

# EAGLE MESSENGER

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

## SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE



### DEAR LB COMMUNITY,

As we enter the final part of the school year, I want to take a moment to recognize and appreciate the students, parents, staff, and community members who make Liberty-Benton such an extraordinary place. Your dedication, hard work, and support drive our district forward, creating meaningful opportunities for our students to thrive.

At Liberty-Benton, our school culture is the heart of who we are and what we strive to be. Through our **Portrait of an Eagle**, we have defined the values that shape our community: **positive character, critical thinking, resilience, emotional intelligence, leadership, and service**. These attributes are more than ideals—they are the foundation of everything we do, shaping our approach to education, leadership, and the way we support one another both in and beyond the classroom.

A core part of our mission is ensuring that every student feels valued and supported. That's why we continue to prioritize strong relationships, and our Relationship Audit remains a vital initiative. This effort helps ensure that each student has at least three trusted teachers or staff members they can turn to. Education is not just about academics—it's about building character, fostering leadership, and preparing our students for lifelong success. I am incredibly grateful for the teachers, coaches, and mentors who bring these values to life every day.

We are also blessed to have new facilities that unite our entire district on a single campus. Construction is progressing on our 15-bay transportation and maintenance facility, a critical investment in our district's long-term operational needs. Meanwhile, our new turf softball diamond will be ready for spring play, thanks to the generosity of 1958 Liberty-Benton graduate Mary Danchuk Cooley and the incredible support of local businesses, athletic boosters, and community donors. Their generosity reflects the spirit of service and commitment that defines Liberty-Benton.

While we embrace progress, we also remain dedicated to honoring our heritage. Key elements from our former campus have been thoughtfully incorporated into our new facilities, ensuring that our history remains a visible and lasting part of Liberty-Benton. A commemorative wall now stands as a tribute to our legacy, preserving our district's rich history for generations of Eagles to come.

This year also marks an exciting new chapter for Liberty-Benton Athletics. After thoughtful consideration, we will transition to the Cardinal Division of the Northern Lakes League (NLL). While we are deeply grateful for our time in the Blanchard Valley Conference and the strong traditions it has fostered, joining the NLL presents new opportunities that align with our district's evolving needs. This move allows us to maintain strong community ties, provide competitive balance, and keep travel reasonable for league play. Many of our teams have already competed against NLL schools in non-conference play, and we look forward to strengthening those relationships in this new league.

As we look ahead, I am excited for the future of Liberty-Benton and all that we will accomplish together. Thank you for your continued support and commitment to making our schools a place where students grow into leaders, problem-solvers, and people of strong character. Together, we will continue to empower our Eagles to reach new heights.

Fly Higher,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Otley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Bruce Otley**  
Superintendent

## A MESSAGE FROM THE TREASURER



Currently, our state legislators are preparing a state budget that will determine whether to fairly fund Ohio schools by completing implementation of the Fair School Funding Plan.

The Ohio House and Senate took a giant step forward for students and schools by enacting the Fair School Funding Plan in 2021. Phased in over six years,

the plan will be fully implemented by fiscal year 2027. The Fair School Funding Plan was developed by school district leaders and expert practitioners. It translates real student needs into concrete resources by accounting for essential education components like appropriate class sizes, student support services, and educational technology. The formula treats all taxpayers fairly based on their community's ability to raise local funds.

The implementation of the Fair School Funding Plan formula represents a move toward the equitable and adequate funding of Ohio's schools. However, for the plan to be effective and constitutional, there is still work to be done. For the formula to work and provide an equitable and adequate education for Ohio's children, full implementation must be included in the budget and current base cost inputs from fiscal year 2022 must be updated to provide the funding necessary in an environment of high inflation.

The Governor's budget, which is now being considered in the House of Representatives, includes the phase-in of years 5 and 6. However, the Governor's budget does not include an update to base costs, which means that districts would lose money because the funding formula would not account for inflationary increases in base costs.

Based on current simulations from the Governor's budget proposal, Liberty-Benton is projected to lose \$212,943 in state funding for the 2025-2026 school year and \$237,680 for the 2026-2027 school year.

It is often said that what we value, we are willing to fund. As our legislators begin discussions of priorities for the biennium budget, we urge you to personally speak to our State Representatives about the importance and urgency of investing in Ohio's children.

