

Inside Your Schools



#WEareInnovat@rs



Today's classroom is nothing like that of the past. Learn how creativity and innovation are reimagining the way our children learn.

#WEareLakota

FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

A Look Ahead

While second semester has recently begun, Lakota's executive team is already looking ahead to the 2018-19 school year. All-day kindergarten offered to all students, daily specials for grades K-6, a 1:1 technology pilot program for all junior high school students and the restructuring of our early childhood schools to serve grades K-2 and our elementary schools grades 3-6 are among the exciting changes that will be coming.

These initiatives are the result of more than 30 meetings that school board members, district administrators and I have had with parents, students, community members and staff.

The conversations focused on the strong foundation we are building upon and the direction the district is headed. We feel confident that this is the first step in moving forward to become a district of choice and

to continue delivering the excellent education our students deserve.

Research has shown that all-day kindergarten improves student achievement as well as social and emotional skills. While we will offer all-day kindergarten to every incoming child, half-day morning classes will still be an option. Students in all-day kindergarten through sixth grade will also receive daily specials. Related arts, physical education and technology, for example, encourage our students to express themselves and engage different parts of their brains.

Our new building structure more closely aligns with the curriculum structure for our students. A K-2 building will assist with early intervention for our youngest learners. This more efficient structure will allow for more flexibility and cluster grouping for

specialized instruction. Increasing the use of technology in our classrooms will enhance our students' learning experience and further support personalized learning.

If you have questions about these initiatives, I encourage you to read the FAQ on our website at lakotaonline.com.

We don't have to wait until next year to see innovation at work in our classrooms. This edition of "Inside Your Schools" will take you into our buildings for a glimpse at what today's education looks like.

At Lakota, we encourage innovation in the classroom as a way to engage our learners. Class lectures and tradi-

tional rows of desks are not necessarily the best way to teach a subject day in and day out.

"At Lakota, we encourage innovation in the classroom as a way to engage our learners."

Encouraging our kids to dive deeper into a subject that interests them will spark their creativity and passion. Genius Hour and Project Based Learning do just that, and many of our teachers are embracing these ideas.

Innovation can also be seen by the use of technology in the classrooms, which will continue to grow at all grade levels. This year,

our students and staff have the option to use programs in either Microsoft or Google, which has shown to be especially helpful with collaboration. Proficiency in both programs will benefit our students in their future. As we move toward being a 1:1 district in terms of student-to-device ratio at the secondary level, the use of technology in the classroom will increase and complement the excellent education our kids are already receiving at Lakota.

I hope you'll join me at our State of the Schools community event at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 13 at Lakota West High School. It's an opportunity to hear firsthand about the innovation that's happening in our schools.



Matthew J. Miller
MATTHEW J. MILLER
Superintendent

Plains Junior seventh-grader Vaughn Nguyen shares his work with Superintendent Matthew Miller during a pop-in visit to his science class.



Meet the Lakota Board of Education

Q: How do you see innovation enhancing the educational experience of Lakota students?

A: "I see innovation allowing our students and educators to get away from testing, and be more excited about learning. We are already seeing this in many areas. One example is through the implementation of Genius Hour. Kids can explore their passions, be successful and have an opportunity for hands-on projects. Technology will allow students to explore worlds we never had access to, and has the potential to continue to transform the traditional lecture approach."

Julie Shaffer
President



Brad Lovell
Vice President

A: "After graduation, our students will compete for jobs that don't currently exist. We must aggressively pursue innovative teaching and learning practices to prepare them. Innovation doesn't mean simply using technology. Our students must be able to think beyond the classroom walls and we must support our teachers in this endeavor. Partnerships with our business community and other educational institutions are imperative to give our students real world experiences."



Kelley Casper
Board Member

A: "Innovation will help develop the next generation of innovators and critical thinkers and prepare them for jobs that haven't been created yet. It will attract students' attention in the classroom and make them more eager to learn. It will allow them to become more involved in the subject matter instead of just memorizing information. Teachers will be able to do more Project Based Learning that will help students solve complex problems and work in teams."



