



Together WE can... *Shine*



When Lakota announced its new Gem Awards program, the nominations poured in with heartfelt stories about Lakota staff members who bring a sparkle to our schools.

Each month, several staff members are recognized for being "a cut above the rest." So far, 17 Lakota Gems have been celebrated for being "Brilliant Innovators" or "Polished Team Players," among other award categories.

"Every single position here at Lakota is important and part of our district's success story," said Lakota Superintendent/CEO Ashley Whitely. "The Lakota Gem

Award celebrates staff whose range of responsibilities and areas of expertise are varied, but whose qualities are strikingly similar. Things like teamwork, innovation, positivity, growth and a student-centered mentality drive excellence and span all roles in public education."

Lakota West Freshman teacher Jason French was selected to receive the "Sapphire of Student Support" Gem Award in November for taking a keen interest in getting to know his students so he can support and encourage them to pursue classes and opportunities that align with their interests.

The parent who nominated him had this to say: "Students want to know that you care about them as a person, not just a student, and Mr. French illustrates

this in an amazing way that has left an impact on both my children."

French, like the other recipients, is humbled by the recognition. "Teaching is a profession where you can see the change you're making. This goes well beyond data and is about the impact we can have on helping students. Whether that's helping them improve grades, figuring out what they may want to do after high school, or just being there for them. A good teacher can change the world."

See the article on page three about how French and other teachers use data to better understand their students and boost their academic growth.

SOME OF OUR PRECIOUS GEMS



Adena Elementary ESL Teacher Helen Vassiliou
- A Cut Above the Rest -



Director of Professional Learning Krista Heidenreich
- Polished Team Player -



Heritage ECS Principal Ben Schneider
- Beacon of Positivity -



Maintenance Team Member John Federle
- Brilliant Innovator -



Hopewell Junior Teacher Delaney Wilson
- Gem of Growth -

Scan to watch videos of our surprise visits to our Lakota Gem Award winners.



Visit Lakota's website to nominate your own Lakota Gem.

FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



As Edward Everett Hale once said, “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

Being new to my role at Lakota Local Schools this year, “coming together” was important in paving our partnership. Thus, our mantra has been “Together, WE can...” and our focus on togetherness is continuing to inspire and support our students in reaching their full academic potential.

At Lakota Local Schools, our commitment to excellence is reflected in the achievements of our students and staff. As we shared in our fall Quality Profile, the state report card showed significant improvements in academic performance across all grade levels, moving the District from a two-star rating to four stars for this component. As evidenced

in this publication, our students have also improved in their academic growth, which is measured by a component called “value added” on the report card. Keeping our focus on academic achievement will ensure our district’s success in growing every single child.

In addition to our academic successes, we have also made strides in fostering a more supportive and inclusive workplace culture. This positive shift is not only benefiting our staff, but also creating a more nurturing and engaging atmosphere for our students.

I am also pleased to announce the conclusion of my 70-plus initial listening

and learning sessions with staff, students and community members. Your valuable feedback has helped me understand the current landscape of our district and will be instrumental in shaping our vision for the future.

Our culture work and these listening sessions are just the beginning of our collaboration. As we move forward with our strategic planning work this spring, we will be guided by the insights and suggestions you have shared. This work will also play an important role as we continue our master facilities planning to address our aging facilities and overcrowding in our schools. A master facilities plan that complements our

vision for instruction is paramount to the success of our district. So, being able to delve into this work simultaneously is a tremendous opportunity.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our school district. Together, WE can continue to grow, building a successful and brighter future for our students and our community.

DR. ASHLEY WHITLEY
Superintendent/CEO



Big Gains for Student Growth

Lakota Local Schools has much to celebrate on the 2023-2024 district report card issued by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW). Behind the District's jump from 3.5 to 4.5 stars (out of a possible 5) are a lot of success stories.

One of the biggest gains was in Lakota's Progress rating, which increased from two to four stars.

