

# EAGLE MESSENGER

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

## SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

### EAGLES SOARING:

#### A Glimpse into Liberty-Benton's Continued Success and Innovation



The finish line for this school year is in sight! For those of you who may be soaking up the last months of your child being at home before they start kindergarten - or before they head into the "real world" - this may ignite fear or a feeling of melancholy. No matter where you are in your child's educational journey, know that Liberty-Benton Schools are here every step of the way.

Over the past few months, our staff and students have continued to make great strides in their teaching and learning, social-emotional development, athletics and performing arts. We are seeing the fruits of our labor in moving to a one-campus model through collaborative efforts that span multiple grade levels.

Students learn best in a safe and fun environment. We received a \$100,000 grant that is helping us improve our safety and security infrastructure, while recent hands-on learning is helping ensure our students retain knowledge. Some recent activities include:

- Compiling a time capsule
- Problem-solving their way out of an escape room
- Presenting to area business leaders at a mock Shark Tank event

In the area of athletics, we recently opened an all-new wrestling room, were awarded Field of the Year at the state baseball clinic, and dedicated our basketball court to an Eagle legend.

Our band was also recognized as the Band of the Week by Chick-fil-A!

We strive to prepare leaders for tomorrow and our students do not disappoint. Two of our students have earned top Future Farmers of America (FFA) honors, our fourth graders participated in a first-of-its-kind event aimed at teaching youth how to behave in a professional environment, and several middle school students represented Liberty-Benton at a Franklin Covey Leadership Summit.

Read about all of this and more throughout this newsletter, and as always, it's a great day to be a Liberty-Benton Eagle!

Fly Higher!

**Bruce Otley**, Superintendent



## A New Chapter in Basketball: Lauren Gerken's Record-Shattering High School Career



Lauren Gerken has redefined excellence in high school basketball at Liberty-Benton, scoring a record-breaking 1,956 career points and surpassing both the school's and Hancock County's previous records. Her achievement outshines Katie Butler's 2003 school record of 1868 and the county record of 1876 previously set by George Keller of Cory-Rawson in 1955. A three-time All-Ohio Selection and Blanchard Valley Conference (BVC) Player of the Year, Gerken's achievements reflect her dedication, skill, and leadership. Beyond her high school success, she has committed to continue her basketball career at Bowling Green State University. Congratulations Lauren!

# TREASURER'S UPDATE



It's often hard to make a direct connection between a school's fiscal priorities and academic performance. That's not the case at Liberty-Benton however!

The district spent \$11,136 per student which is nearly 28% lower than the average of other Hancock County school districts in 2023.

Historically, the district's expense per student

increased just under 20% while the same peer group of Hancock County schools increased 34%.

Additionally, when comparing Liberty-Benton to all schools within Hancock County, we have one of the current lowest Total Property Taxes per pupil at \$4,996.

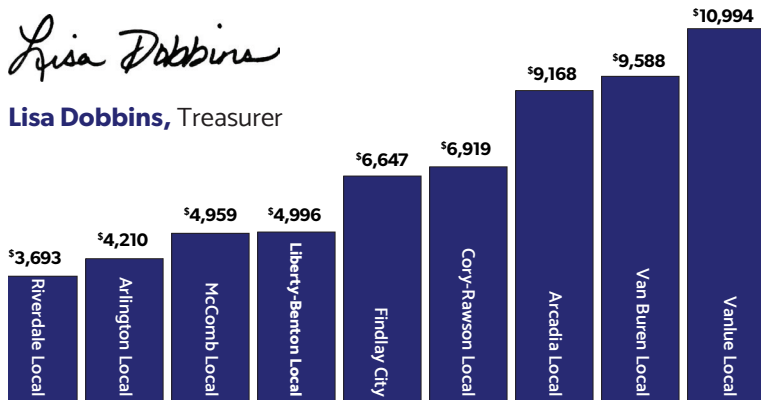
While demonstrating fiscal responsibility, the district has also proven itself academically. Liberty-Benton continues to excel and most recently was ranked in the top 15% of all school districts in the state (88 out of 607 districts) on Ohio's School Report Card. This demonstrates an incredible return on our taxpayers' investment.

The commitment to investing in education ensures that students have access to quality education. We will continue to allocate resources to ensure that the students at Liberty-Benton are provided a culture of lifelong learning and opportunity of academic growth in an environment where they can thrive now and in the future.