Lynda O'Connor
Board Member

A: "A typical graduate's opportunities are broader than ever. Their K-12 educational experience lays the foundation for future jobs, which we can only imagine today. Innovation in delivery models, use of technology, processes, and educational systems can enhance student engagement, differentiated classroom instruction, efficient use of finite resources, and more. Through retooling how we develop deeper learning in students, we can provide students with a 'toolbox' of skills that will serve them well into all of their future endeavors."



Todd Parnell
Board Member

A: "Innovation, in all its forms - whether in technology, curriculum, student opportunities or parental engagement - will greatly enhance the educational experience for all students. Innovation is not just about 'technology,' but spans a very broad spectrum. We are committed to managing innovation (and associated change) to make sure we get the most out of new ideas and changes. Innovation in all areas, as part of an overall strategy and with all areas working together, will exponentially enhance our student experience in so many areas."

FROM THE TREASURER

Student-Centered & Financially Stable

A great education is student-centered. At Lakota, every decision we make is done with the best interest of our students in mind. This philosophy also extends to the district's finances. It is our responsibility to find a way when possible to fund new initiatives for our students while we continue to be good stewards of the public tax dollar.

We have very exciting new initiatives planned for the 2018-19 school year that will benefit our students and continue to raise the bar on a Lakota education, but we must be able to pay for these offerings in a fiscally responsible manner. We are pleased to share that these changes can be implemented without a detrimental impact on our bottom line and long-term financial planning.

After an extensive study of current staffing and our facilities, we believe that we will be able to offer all-day kindergarten and daily specials for our early childhood and elementary students with little financial impact. By offering

all-day kindergarten to all students, we will eliminate most of our midday bus routes, which we believe will be an annual cost savings in excess of \$400,000.

Our 1:1 technology pilot in the junior schools, which builds upon our levy commitment to increase instructional technology, will be paid for using the monies set aside for technology in our permanent improvement fund. In 2013, our community generously supported 2 mills to be spent on facilities and technology - items that have a lifespan of five years or more. As we continue to increase instructional technology, we will repurpose current devices for use in our elementary and early childhood buildings.

The most recent five-year forecast, which is a snapshot financial report, was presented at the October 23, 2017 Lakota Board of Education meeting. For the last five consecutive years, Lakota Local Schools has operated with a balanced budget. This updated forecast predicts that we will continue to have a balanced budget

through 2022 and that our cash balance will grow.

Overall expenses in 2017 were \$7.8 million less than we spent in 2010 and our budget for the 2018 fiscal year remains below our 2010 expenditures. Lakota continues to operate in a fiscally responsible and efficient manner, while at the same time providing an excellent quality education for its students. We have worked hard to restore financial stability to this district. We will continue to align our resources with our instructional priorities, while at the same time focus on fiscal sustainability.

We value the credibility we have regained from our community. We must continue to look toward the future to ensure we are providing the best education for the children of West Chester and Liberty Townships. The new initiatives planned for the 2018-19 school year are steps to continue to move the district forward.



