

EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO BE THEIR OWN READING SUPERHEROES

For the past five years, Liberty-Benton Elementary Literacy Coach Ronda Smith has worked with the school's teachers to develop an accelerated reading program that encourages students to read more by making reading fun through incentives and student collaboration.

"It is not a graded program—it's an incentive program, and that's where the magic happens," stated Mrs. Smith. "The students are empowered to set their own goals for how many points they are going to earn and work toward those goals."

At the beginning of the school year, students are tested and the results provide each student with a zone or level of reading. They are then encouraged to read books at their level and take corresponding quizzes on their iPads.

This year's theme for the program is "Superheroes" and the motto for the program this year is "Learning at Liberty-Benton Gives You Superpowers."

"Students love it," she said. "I go around, usually on the first day of the month, and pass out the incentives. They love seeing me coming in the classroom with my superhero cape on. They also love passing me in the hallways and telling me how many points they have or how close they are to reaching their goals."

Each grade level has an incentive chart, with students earning incentives for milestones reached. At the end of the year, students in kindergarten must have earned 35 points, grades 1 and 2 must have earned 100 points, those in grade 3 need 150 points, and those in grades 4 and 5 must have earned 180 points to attend the Accelerated Reading Banquet at the end of the school year. That being said, every student is accommodated based on his or her learning level.

"Students are invited to bring two guests to the banquet, and we have entertainment, dinner and awards," explained Mrs. Smith. "It's really a special night, full of celebration and smiling faces."



Mrs. Smith has been proud of the work she and her fellow teachers have done, not only in setting up the curriculum but using the program to foster accelerated reading, empower students to set their own goals, and encourage collaboration among students.

"Improvement in reading can be seen in each grade level as well as in each individual student because reading has been customized to what each student is realistically capable of accomplishing."

ATTENTION:

Liberty-Benton Local Schools is in need of qualified substitute employees for the following positions: bus driver, cook, custodian, educational aide, and secretary. If interested in obtaining more information, please call the superintendent's office at 419-422-8526.

LETTER FROM THE TREASURER



A tradition here at Liberty-Benton Local Schools is to operate with great fiscal responsibility and offer great value to our community. We all know that strong fiscal stewardship is essential to making the opportunities we offer our students and staff happen, and this is always my top priority. We will continue to seek efficiencies, cost avoidance and savings. From FY 2010 to FY 2018, the district has not spent more than it has received.

It's energizing to see all of the collaborative teaching and inspired learning happening in our schools. Mark and I both agree that budgets are a statement of priorities. And if you look at our district's budget, you can see we value sending money to the classroom. Sixty-seven percent of the district budget is spent on classroom instruction; money that allows us to offer myriad opportunities, put technology in the hands of our students and employ some of the best teachers in the state.

This is why the conversation about the future of our facilities is so important. Believe it or not, our current elementary school building will soon be 97 years old! Repair and maintenance costs are growing, and at some point, the age and design of our middle school and elementary school buildings also begin to interfere with the education, technology and safety needs of today. We are planning now, which will help to minimize costs into the future.

And as we plan, we will make sure to involve you along the way. After all, these school buildings belong to the community; we are simply the caretakers of the incredible tradition that is Liberty-Benton Local Schools.

This partnership between the community and the district is critically important to the success of the district, and I am grateful we have such a supportive community. It is an honor and a privilege to serve as the treasurer for a school district and community that places such a high value on an excellent educational experience.

Respectfully,

Lisa Dobbins, Treasurer

EAGLE MESSENGER

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



WHY AM I GETTING THIS NEWSLETTER?

The ultimate goal of the district's communication efforts is to assure Liberty-Benton Local Schools is reaching all residents in a way that is highly relevant, while also efficiently utilizing the district's available outreach methods. Recognizing the need for sustainable communication efforts, there is a clear desire for a stronger communications program and it is definitely a priority for the district.

"There is so much happening with our students and staff, and I want to make sure we are telling our school district's story because this is not only our story but our community's story as well," said Superintendent Mark Kowalski. "At Liberty-Benton, our goal is to continue to provide an excellent educational experience for our students, and to do so in a way that is also fiscally responsible. We want the community to take pride in their schools and understand what's happening in their schools and how the decisions we make impact the great value we provide."

