

EAGLE MESSENGER

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF LIBERTY-BENTON LOCAL SCHOOLS | SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER

Message from the Superintendent



DEAR LIBERTY-BENTON COMMUNITY,

Each school year tells its own story. The story of 2025-26 has been one of service, leadership, achievement and continued momentum across Liberty-Benton Local Schools.

Throughout this issue, you will see examples of students learning by doing and leading by serving. Our Eagles raised more than \$5,000 for Cancer Patient Services, helped bring clean water to a village in Uganda, honored veterans and military-connected families, supported community events and represented Liberty-Benton with excellence in FFA, athletics and the performing arts. These moments reflect the kind of school community we strive to build, one where students are encouraged to use their talents, work hard and make a difference.

This year, we also celebrated 125 members of the Class of 2026 as they crossed the stage and prepared for their next steps. Some will enter the workforce, others will continue their education, pursue technical training or serve in the military. Whatever path they choose, they leave Liberty-Benton with the foundation, values and work ethic that will serve them well.

As we look ahead, we are excited to continue expanding opportunities for students. Beginning in Fall 2026, Liberty-Benton High School will launch a new JROTC program focused on leadership, communication, responsibility and service. This program is not a military commitment, but rather another pathway for students to build confidence, character and skills they can carry into college, careers and life.

This newsletter also includes an important Treasurer's Update on district finances. Liberty-Benton continues to deliver strong results while operating efficiently, including one of the lowest per-pupil expenditures in Ohio. We take seriously our responsibility to provide excellent opportunities for students while being careful stewards of taxpayer dollars.

Thank you for your continued support of Liberty-Benton Local Schools. The strength of this district has always come from people who care deeply about our students and are willing to work together on their behalf.



Bruce Otley, Superintendent





Message from the Treasurer

Efficient Operations and the Bigger Picture

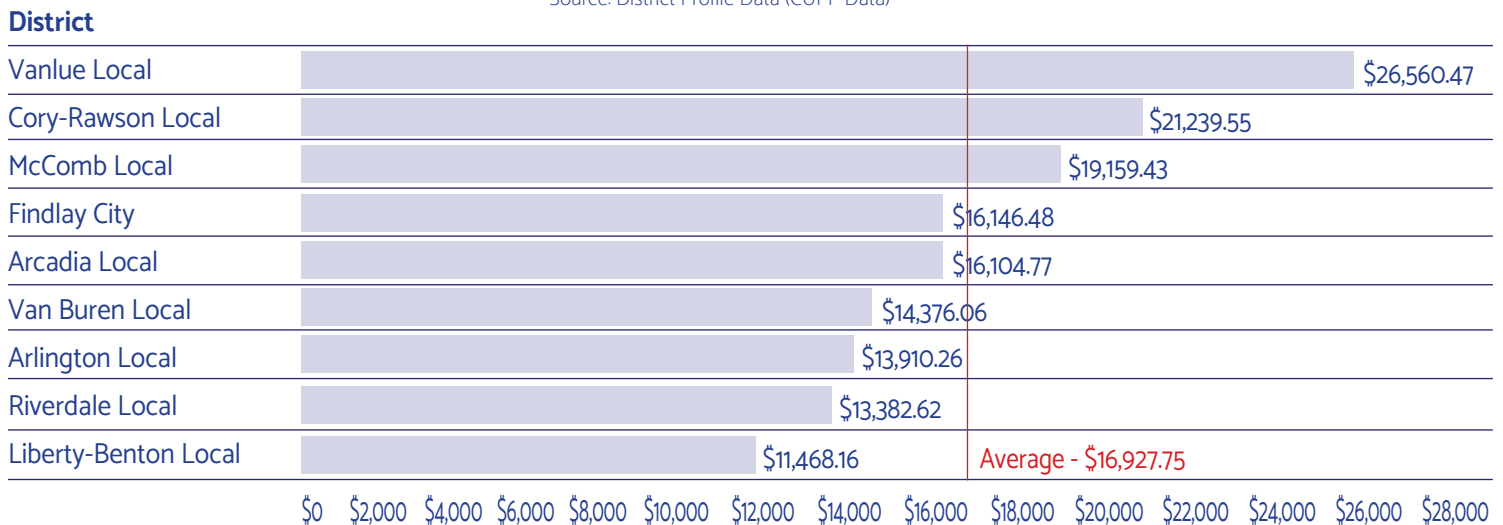


As financial conversations continue across Ohio, it is important to understand how Liberty-Benton compares when it comes to spending and operating efficiently.

