

A Look Around Lakota




WE are PREPARED

2020-2021 Responsible Reopening

As different as it may have looked, there was no masking the excitement of Lakota students and staff returning to school this year.

Nearly five months after the district had transitioned to remote learning in response to the statewide shutdown for the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), Lakota opened its doors to 17,000 students - some returning in person and others choosing the district's new virtual learning option (VLO).

The responsible reopening followed a spring and summer of unprecedented preparation, marked by continuous dialogue with the community.

"Nothing is more important than the safety of our students and staff, which is why we went to great lengths to introduce new procedures. We wanted nothing more than to have our students back, but in a safe manner," said Lakota Superintendent Matthew Miller, who hosted numerous virtual sessions over the summer to help address questions and concerns.

Students and staff were able to ease into those new safety procedures thanks to a first-ever staggered start. Attending every other day during the first week, students started the year in a smaller group setting, which facilitated Lakota's continued commitment to strong relationship building.

Among the changes was the requirement to wear masks and neck gaiters. Physical distancing

reminders are posted on walls, seats are farther apart and hand sanitizer stations are available at entrances to the buildings.

Lakota relied heavily on the guidance of the Butler County health commissioner as well as the Ohio Department of Health, the CDC and infectious

disease experts when building its responsible reopening plan. Part of the planning also included surveying families and staff in May and June, a move that inspired Lakota's virtual option. Surveys have continued to inform Lakota's ever-evolving plan.

Lakota's plans continue to be fluid and based on

an "A-B-C" model that considers three different scenarios, each including VLO. Currently, the district is implementing "Plan A," which welcomes back all students every day with extra safety precautions. The district continues to prepare for a possible shift that would introduce remote learning. A shift to the "Balanced" option would bring students to school with restrictions (i.e. increased physical distancing and a combination of in-person and remote learning for secondary students). The "Connected" model would involve all students learning in a remote environment full-time.

We wanted nothing more than to have our students back, but in a safe manner.

Matt Miller, Superintendent



WE Can Lakota

On Aug. 17, WE opened our doors and welcomed back our students for both in-person and virtual learning.

More than 13,000 students are back in our schools every day, with nearly 4,000 learning from home through the Lakota Virtual Learning Option.

We knew that we would have positive COVID-19 cases. And WE were prepared. We continue to work closely with the Butler County Health Department. Within 24 hours of learning about a positive case, and following the guidance of the health department, we have identified close contacts and notified the families of our impacted school. Our safety protocols and guidelines can be found on our website, www.lakotaonline.com. This is also where you will find our COVID-19 dashboard, which is updated on Mondays.

The dashboard shows a weekly snapshot of positive cases and quarantines by school, along with district totals. Graphics show the percentage of positive and quarantined individuals compared to those attending school or who are absent for other reasons. Monthly and year-to-date totals are also available.

At the time this publication was created, we are still in school. We do not know if we will be forced to move to remote learning in the future, but we do know that WE are prepared. The safety and security of our staff and students is always our top priority. This includes their health and well-being. Thank you for your continued trust in Lakota Schools.



Matthew J. Miller
MATTHEW J. MILLER
Superintendent



Inside Virtual Learning

"It is now the largest school in Lakota and larger than many entire school districts," said Keith Koehne, Lakota's Executive Director of Curriculum & Instruction.

That school is Lakota's new Virtual Learning Option (VLO), an idea that hadn't even been dreamt of until six months ago. Now the VLO is a reality, with about 4,000 students enrolled across all grade levels.

"Surveys told us that many of our families would not want to send their child to school due to the COVID-19 pandemic," Koehne said. That's why Lakota began the massive undertaking to develop this unique 100-percent online K-12 education option for families.

What makes it so unique? Most districts go out and purchase third party software for virtual learning. This summer some of Lakota's best teachers worked with the curriculum team to design the best courses possible. That means that VLO students will take Lakota classes taught by Lakota teachers and receive a Lakota diploma.

About one in four Lakota students have set up their classrooms in home offices, kitchens and even in an RV during travels out West.

About 300 Lakota teachers are instructing at least some VLO courses. In-school teachers are also able to use the online content as a supplement to face-to-face instruction, giving them more time to spend on more individualized instruction. The robust curriculum and resources are also readily available should there be a need to move to all remote learning.