Jenni L. Logan
Treasurer

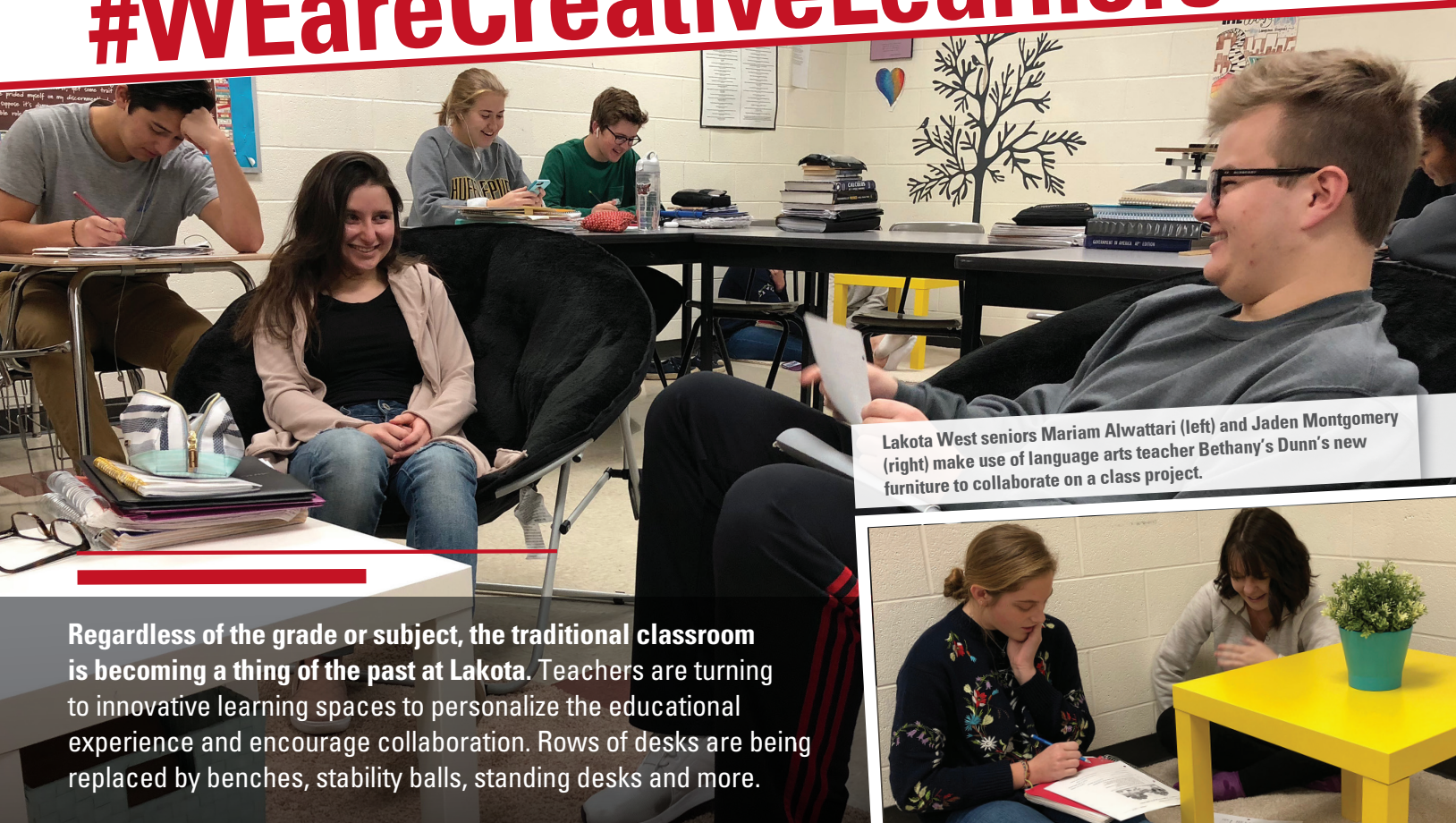
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Lakota West seniors Mariam Alwattari (left) and Jaden Montgomery (right) make use of language arts teacher Bethany's Dunn's new furniture to collaborate on a class project.



Lakota West sophomore Abigail Lindley (left) and senior Sophia Kimble (right) choose a corner spot in Bethany Dunn's language arts class to work.

Regardless of the grade or subject, the traditional classroom is becoming a thing of the past at Lakota. Teachers are turning to innovative learning spaces to personalize the educational experience and encourage collaboration. Rows of desks are being replaced by benches, stability balls, standing desks and more.

Making Space for Student Choice

Todd Caulfield's sixth grade classroom at Cherokee Elementary School (pictured on cover) doesn't have a desk in sight. "I noticed that I wasn't meeting the needs of all my students," Caulfield said. "The students were more engaged when they chose their own learning space, so I decided to make my room a mix of different options."

"As adults, we don't sit at desks all day, so why would we expect them to excel in this way?"

The same observation, paired with a professional development session taught by a fellow Lakota teacher, inspired Lakota West English teacher **Bethany Dunn** to introduce three standing desks, two saucer chairs and two video game rockers in her classroom. "What rows of desks creates is the Mrs. Dunn show," she laughed. "No matter what I tried to create, my students were almost trained to look at me as the sole giver of information."

Instead, her new setup encourages peer

collaboration. She can differentiate her teaching and group students based on their needs. It's a small change that quite literally has made a big difference for some students, including a 6'6" student who looks "so much more natural and comfortable" at a standing desk, Dunn said.