Respectfully,

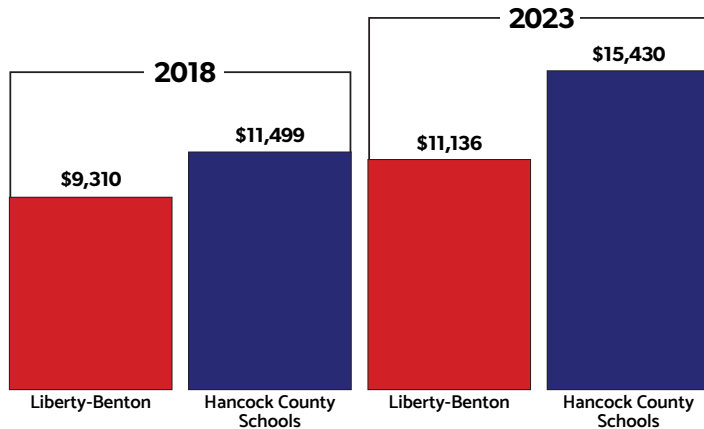
*Lisa Dobbins*

**Lisa Dobbins**, Treasurer



**Total Property Tax Per Pupil**

Source: Ohio Department of Taxation Tax Year 2022 DTE-14 data files and Fiscal Year 2023 Final #2 State Foundation Funding Payment File



**Liberty-Benton Local Benchmark Report**

Source: District Profile Data (CUPP Data)

## First Annual Amazing Shake

What's the Amazing Shake you ask? Jan. 26 marked the first annual event, which is aimed at teaching students manners, discipline, respect, and how to conduct themselves in a professional environment to open up opportunities for them now and in the future. A firm handshake is an important part of presenting one's self well.

Fourth graders perfected their skills during Language Arts, Leader In Me and at home in preparation for the big day. The event kicked off with students going through a series of fast-paced scenarios, also known as The Gauntlet, with 25 local business professionals. They got to spend one minute interacting with business leaders. The professionals then score students based on their leadership, conversation skills, social etiquette, confidence, and daily life skills.

The top 21 scorers advanced to a similar event on March 8, and a grand winner will be announced on March 22. Thank you to our community judges, our parents for your help and support, and our fourth graders for being such a hardworking group of students!



## The Great Escape

Students in grades 5-8 recently tested their problem-solving skills by finding a way out of an escape room! Teams had to complete a puzzle to unlock a lock in each room. Once all of the classroom locks were completed they received a final puzzle to complete. Congratulations to the winning team of eighth graders who found their way out of the escape room in two hours and 25 minutes.





## Liberty-Benton Unveils Steve Williman Court

On Dec. 28, 2023, the Liberty-Benton community came together to celebrate the contributions of Steve Williman, an L-B alumnus who served as the head boy's basketball coach for 26 years.

During his tenure, he amassed 516 wins and impacted countless student-athletes. Current players and alumni enjoyed a dinner at the Findlay Country Club before the court was dedicated as part of the Steve Williman Invitational. A piece of the old gymnasium floor signed by players was presented to Coach Williman during the ceremony. A celebration continued at the Hillcrest Country Club after the game.



## New Wrestling Room Officially Open

Jan. 3 will be a night to remember for Liberty-Benton's wrestling program. After the St. John's Jesuit dual meet and our senior night, Coach Marzec, and Superintendent Otley performed a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the all-new Wrestling Room.

The project began in August and was completed in November. The new state-of-the-art space is located in the LB Athletic Booster's Field House.

"The completion of this project was truly a team effort, and is a reflection of what makes Liberty-Benton such a special place," said Superintendent Otley. "I would like to acknowledge the following groups for their outstanding work on the project: Warner Mechanical, Garlock Brothers Construction, Ohio Concrete Solutions, and Gillig Winery. The Wrestling Room would not be possible without the contributions of the Capital Campaign Committee as well as generous donors."



## Students Prepare Time Capsule

In November of 2023, students in grades K-8 selected items to place in a time capsule in hopes that they will help future students understand what life was like in 2023. Items ranged from artifacts from the old building and the dedication of the new building to a photo of the school dog, lunch menu recipes, and more!



## Grant Helping District Make Safety and Security Upgrades

Liberty-Benton Local Schools regularly applies for grants to help stretch its resources, and one recent grant paid off in a big way.