"Our families are also excited that VLO students will stay connected to their home schools -- they can even get their school pictures taken and participate in extracurricular activities," said Krista Heidenreich, Director of Digital Learning and Professional Learning.

Cherokee Elementary Principal Valerie Montgomery sums up the relationship between home schools and VLO students. "We are doing everything we can to include our VLO kids. They are Cherokee students and we don't want them to feel left out."

VLO Bulletins and surveys are sent out regularly. "This is the first time we've done this, so it's a learning curve for everyone," said Heidenreich. "We will use feedback from parents, students and staff to continually modify our approach."

VLO will be offered for the entire 2020-2021 school year, and the district will reassess the program at the end of the year.

"In the end, our goal is to do what is in the best interest of our families and students," said Koehne. "We know that every student is unique and if this solution can help serve some of our students for the long-term, then we will explore ways to make that happen."



FROM THE LAKOTA BOARD OF EDUCATION | Q: What is your



A: "I believe that our future starts in our schools. As a proud Lakota graduate, my "why" is the work we do each day to create a thriving community where our students' education is the foundation. Serving on our Board of Education allows me to give back just a fraction of what this community and school system has given to me in my life."



A: "I am the daughter of a public school teacher, a product of public schools and a former first grade teacher. I believe strongly in an excellent public school education for all students. I am blessed to have two children who attended Lakota grades K-12 and are both successful as a result of their education here. Being on the Board is my way of giving back to the district and community that has meant so much to my family."



Lynda O'Connor

incubatoredu@lakota

“SHARK TANK” FOR HIGH-SCHOOLERS

Lakota is only the second school district in Ohio – and one of just 125 nationwide – to make “Shark Tank” a class at both Lakota East and Lakota West high schools this year.

Officially called INCubatoredu@Lakota, the entrepreneurial experience allows students to develop their own product or service and then pitch it to local investors for a chance to make it a reality.

“My biggest challenge so far has been helping students to understand that they don’t have to be an inventor through this process. They just have to be an innovator,” said teacher Kevin Keen.

According to Lakota’s executive director of curriculum and instruction, Keith Koehne, the program’s real “secret ingredient” is its mentors.

“We have all these great people who are willing to jump in and serve as mentors and guides along the way,” Koehne said of the 24 professionals he and his team have recruited for the program’s inaugural year.

“This is not a program where kids sit and listen and take notes and move on. This is really learning by doing, building something real and getting good, honest feedback from actual entrepreneurs.”

Representing a wide range of industries and experiences, the mentors will be paired with a group of four or five students. They will meet at least twice a month - virtually for now - to check in on their progress and offer guidance.

“Entrepreneurship always seemed very risky and scary to me, so I had a ‘safe’ job for almost 20 years before I took the leap to start my own business,” said mentor Michelle Moody, publisher and franchise owner for West Chester Liberty Lifestyle Magazine. She admits that such a program would have changed her own pathway significantly.

INCubatoredu@Lakota was a direct response to Lakota’s decision to add “Entrepreneurship” as the fourth “E” for post-graduate options promoted to students, along with Enrollment, Employment and Enlistment.

Similarly, mentor Anisha Bailey, the founder of Taxley and the Taxley Academy, is looking forward to helping students see an alternate pathway. “I believe it’s easy to find ourselves stuck in the tradition of high school, college, job,” Bailey said. “While there’s nothing wrong with tradition, it’s important for young people to know that other possibilities await them.”

Randy Wilhelm is more than just a mentor to some of Lakota’s INCubatoredu students. As the owner of a local consulting firm for business accelerators called Think Horsepower, he has ridden shotgun with the district over the last 18 months as they shadowed and learned from other districts implementing the same program.

“There’s hardly anything that could make me happier than watching entrepreneurship grow within our region,” Wilhelm said. “I believe that it’s the lifeblood of what we do and it’s an economic engine for us.”

Lakota is still seeking more program mentors and subject matter experts. Contact Lakota’s strategic partnerships coordinator, Katie Bauer, at kathryn.bauer@lakotaonline.com to learn more.



WE are Fiscally Responsible.



Jenni L. Logan
CFO/Treasurer

It’s not just a pillar of our strategic plan, it’s what we are every day. This has been especially important during the last eight months with regards to the financial impact of COVID-19 on school finances.

In May, Gov. DeWine’s \$300.5 million in cuts to K-12 education amounted to \$3.4 million in cuts for Lakota. The cuts did not stop there, we received an additional \$3.4 million cut for this fiscal year as well. Because fiscal responsibility is a priority for us, we are prepared to weather this financial storm.

