

EAGLE MESSENGER

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF LIBERTY-BENTON LOCAL SCHOOLS | WINTER 2026 NEWSLETTER

Message from the Superintendent



I want to start by recognizing the Liberty-Benton community for its support this past November. We are grateful for your partnership and the confidence you continue to place in Liberty-Benton Local Schools.

With the passage of the November ballot issue, the district was able to combine two existing emergency levies into a single continuing substitute levy at the same overall amount, while preserving the homestead and rollback benefits provided by the state. This action did not represent a new tax, but rather a thoughtful step that supports long-term financial stability and responsible planning.

Even with this support, we know financial challenges remain on the horizon. Ongoing tax reform in Ohio will affect school funding in the years ahead, and it is important that our Liberty-Benton community understands how these changes are expected to impact our district. You will find more details in Treasurer Lisa Dobbins' article later in this newsletter.

Through it all, great teaching and meaningful learning remain at the heart of our work. Our students benefit from educators who are committed to helping them grow academically, socially, and as leaders through engaging classroom instruction, hands-on learning, leadership development, and extracurricular opportunities. As you read on in this newsletter, you'll see just a few examples of that work in action, reflecting the dedication of our staff, the curiosity and determination of our students, and the

strong culture we continue to build together as a school community.

This winter is also a time to reflect on leadership—honoring those who have left a lasting legacy while welcoming new voices to Liberty-Benton. We are grateful for the many years of service provided by A.J. Granger on the Board of Education and for the decades of impact Coach Scott Garlock has had as an educator, mentor, and leader. Their contributions have helped shape Liberty-Benton into the district it is today.

At the same time, we are excited about the fresh perspectives strengthening our team. Liz Sabel is now serving on the Board of Education, and we appreciate her willingness to step into this important role. We have also welcomed Drake Spridgeon as our new Associate Treasurer and Jason Peters as our new head football coach and high school social studies teacher.

I truly enjoy having a front-row seat to the great things happening at Liberty-Benton Local Schools. As we look ahead to the remainder of the school year, I am excited for all that is still to come and grateful to share this journey with such a supportive community.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Otley".

Bruce Otley, Superintendent





Message from the Treasurer

Our Schools, Our Community: Understanding Ohio's New Property Tax Changes

In December 2025, Ohio lawmakers passed new property-tax legislation aimed at providing homeowners with more financial predictability. While this change may come as welcome news to property owners, it's important to understand how it could impact school funding, particularly for districts like Liberty-Benton Local Schools that rely on local tax revenue to support day-to-day operations.

How Schools Are Funded

Ohio's Constitution requires public education to be funded through a partnership between the state and local communities. For Liberty-Benton Local Schools, revenue currently comes from three main sources: local taxes (51%), state funding (44%), and Other (5%).

Why Property Taxes Feel Different

Two long-term trends have changed how school funding feels at the local level.

First, the share paid by homeowners has increased. In 1991, homeowners paid about 46% of school property taxes statewide. Today, they pay nearly 68%, as the business share has declined.

Second, property values have risen. Within the Liberty-Benton Local School District, residential values increased by approximately 23% in 2025.

Why Higher Values Don't Automatically Mean More School Revenue

Although property values have risen, state law limits how much additional revenue schools receive. A key law is House Bill 920 (1976), which adjusts tax rates downward when property values increase. This protects homeowners by ensuring that most voter-approved levies generate roughly the same revenue over time.

There is one notable exception.

Understanding the 20-Mill Floor

Once a district's operating millage reaches the 20-mill floor, tax rates can no longer be reduced. At that point, revenue may begin to grow as property values increase.

Once a district's operating tax rate reaches 20 mills, rates can no longer be reduced, and revenue may begin to grow with property values. Of the 20 mills, 5.3 inside mills support Liberty-Benton Local Schools. Outside mills make up the remaining 14.7 mills that were voter-approved by the local tax payers.

New State Laws Affecting Liberty-Benton

All of the recently passed property tax-related bills apply to Liberty-Benton Local Schools and have the potential of reducing tax revenue to the district by an estimated \$1,800,000 over the next five years.