Flexible seating empowers students to choose their seats upon entering the classroom. Oftentimes, they have the option to move around the room during class. They can rearrange furniture to accommodate small group work or individual study.

Jennifer Whitten, a fourth grade teacher at Woodland Elementary School, took a different approach when designing her flexible seating this year. She asked her students for input. "This was really important because they provided insight that I would have been missing if I hadn't brought them in on the plan. It was also important to include them because it is their classroom too."

Whitten's students have appreciated the change. "It's more comfortable and makes me work more efficiently," said **Zachary Flora**,

noting that he is able to focus on his work in a comfortable seat and not have to worry about "sitting on a hard chair." **Gabe Alexander** has also noticed a change in the classroom. "Everything is calmer," he said. Both Gabe and Zachary believe that being able to move around the classroom is beneficial. "You can choose what seat will make you work better," Zachary notes.

"You really have to tailor flexible seating to your style and your subject, but it comes down to what's good for the kids," Dunn said. "It's not about picking seating because it looks cool, but because it's what your students need."



Funding Flexible Furniture

How do teachers redesign their rooms on a limited district allowance? They get innovative!

Through furniture donations from families and friends, grants and even spending their own money, teachers throughout Lakota are finding ways to outfit their classrooms with flexible furniture.

Flexible Seating, Technology a Gateway to Collaboration

For Liberty Junior math teacher **Ken Cowan**, chairs and desks on wheels translate to collaboration - not chaos.

"What you find is that the conversations are hugely impactful," he said. "They help one another. You can actually see and hear the learning taking place."

For Cowan, the shift to a

"What you find is that the conversations are hugely impactful... You can actually see and hear the learning taking place."

more free-flowing classroom is just one step in getting his students to see him as just one resource - not *the* resource - for solving a problem he presents.

By giving them the freedom to move through the room and putting devices in their hands, they suddenly have multiple resources, he explains.

"These things aren't the end all, be all," Cowan says, holding up a tablet. "Interaction and conversation are the most critical pieces to it all. This thing just gives them a platform for organizing their thoughts and maybe even testing their comprehension."

Known as the "launch pad," Cowan's classroom was intentionally designed to house a two-way mirror, which shares a wall with an observation room. The space is a turnstile for other teachers at Liberty and throughout the district who are also experimenting with flexible seating and digital learning

strategies. They can observe it in action without disruption. On occasion, Cowan even switches rooms with other teachers for the day to give them a chance to experiment with the model.

"To pull this off and ultimately do what's best for our kids, we need to be collaborating with each other," Cowan said. "It's too big a process to take on by yourself."



Liberty Junior math teacher Ken Cowan moves around his room as freely as his students do.



Building a Classroom with Purpose

The earth tones, natural lighting and cozy learning spaces in **Julie Meno's** kindergarten classroom at Liberty Early Childhood School may be mistaken as "nice decorating." But for Meno, it's much more purposeful than that.

Meno and many other early educators around Lakota

Italian town named Reggio Emilia, values student voice and choice above all else.

"They build the classroom environment right alongside you," Meno explains. "That environment actually becomes the third teacher, as they learn from the things they created. When they build it, they're

"They build the classroom environment right alongside you... [it] actually becomes the third teacher, as they learn from the things they created."

use a Reggio-inspired approach for setting up their classrooms. The community-based style of learning, which originated in an

more likely to use it and pay attention to it."

That thinking explains the varying displays of student-



Liberty ECS teacher Julie Meno bounces among her kindergartners to assist with their work.

created ABCs and 123s around the room and the responsibilities that students tackle as soon as they enter the room each day. It also explains seating options ranging from tree trunks around a lower table to saucer chairs for independent study - all to give students some level of choice and ownership in how they learn.

Another key element involves continuous change. "You want to avoid things

getting stale," explains Meno, who frequently changes out the contents of her reading and math baskets, for instance. "Even if you're working on the same concept, it's about presenting it in a different way."

Most importantly, reminds Meno, what might just look like child play always has a purpose in the learning process. "We call it purposeful play," she said.