This quarterly newsletter is one step Liberty-Benton Local Schools is taking to enhance the level of engagement and communication the district has with the community. Residents can also follow Superintendent Mark Kowalski's Twitter feed at @LBEaglesSupt.

DID YOU KNOW?

FACT 1

Our district was recently named the

**#1 district for athletes,
the #1 place to teach
and the #1 safest school**

in Hancock County by Niche.com.



FACT 2

100%

of our students have direct access to a computer device through our 1:1 technology initiative



DATES:

October 8-9

Parent-Teacher Conferences

October 29

Grandparents Day at the Elementary and Middle Schools

October 29

National Junior Honor Society Induction at Van Buren HS

November 5

National Honor Society Induction at Van Buren HS

November 12

Veterans Day Assembly at LBHS



Liberty-Benton Local Schools
9190 Co Rd 9
Findlay, OH 45840

CHANGING THE SCHOOL LUNCH EXPERIENCE



To create school lunches using more fresh entrees and sides, Liberty-Benton Local Schools has partnered with The Nutrition Group, completely changing the school lunch experience beginning this school year.

“The main goal is to provide fresh, inventive yet approachable food for the students,” said Food Service Director Dustin Klopping. “Just because food has to be within the government’s standards doesn’t mean it has to be tasteless or processed; we want to provide students with a quality, delicious meal.”

Menus for all three district schools have been overhauled, with the addition of a vegetable bar and a salad bar at all three schools, and a pizza bar at the high school.

“What we’ve done is utilize real, raw ingredients more often than not. There are still some classic school lunchroom options but now there is more variety and healthier options as well.”

Case in point, one day in September, the schools served Sloppy Joes and instead of thawing a bag of premade meat and sauce, Klopping’s staff browned ground beef and made the sauce.

“We actually make the meal the kids are going to eat,” he said. “We know what’s in each dish and the food tastes better and fresher.”

So many times, students arrive home from school having not eaten an entire meal at lunch. That hasn’t been the case much this year.

“You hear the parents saying that in the past their children weren’t getting enough food,” Klopping explained. “Gone are processed foods and here to stay is fresh food, and everyone seems to be happier and healthier.”

When Klopping started as district food service director he asked students, teachers and families in all three schools what they would like to see in their school lunch. Some of the responses were funny, like the elementary and middle school students wanting to get rid of sporks, but others were right in line with what The Nutrition Group already values.

“I would say we’re off to a great start. Our primary goal is to feed every student and keep them happy and healthy, while being fiscally responsible with the district’s resources,” Klopping said. “I had a second grader dancing in the cafeteria, saying how great school is just because of what she was having for lunch. How does that not put a smile on your face?”

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE YEAR AHEAD

Many people like to think of the beginning of the school year as a fresh start, a new beginning, a clean slate. And although this is true, I look toward a new school year as an opportunity to continue our work and momentum to be the best school district possible for all of our community’s children.

Under the leadership of our five building administrators—who have collectively over 70 years of administrative leadership experience—our growing student body was welcomed to what will surely shape up to be another great year at Liberty-Benton Local Schools, where we believe our students will continue to soar.

As we know, there are changing needs to providing students with a 21st century education and we are proactively adjusting to meet those needs. Our district has been providing one-to-one technology for each student in grades K-12 for over the past five years, enabling our students to individualize their learning experience. New this year, we are providing district parents with the opportunity to use online forms to streamline necessary processes and paperwork. We are offering a robotics class in our high school and online learning options for both traditional and non-traditional students as well as a career exploration class. All of this was done because we are focusing our energy and resources where they matter the most—on the student experience.

School safety is also of paramount importance to our Board of Education and administration. This school year we have begun using a secure, dedicated digital radio system for both transportation and building safety. Our buildings have also seen a few minor (but necessary) upgrades to the gutters, roofing, and brick and mortar. After all, our high school is nearly 25 years old, our middle school is over 40 years old and the main structure of our elementary building is 97 years old. A major part of providing a safe environment for student learning is providing safe facilities. We will need community input on how to move forward with our facilities this school year. More on that to come.