House Bill 129 limits Liberty-Benton's ability to see revenue growth following county reappraisals or triennial updates by changing how the 20-mill floor is calculated.

House Bill 186 limits property tax increases for Liberty-Benton property owners when the district is on the 20-mill floor by requiring county auditors to apply tax credits that cap increases at an inflationary rate based on gross domestic product (GDP). For Liberty-Benton, these credits reduce the amount of property tax revenue collected locally.

House Bill 309 allows the Hancock County Budget Commission to reduce the amount collected from voter-approved levies after the first year they are in effect. For Liberty-Benton, this means future levy collections could be adjusted by the county rather than set solely by voter approval.

House Bill 335 requires counties to reduce certain inside millage when property values grow faster than inflation. This applies only to inside millage and does not affect voter-approved levies.



Welcome New Associate Treasurer!

Please join us in warmly welcoming **Drake Spridgeon, Liberty-Benton's new Associate Treasurer!**



Born and raised in Hancock County, Drake is a proud graduate of Arcadia Local Schools and the University of Findlay (where he was named a Dana Scholar in 2024!). His career includes time at Marathon Petroleum and the Wood County Board of Developmental Disabilities Fiscal Office.

Looking Ahead

These reforms create a challenging environment. The state funding formula assumes districts will rely more on local revenue, yet new laws limit how much that revenue can grow. At the same time, schools face increasing expenses.

Beyond these immediate changes, broader conversations continue at the state level about the future of property taxes in Ohio. In early February, Governor Mike DeWine discussed the potential impact of eliminating property taxes altogether, noting that property taxes fund not only schools but also many local government services statewide. He explained that fully replacing property tax revenue would require significant increases in other taxes. According to the Governor, Ohio's current state income tax rate of 2.75%—one of the lowest in the nation—would need to rise to approximately 11% to 15% to offset the loss. Similarly, the statewide sales tax would need to increase to an estimated 15% to 18%, potentially including items such as groceries that are not currently subject to sales tax.

Regardless of how the state ultimately changes how residents are taxed, school districts must continue to operate within the funding structures established by state law while managing rising costs and maintaining stability. Liberty-Benton Local Schools remains committed to responsible financial planning, transparency, and long-term stability by regularly evaluating spending, following board-adopted reserve policies, and planning conservatively to manage cash flow, inflation, and unexpected expenses.

We appreciate the continued support of the Liberty-Benton community and will continue to share clear, factual information as conditions change.

Lisa Dobbins, Treasurer

Welcome New Football Head Coach!



The Liberty-Benton Eagles are excited to **welcome Jason Peters as the new Head Football Coach** for the 2026-2027 school year! In addition to leading the football program, Coach Peters will join the district as a high school social studies teacher.

Coach Peters, brings more than two decades of experience and leadership in high school football coaching. Most notably, he served 18 years as Head Coach at Grandview Heights High School where he became the winningest head coach in school history, his teams made nine playoff appearances, and his players earned numerous postseason honors. In addition to his coaching career, Peters played collegiately with the Bowling Green Falcons, where he was a three-year starter, a two-time conference champion, and earned All Mid-American Conference and Academic All-American honors.

Coach Garlock's L-B Legacy



AFTER TWO DECADES OF LEADERSHIP BOTH ON THE TURF AND IN THE CLASSROOM, SCOTT GARLOCK RETIRED AS LIBERTY-BENTON'S HEAD FOOTBALL COACH and intervention specialist in December. A 1990 Findlay High School graduate and former University of Findlay quarterback, Garlock leaves a legacy defined by his unwavering commitment to the Eagle community.

Across two storied stints leading the program, Garlock compiled a 94-25 overall record, transforming Liberty-Benton into a perennial powerhouse. His initial five-year run from 2002

to 2006 secured three Blanchard Valley Conference titles and a Division V regional championship. Returning to wrap up his coaching career with Liberty-Benton, he guided the Eagles to a 47-12 record over the last five seasons, including three consecutive BVC titles and a dominant 12-1 campaign in 2025 that earned him Northwest District Division V co-coach of the year honors.