Legislators representing our school district:

**Representative Ty D. Mathews**

**Phone:** 614-466-3819

**Email:** rep83@ohiohouse.gov

**Legislative Aide:** Reed Neal, reed.neal@ohiohouse.gov

**Senator Rob McColley**

**Phone:** 614-466-8150

**Email:** mcolley@ohiosenate.gov

**Legislative Aide:** Marcella Perretti, marcella.perretti@ohiosenate.gov

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We sincerely appreciate our community's continued support in maintaining a strong financial foundation for student success.

Sincerely,

Lisa Dobbins, Treasurer

## December Service Project: Supporting Hope House of Findlay

In December, our kindergarten students and teachers joined together in the spirit of giving by supporting Hope House of Findlay, a local organization dedicated to helping homeless and impoverished individuals and families in Hancock County. Each classroom received an empty laundry basket with the goal of filling it with household items from the Hope House wish list. Thanks to the generosity of our LB elementary students and teachers, these baskets quickly filled up, demonstrating the power of kindness and community.

We are incredibly proud of our students for their compassion and generosity this holiday season. Thank you for making a difference!



## The Nursing Home Connection Action Team Spreading Holiday Cheer

The Middle School Nursing Home Connection Action Team brought joy to their friends at Fox Run Manor in Findlay, Ohio, by creating Christmas crafts and gifts. Students dedicated their time and creativity to spreading holiday cheer, making the season a little brighter for the residents. What a wonderful way to celebrate the spirit of giving!



# Remembering Our Roots at Liberty-Benton

It has been said that a people who forgets their past, has no future.

As you drive past our campus, you have probably noticed the new brick wall just off County Road 9. This commemorative wall is the final preservation project from our old campus. When the building was demolished in 2023, the original badging that once crowned the old school was carefully removed and preserved, along with bricks from the structure. These items now form this commemorative wall, honoring the legacy of the original school. The bronze plaque on the wall tells the complete history of our district so that future generations of Eagles will have a tangible reminder of our LB heritage. The image on the plaque shows Board Members President Geo. W. Inbody, members O.E. Moorhead, H.B. Clark, W.J. Creighton, and D. Yake, and Clerk Paul Porter proudly standing in front of the old school with the district's first motorized fleet of school buses.

The plaque reads:

The Centralized School of Liberty Township opened its doors in 1921. When the building was demolished in 2023, the original badging that once crowned the school was carefully removed and preserved, along with bricks from the structure. These items now form this commemorative wall, honoring the legacy of the original school.

The 1921 School Board members were President Geo. W. Inbody, members O.E. Moorhead, H.B. Clark, W.J. Creighton, and D. Yake, and Clerk Paul Porter. They are pictured above alongside the district's first motorized school buses. Their names are also featured on the original dedication plaque, which is now displayed near the main office of the current PreK-8 building.

The first brick schoolhouse in Benton Ridge was constructed in 1887 at the corner of Market and North Street. At that time, the school adopted the mascot "Hawks" and served students until 1907. A new school was built about half a mile east of Benton Ridge, operating from 1908 until 1926 when high school classes were discontinued. However, it continued to serve grades 1-8 until 1954.

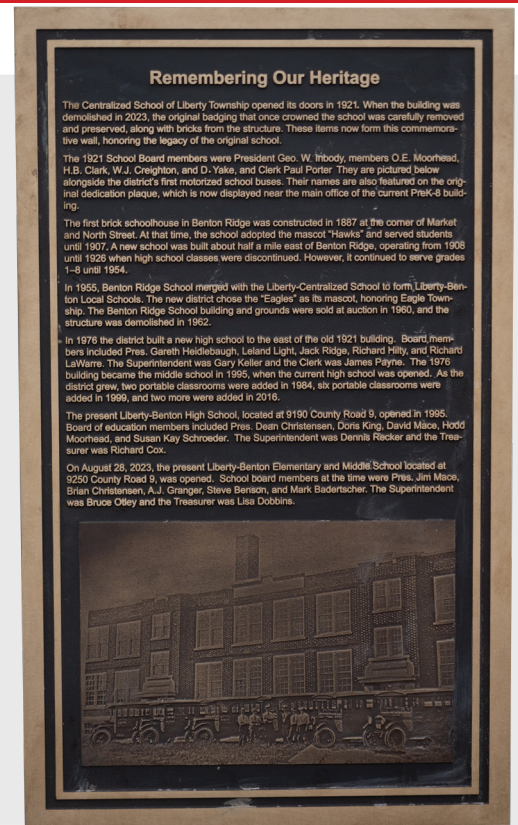
In 1955, Benton Ridge School merged with the Liberty-Centralized School to form Liberty-Benton Local Schools. The new district chose the "Eagles" as its mascot, honoring Eagle Township. The Benton Ridge School building and grounds were sold at auction in 1960, and the structure was demolished in 1962.