And while we have implemented some changes, there are some things that have stayed the same for our Eagles. Our district was recently named the #1 district for athletes, the #1 place to teach and the #1 safest school in Hancock County by Niche.com. We were also recently recognized with a bronze medal in the National Ranking by the U.S. News and World Report, with test score proficiency consistently above both the state and national averages. At Liberty-Benton Local Schools, we care about all of our students and support them in reaching their fullest potential. Not only do we want them to achieve in the classroom, but to grow and gain the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in the future.

And this year we will continue to focus on just that—giving our students the space, opportunities and guidance to be successful in the future, to soar.

Indeed, there is much to look forward to with a new school year. Please stay updated on school events and news by visiting our website, which will soon be updated, at liberty-benton.org. You can also follow me on Twitter (@LBEaglesSupt). I know I’ll have plenty to share.

Respectfully,

Mark Kowalski, Superintendent

On September 4, 2018, the Liberty-Benton School Board approved a resolution stating the intent to purchase 10 acres of land located south and adjacent to the high school property. In making the purchase, the board kept its commitment to voters by keeping this purchase within the financial means of the school district.

The Liberty-Benton Local School Board of Education and district always operate with transparency in mind, and we absolutely will be informing our public as we go through the process of deciding what would be the next step for our school district. No decisions about our facilities or the use of this land have been made—this is the beginning of a process that will require the involvement, input, and ultimately the support of our community. Purchasing this land is an important piece as to how we move forward, but there is still some longer-range work and planning that must occur.

Mark Kowalski, Superintendent



TEACHERS AS STUDENTS, TAKING TEACHING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

There’s that old saying about the student becoming the teacher. At Liberty-Benton Local Schools, the teachers became the students for a few days as the school year was getting underway.

The district’s entire teaching staff participated in two days of professional development while students had the days off for the county fair. Internationally renowned author and public speaker, Eric Sheninger, led the training. In order to successfully teach students in today’s ever-changing digital world, Mr. Sheninger presented, discussed, and modeled those techniques appropriate for a one-to-one technology district.

“The goal is two-fold,” Sheninger said. “The first goal is that we have to understand that the world is changing and most of those changes have to do with technology. Technology is changing, which means that teaching, learning and leadership are changing, too.”

“If we want to keep up with the world and prepare our kids, not for something, but for anything, we need to take a critical lens through our practice, and that really aligns with our second goal, which is understanding that there is always room for growth and improvement. We want to make connections to not only proven research and successes but also to the practicality of what happens in classrooms every day.”

Sheninger stressed that the need for change does not always mean work done previously was done poorly, but that an ever-changing world around us makes adapting a necessity.

“He’s not only explaining why we need to make these adjustments and what that looks like,” said Liberty-Benton High School Principal Brenda Frankart. “But he’s also modeling the changes; we are the students and we’re looking at how we can get better.”

And Sheninger’s energy was palpable.

“He has a passion for what he’s teaching and that makes you want to have the same passion to want to change things for the better,” said 8th grade science teacher, Lyndsey Fox. “We know we have great technology, students, and teachers, but there are areas we can keep improving.”

“There’s a new way of learning because we are working with a different generation of kids,” continued 4th grade teacher Holly Myers. “We have to have the technology to engage with these kids and to prepare them for a technological world, because that’s what they live in and that’s where they’re going to live.”

High school science teacher, Chad Marzec, was excited for the opportunity to collaborate with fellow teachers, some of whom he does not get to work with on a daily basis and appreciated the district’s administration for seeing the value in collaboration.

“It says a lot about our administration that they’re prioritizing our improvement,” he said. “We have time to reflect on where we can grow and improve; this time is invaluable. I really feel at Liberty-Benton that the leadership is investing in us.”



A few weeks later, Weston Kieschnick, lifelong learner, author and blended learning expert, also spent time with district staff to deliver a message and training that expanded on Sheninger’s presentation. And later this school year, Sheninger will return to spend a couple more days with staff.

Superintendent Mark Kowalski explains, “The goal is to bring one of these experts back annually to do some instructional coaching with our district staff, which will ultimately lead to increased student achievement.”