While his on-field achievements are substantial, his true legacy remains the generations of student-athletes he mentored as an intervention specialist and coach. The entire Liberty-Benton community is deeply grateful to Coach Garlock for his dedication to excellence and wishes him the very best in his well-deserved retirement. Once an Eagle, always an Eagle!

Myers Honored as CORAS Outstanding Elementary Teacher



LIBERTY-BENTON LOCAL SCHOOLS IS PROUD TO CELEBRATE SECOND-GRADE TEACHER HOLLY MYERS, who was honored Feb. 11 at the Coalition of Ohio Rural and Appalachian Schools (CORAS) Outstanding Elementary Teacher recognition luncheon at Bowling Green State University.

The event brought together educational leaders from across the state, including

Dr. Richard Murray, CORAS executive director; Dr. Rodney Rodgers, president of BGSU; Paul Craft, Ohio superintendent of public instruction; and Paul LaRue, president of the State Board of Education.

Mrs. Myers was recognized for her commitment to students and excellence in the classroom.

"Mrs. Holly Myers is an exceptionally child-centered second-grade teacher whose enthusiasm, creativity, and professionalism inspire both students and colleagues," said Elementary Principal Brian Burkett. **"She sets high expectations, uses diverse, effective teaching strategies to reach all her students, and builds a safe and caring classroom community. Mrs. Myers' dedication, flexibility, and commitment to excellence make her a deserving nominee for the CORAS Outstanding Teacher Award."**

Superintendent Bruce Otley added, "Mrs. Myers is a true difference maker in the lives of our students. Year after year, she inspires, challenges, and supports her students to be the best they can be."

We are proud of Mrs. Myers for representing Liberty-Benton with excellence and for the impact she makes each day in the lives of our young Eagles.

Board of Education



On behalf of the entire Liberty-Benton Local Schools community, we'd like to extend our deepest, most sincere appreciation to A.J. Granger for more than 12 years of dedicated service on the Board of Education.

Throughout his service, Granger offered clear vision and thoughtful direction that helped the district navigate periods of growth and change. He also dedicated time to mentoring new board members, ensuring they felt supported and prepared to fulfill their responsibilities. Granger's positive influence will continue to benefit the school community for years to come. Thank you, A.J., for everything you have given to Liberty-Benton.

Current Board of Education members include President Jim Mace, Vice President Brian Christiansen, Steve Benson, Heather Franks, and our newest member, Liz Sabel.



Learning in Focus Elementary

First- and fourth-grade leadership buddies know that everyone needs to stay warm in the winter, so they worked together to make cozy blankets for nursing home residents and delivered them just in time for our coldest days of the season.



Learning in Focus

Elementary

Continuing to keep the spirit of Carol Waldman in the heart of students, "The Invisible String" was donated in her honor by Rick and Cindy Eyman, Carol's daughter-in-law's parents. Even though our beloved Mrs. Waldman is no longer with us, this book reminds us that we are connected to her with an invisible string of love.



Middle School

Seventh-grade gifted reading students brought a novel to life by drafting a technical theatre plan for each chapter of the book "Seedfolks," and entertained parents and administrators with a lively performance.



High School

Environmental science and agriculture high school students connected fascinating science with real-world application through a hands-on deer processing demonstration. They now know the ins and outs of how hunting supports conservation in Ohio.



Eagles in Action



Hope House

Kindergarten teachers and students led a compassionate, school-wide service project by filling laundry baskets with essential household items for Hope House, an organization dedicated to supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness in our community.



Sports Action Team

Our middle school sports action team proved that the best way to learn a new sport is with your friends by your side, bringing plenty of energy and team spirit to their latest soccer match in the field house.



Z-Club

Strengthening the connection between graduation and giving back, high school Z-Club members spent their week collecting canned goods for those in need and gaining a world-class perspective from 2018 graduate Jessica LaFontaine's experiences teaching in Belize.



FFA

Trinity Williamson's years of dedication to her goats, dairy feeders, and local community have culminated in a national milestone, earning her the prestigious American FFA Degree at the 98th National FFA Convention & Expo. Congratulations, Trinity!



