

EAGLE MESSENGER

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF LIBERTY-BENTON LOCAL SCHOOLS | FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER

Message from the Superintendent



The 2025-2026 school year is off to a strong start at Liberty-Benton Local Schools. Our classrooms are filled with energy, and students are actively engaged in academics, athletics, and extracurricular activities. It has been inspiring to see our students and staff return with such enthusiasm and momentum. In addition to this excitement, we are also pleased to

welcome 16 new staff members to our team this year, ranging from teachers and guidance counselors to food service staff, custodians, and a bus driver.

That same spirit of community pride was on full display September 5 during our military football game, when we came together for a special dedication. On that evening, we unveiled the Liberty-Benton honor wall, recognizing the service of our alumni. This tribute will stand as a lasting reminder of the courage, sacrifice, and service of those who answered the call to serve our nation.

The beginning of the school year also brought the unveiling of our brand-new stadium scoreboard, made possible by our dedicated boosters and generous donors. Just in time for football season, the scoreboard represents the latest in a proud tradition

of enhancements funded through partnerships between boosters and the school. Read on in the newsletter to learn more about other facility projects funded through the support of community donations.

As we look ahead, Liberty-Benton is placing a Continuing Substitute Levy on the November 4, 2025 ballot. The proposed levy would combine the District's two existing Emergency Levies into a single Continuing Substitute Levy totaling the same amount of \$1,424,600. It would result in a zero tax increase for Liberty-Benton residents, in its initial year.

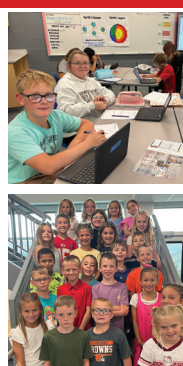
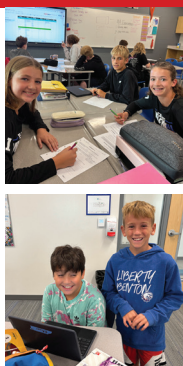
I look forward to another year of progress, collaboration, and continued success for our students and staff. We will remain committed to keeping our community informed and to sharing updates as the year unfolds.

Fly Higher,

Bruce Otley

First Day Highlights Across Liberty-Benton

The first day of school brought energy and excitement to every grade level, as students gathered for photos, explored new routines, and showed their Eagle pride.



Message from the Treasurer



At Liberty-Benton, we are proud of our long-standing commitment to strong fiscal stewardship and protecting the investments of our taxpayers. Our community expects, and deserves, transparent, responsible, and efficient use of public funds.

For years, Liberty-Benton has upheld these values by making strategic, long-term financial decisions that prioritize student success. As a result, our district continues to deliver an outstanding return on your tax dollar investment. Liberty-Benton consistently ranks among the top 20% of school districts statewide in academic achievement, while operating at one of the lowest per-pupil costs in Ohio (\$10,103 compared to the state average of \$12,397). This remarkable balance of efficiency and excellence allows us to provide some of the highest levels of student performance in the state.

As treasurer, I will continue to ensure that every dollar is used wisely to support our district's educational mission and our students' future.

We are also closely tracking developments at the state level that could affect local finances. This includes the passed state budget, specifically the potential override of the Governor's veto related to the 30 percent cash balance carryover, as well as property tax reform proposals expected to reach the Governor this fall.

Liberty-Benton is placing a Continuing Substitute Levy on the November 4, 2025 ballot. The proposed levy would combine the District's two existing Emergency Levies into a single Continuing Substitute Levy totaling the same

amount of \$1,424,600. It would result in a zero tax increase for Liberty-Benton residents, in its initial year.

This approach was chosen in response to changes made to current law eliminating emergency levies as an option after this year. If voters approve the Continuing Substitute Levy, the collection of existing Emergency Levies will stop when the new Substitute Levy collection begins. The continuing structure is necessary as there will be no option to renew in the future. Unlike the existing Emergency Levies, as the District grows, the Continuing Substitute Levy adjusts to capture the additional property value, allowing revenue growth.