The district received \$100,000 from Marathon Petroleum's Thriving Communities grant program in December of 2023. The monies are helping offset the cost of safety and security upgrades made last summer, including:

- Door sensors installed on exterior doors
- Video surveillance upgrades
- Line-of-sight solutions
- Secondary locking devices
- Emergency notification systems
- Structural enhancements

Superintendent Otley said the extra funds will help the district invest in additional safety and security infrastructure.



## L-B Represented at Franklin Covey Leadership Summit

The middle school Jr. Lighthouse team attended the first Middle Leadership Summit hosted by Franklin Covey and Smithville Schools in November. The group presented on the Leader in Me program at Liberty-Benton Middle School.



## Eagle Band Recognized by Chick-fil-A

Congrats to the Eagle band, which was recognized as the Band of the Week by Chick-fil-A and BCSN!

# Two Students Earn Top FFA Honors

Each year, the National Future Farmers of America (FFA) honors members who show high levels of dedication to the organization through their desire to develop their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education.

This year, more than 4,400 American Degrees were awarded, including two of Liberty-Benton's own: Chloe Heidlebaugh and Lexi Heidlebaugh. They received their award at the 96th National FFA Convention & Expo on Nov. 4, 2023.

To be eligible, students must have earned at least \$10,000 or \$2,000 and worked at least 2,250 hours outside of class time through a supervised agricultural experience (SAE) in which they own a business, hold a professional position as an employee, or conduct research. Recipients must also complete 50 hours of community service and demonstrate outstanding leadership abilities and civic involvement through the completion of several FFA and community activities. Less than 1% of FFA members receive the American FFA Degree.

Chloe is a sophomore at Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute. Her SAE was raising market lambs, breeding sheep, field corn, soybeans and sweet corn on the family farm. Lexi is a sophomore at Owens Community College. She raised veal calves, field corn, soybeans and sweet corn. She also worked for the DaBaugh Farm, Meyer Ag Service, and Tardibuono Baling.

FFA is a national, school-based youth leadership development organization made up of more than 945,000 students. There are 9,163 chapters across all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Congratulations Chloe and Lexi!



## Move to One Campus Improves Collaboration



Before winter break, senior composition course students got to know third graders through story and letter writing!

Students from both grade levels completed questionnaires and made self-portraits before they were paired up. Seniors wrote emails and personalized stories with a moral or lesson that they read to their third grade mentees. The third graders were tasked with writing the next section of the story and responding to the emailed letters.

The older students also helped the younger students with some fun writing activities and competed in Gimkits, a live learning game show. Additionally, seniors wrote letters of encouragement that third grade teachers will hand out to their students as they feel they need a pick-me-up.

This project is one of the many benefits of Liberty-Benton's new one-campus learning environment.

## Celebrating Our Board of Education

Each January, school districts across the state recognize their Boards of Education during School Board Recognition Month. The theme of this year's celebration - Launching Our Next Generation - perfectly encapsulates what our board members do each day.

They are responsible for establishing policies, developing curriculum, and allocating our budget to ensure a safe and productive learning environment for our students. Their dedication is admirable, and for this, we say thank you!

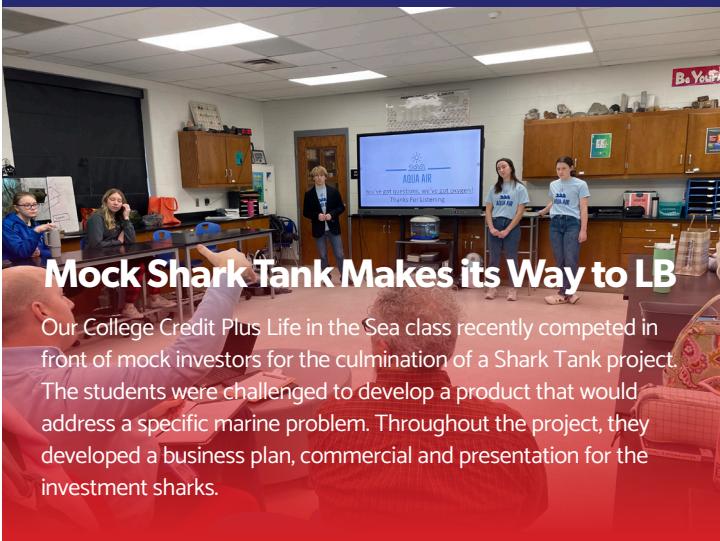


From left to right: Heather Franks, Brian Christiansen, vice president, Steve Benson, Jim Mace, president, and AJ Granger.