In 1976, the district built a new high school to the east of the old 1921 building. Board members included Pres. Gareth Heidlebaugh, Leland Light, Jack Ridge, Richard Hilty, and Richard LaWarre. The Superintendent was Gary Keller and the Clerk was James Payne. The 1976 building became the middle school in 1995, when the current high school was opened. As the district grew, two portable classrooms were added in 1984, six portable classrooms were added in 1999, and two more were added in 2016.

The present Liberty-Benton High School, located at 9190 County Road 9, opened in 1995. Board of education members included President Dean Christiansen, Doris King, David Mace, Hodd Moorhead, and Susan Kay Schroeder. The Superintendent was Dennis Recker and the Treasurer was Richard Cox.

On August 28, 2023, the present Liberty-Benton Elementary and Middle School located at 9250 County Road 9, was opened. School board members at the time were Pres. Jim Mace, Brian Christiansen, A.J. Granger, Steve Benson, and Mark Badertscher. The Superintendent was Bruce Otley and the Treasurer was Lisa Dobbins.

Although the photo on the plaque is over 100 years old, at the time of the photo, the "old building" was brand new. In many ways Liberty-Benton Local Schools is again standing on similar ground with new facilities and a vision for building our legacy in the next 100 years.



For our current students and future generations of Eagles, this memorial serves as a tangible link to the past—a reminder of the strong foundation on which our schools were built. The history, traditions, and community spirit of Liberty-Benton Local Schools will always have a place here.



## 4th Grade Students Shine in The Amazing Shake

Our 4th graders recently participated in The Amazing Shake, a program designed to build confidence, communication, and leadership skills. On December 6, all students competed in Round 1, showcasing professionalism, strong handshakes, and the ability to engage with 30 community judges. The top 20 advanced to the next round held on January 10, narrowing down to five finalists. These top students will compete at the Clerk of Courts on February 21, with our winner heading to the Global Amazing Shake in Atlanta on March 28!

This program has helped our students develop essential real-world skills, and we are proud of their growth and achievements!



## LB Elementary School Hype Club Supports Basketball Team

The LBES Eagle Hype Club made treat bags for the LBHS Boys Basketball team. The team visited our club to say thank you, answered the students' questions, and even passed out a little treat!



## Liberty-Benton Hosts Leader in Me Middle School Summit

Liberty-Benton's Jr. Lighthouse Team welcomed over 200 attendees from schools across Ohio for the Leader in Me Middle School Summit in November. Centered on Habit 8: Find Your Voice – Spark Greatness, Ignite Change, the event showcased student leadership and collaboration. Participants shared how they cultivate leadership in their schools, reinforcing Leader in Me's mission to empower students, educators, and families with essential life and leadership skills.

## Middle School Library Action Team

The Library Action Team plays a vital role in keeping our school library a welcoming and organized space. With multiple subgroups, students contribute in various ways, including dusting and organizing shelves, decorating, creating bookmarks, and cleaning books. They also ensure that the self-service kiosks in the ELA classrooms are restarted and logged in daily. Beyond these tasks, team members share their love of reading by reading aloud to younger students. Here, they are pictured reading to Mrs. Sparling's kindergarten class during library time.

A special thank you to Mrs. Irwin for overseeing the Library Action Team and supporting our students in their efforts!



## Balance My Day Program



The Hancock County Health Department launched a six-week program to teach our second graders about healthy habits and nutrition. In January, students learned about germs and proper handwashing techniques. Using a special hand lotion, they shook hands and then observed the “germs” left behind before practicing the correct way to wash their hands. They even had fun playing a Simon Says game with tissues! The program will continue every Friday through the winter, reinforcing important lessons in health and wellness.

