/CFO



Auditor of State Award With Distinction

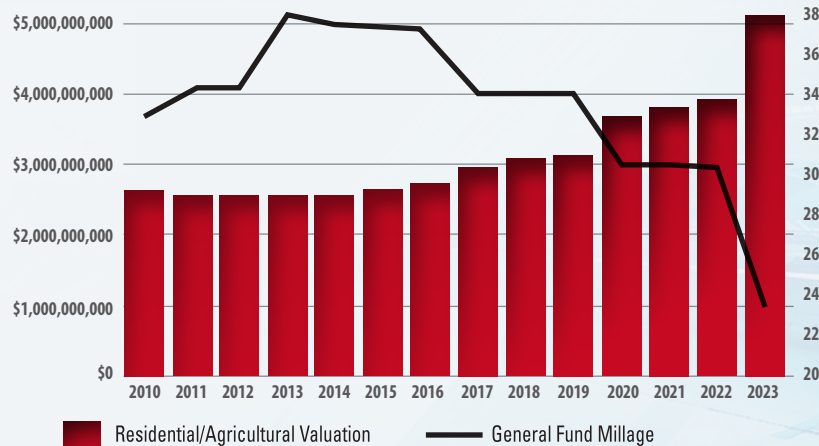
Lakota was recently notified by the State that it has earned its 10th consecutive Auditor of State Award with Distinction.

With fewer than four percent of government entities in the State earning this award, Lakota Local Schools is among the most elite in its accounting practices.



DID YOU KNOW...
the general fund effective mills collected by Lakota have dropped below pre-levy numbers?

TAX YEAR RESIDENTIAL/AGRICULTURAL VALUATION VS. GENERAL FUND EFFECTIVE TAX MILLAGE



LEARN MORE:
Scan these QR codes to learn more about the impact millage and valuation have on Lakota's general operating fund.



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WE *are* In This Together



LAKOTA HOMEGROWN

Nothing says loyalty like our proud alumni who return home to teach, lead and pay it forward.

This Hopewell Junior School principal and Lakota alum once sat in the same seats as the seventh and eighth grade Thunderhawks he's taken under his wing. Jeff Rouff's Lakota pride runs deep and to say he believes in what he does is an understatement.



Scan to hear his full story and watch more in this new video series.



BIG PAWS LITTLE PAWS

A revitalized partnership between Liberty Early Childhood School and Lakota East High School pairs "big paws" with "little paws," giving students on both sides of the program some big benefits.

"I definitely get as much out of it as they do," reflected East senior Meredith Brown about the time she's spent with her two little paws, Skyrah and Reagan.

Once a week, about 20 high school students reunite with their same one (or two) Liberty Leopards. During their weekly meetings, mentorship takes the form of reading, board games, coloring, arts and crafts and even physical activities like "turtle tag."

"It is a great way to give a little paw a little extra attention one time a week," said Liberty counselor and program co-founder Dana Hallgarth. "I believe that students can benefit from having a consistent mentor in their life. Oftentimes, that connection is key to having a successful school day."



Scan to watch the video story.

IMPORTANT DATES



Light Up Lakota School Showcase
 March 13
 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
 Lakota East High School

Military Commitment Ceremony
 April 23
 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.
 Lakota East Freshman School

K-12 Registration for 2024-2025 School Year Now Open!
 Early kindergarten registration ends April 5, open houses April 18.
 Visit www.lakotaonline.com/enroll