For this metric, the State uses Value Added data to measure overall student growth over time. The four-star rating means that the District exceeded student growth expectations.

Data from the past three years are calculated into the final star rating, with the most recent year being weighted 50% and the prior two years at 25% each.

"Our teachers, administrators and support staff put a huge emphasis on using data to gauge where every student is in their learning," said Lakota Superintendent/CEO Ashley Whitely. They worked tirelessly to personalize their approach and grow each one of them in their learning."

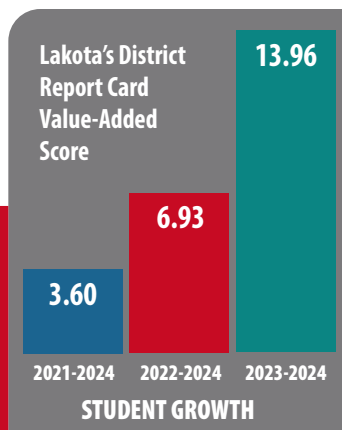
Lakota prepares actionable data for school administrators and teachers, even providing customized data reports for individual teachers, bell by bell, to help inform classroom-level decisions and instructional models. Course history and projections help teachers leverage master schedules to provide targeted intervention and enrichment during support structures like daily advisory bells, for example.

one-on-one or small group help to go back over gaps in their learning," said Lakota West Freshman teacher Jason French (featured on the cover). He also uses grade-level and course-level data to work with students to promote more rigorous coursework.

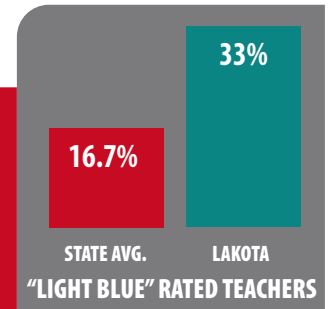
With this student-centered focus on academic data, Lakota anticipates additional years of high growth and continued gains in the District's Progress rating.

"Using data helps me know which students are getting the information and which students may need some

Lakota's student growth from the 2023-2024 school year was so significant that it increased the District's overall composite rating by two stars.



The use of data has even contributed to Lakota having double the state average of teachers receiving a "Light Blue" rating, meaning these teachers see more than expected growth of their students.



FROM THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Celebrating Growth

In what ways have you seen Lakota students and staff grow?



Julie Shaffer, President

This year, Lakota's staff and students have demonstrated incredible growth. Staff are focused on curriculum standards. They are enhancing their instructional strategies and collaborating to ensure academic rigor while teaching the new curriculum. Our commitment to meeting the whole child's needs – social, emotional and academic – fosters a supportive learning environment. More students are accessing Advanced Placement and College Credit Plus offerings, reflecting their willingness to challenge themselves academically. Together, we have created a foundation for long term excellence.



Kelley Casper, Vice President

Our staff and students are showing a renewed sense of excitement for teaching and learning. New curriculum, targeted professional development and analyzing data allows our teachers to meet students' needs. Our teacher leaders work with our staff to make sure they are using the curriculum effectively, adapting it for each student's learning style. These strategies have led to an increase in our test scores and student growth, which has increased our overall report card score.



Christina French, Member

Lakota has the best staff and students in Ohio. The state report card is one way that displays our success and growth, but it is the behind-the-scenes growth that culminates in results. Our staff has delved into the new curriculum, grown in their approach to teaching and learning and our students have risen to the occasion. I am incredibly proud of the positive learning environments and the excitement that has become contagious and continues to grow!



Isaac Adi, Member

Over the past year, I'm proud to see that our district has grown not only in stability, but our student achievement has also achieved a remarkable milestone—advancing one star higher. This growth symbolizes that when we work together and focus not only on what matters, but also on our commitment to continuous learning and improvement, even the sky cannot limit our rise.