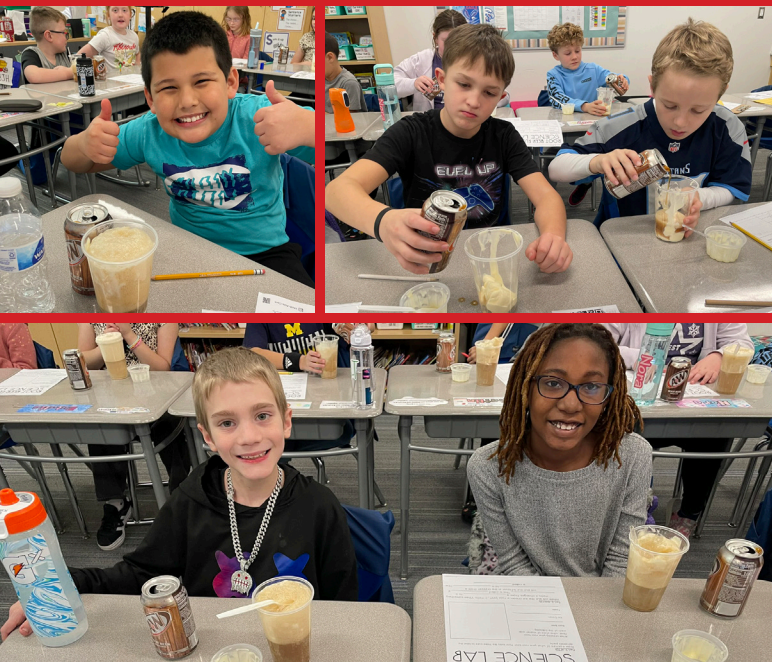
## Middle School Fly Like An Eagle Day

We had Fly Like an Eagle Day just before Christmas. Students competed in a scavenger hunt in the morning, followed by Reindeer Relays, and even took in a wrestling match cheering on their classmates.



## States of Matter in Action

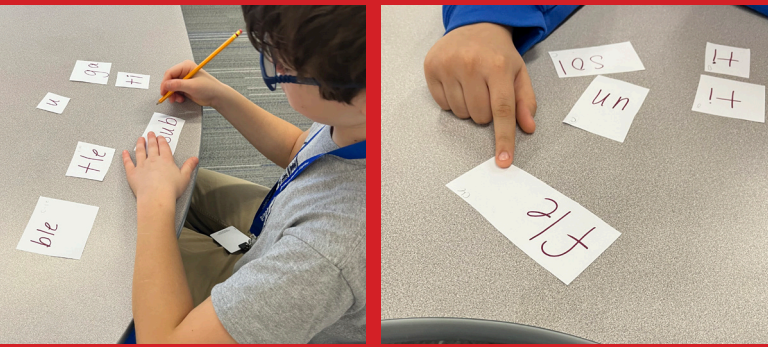
To bring their States of Matter lessons to life, our 3rd-grade students made delicious root beer floats! As they enjoyed their sweet treats, they identified the different states of matter in the cup, ice cream, and root beer—observing how they changed throughout the process. A fun (and tasty!) way to learn science!



## Elementary Art Notan Designs

Our 3rd-grade students have been exploring the art of Notan Designs in the Art Room! Using marker printing, Kwik Stix, or painting, they created unique patterns and then carefully cut out organic and geometric shapes to bring their designs to life. Their creativity is truly shining through in this engaging project!





## Middle School Intervention Syllable Success

Middle school students have been sharpening their reading skills by reviewing different syllable types. Through listening activities and word analysis, they practiced identifying syllables to decode multi-syllable words with confidence. These exercises are helping build stronger reading and comprehension skills!

## LB Future Farmers of America Chapter Excels in Soil Judging Event

Liberty-Benton Future Farmers of America (FFA) recently participated in the State Urban Soils Career Development Event (CDE), where students analyzed soil pits to assess texture, drainage, compaction, and suitability for various uses such as roads, basements, septic systems, and gardens. Participants also took two exams—one knowledge-based and another using a soil survey book. Liberty Benton's Urban Team placed 26th in the state!



## High School Senior English Students Become Published Authors

Mrs. Teders' Rhodes State Composition classes participated in the Young Writers Fright Club contest in October, where students submitted 100-word horror stories for a chance to win prizes and become published authors.

All **77 student entries** were selected for publication in *Fright Club - The Fear Chronicles*, an incredible achievement! This accomplishment also puts Liberty Benton in the running for the **Young Writers Award of Excellence**. The winner will be announced this spring. Stay tuned! Congratulations to our talented writers—keep soaring, Eagles!

Here are a couple of examples of what was entered into the contest:

### LURKING IN THE SHADOWS

I felt my breath hitch in my throat as the light flickered. The abandoned alley I had to walk through to return to my car kept me on my feet. Water droplets dripping from the gutters, making my walk more eerie. The air was dense and a cold breeze made the hairs on my neck stand tall. Walking further down, I suddenly heard a shift in movement. I quickly peered over my shoulder but saw nothing. Suddenly, I felt a hand cover my mouth and a sharp pain in my back. I was on the ground and everything was black.