According to the FY2025 District Profile Data (CUPP Report), Liberty-Benton Local Schools has the third lowest total operating expenditure per pupil among Ohio's 606 public school districts. Liberty-Benton's operating expenditure per pupil was \$11,468.16, compared to the statewide average of \$17,220.79. Here in Hancock County, the average expenditure per pupil was \$16,927.75, making Liberty-Benton the lowest spending district in the county on a per-pupil basis.

Per Pupil Expenditures

Source: District Profile Data (CUPP Data)



At the same time, Liberty-Benton continues to earn the highest overall Ohio Report Card rating in Hancock County. That combination reflects the district's longstanding commitment to fiscal responsibility, efficient operations and strong academic outcomes for students.

Local property tax discussions and property tax reform have become increasingly important and frequent. Ohio's property tax challenges are largely the result of long-term state policy decisions that have shifted more of the responsibility for funding schools and local government onto homeowners. Elimination of certain business taxes, expanded tax abatements, and reductions in business property tax assessments have reduced state and business contributions to public services including school districts. School districts throughout Ohio have become increasingly dependent on property taxes and voter-approved levies to maintain operations. Ohio's share of K-12 funding has declined over time, leaving local taxpayers to shoulder a larger percentage of education costs.

Districts like Liberty-Benton are often forced to seek local levy support not because of excessive spending, but because state funding and business tax revenues have not kept pace with educational costs and taxpayer expectations. The financial challenges facing school districts

are influenced not only by local decisions but also by broader state funding and tax policy choices.

School districts across Ohio continue to navigate increasing financial pressures. Rising operational costs, inflation and changes in state funding structures impact local schools, even districts that operate efficiently and maintain lower spending levels. A greater share of school funding responsibility continues to be shifted to local communities, creating additional challenges for both school districts and taxpayers.

Liberty-Benton remains committed to being responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars while continuing to provide high-quality opportunities and experiences for students. We will continue monitoring state-level decisions, evaluating long-term financial trends and communicating openly with our community as we look ahead.

Lisa Dobbins, Treasurer

Liberty-Benton Celebrates the Class of 2026

On Sunday, May 24, 125 members of the Liberty-Benton Class of 2026 crossed the stage, turned their tassels and officially became graduates.

Throughout their time at Liberty-Benton, the Class of 2026 demonstrated dedication, resilience and Eagle pride both inside and outside the classroom.

As graduates begin their next chapter pursuing careers, military service, technical training and higher education opportunities, Liberty-Benton proudly celebrates all they have accomplished and looks forward to the impact they will make in the future.

Valedictorians:

Sadie Barnes
Lillian Hamilton
Reid Irwin
Aidyn Levenhagen
Elise Spears
Camille St. Amour
Celeste Taylor
Andrew Tomlinson
Henry Trautman

Salutatorian:

Evelyn Parmelee

Photo credit: Carter Gallagher



Class of 2026 *By the Numbers*

Plans After High School

- 67%** Four-Year College
- 6%** U.S. Military
- 7%** Two-Year College
- 7%** Apprenticeship
- 13%** Workplace

Scholarships Earned

- \$1,035,749** awarded for next year
- \$3,852,496** four-year total

College Credit Plus

- 25** CCP courses offered at LB
- 3,829** total CCP hours earned
- 33.88** average hours per CCP student
- 76** most hours earned by one student

