

EAGLE MESSENGER

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF LIBERTY-BENTON LOCAL SCHOOLS | SUMMER 2024 NEWSLETTER

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

A Year of Success and Community



DEAR LIBERTY-BENTON COMMUNITY,

As I reflect on my first year as your superintendent, I am filled with gratitude and pride. This has been an extraordinary year, and there is truly nowhere else I'd rather be. I am honored to work with such a dedicated and talented staff, and our students continue to amaze me with their achievements and spirit.

Together, we have fostered a culture of excellence that is evident in every area of our district.

For nearly 20 years, Liberty-Benton Local Schools has consistently ranked in the top 15% of all 607 school districts in the state academically. Our athletic and performing arts programs continue to thrive, and our students are deeply committed to community service.

Our student experiences are second to none. Just this spring, we celebrated incredible success at the FFA Convention, an arts festival displaying outstanding talent, and an amazing performance of "The Sound of Music." From planting the Moon Tree to witnessing the solar eclipse, we've embraced the importance of understanding our world, from the earth beneath our feet to the wonders of outer space.

Much like the dynasties in football, our success is rooted in a strong culture, akin to what Bill Belichick calls "The Patriot Way." Here at Liberty-Benton, our "secret sauce" is this incredible blend of dedication, commitment to excellence, and sense of community.

We have achieved so much together this year, but our work is ongoing. By working collaboratively with a variety of the district's stakeholders this spring, we were able to identify and define the essence of our culture in our Portrait of an Eagle. I am excited to collaborate with staff on how we continuously support growing these character traits with all of our students throughout their Liberty-Benton experiences in the 2024-25 school year.

ENJOY SUMMER VACATION, GET RESTED, AND FLY HIGHER!

Bruce Otley, Superintendent



Rich LaFontaine Named L-B's Golden Eagle Teacher of the Year

A proud district alum, English teacher Rich LaFontaine graduated in 1982 and has dedicated 24 incredible years to inspiring students at LBHS. After earning his degree from BGSU, he returned to his roots to share his passion for literature and learning. Join us in celebrating his amazing contributions and commitment to our school community!



A NOTE FROM THE TREASURER: L-B Driving Ahead with New Bus Garage



On March 15, the Liberty-Benton Local School District initiated plans for a new 18,000-square-foot bus storage and maintenance facility. The district reviewed four proposals, and after careful evaluation, the Board approved a \$1,396,120 contract with Charles Construction. The new garage will be

located just south of the new Elementary and Middle School buildings and is set for completion by Dec. 31, 2024.

The one-story building will include a wash bay, maintenance bay, restrooms, a break room, two offices, and 13 bays for bus and equipment storage. Not only will it keep all the buses protected and secure, but it will also enhance the district's ability to keep them clean, operational, and ready to safely transport students. The strategic location near campus will streamline operations and improve overall transportation services.

Respectfully,

Lisa Dobbins

Lisa Dobbins, Treasurer



Arts Festival Celebrates Student Creativity at All Grades

The L-B Arts Festival on May 8 showcased artwork from K-8 and high school students. The festival highlighted the amazing talents of district students and brought the community together in celebration. Attendees enjoyed free face-painting, hands-on art activities, and live music. Thanks to all who made it a fun and engaging event!



NEST Students Display Their New Talent at the Arts Festival

Students who attend the district's School-Age Childcare Program (the NEST) had the opportunity to learn piano under the guidance of Jenny Welte. During their sessions, the students learned the basics and practiced two songs. Their hard work was showcased at the school's Arts Festival, where the students performed in front of family members and other attendees, demonstrating their newly acquired musical abilities!



No Question: L-B Middle School Quiz Bowl Team is "Winning"

Congratulations to our Liberty-Benton Middle School Quiz Bowl Team for an outstanding season! They secured second place at the county tournament and claimed first place in the regular season with an impressive 6-1 record. Great job, Eagles!



Little Helpers, Big Hearts: First-Graders Donate Baby Care Items to Women's Resource Center

First-graders gave back to the community by donating items to the Women's Resource Center for our Service Learning Project! Items donated were diapers, wipes, pull-ups, baby lotion, baby shampoo, and diaper cream.