### THE BLACK ABYSS

Aaaah! A screech fills the air as a young girl is awakened from her wisdom tooth surgery, unknowing of her surroundings or the faces of those around her. She begins to feel around her mouth, only to realize she has no teeth. However, in place of her pearly whites are the gummy craters that used to house her smile. She looks around to see who did this to her. That's when she heard the sound of the drill once again consuming her being. She tried to fight off the drowsy feeling when the black abyss filled the air around her.

## Future Farmers of America Degree Recipients

The American FFA Degree is the highest honor awarded by the National FFA Organization, recognizing exceptional leadership, community involvement, and dedication to agricultural excellence.

This year, Liberty-Benton FFA members **Mary Holley** and **Erica Patterson** earned this prestigious award at the National FFA Convention.

Only 529 members in Ohio received this honor, which reflects years of commitment to their chapter, state association, and supervised agricultural experiences. Their achievements demonstrate outstanding leadership and a bright future in agriculture.

**Congratulations to all our FFA members on their accomplishments!**



Mary Holley



Erica Patterson

## Athletics

Our winter athletes had great seasons! Here are some of our talented seniors in action!



Alex Durliat  
Bowling



Avery Knepper  
Basketball



Avery Martin  
Bowling



Jake Gerken  
Basketball

## Liberty-Benton S.O.S. Club Seeks Alumni for Military Honor Wall

The Liberty-Benton Support Our Soldiers (S.O.S.) Club is seeking names of alumni who have served or are currently serving in the military to be recognized on a new Honor Wall.

As a special service project, the Honor Wall will be displayed outside the high school gymnasium, spanning three pillars. The final design and dimensions will be determined based on the number of names submitted.

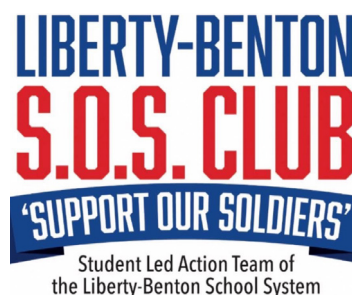
All Liberty-Benton alumni who are veterans (regardless of discharge type) or are actively serving in any branch of the military are eligible for inclusion.

Submissions should include:

- Name
- Graduation year
- Branch(es) of service

Photos are also welcome and greatly appreciated.

To submit a name or for more information, please email [sos@liberty-benton.org](mailto:sos@liberty-benton.org). Help us honor and celebrate our Eagles who have dedicated themselves to serving our country!



# BEYOND THE NEST: ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

## From Homework to Hardcover: Three Liberty-Benton alumni have transformed their love for writing into published works.



**LINDSEY (KAYLE) HILTY ('02)** began as a newspaper reporter in the Cincinnati/Dayton area before transitioning to freelance writing while raising her children. In 2023, she published *Do You Have to Take Showers in Heaven?*, a devotional-style book answering kids' questions about heaven. She now writes curriculum for Bible Study Fellowship, impacting 68,000 students worldwide. Her works are available on Amazon and Christianbook.com.



**BETHANY TODD ('23)** released her first book, *A Heart for Revival*, on Amazon and has more works in progress. A lifelong book lover, she is also a children's ministry leader at First United Brethren in Christ, where she enjoys helping kids grow in their faith.



**HANNAH BROWN ('16)** eagerly anticipates the April 2025 debut of her self-illustrated children's book, *Flynn, the Extraordinary Goldendoodle*. A full-time Cadillac of Novi employee, she pursues freelance illustration and has worked with Bluffton University, the U.S. National Parks System, and local authors. A former Disney College Program participant, she hopes to publish more children's books.



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## Softball Diamond Dedication March 22

Join us on **Saturday, March 22, at 11 AM** as we celebrate the dedication of our brand-new softball diamond! We extend a special invitation to any alumni softball players to be part of this exciting event.

The program will feature remarks from the Athletic Boosters and Superintendent Bruce Otley, along with recognition of our generous donors.

Following the ceremony, local youth softball and baseball players will have the honor of circling the bases on our new field.

We look forward to celebrating this milestone with our school community.



## Attention Liberty-Benton Alumni!

We're excited to reconnect with our alumni through a new form designed to gather updates and expand our alumni network. Scan the QR code to stay informed with LB news, and get involved as a mentor, speaker, or career day presenter. We'd love to feature you in our newsletters and social media spotlights!

Help us grow our alumni community—spread the word and stay connected to your LB family.

## Important Dates

**March 21**  
End of Third Quarter

**March 24**  
Professional Development - Remote Learning Day

**April 14-21**  
Spring Break

**May 25**  
Graduation

**May 26**  
Memorial Day

**May 29**  
Last Day for Students