## Mock Shark Tank Makes its Way to LB

Our College Credit Plus Life in the Sea class recently competed in front of mock investors for the culmination of a Shark Tank project. The students were challenged to develop a product that would address a specific marine problem. Throughout the project, they developed a business plan, commercial and presentation for the investment sharks.



# YouScience Helping Guide High School Students to Future Pathways

YouScience is an aptitude-based guidance platform that helps students identify their aptitudes, validate their skills, and get matched with educational and career pathways.

Last month, all Liberty-Benton High School students completed the YouScience career assessment. Assessment results will help staff tailor specific career experiences for students, such as conversations with area professionals, job shadowing, career expo activities, college and trade school visits, and internships.

This is an effective tool being used by many area schools. Hancock County's Raise the Bar is compiling aptitude results from several area districts to provide local employers with trends in the upcoming workforce. The goal is to establish new educational and industry partnerships as a result.

We are excited to see the positive ways this new tool will be used at Liberty-Benton Schools and encourage parents to talk with their high school student(s) about their results.



## Second Annual Military Appreciation Night Held

On Jan. 27, Liberty-Benton hosted its second annual Military Appreciation Basketball Night. The event was sponsored by Liberty-Benton's Support Our Soldiers, the United States Air Force and Ohio National Guard area recruiters.

Liberty-Benton seniors and recent graduates were recognized for their commitment to the Armed Forces, including:

### Seniors

Leo Mead - Navy

Anderson Roberts - Air National Guard

Shane Lasiter - Air National Guard

Connor Arnold - Air National Guard

Zac Ponx - will be attending a military academy

### 2023 Graduates

Tim Folk - Army National Guard

Gavin Gillig - Army National Guard

Sable Siebeneck - Navy

Kaden Boutwell - Air National Guard



Additionally, Bowling Green State University Student Veterans of America displayed a full-court-sized American flag and MVPs were selected for the boy's and girl's games. Congratulations to Carson Conaway for being named the MVP of the boy's game.

At the beginning of the varsity game, the Liberty-Benton Support Our Soldiers were also presented with a fundraising check from Paul Hadde - Chick-fil-A Findlay and Josh Elchert - Heavenly Pizza. The dollars raised were the result of a once-a-year fundraiser. Heavenly Pizza sold 100 special edition Chick-fil-A pizzas smothered in Chick-fil-A sauce and topped with chicken nuggets, waffle fries and a special cheese blend. The proceeds will help cover the cost of Flag City Honor Flight Guardian fees and other special projects.

The mission of Support Our Soldiers is to honor and support all those who have served or are currently serving and their families. They support military-connected students, staff and alumni by recognizing their challenges and needs. They serve as the supporting group for Liberty-Benton's Purple Star initiative.

## Z-Club Bakes Cookies for First Responders

Z-Club members recently baked cookies for our local heroes before personally delivering them to the State Highway Patrol, Findlay Police Department and Hancock County Sheriff. Way to give back!



## Lifevac Devices Improving Safety

Three Lifevac devices, the most reliable choking rescue device in the world, were recently secured for the district and are spread across our schools. Thanks to our nurse, Niki Spencer, all staff have been trained on how to use the device in the case of an emergency.



# College Credit Plus Reminder



Students in grades 6-11 who plan to take College Credit Plus courses during the 2024-2025 school year must complete an Intent to Participate form and Liberty-Benton High School Mandated Counseling form and return them to the counseling office by Tuesday, April 2.

# Baseball Field Named Field of the Year



Liberty-Benton is proud to share that the high school baseball field was honored as the Ohio High School Baseball Association's Field of the Year at this year's state baseball clinic. The award is given annually to the most deserving field in the state.

Our baseball program is grateful for all of the parent and community support through the years to make our field such a great place to play.



# 15th Annual PTO Family Carnival in the Books



Thank you to the more than 225 volunteers who made this year's annual PTO Family Carnival a hit! Families enjoyed inflatable bounce houses and obstacle courses, carnival games, a photo booth with props, and of course, food!

# Important Dates

**March 29-April 1** - Spring Break

**April 8** - Remote Learning Day - Solar Eclipse

**May 27** - Memorial Day - No School

**May 30** - Last Day of School - 2-hour early dismissal

**June 2** - Graduation

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