

Looking Back at the 2018-19 School Year

It's hard to believe the school year is coming to a close already. It seems like just yesterday we were welcoming our students back into our buildings with sharpened pencils, new lunch boxes and school supplies. Several changes were implemented this year to enhance the exceptional education our community expects from Lakota Local Schools.

We began the school year a bit differently in August; instead of teachers jumping into lesson plans, they were encouraged to take the first two days of school to get to know their students, and let their students get to know them. A strong relationship between teachers and students builds trust and a foundation for engaged learning. It also sets the stage for a more personalized learning experience, which we believe in so strongly that it is one of the pillars of our mission statement.

All-day kindergarten without a lottery was introduced, along with daily specials for students in grades K-6, including a new health and wellness class. Our junior school students were the first to receive Chromebooks as part of the WE are Empowered initiative. The launch of this 1:1 program went exceptionally well, enabling us to expand the program to our high school students much earlier than anticipated.

While we focused on changes to our primary grades, as well as our junior schools, we promised that our high schools were next. And they are. As I mentioned, we were able to move up the launch of 1:1 for our high school students to January. Because they would only be with us for a few more months, we made the fiscally responsible decision to only distribute Chromebooks to students in grades 9-11. Our seniors have been able to access the same learning tools by using the devices already in our buildings. Additionally, over winter break the media centers at the high schools and freshman buildings were transformed into Innovation Hubs. Now, all secondary students, including those at our junior schools, have access to a myriad of digital tools, such as green screen technology, virtual reality stations and 3D printers - all in a space designed for collaboration with their peers.

Our high school students have also benefited from expanded opportunities for real world learning through internships, guest speakers and project mentors. Our partnerships with the business community have grown from around 20 to 150 this year, thanks to the work of our strategic partnerships coordinator.

We have also received positive feedback from students and parents about our expanded class options for zero bell at the main campuses. Class assignments will be based on student request and district resources, which opens more opportunities than the traditional English and social studies courses. This is a direct result of feedback we have received through community conversations and the collaboration between staff and students through LakotaNext. The group was tasked with reimagining the high school experience for students, and they did not disappoint.

The end of the school year always brings about mixed emotions. We are sad to see the class of 2019 leave our hallways, but look forward to watching their future successes after crossing the graduation stage.

As we close out our year, I would like to take the opportunity to invite you to a community event that we are hosting with Caring Community Collaborative. On Friday, May 31, join us at Lakota East High School for “Through Our Eyes: Mental Health and Substance Abuse - Twin Challenges.” This free event includes breakout sessions and panel discussions. More information can be found on our website.

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