Douglas Horton, Member

The growth of Lakota's students and staff is evident in numerous ways: Students are growing in their poise and presence; staff are growing in their passion and pedagogy; students are becoming more and more expert and embracing of change; students are reaching higher levels of achievement; staff are reaching higher levels of achievement; and students and staff are showing that "Together WE can... do all things!"



Cherokee Teacher Maria Kluener

Old + New = A Winning Formula for Teaching Math

To the tune of "If You're Happy and You Know It," Cherokee Elementary fourth grade math teacher Maria Kluener sings her own rendition about rounding numbers. "If it's five or greater, you go up. If it's four or less, let it rest," she sings, many of her students joining in, too.

The sing-along is just one example of how she and her teaching partner, Cassie Hill, keep their students engaged and understanding new math concepts. It's also a good example of how they have managed to put their own stamp on the new K-6 math curriculum Lakota adopted for the current school year. It's neither the first nor the last time, Kluener says, that she will pull out a proven technique from her student teaching days.

Fully acknowledging that curriculum changes can be hard, the teaching duo has embraced the new teaching models and student workbooks that came with Lakota's adoption of the Illustrative math curriculum. The concepts still align with Ohio's math learning standards, but the

suggested order and pacing is different than before. Their open-minded approach allowed them to slowly see the benefits of the new model, too.

"[Our students] understand the content so deeply that I find them making connections to new concepts without me doing it for them," said Hill, referring to a recent lesson on simplifying fractions. Her students quickly connected it to an earlier lesson all about common factors.

Hill and Kluener said the new tools also make it easy for them to differentiate their teaching for all learning levels. With built-in visuals to use with struggling learners and discussion prompts to help stretch their high flyers, they've also carried over other proven techniques like stations and flexible playlists. Every unit includes both, giving students a level of choice when it comes to practicing concepts that are more difficult for them and in a way that suits their learning style.

"We incorporate old stuff with the new curriculum all the time and we've really been able to make it our own," Kluener said.

As someone who obviously loves numbers, data is Kluener's ultimate metric for success. And the results speak for themselves. Hanging prominently on her wall is a bar graph showing her class's upward trajectory on the most recent math assessments. "It's how we know if what we're doing is working," she said. "We are always adjusting and adapting."



Cherokee Teacher Cassie Hill

Labs Revolutionize K-2 Language Arts Learning

"It is eye opening the way the new K-2 English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum is teaching comprehension," said Hopewell Early Childhood School Principal Becky Francko.

Before Lakota's adoption of the new K-2 ELA curriculum this school year, students practiced comprehension by reading a passage and then answering questions. Now, they receive an hour of instruction followed by an hour of hands-on activities to deepen their understanding of a new topic.

"The exciting thing about labs is that our students have the opportunity to apply and expand on the concepts they've learned in module lessons," said Emily Hermann, Lakota's director of K-6 curriculum and instruction.

As one example, Hopewell ECS second grader Zuri created a pink playdough dinosaur using shapes. But it wasn't just any dinosaur. "This is a plesiosaur," she said confidently. "It's technically a dinosaur, but it lives in the water. The plesiosaur doesn't have scales, but lungs."

Her vocabulary and the excitement she showed is a prime example of how the new labs are helping students understand concepts and then make their own connections with the book or topic.

At Hopewell, where they use their Innovation Hub to host multiple labs at the same time, instructional aide Robin Madden was stringing lights from the ceiling one day to create a night sky ambiance. "They are painting the sky in

our create lab and are learning that the sky looks different depending on many factors, including the time of day," Madden said. "The focus on language acquisition is encouraged through rigorous conversation. They are using words like positioning, details, landscape and horizon!"

"The play-based structure gives students the language and vocabulary that not all students are exposed to," said Francko. "There is so much opportunity for learning through doing, which is how kids learn."