LEADER IN ME

INSPIRING STUDENT LEADERSHIP ACROSS ALL GRADE LEVELS

For a number of years, our district has participated in the Leader in Me program, which is designed to nurture student leadership, foster a culture of trust, and boost academic success across all grade levels. This proven approach empowers students, educators, and families with essential leadership and life skills, preparing them to excel. See what L-B schools across all grade levels have done this spring to help students embrace their own “Leader in Me.”



Starting in January, we launched Leadership Interest Clubs, giving our Eagle Leaders the chance to dive into new interests and build their leadership skills. Each month, students got to pick from clubs like nature, baking, crafting, and many more. This initiative has helped create a strong sense of community and allowed students to discover and follow their passions.

In March, our leaders worked together to reach our building goal of reading 10,000 minutes for Right to Read Week. Their dedication and teamwork were rewarded with a “Fun Fair.” During this event, students moved from room to room, enjoying various fun activities with their building buddies. The excitement and joy shown by our Eagle Leaders were truly inspiring, showcasing the success of our leadership and reading programs.



On May 10, our middle school students had a blast at the Sharpen the Saw Field Day, thanks to the Sharpen the Saw Leader in Me action team. With generous grant money from the Hancock Community Foundation and Raise the Bar, we purchased a variety of games and activities for the event.

Students enjoyed activities like cornhole and spike ball, got creative in the playdough and Lego room, and showed off their singing talents in the karaoke room. The Bingo room and board games offered a more relaxed option, while the dodgeball competitions brought out everyone’s competitive side. It was a day full of fun and excitement for all.

Meanwhile, the middle school Leader in Me Nursing Home Connections action team visited Fox Run Manor on May 17. They presented biographies to the residents, which they had written after visiting in March. The students also spent time playing board games and decorating cupcakes with their friends at the nursing home.

On May 21, the middle school Leader in Me Jr. Lighthouse team held their final celebration assembly of the year to recognize students in various groups, including Honors Choir, Pointe of the Evening, Exceptional Eagles, Wildlife Squad, Spirit Squad, and Honor Roll.

Students enjoyed cheering on fellow classmates in the Synergize game and were thrilled when the day ended with Mr. Marshall getting a pie in the face. It was a fantastic event celebrating student achievements and school spirit.

HIGH SCHOOL



The Leader in Me Campus Connections Action Team recently organized an 8th-grade tour of the high school. Led by students who shared their insights and experiences, the tour provided valuable perspectives. After the tour, students gathered in the gym for a fair showcasing the various action team options available for the next year. This event offered 8th graders a great preview of what to expect and how they can get involved in high school activities.



The Leader in Me Action Teams at Liberty-Benton organized a remarkable Meals of Hope event, sponsored by the Ag Advocacy Action Team. Under the guidance of Mrs. Karhoff, 144 dedicated student volunteers came together to assemble an impressive 10,000 meals in just one hour. These meals will be used to feed the hungry within the community, ensuring that the support and effort of our students directly benefit those around us.



High School Music Department Performs at Disney Springs

In early April, over 50 Liberty-Benton High School music students, chaperones, and directors embarked on a chartered bus journey to Orlando, Florida, for a magical adventure at Walt Disney World. The students were able to spend a day in each of the four Disney theme parks: Epcot, The Magic Kingdom, Hollywood Studios, and The Animal Kingdom.

The highlight of the students' visit was having the chance to perform on stage at Disney Springs, a themed dining and entertainment center near the parks.



Junior Mock Interview Event Prepares Students for Future Careers

Interviewing for a job is a skill that can be learned and improved, and the junior class had the chance to practice this on April 30. The Hancock County Business Advisory Council organized an event where students could speak with professionals from various fields. This collaboration between local industry and education aims to prepare students for post-graduation careers. The event, developed by career educators from Liberty-Benton, Cory-Rawson, and Van Buren, along with Raise the Bar workforce program specialists, involved over 100 community volunteers and 250 students.

In preparation, students created resumes, learned about professional attire, and practiced interview questions. They had taken the YouScience assessment, which helped identify best-fit career choices. At the event, students chose interview stations based on career clusters and received feedback from professionals. In addition to two interviews, they attended sessions led by Tiffin University's Career Services Center on resume and interview skills, and by Raise the Bar, United Way, and Exploring on increasing leadership skills and enhancing resumes, college, and scholarship applications.