Soar Like An Eagle Day

Before break, students put on their holiday-style game face for our annual Soar Like an Eagle Day, competing in fun games like the Amazing Race and Reindeer Relays.

All-American

Soccer player Aiden Hatch has officially etched his name into the record books as an All-American, cementing a legacy of excellence that defines what it means to be a student-athlete at Liberty-Benton.

Scan this QR code to see Aiden in action.



Amazing Shake



ANOTHER YEAR, AND ANOTHER AMAZING SHAKE! This real-world leadership and professionalism experience is an easy community favorite, designed to help fourth grade students build confidence, communication skills, and strong character traits. After practicing their leadership and conversation skills in class and at home, students compete in “The Gauntlet,” a series of fast-paced professional challenges. During the event, local community members judge participants on their professionalism, etiquette, and confidence through one-minute rotations.

A huge thank you to our incredible community of volunteers and community partners who made this event a success:

ABE SPARLING
Marathon
SCADA Manager

ADAM BORSAY
Gateway Church
Youth Director

ALICIA GIANGIORDANO
APM Marketing, LLC
Owner

AMY KOCHENDOERFER
The University of Findlay
Assistant Professor

AMY MENDOZA
Hancock County Public Defender's
Office
Youth and Family Defense
Administrator

ASHLEY GOECKE
MPC
Community Relations

ASHLEY PETERS
Gateway Church
Go(Missions) Director

ASHLEY STEPEC-BIBLER
Raise the Bar
Workforce Program Specialist

BEN BRUMBAUGH
Garner Trucking
Maintenance Director & Driver
Advocate

BEN STEVENS
Journey Salon and Day Spa
Owner

BILL MEAD
McNaughton McKay Electric Co

BRIANNA YBARRA
Hancock County Job and Family
Services
Workforce Development Supervisor

BRITTANY BELTZ
State Bank
Treasury Management Officer

CAROL METZGER
Cancer Patient Services
CEO

CATIE SAUM
Kirk Bros
Project Coordinator

CHRISTY CRAMER
Liberty-Benton Schools

CRAIG VANRENTERGHEM
MCPA Education Director

CRISTINA NIETO
Chick-fil-A
Director of Sales and Brand Growth

DEREK DRAPER
Findlay Family YMCA

DIONNE NEUBAUER
Findlay Hancock County Chamber
of Commerce
Executive Director

DIRK BENGEL
Hancock Hotel

DOUG JENKINS
Findlay-Hancock County Chamber
of Commerce

FRED SMITH
Hancock County Sheriff's Office
Detective Sergeant

GREG ALLEN
Fostoria Economic Development
Corporation

HEATHER FRANKS
Marathon Petroleum
Advanced Administrative Assistant;
LB School Board Member

HOLLY BROBSTON
Legacy Farmer's Cooperative
Agronomy Admin & Intern Program
Coordinator

JACLYNN HOHMAN
Mayor's Office, City of Findlay
Project Manager

JEN CARPENTER
Hancock Federal Credit Union
Executive Vice President

JENNIFER STUMPP
Citizens National Bank
Mortgage Loan Officer

JENNY FALL
Women In Trucking
Director of Driver Engagement

KATIE BURKHOLDER
Valgroup
Financial Analyst

KERRY TROMBLEY
Marathon Petroleum
Engineering Director

KRISTEN HUNTER
Blanchard Valley Health System
Director of Revenue Integrity

KRISTI ST AMOUR
Gateway Church
Hospitality Director

KRISTINA ROWE
BrainPOP LLC

LARRY ROSENBERGER
Northwest Ohio Orthopedics and
Sports Medicine
Nurse Practitioner