**Lakota's New Mobile App**

Lakota's new and improved mobile app allows you to customize your calendar view, news feed and push notifications for the schools you select. Enjoy other convenient features like the ability to add events to your personal calendar, easily access menus and school directions, hours and phone numbers while on-the-go, and even connect with district and school social media channels. Search "Lakota Schools" in your mobile device's app store to download the new app. #WEareLakota



**Lakota Goes Live on Facebook**

A new learning series makes engaging with the schools and learning about modern education as easy as logging into Facebook. One night a month, a group of Lakota teachers and staff are available in a live conversation format on Facebook. The 30-minute sessions provide tips and strategies for how to support the student learning process and are available for playback later. Visit Lakota's website for the full schedule and tune in on Lakota's Facebook page. #WEareLakota



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#WEareInnovative

At the heart of Lakota's passion for student-centered learning through discovery and exploration are innovative teaching practices like **Makerspaces, Genius Hour** and **Project Based Learning**.

Makerspaces: Making Learning Fun

There weren't any glue brushes left for Wyandot ECS kindergartener, **Jordis Brewer** to use for a project she was working on.

So she came up with the idea to use a nearby straw to spread the glue. Five-year-old **Avery Dunn** noticed the new invention and said, "Good problem-solving, Jordis."

But the creativity didn't stop there. Jordis went on

to design her own brush, using the straw and some pipe cleaners.

Nearby **Ruthie Evans** was using the lesson teacher **Elizabeth Farris** had just taught on how to use an iPad to plan and document projects. Ruthie drew her design on the iPad and worked to construct it out of cardboard tubes, straws and pipe cleaners. When she was finished, she documented the project by taking a photo of it,

recorded a description of her creation and then saved it all to her classroom's files using a QR code.

Scenes like these are happening across Lakota in learning environments called Makerspaces.

Makerspaces are dedicated areas that promote learning through play and experimentation. They are stocked with tools and materials that encourage students to design,

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build, invent and experiment. Students are challenged to use the materials to solve some problem, or they have the freedom to come up with their own project ideas.

Farris is a firm believer in this exploratory approach to learning. "My students are learning so much," she said. "Sometimes you might not see it in the moment, but they are building communication skills, basic knowledge in STEAM areas and the design process, and are using lots of creativity. Plus, it is so engaging."

At Lakota, student engagement is a leading strategy. Innovative, hands-on tools like Makerspaces are taking students to deeper levels of learning.

The Makerspace concept is used in kindergarten classrooms all the way through high school. The look of the spaces is



Wyandot ECS kindergartener Kaliyah Quinn puts her class's Makerspace materials to use.

different, but they are all rooted in the same philosophy of putting the student at the center of learning, with the teacher being more of a facilitator. Some schools combine their STEAM lab with a Makerspace, while others have dedicated Makerspace rooms or a separate

space in their classroom. Makerspaces can include cutting-edge technology like 3D printers, but the key ingredients include students, problems and materials.

Project Based Learning: Putting Ideas into Action

Seventh-graders in **Angela Riffle** and **Krista Hctor**'s Advanced Language Arts classes at Hopewell Junior were able to identify a real-world problem and work to find a solution, thanks to Project Based Learning (PBL).

Riffle explained PBL's effectiveness by saying, "It helps (the students) understand better how what you're learning now matters in life...When you do a project like this, you learn about people who need help around the world."

The students worked in groups to research the

non-profit organization "Water for Life" and choose one of their projects to champion as a class. Lakota administrators, along with school board members, were invited to judge the top three presentations, as determined by the students, and choose a winner. **Eric Popp**, a student in Riffle's class, was excited about the opportunity. "We didn't have restrictions. We're helping real people in real life." **Sam Pennix** agrees. "It wasn't just a project to benefit us. We got to help other people."

Keira King, Zaara Sharma, Zeena Bayyari and **Kenzie Ringo** are the students behind the winning presentation. A bathroom, handwashing station and changing room will be constructed at the Manera Primary School in Kenya. In addition, Water for Life will

teach sixth-through-eighth grade girls and 20 women how to make soap and give them a small loan to start a soap-making business.

Through fundraising, the students hope to raise the \$1,130 needed to complete this project. "We learned more from it," Ringo said. "We got to go out and learn about a real cause."



Hopewell Junior sixth-graders Sam Pennix (left) and Nana Oppong (right) collaborate on a Project Based Learning activity in their language arts class.