New Auditorium Filled with "The Sound of Music"

The community got to enjoy the new school auditorium in early March as more than 100 students in grades 3-12 participated in "The Sound of Music." There were four well-attended performances of the popular musical, which was the first to be held in the new venue. Thanks to all of the seniors and other students who have dedicated their time and efforts to the musicals over the years. Know that you will be missed! Break a leg in your next "act."



Students Juggle Coursework to Learn New Skills

Liberty-Benton students take part in a monthly interest club, spending 30-40 minutes each session exploring an activity outside of the classroom. This month, students were given the opportunity to learn the art of juggling, which they found to be more challenging than expected! The club was led by Jenny Welte with assistance from Dawn Smith.



Baseball Team Covers All the Bases with Record-Breaking Achievements

L-B's baseball team made history this season with an unprecedented record of 25-5 - the most wins in school history - becoming BVC champions, sectional champions, and district runner-up. The following players received individual honors: 1st Team BVC - Landen Stansbery, Jarrett Haan, Conner Hiss, Seth Elchert, and Zach Elchert. 2nd Team All-Ohio - Landen Stansbery.



Softball Slides into Summer with Impressive 19-5 Record

The Eagles' softball team wrapped up its incredible 2024 season as BVC runner-up and sectional champions. Congratulations to all, with special kudos to these players named 1st Team BVC: Kaytlin Erdeljac, Lauren Gerken, and Reagan Knapke.

L-B Track Teams Run Off with Multiple Awards, Including Boys' Conference Coach and Athlete of the Year!

Not only was the boys track team named 2024 BVC champions, but Eagles coach Paul Gladden was also named BVC Coach of the Year. Special congratulations to Coach Gladden and Jackson Hochstettler, who made us proud by earning BVC Athlete of the Year. The girls track team had a successful season as well, coming in second in the BVC. Several athletes qualified for the state competition, with two placing among the finalists. State Meet Qualifiers: (Boys) Tyler Grose - 5th Place Discus, Stefan Kolan - 5th Place Pole Vault, Gabe St. Amour, and Owen Wilkins. (Girls) Jocelyn Barfell and Saiphone Kaedaeng.



Junior High Track Teams Triumph at BVC Meet

Congratulations to our Junior High Boys and Girls Track Teams for finishing first at the Blanchard Valley Conference Meet! The teams showed incredible talent and determination, with several athletes earning first place in their events. Event Winners: Josie Hochstettler - 800m, Pole Vault (New Meet Record 10 feet 1 inch), Lilah Harvey - 100 hurdles, Kylie Carr, Piper Ogden, Liz Niese, Reese Alexander - 4x400 relay, Liz Niese, Piper Ogden, Reese Alexander, Josie Kern - 4x800 relay, Jake Sharpe - 800m, Nolan Rioch - High Jump, Wyatt Myers - Shot and Discus.



Middle School Basketball — Blanchard Valley Conference Champions



Lilly Conrad Gets Highest State FFA Honor and L-B Chapter Holds Annual FFA Week

We are proud to announce that one of our own Liberty-Benton Future Farmers of America (FFA) Chapter members was honored this year at the 96th State FFA Convention, held on May 3 at The Ohio Expo Center in Columbus. Lilly Conrad achieved the prestigious State FFA Degree, the highest honor that the Ohio State FFA Association can award. This significant accomplishment places Lilly among the most outstanding FFA members statewide, with only 1,050 members receiving this honor this year.

Lilly's journey to the State FFA Degree involved:

- Rigorous dedication and a deep commitment to her Supervised Agriculture Experience (SAE) in poultry production, meticulously documenting her agricultural activities (including time management and financial records) through the Agricultural Experience Tracker (AET)
- Contributing over 25 hours of community service
- Engaging in multiple FFA events
- Mastering classroom standards



L-B Second-Graders Receive STEM Grant

Findlay Rotary Club awarded a STEM grant to Mrs. Myers' 2nd grade class. This grant provides hands-on, scientific experiment manipulatives. Students are now able to design, build, and then conduct experiments using these materials. This gives kids the chance to apply their knowledge of simple machines, which is a 2nd-grade state standard. Thank you, Findlay Rotary Club!