Additionally, the November 4, 2025 election will be the only opportunity to preserve the 12.5% homestead and rollback contribution currently paid by the state. If the District waits until the existing levies expire in 2028, the local taxpayer will no longer receive the 12.5% homestead and rollback contribution currently paid by the state.

Looking ahead, the district will continue to navigate these financial requirements with care and transparency. As developments occur at both the state and local level, information will be shared so that our community remains informed throughout the process. Community members are also encouraged to contact me directly with any questions at ldobbins@liberty-benton.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa Dobbins".

Lisa Dobbins

2025 Summer Safe Ways to Schools Sidewalk Project & Grant

In collaboration with County Engineer Doug Cade and Lindsay Taylor's 7th-grade English class, the District secured a Safe Routes to School grant that fully funded critical safety improvements to school sidewalks across the District.

Phase I, completed in June 2025, invested \$462,945 to build 2,800 feet of 10-foot-wide sidewalk and pedestrian activated crossing at County Road 9 and Early Drive.

Phase II, approved in June and scheduled for 2028, will add 3,630 feet of 5-foot-wide sidewalk along County Road 88 from Dold Drive to Palm Drive, plus pedestrian activated crossing at Nebraska and Sandusky—a \$544,074.02 investment in the community.





Honor Our Eagles Who Serve

On September 5, during Military Appreciation Night at our home football game, Liberty-Benton proudly unveiled the Honor Wall, a powerful new symbol of gratitude and remembrance.

For the past several years, the Liberty-Benton High School Support Our Soldiers (SOS) Action Team has worked tirelessly to raise the funds needed to bring this vision to life. Their efforts ensure that our alumni who serve are remembered and honored for generations to come.

This permanent display, located outside the high school gym, honors Liberty-Benton alumni who have served, or are currently serving, in our nation's military. The wall stands as a lasting tribute to the courage, sacrifice, and commitment of our Eagles in uniform.

Are you a Liberty-Benton alum who has served?

To have a dog tag added to the wall, please email Mychelle Dukes at mdukes@liberty-benton.org.



Liberty-Benton Local Schools is placing a

CONTINUING SUBSTITUTE LEVY



on the **November 4, 2025 ballot**

The proposed levy would:

- Combine the District's two existing Emergency Levies into a single Continuing Substitute Levy totaling the same amount of \$1,424,600.
- Result in a zero tax increase for Liberty-Benton residents, in its initial year. Each year the levy can bring in a bit more revenue when new homes or businesses are built in the community.

Why the November 4, 2025 General Election?

- Changes made to current law eliminate emergency levies as an option after this year.
- The November 4, 2025 election will be the only opportunity to preserve the 12.5% homestead and rollback contribution currently paid by the state.
- If the District waits until the existing levies expire in 2028, the local taxpayer will no longer receive the 12.5% homestead and rollback contribution currently paid by the state.

Existing Emergency Levies:

- \$724,600 Emergency Levy – First approved in 1994, expires in 2028.
- \$700,000 Emergency Levy – First approved in 2009, expires in 2028.

If voters approve the Continuing Substitute Levy, the collection of existing Emergency Levies will stop when the new Substitute Levy collection begins.

Key Considerations:

- The November 4, 2025 election is the only opportunity for local taxpayers to preserve the 12.5% homestead and rollback contribution from the state.
- The continuing structure is necessary as there will be no option to renew in the future.
- Unlike the existing Emergency Levies, as the District grows, the Continuing Substitute Levy adjusts to capture the additional property value allowing revenue growth.