English language arts lab time in Hopewell ECS's Innovation Hub



CCP Anatomy



CCP American Sign Language



Lakota West CCP Financial Literacy
Teacher Adam Gleim



Flight & Space

Growing College Credit Plus Options

Last school year, students who took advantage of Lakota’s growing College Credit Plus (CCP) offerings altogether earned more than 8,200 college credits. That translates to an estimated \$3.7 million in future higher education tuition cost savings for Lakota families.

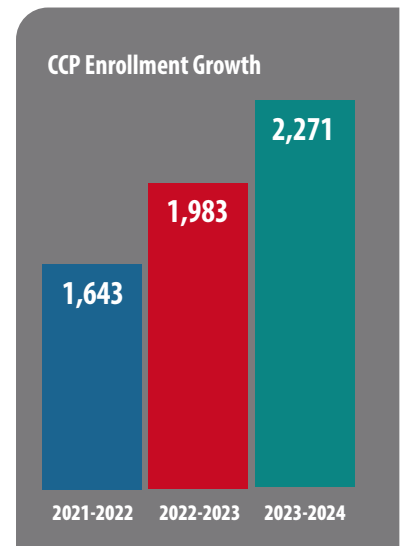
What does that mean to the individual student? On average, every completed CCP course may double as both high school and college credit, translating to approximately \$3,000 in savings per course. But that’s not the only reason Lakota continues to grow its portfolio of college-level courses taught by Lakota teachers at both high school campuses.

“It can work for students with all different goals. For some, a college diploma is not their next stop,” explains Andrew Wheatley, Lakota’s director of 7-12 curriculum and instruction. That is where CCP courses like cyber security, exercise science and athletic training come in. Students can gain technical training or industry certifications that can apply to further schooling or lead right into a career.

Additionally, for the first time, the sixth component on the Ohio report card – College, Career, Workforce and Military Readiness (CCWM) – will weigh into the District’s overall rating this school year. “At the highest level, this is the indicator for whether or not a student is in some way shape or form ready to do something after graduation,” Wheatley explains.

The CCWM score is calculated by the number of students who meet at least one of the component’s requirements: a remediation-free ACT score, a score of three or higher on three AP exams, enlistment in the military, or at least 12 college credits, just to name a few. “Lakota favors the CCP requirement because it has the potential to stretch every kid and truly impact their future, whether they aspire to be an HVAC installer or a surgeon,” Wheatley said.

With six new CCP courses added this school year, and six more in the pipeline for next year, this is an area that Lakota will continue to grow.



Spotlight ON CCP FINANCIAL LITERACY

Ironically, just by enrolling in CCP financial literacy, students are making a smart financial decision. As one of Lakota’s newest CCP offerings, the course fulfills one of the State’s high school graduation requirements while simultaneously awarding a student college credit.

“It’s nice to already have college credit this early,” said Lakota West sophomore Josh Fuller. “Plus, it’s something everyone needs.”

Lakota West financial literacy teacher

Adam Gleim describes CCP courses as “students having one foot in two camps.”

“They’re still high school kids, but they’re getting an early look at what college might be like.”

Gleim follows the curriculum set by the District’s partner university, Sinclair Community College. Students learn everything from how to manage stocks and obtain a will to how to prepare financially for college and maximize their savings. Budgeting activities bookend the semester-long course, giving

students a metric of their growth from beginning to end.

Another obvious metric is the actual financial strides he sees his students making. “Students walk through my door with a checking account and no plan,” Gleim said. “They leave splitting their savings between three different accounts and with a deep understanding of why you do that.”

“The earlier we learn it, the earlier we can apply it,” reflected Lakota West sophomore Lucy Smith.

NEW JUNIOR SCHOOL COURSE TAKES FLIGHT

High school students aren’t the only ones with course options that emphasize career-ready skills. Case in point: Lakota’s new flight and space course offered in partnership with Butler Tech. Scan the QR code to read all about this project-based class where students become engineers and test their understanding of what it takes to travel and live in space.