During the week of May 13-17, the entire Liberty-Benton Chapter held its annual FFA Week. The week was packed with engaging theme days, reading sessions with kindergartners and first graders, and educational collaborations with fourth graders on agriculture in STEM. The chapter also hosted a Staff Breakfast and Chapter Potluck.

Finally, the FFA chapter teamed up with the Agriculture Advocacy and Helping Hands Action Team to spearhead a Meals of Hope Community Service project during the high school's Field Day. For the project, these students packaged a remarkable 10,000 meals, demonstrating their commitment not just to agriculture, but also toward making a tangible difference in our community.



Mixing Art and Science: 7th-Graders Use Eclipse as Inspiration for Project

Liberty-Benton students in all grades were excited to view this year's solar eclipse, and many teachers created classroom activities to enhance the students' understanding of this incredible and rare event. From kindergarten students eating eclipse-themed snacks to NEST students participating in coloring page contests, the students were inspired to be creative.

Mrs. Arnold's 7th grade artists created mixed media outer space scenes including a full eclipse with "Bailey Beads and Diamond Rings." Students used watercolors, tempera, oil pastel, and charcoal to create stunning solar eclipse art.

Committee Determines "Portrait of an Eagle"

In February and March, as an extension of the strategic plan, a group of parents, students, teachers, administrators, and a school board member set out to answer these questions to more strategically embed and support them in our work with students on a K-12 basis:

- What are the character traits that define our culture and the skills we want every student to possess by the time they graduate?
- How do we at L-B define these skills and traits?
- What does a portrait of an L-B graduate look like?

After two work sessions, and with the help of our consultant from The Impact Group, we are pleased to share the illustration to the right. Our "Portrait of an Eagle" is a snapshot of the L-B way and an expression of our school culture.



LBHS "Moon Tree" is Out of This World



Liberty-Benton High School is now home to a piece of space history! On April 25, 2024, a unique "Moon Tree" was planted in front of the high school. This special tree, a Sycamore, stands at 54 ½ inches and is expected to grow two feet each year, thriving for generations to come.

The story behind our Moon Tree is fascinating. On November 16, 2022, NASA sent seeds from five different tree species into space as part of the Artemis Missions. These seeds orbited the moon for nine days before returning to Earth. After careful study and germination by NASA and the USDA Forest Service, these seeds were distributed to schools and organizations across the country. L-B science teacher Dillon Webster applied for one of the special trees. Due to his efforts, the school now has a living part of space exploration history.

**CONGRATULATIONS
CLASS OF 2024
FLY LIKE AN EAGLE**





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L-B Students Visit Marathon Petroleum's Career Exploration Day

More than 100 seventh graders from Liberty-Benton Schools visited Marathon Petroleum's headquarters in Findlay, Ohio, in February for a Career Exploration Day.

Students could choose their top three career interests from the following offerings:

- Accounting & Finance
- Communications
- Engineering
- Health
- Environmental
- Safety & Security
- Information Technology
- Law
- Marketing
- Supply Chain
- Trades

Marathon employees highlighted the various careers available at the company and shared tips on what students can do now to be successful in the future. During lunch, students visited the Talent Acquisition team where they practiced their communication and interviewing skills by asking questions about the company.

"Liberty-Benton Schools are just a couple of miles down the road from our campus, but for many students, this was the first time they saw inside our doors," said Brian Niese, Marathon Petroleum Facility Services and Real Estate Director. "It was great to share with the students the opportunities our company has to offer right here in their community and around the world."

Students were enthusiastic about their visit, with one commenting, "The whole experience taught me that just because you start in one field of work and at one company or business, that doesn't mean you have to stay there for the rest of your life. Many people I talked to said they have switched around a lot until they found something they really enjoy doing daily." Another student noted, "The biggest lesson I learned from the day was to always work my hardest and think about how what I do in the present will affect my future." A third student added, "I learned that if you don't have certain skills for a job, you should work on developing them instead of giving up."