**If November 4, 2025 Continuing
Substitute Levy is Approved**



Existing Emergency Levies

\$724,600
First Approved 1994
Expires 2028

\$700,000
First Approved 2009
Expires 2028

BECOMES

Continuing Substitute Levy

Same amount of \$1,424,600
12.5% State homestead and rollback preserved

Learn more at: www.liberty-benton.org or contact:
Bruce Otley, Superintendent: botley@liberty-benton.org
Lisa Dobbins, Treasurer: ldobbins@liberty-benton.org

Improved Facilities, Little to No District Dollars Spent

Liberty-Benton is blessed with a proud tradition of community support, and that commitment shines through in every opportunity we provide for our students. Our most recent facility improvements stand as a testament to this enduring spirit. Thanks to the hard work of our boosters, the generosity of donors, and the support of grant funding, these upgrades continue a legacy of enhancements that reflect our community's unwavering dedication to student success.

These projects are more than just turf, lights, or sidewalks—they are symbols of pride, progress, and partnership. They represent the shared belief that when we invest in our students, we invest in the future of Liberty-Benton. We are deeply grateful for your continued support and for the role you play in making these opportunities possible.

On August 15, Liberty-Benton Local Schools officially dedicated their new digital scoreboard in between the girls and boys soccer games against Ottawa Hills. The project was a collaborative effort between the athletic boosters and the school district, with the majority of funding provided by donors and the boosters.



Special thanks to our Athletic Boosters and generous donors who made the project possible:

LB Athletic Boosters, Scoreboard Capital Committee

Jeremy Theiss

Paul Witte

Jason Broerman

Nick Ferris

Marc Krauss

Abe Sparling

Matt Moser

Naming Rights Sponsor

Garner Trucking

Eagle Sponsors

J. Elchert Wealth Management

Chick-fil-A

Marathon Petroleum (workforce grant to cover the cost of software)

Diamond Sponsors

Key Realty – Scott Kellar

loanDepot – Scott Snapp

Findlay Truck & RV

Bellstores

Lion's Share Company

Gold Sponsors

Stump Family

Pilgrim Restaurant

Stump Fire Protection

The Baking Company & Bread Kneads

Silver Sponsors

Nutrien Ag

Monkey Around



2024 Fall Softball Field Renovation

On March 22, the district celebrated the completion of our softball field renovation—a project made possible through a partnership among our athletic boosters, community, and district. In just over 60 days, the boosters and community raised \$250,000, which, combined with a generous \$300,000 gift from 1958 graduate Mary Danchuk Cooley.

Projects like this take planning and teamwork, and the results provide lasting value. The renovation improves district facilities and supports a sense of pride and connection in our schools. The project was completed on time and within budget.

More Donor Funded Projects over the Years

2023
SUMMER BAND
TRAILER DECALS
(Band Boosters)

2022
SPRING ATHLETIC
FIELD HOUSE
(Athletic Boosters)

2021
FALL BASEBALL
FIELD TURF AND
RENOVATION
(Athletic Boosters)

2004
FITNESS CENTER/
WEIGHT ROOM
(Athletic Boosters)





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Once Again, L-B Earns Strong Marks on the State Report Card

Overall



Achievement



Progress



Gap Closing



Graduation



Early Literacy



College, Career,
Workforce, and
Military Readiness



These are tremendous results, and they belong to all of us. Our staff are working tirelessly, our students continue to rise to every challenge, and our families and community partners play a vital role in supporting their success.

New this year, the report card includes a College, Career, Workforce, and Military Readiness component, where LB earned 4 stars, showing our graduates are well-prepared for life after high school. The District maintained every category score from last year except Progress. The district earned 3 stars in Progress, which means the district met, but didn't exceed expected levels of growth. Liberty-Benton is perennially high performing, and "Exceeded" expected levels of growth last year. This made it statistically improbable to exceed expected levels of growth a second consecutive year. Phrased another way, a rating of 5 in the Progress category is a place high performing districts visit (as we did last year) but can't indefinitely stay.

Together, we will keep building on this strong foundation to ensure success for every student.