Top Colleges

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| | | | | |
| 21 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 9 |
| Bowling Green State University | The Ohio State University | University of Findlay | University of Toledo | Ohio Northern University |

Top Majors

Engineering | Nursing | Education | Business

Spring Athletics

Baseball



Record: 22-6
BVC Champions,
Sectional Champions,
District Champions (first time since 1997),
Regional Champions (first in school history),
State Semi-Finalist

Softball



Record: 18-10
BVC Co-Champions,
Sectional Champions

Boys Track



BVC Champions,
District Champions,
9th Place at State

Girls Track



State Qualifier: Josie Hochstettler - Pole Vault 4th Place

Honoring Steve Benson's Service to Liberty-Benton



Liberty-Benton Local Schools is proud to recognize Steve Benson for 10 years of dedicated service on the Board of Education.

Since joining the board in 2016, Steve has brought thoughtful leadership, steady support, and a deep commitment to the Liberty-Benton community. Throughout his service, he has remained focused on what he believes is the district's greatest strength: its people.

During Steve's time on the board, Liberty-Benton has seen significant progress, including the construction of a new elementary and middle school, the reunification of the district on a consolidated campus, and the development of a new transportation facility. The district also worked alongside boosters to support the field house and improvements to baseball, softball, football, wrestling, and track facilities.

Liberty-Benton Local Schools extends its sincere gratitude to Steve Benson for his years of service, leadership, and dedication to the district.

Liberty-Benton Welcomes Northwest Ohio School Leaders for Regional Meeting

Liberty-Benton Local Schools welcomed 100 school board members and administrators from across northwest Ohio on March 19 for the Ohio School Board Association Northwest Ohio Regional Meeting.

From the moment guests arrived, Liberty-Benton students and staff helped set the tone for the evening. Fourth graders greeted attendees and escorted them to their seats, middle school students managed check-in, and National Honor Society members provided table service throughout the event. Guests enjoyed a meal prepared by the district's kitchen staff featuring pretzel-crusted chicken, fresh vegetables, and a selection of desserts, while student performers added to the evening with music and entertainment.

The program featured background music from Mr. Holben and the high school jazz band as guests arrived and enjoyed hors d'oeuvres, a performance by Mr. Frankart's fourth grade ukulele players, who played and sang Bruno Mars's "Count on Me," "1-2-3," and Bobby McFerrin's "Don't Worry, Be Happy," and selections from Mr. Wolfe's high school a cappella group, Fermata the Blue. Table centerpieces were created by Mrs. Arnold's high school ceramics students. During the evening, board member Heather Franks also presented fourth grade teacher Jeanine Baker with an excellence award in recognition of her leadership with the district's Amazing Shake initiative.



Students Raise More Than \$5,000 for Cancer Patient Services



Liberty-Benton and Van Buren students teamed up for a “Bring the Change” fundraiser to support Cancer Patient Services, raising more than \$5,000 for the organization.

As part of the effort, Liberty-Benton second graders helped count the donations collected, giving students a hands-on opportunity to be part of the community service project and see the impact of giving back.

Thank you to everyone who donated and supported the fundraiser. The collaboration between both schools helped make a meaningful difference for individuals and families receiving support through Cancer Patient Services.

Liberty-Benton Middle School Students Help Bring Clean Water to Village in Uganda

A group of Liberty-Benton Middle School students made a lasting impact far beyond their own school community through a service project supporting Wells of Life. Motivated by the fact that nearly two-thirds of rural communities in Uganda lack access to safe water, the Wells of Life Action Team set out to restore a broken water well and provide clean drinking water for children in need.

Before launching their fundraiser, students first educated themselves about Uganda and the global water crisis by conducting research and watching videos. They then shared what they learned with their classmates through presentations and informational signs posted near the school drinking fountains. Along the way, students practiced leadership habits such as beginning with the end in mind and putting first things first.

