

When children come into our schools, they learn more than just math and reading. At Lakota, we teach to the whole child, a phrase that is purposefully used in our new strategic plan. That means that we build relationships with our students to help ensure that they are engaged, supported and challenged.

It also means that the way we teach should inspire creativity and imagination. We should encourage, and model, compassion for one-another, teach social skills and support the emotional health of each and every child.

If you walk through any of our 23 schools on any given day, you will see acts of kindness by our students and our staff. In fact, many recent acts of kindness have been shared on social media during kindness weeks held at several of our schools this month.

Our youngest learners have been participating in kindness weeks and kindness challenges during the month of February. At Liberty Early Childhood School, kindergartners collected 100 canned goods to donate to Reach Out Lakota. Similarly, students at Wyandot ECS have been collecting first aid supplies for Matthew 25 Ministries. Over at Hopewell ECS, students have been collecting items for their resource pantry, which contains items like snacks and school supplies that teachers can access throughout the day.

Acts of kindness aren't just limited to February, either. Fifth graders at Endeavor Elementary School participate in a different charity drive every month. They've recently collected boxes of candy and Valentine's Day cards to send to Pine Ridge Reservation, home to a Lakota Indian tribe.

A school project led to a successful clothing drive for Reach Out Lakota at Liberty Junior. What started as one student's passion project to help those in need turned into a school-wide clothing drive, with more than 1,000 items donated.

The generosity and displays of kindness by our families and students is astounding. Likewise, our staff has repeatedly stepped up to the plate to help others. Through one email to staff from the community liaison at Lakota West, donations of winter clothing flowed in, which in turn were given to students in need. District-wide, staff have the option to participate in our Casual for a Cause program each year. Through payroll deductions, monetary donations are split among four community partners. Over \$64,000 has been donated by our staff just since 2017.

Examples of kindness encompass more than donations to various organizations. Students caught performing an act of kindness are also recognized at several of our schools. You may be named “Hawk of the Week” at Lakota East if you’re caught making a difference by a staff member. Over at Plains Junior, students are nominated for “Plains Perks” by staff for displaying acts of kindness, responsibility and effort.

By encouraging compassion and kindness in our kids, we are teaching them to care for one another and helping them to be more conscious of others, a lesson that carries on past our doors.

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