Lakota did not achieve a healthy financial position, by accident. Through the support of the community and the hard work of many, Lakota ended the 2020 fiscal year with more than seven months of operating cash. That’s because our past eight fiscal years have ended with a spending surplus, meaning our expenditures did not exceed our revenue. We also established a rainy day fund that is for situations just like this.

In order to reopen our doors safely this fall, additional expenses have been incurred. The purchase of personal protective equipment, disposable masks and cleaning supplies are just a few of the additional costs related to keeping our staff and students safe.

We also opened what has turned out to be our largest school with the Lakota Virtual Learning Option. We wanted to provide the best curriculum for our students and that meant a Lakota curriculum. A dedicated group of nearly 100 teachers worked tirelessly this summer to write the curriculum for this program. As expected, there have also been additional technology expenses as a result of COVID-19.

These expenses are most definitely “out of the norm” for us. However, we will be maximizing the \$2.3 million we are receiving through the federal CARES Act to help offset some of these additional costs.

While there are still many unknowns for this school year, including sources of revenue for us, we will continue to be fiscally responsible and good stewards of our taxpayers’ dollars.

JENNI L. LOGAN
CFO/Treasurer

“WHY” for being a member of the Lakota Board of Education?

A: “Now in my thirteenth year on the Lakota Board, my reason for serving is the same as it was from day one – making sure that we provide the best education that we can for the children and youth in the Lakota School District. My sole focus is and always has been about serving our students and our community.”



Michael Pearl

A: “My goal is to support the staff, faculty and administration of our schools in delivering the greatest education, programs and extracurriculars that will provide each and every one of our students the opportunity to be the best prepared, most well-rounded graduates in the state!”



Julie Shaffer

A: “I joined the Board to make a positive difference in the lives of students. I recognize the value public education can make in changing the trajectory of a student’s life, having moved and experienced schools with and without the necessary resources. I never thought I would hold public office, but I wanted to be able to give back, knowing I would put students’ interests first, ultimately serving all stakeholders.”

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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A Lakota Therapy Dog

Last year, members of Lakota's special services department researched different methods to assist the growing number of students with social and emotional needs. This led to a conversation about bringing a therapy dog into a school.

"It was about thinking outside the box and trying something new," Executive Director of Special Services Andrea Longworth said. While therapy dogs have visited Lakota's schools for several years, the district has not had one as a dedicated staff member... until now.

After extensive research, Longworth stumbled upon Circle Tail, a non-profit organization that provides service and hearing dogs for people with disabilities. The only Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited organization in the tri-state area, a pilot program between Circle Tail and Lakota developed quickly.

Three of the four Lakota therapy dogs are assigned to specific schools, while the fourth is a traveling staff member that visits different buildings throughout the week. Creekside Early Childhood, Union Elementary and Hopewell Junior all have four-legged staff members that greet students, man

Principal Kara Yates announce student recognitions in classrooms. She also loves to go outside with students at recess. At Hopewell Junior School, Zooey spends much of her day working with students in the specialized classrooms.

Lakota Local Schools has gone to the dogs... therapy dogs, that is.

(or dog) the hallways during class changes and visit general education classrooms. As therapy dogs, they have received extensive training to provide comfort to students who may be experiencing anxiety or are otherwise struggling during the school day. The dogs can also be found in special education classrooms.

As a member of the staff, each dog has a daily schedule. Over at Creekside, Bendi can be found participating in small group sessions led by Jen Russell, the school's guidance counselor, providing support to individual students or visiting classrooms.

In addition to spending time with individual students at Union Elementary, Quizz helps Assistant

However, she still makes time to visit during bell changes, stop by classes and even run with the cross country team during practice.

Biggs is the newest member of the Lakota therapy dog team. In addition to scheduled days at different schools, he visits students throughout the district with Superintendent Matthew Miller. "Having therapy dogs in our schools is a great support for not only our students, but also our staff," said Miller. "The stress and anxiety levels are especially high this year because of COVID-19," he continued. "Our dogs are a coping mechanism, providing a sense of comfort in our schools."



 **ZOOEY**

 **BENDI**

 **BIGGS**

 **QUIZZ**



Scan the QR code to step inside our schools and experience a day in the life of a Lakota therapy dog.