The group organized several creative fundraising efforts throughout the year. They sold bottled water at athletic events, collected spare change and dollar bills in large water jugs by grade level and sold lollipops during lunch. Through these efforts, students raised more than \$1,000 to support the restoration of a well in Uganda.

Their donation was sent to Wells of Life to help restore a broken well and provide clean drinking water for an entire village. In return, students received a commemorative book featuring photos of the well, their plaque and smiling children enjoying fresh water. A photo included with the materials shows children in Mukwiny Village holding a sign that reads, “Thank you Liberty Benton Middle School,” along with the message, “Water is Now Flowing!”

Liberty-Benton is proud of these students for turning compassion into action and making a meaningful difference in the lives of others.



Wells of Life Action Team Members

Knox Karhoff	Austin Troxel-Spears	*Not Pictured
Caroline Jackson	Bryson Valasek	*JJ Getui
Lucas Price	Antony Rosario	*Duncan Hefferman
Emilliano Lizcano	Brennan Davis	



Honoring a Hometown Hero: Calvin Rettig Celebrates 101 Years

Members of the Liberty-Benton Support Our Soldiers (SOS) Action Team helped celebrate a very special milestone, the 101st birthday of WWII veteran and Liberty-Benton graduate Calvin Rettig. As part of the celebration, high school students gathered for a schoolwide assembly and sang “Happy Birthday” to Calvin.

Members of the SOS Action Team also spent time with Calvin, hearing firsthand what it was like to attend school during the Great Depression at the old Liberty Township-Centralized School and learning about his remarkable service during World War II in the Pacific Theater, including in the Philippines with an advanced reconnaissance unit.

It was a memorable opportunity to honor a hometown hero and learn from his extraordinary life and service.





2025-2026 Liberty-Benton Sidewalk Crew

Sidewalk Project Moves Forward with Phase II Celebration

What began as an idea from a Liberty-Benton Middle School seventh-grade action team is continuing to make a lasting impact on student safety and community connectivity. Thanks to a Safe Routes to School grant secured in collaboration with County Engineer Doug Cade and Lindsay Taylor’s class, Phase I of the district’s sidewalk project was completed in June 2025, adding 2,800 feet of sidewalk and an actuated pedestrian crossing at County Road 9 and Early Drive. Phase II was later approved and will extend sidewalks along Sandusky Street to better connect the Western Meadows, Palms and Dold subdivisions, giving more students a safe route to school.

To celebrate the awarding of Phase II, the Sidewalk Crew hosted a Wheels & Heels event at Liberty-Benton High School. The event featured a dedication ceremony and a bicycle rodeo, with food trucks available throughout the morning. The project reflects Liberty-Benton’s early commitment to student-led ideas and safe pathways for students and families.

Liberty-Benton to Launch New JROTC Leadership Program

Liberty-Benton High School is excited to launch a new Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program beginning in Fall 2026. The elective program will focus on leadership development, teamwork, communication and personal growth for students.

The program will be led by Major Joel Sabella, who has served in the United States Army for the past 20 years. Major Sabella holds a Master’s degree in Higher Education Administration and Leadership and a Bachelor’s degree in Childhood Special Education. He has also served as an Assistant Professor of Military Science and brings extensive experience in communications and technology.

Students participating in JROTC will have opportunities to develop leadership skills both inside and outside the classroom. Potential extracurricular opportunities connected to the program may include Color Guard, Raider Challenge fitness competitions, Robotics Team and Drone Team activities.

Importantly, participation in JROTC does not require or obligate students to join the military. Students involved in athletics, music, FFA and other extracurriculars can also participate in the program as part of their school-day schedule.



Cole Fisher Earns Prestigious State FFA Degree



Liberty-Benton FFA member Cole Fisher was recognized at the Ohio State FFA Convention, earning honors for his secretary book and the prestigious State FFA Degree.

The State FFA Degree is one of the highest honors an Ohio FFA member can receive and is awarded to only about 3% of members statewide.

Congratulations to Cole on this outstanding achievement and for representing Liberty-Benton FFA with excellence.