Together WE can... *Build our Future*

Master Facilities Plan

Together, WE can build a brighter future for our students and our community.

This school year, the Lakota Board of Education has been diligently working on the District's Master Facilities Plan (MFP). The creation of a new MFP is part of the District's strategic plan, helping to determine the improvements our school buildings need and how much funding is required to make those improvements happen.

The last time Lakota created a comprehensive facilities plan was in the early 2000s, with an implementation in 2008. The Board's application to the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC) to join the Expedited Local Partnership Program (ELPP) has been approved.

With this approval, the State has completed a new enrollment study and a detailed assessment of our buildings. Our district is now reviewing this information to help shape our facilities plan.

Partnering with the State through ELPP makes Lakota eligible for financial help. The District will qualify for a 32% reimbursement rate for facilities

projects once the final MFP is submitted and approved by the State.

This means that for every dollar spent on approved projects, the State will give Lakota 32 cents, making future projects more affordable and less of a burden to local taxpayers.

The MFP committee, which includes school board members, district leaders and members of the District's architecture team, meets twice a month to discuss different plan components. Recently, they've discussed timelines, possible locations for new elementary schools, ways to involve the community and funding options.

As we move forward, we encourage everyone in the community to stay involved and informed. Your understanding of the MFP and support is crucial as we work together to create a better learning environment for our students now and in the future.



THE PLAN

During the 2023-2024 school year, the Board approved the following grade-band configuration for the Master Facilities Plan:

PRESCHOOL 1 SCHOOL



Liberty Early Childhood

GRADES K-5 11 SCHOOLS



Cherokee



Endeavor



Independence



Union



VanGorden



Wyandot



Ridge Junior



Four NEW K-5 Buildings

GRADES 6-8 2 SCHOOLS



Additions on East Freshman



Additions on Plains Junior

GRADES 9-12 2 SCHOOLS



Additions on Lakota West HS



Additions on Lakota East HS

Scan to visit the MFP website.



Scan to see the building blocks that our community says makes Lakota's foundation strong.

FROM THE TREASURER

School finances can be tricky to understand. There's state funding, local funding, operating funds, permanent improvement funds and bonds. But what does all that mean?

We'd like to help our community understand some of the many nuances that are a part of public school funding... and what WE do at Lakota to make sure that each of our decisions is fiscally responsible.

HOW SCHOOLS ARE FUNDED

Lakota's revenue comes from the State or local sources. Registered voters approve the amount a school district can collect from property taxes. This amount is calculated through millage, or mills. A mill is the annual tax rate applied to an assessed value of property.

In fiscal year 2024, state aid accounted for 31% of Lakota's **general operating fund** while local real estate taxes made up 56%. The remaining 13% came from other local revenue.

The District's **permanent improvement funds** are generated through property taxes collected on residential, commercial and public utility.

Bonds are used to fund major capital improvement projects in a school district, such as building new schools. With the community's support, the bonds are issued by the school district and sold to investors. The District then pays the bondholders with interest over a period of time through tax collection.



Adam Zink

ADAM ZINK
Treasurer/CFO



GENERAL OPERATING FUND

Money from Lakota's general operating fund may be used for the day-to-day operating expenses required to run the school district. Examples include: instruction, pupil support, instructional support and extracurricular activities. Transportation is also included, making up more than 10% of Lakota's operating expenses.



PERMANENT IMPROVEMENT FUND

Lakota's permanent improvement (PI) fund may only be used for long-term projects, with items having a lifespan of at least five years. Examples include technology and repairs to buildings like roofs and parking lots.



BONDS

Taxpayers may choose to support a school district's capital projects through approval of a bond issue. Once approved, the District can sell bonds to raise the necessary money to fund capital improvement projects like a Master Facilities Plan. Bonds are repaid over a long period of time, often more than 20 years, through a property tax collection.

What is a Mill?

A Mill is the annual tax rate applied to an assessed value of property.