LINDSAY BROWN
University of Idaho

MAKENNA DYSERT
Findlay Municipal Court
Chief Deputy Clerk

MARC SCHERMAN
Fifth Third
Regional Manager

MATT MOSER
Marathon Petroleum Company

MEAGAN JAMES
Children's Museum of Findlay
Visitor Experience Manager

MIGUEL PADRON
MPLarry

NICOLE HARTSCHUH
Danberry Realtors
Realtor

NICOLE MCCONNAHEA
Rhodes State College
Student Navigator

PAM HAMLIN
Millstream Career Center
Director

PATRICIA STOZICH
Findlay Municipal Court
Deputy Clerk

PAUL FULTZ
Fifth Third Bank
Vice President, Financial Center
Manager

RAVI KNUTSON
Country Inn & Suites
General Manager

ROB ORWICK
Impact Credit Union
Findlay East Branch Manager

SHAWN CARPENTER
Hancock County Probate and
Juvenile Court
Court Administrator/Chief
Probation Officer

SHELBY COOK
City of Findlay Municipal Court
Deputy Clerk

SHELLY GILBERT
University of Findlay College of
Education
Director of Field Experience

STEPHANIE RENN
Retired FCS Director

SUSAN ALLEN
Liberty-Benton Local Schools
Career Network Coordinator

SUZZETTE BOYD
Citizens National Bank
VP Business Banking Officer

TARRAH COLLERT
Danberry Realty
Real Estate Agent

TAWONNE LAWSON
Valgroup
Specialty Production Manager

WILLIAM BATESON
Hancock County Commissioner

Amazing Shake

The Amazing Shake is a strong example of how the district blends academics, leadership, and community engagement to prepare students to fly higher. Congrats to our students who made it through the third round.



Kindergarten Registration & Screening

KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN FOR THE 2026/2027 SCHOOL YEAR THROUGH MAY 8. Your child **MUST** be age 5 by August 25th to be eligible for kindergarten or beginningergarten.

Kindergarten Screening will be held on **Friday, March 13, 2026 at Gateway Church, 9555 County Rd 9, Findlay.** Families must register for the kindergarten screening process. Registration information is available on the ENROLL tab at www.liberty-benton.org

The following items will be required the day of screening for registration purposes:

- Child's Birth Certificate
- Current Immunization Record
- Any court documents that pertain to the child (custody paperwork, adoption documents, etc.)

If you have questions regarding any part of the kindergarten registration process, please contact:

SUSIE STENNETT at [sstennett@liberty-benton.org](mailto:ssennett@liberty-benton.org) or by telephone at (419) 422-9161.

Deputy Brandon Kendrick on Speaking Up and Staying Safe

Did you know early reporting prevents larger incidents? If a friend is talking about violence, self-harm, or bringing a weapon to school, it is critical to tell a trusted adult immediately. Reporting concerns allows school staff and law enforcement to intervene early, provide support, and prevent situations from escalating. Protecting your peers is not "snitching" – it is an act of leadership and care for your school community.

In March, during Life Readiness Day, I will be presenting on situational awareness to our high school students. This presentation will focus on proactive steps students can take in their everyday lives – from the moment they leave home in the morning until they return at night. Simple habits like putting phones down while walking, paying attention to surroundings, recognizing unusual behavior, and trusting their instincts can greatly increase personal safety.

Being alert not only helps students protect themselves, but it also positions them to recognize when someone else may need help.





Liberty-Benton Local Schools
 9190 Co Rd 9
 Findlay, OH 45840
liberty-benton.org

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 @LBLocalSchools

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Mark Your Calendars

ACT Testing

Grade 11
 March 10

Kindergarten Screening at Gateway Church

March 13

Imagine a Dragon Musical Auditions

March 16, 18

Spring Break

April 1-6

Imagine a Dragon Musical Performances

April 24-26

Graduation

May 24

Memorial Day

May 25

Last Day for Students

May 28

State Testing Dates

April 14-15

English Grade 10
 English Language Arts Grades 3, 5-8

April 16-17

English Language Arts Grade 4

April 21-22

American Government Grade 11
 American History Grade 10
 Biology Grade 9
 Science Grades 5, 8

April 28-29

Algebra 1 & Geometry Grades 9-10
 Math Grades 3-5, 8

Beyond the Nest

CALLING ALL LB GRADUATES! Even though you've left the LB Nest, this will always be your home, and we want you to continue to be proud of our strong Liberty-Benton traditions, culture, and education. Scan the QR code below 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.



SCAN ME