Students Recognized During Military Signing Night

Military Signing Night was held to recognize and honor five students who have committed to serving our country through military enlistment following graduation.

The following students were recognized for their commitment and dedication:

- **Ben Beard**
Navy
- **Kaden Beck**
Air Force
- **Ava Delehoy**
Ohio Air National Guard
- **Jonas Frederick**
Ohio Army National Guard
- **Langston Miller**
Navy Reserves

The evening celebrated the students' decision to serve and recognized the leadership, courage and commitment they will carry into this next chapter.

A special moment during the event included Jonas Frederick taking the oath of enlistment in front of the high school student body, marking the first military enlistment ceremony ever held at the school.

Congratulations and thank you to these students for their willingness to serve our nation.



Purple Up Celebration Honors Military-Connected Students

Students celebrated Purple Up with a special day recognizing military-connected families and the important role they play in our school community.

The celebration included an afternoon of inflatables, games and a luncheon for students from military-connected families. Purple Up is part of the Month of the Military Child, which is observed each April to honor the strength and resilience of children in military families.

The color purple represents all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, blending Army green, Air Force, Space Force, Coast Guard and Navy blue, and Marine Corps red. Together, purple symbolizes the shared identity and service of military families across all branches.



Students Honor Military Service Through Community Volunteer Effort

Members of the SOS Jr. Action Team recently volunteered to help set up for the 39th Annual Armed Forces Day Celebration at the Hancock County Fairgrounds.

This year's event honored the 250th Anniversary of the United States of America and featured historical displays, military vehicles, re-enactor encampments, vendor swap meets and other activities celebrating our nation's history and military service.

The opportunity allowed students to serve their community while supporting an event that recognizes and honors members of the armed forces and the history of our country.



Liberty-Benton Alumni Recognized at Armed Forces Celebration

Liberty-Benton is proud to recognize two alumni who were honored during the Armed Forces Celebration on May 16.

Calvin Rettig, Class of 1942, was named Veteran of the Year, and Jacob Dukes, Class of 2021, was named Soldier of the Year.

Congratulations to both alumni on this meaningful recognition, and thank you for your service and continued representation of the Liberty-Benton community.



Liberty-Benton Local Schools
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 Findlay, OH 45840
liberty-benton.org

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 @libertybentoneagles

Mark Your Calendars

August

August 20: Meet the Teacher - Grades K-8
August 25: First Day of School

September

September 1-4: Fair Break – No School
September 7: Labor Day – No School
September 30: Parent-Teacher Conferences, 5-8 p.m.

October

October 8: Parent-Teacher Conferences, 5-8 p.m.
October 9: Parent-Teacher Conferences, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. – No School
October 12: County-Wide PD Day – No School
October 30: End of 1st 9 Weeks



Student-Athletes Earn Inaugural Triple Threat Award

Congratulations to Reid Irwin, Claire McDaniel, Andrew Berger and Austin Collert, the first recipients of Liberty-Benton's Triple Threat Award.

This new recognition honors student-athletes who competed in three sports during all four years of high school. Their dedication reflects years of commitment to their teams, classmates and school community.

Congratulations to these four Eagles on setting a high standard for year-round participation, hard work and school pride.

Spring Musicals Showcase Student Talent

Liberty-Benton students took center stage this spring with musical productions at both the middle school and high school levels.

The high school presented *Mamma Mia!*, featuring energetic performances and memorable music, while the middle school brought *Imagine a Dragon* to life in a fun, family-friendly production.

Both shows highlighted the creativity, preparation and teamwork of students on stage and behind the scenes. Congratulations to all performers, stage crews, directors, staff and volunteers who helped make this year's spring musicals a success.



Beyond the Nest

**ONCE AN EAGLE,
ALWAYS AN EAGLE.**

Stay connected to Liberty-Benton by visiting the link below for alumni news and opportunities to get involved. We'd love to feature you in future newsletters and social media spotlights.

www.liberty-benton.org/alumni