1 Mill = \$1 for every \$1,000 of assessed value*

*Assessed value is calculated at 35% of appraised property value. These values are on file at the Butler County Auditor's Office.

\$100,000 | ASSESSED VALUE OF HOME

TAKE 35% OF PROPERTY VALUE

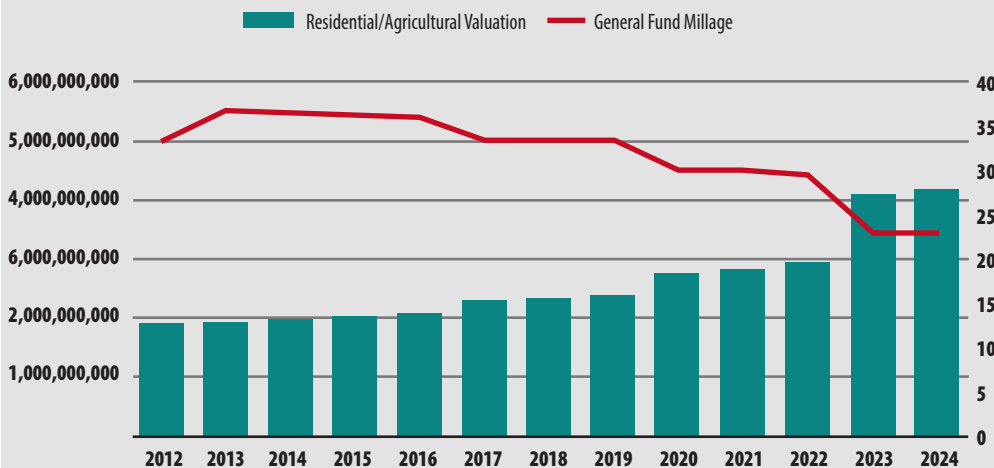
\$35,000 | TAXABLE VALUE

DIVIDE BY 1000 FOR TAX PER MILL

\$35 | TAX PER MILL



EFFECT OF HB920



DID YOU KNOW...



The general fund effective mills collected by Lakota have dropped below pre-levy year numbers?

This is because House Bill 920 ensures that Ohio school districts collect the same amount in local tax revenue as the year prior by increasing or decreasing effective millage.



Scan the QR code to learn more about the impact millage and valuation have on Lakota's general operating fund.



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-  Lakota_District
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Lakota Lovebirds

WE love sharing the love stories that point back to Lakota as the place where it all began.

As the saying goes, "Absence makes the heart grow stronger." That is unless you've been teaching under the same roof for 34 years!

Independence Elementary teachers Scott and Susan Smith are a testament to the power of connection in unexpected places. The couple met during Susan's first year and Scott's second year of teaching at the former Hopewell Elementary.

Susan remembers the time she was a reading intervention teacher and would often land in Scott's room to work with his kids. At one point, they even landed across the hall from each other when they both taught fourth grade. And when separation seemed inevitable the year Hopewell shifted to an early childhood school, the stars aligned once again and they were both moved to Independence Elementary together. It's also fitting that they will retire together at the end of this year.

So much of their love story points back to their days at Hopewell, where the couple had a wedding shower, baby showers and even witnessed their oldest child take her very first steps. Even if they thank fate for their happy ending, Susan laughs at the fact that the principal who hired them credits himself with being the ultimate matchmaker.

Besides their common colleagues, they've both loved the shared connection with so many Lakota families over the years. "By teaching in the same building, we have really gotten to know many families over the course of several years," says Susan. "Scott frequently teaches students that I previously taught or we teach students simultaneously from the same family, and that added connection is really special."

Search #LakotaLovebirds on Facebook or Instagram to read more Lakota love stories and be on the lookout for new ones leading up to Valentine's Day!

Let's Go Lakota!

Lakota Superintendent/CEO Ashley Whitely invites the community into our schools to experience a piece of the action.



Enjoy this fun new video series!