Genius Hour Sparks Creativity

If it weren't for a little something called "Genius Hour," Google may have never discovered a little something called Gmail.

It's with a similar goal in mind - giving students the creative outlet to discover and explore what interests them - that many Lakota teachers are turning to a concept Google coined "Genius Hour." Some call it a "Passion Project," while others call it "20% Time," but the basic premise is the same.

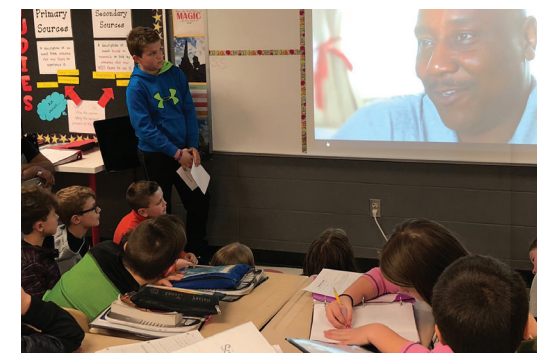
"It's about giving students the time and freedom to research and develop ideas around some topic they want to learn more about," said Woodland fifth grade teacher **Jessica Lewicki**. "Seeing the excitement and creativity it generates is a daily reminder of what learning should look like."

One of Lewicki's latest prompts challenged students to choose a project that could "make the world around them more awesome." The result was everything from researching the Hope House and organizing a school-wide coat drive to learning how to bake a new recipe and sharing it with their classmates.

Genius Hour isn't just limited to any specific subject areas or grade levels either. While the topics may be wide open, setting specific requirements is what guides students toward practicing softer skills such as research,

interviewing and presenting and even more technical skills like writing, science and math.

"Every student has their interests and things they can teach their classmates," Lewicki said. "Genius Hour puts that idea into action and truly empowers them to take ownership of their learning."



Woodland fifth-grader Quinn Bonfield presents his Genius Hour project about the Hope House.

State of the Schools March 13

Lakota Superintendent Matthew Miller will deliver his first community State of the Schools address at Lakota West High School on Tuesday, March 13. All are welcome for a light reception at 6:30 p.m., followed by Miller's public address at 7 p.m. The event will give staff, parents, students and community members a look at Lakota's current and future plans. #WEareLakota

Celebrating Our Future Veterans

To celebrate those @EAST_HAWKS and @FirebirdTweets students whose post-graduate plans include enlistment in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, Lakota will host its first Military Commitment Ceremony on Thursday, April 5. The hour-long program is open to the entire community and will begin at 7 p.m. at Lakota East Freshman. #WEareLakota



LAKOTA MILITARY COMMITMENT CEREMONY

APRIL 5 - 7 PM @ LAKOTA EAST FRESHMAN

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Visit Lakota's Online Spirit Store

There's a new way to show your #WEareLakota pride. Students, parents and staff can visit Lakota's new online spirit shop for a range of customizable district accessories and apparel in men's, women's and youth sizes. As part of the district's partnership with Rokkitwear, 15 percent of all regular sales will be applied to student programming. #WEareLakota






NEW: Lakota District Online Spirit Wear Shop NOW OPEN



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Buckets of Blessings

Lakota West senior **Aaron Parker** approached his principal, **Elgin Card**, with an idea to help those in need. He wanted to collect supplies and deliver them to an organization that

helps homeless people. From this meeting, "Buckets of Blessings" was born.

The way Aaron looks at life has been shaped by his mom's positive outlook. "My

mom's my biggest influence," he said. "How she looks at the blessings of life (makes me ask) how can I help someone else?"

Initially, Aaron wanted to deliver the donations on

Thanksgiving, but had a difficult time arranging this with various organizations he contacted. Not to be discouraged, Aaron connected with the Prince of Peace Church in Over the Rhine and made plans to bring the donated items on Christmas Eve...at 6:00 a.m.

He set up collection bins in the school's office and a "Go Fund Me" page. In addition to the clothes, toiletries and blankets collected, Aaron used donated money to purchase hats, gloves, scarves and other winter staples. In addition to the generosity of the Lakota West community, Aaron noted that members of New Chapel Church heard about "Buckets of Blessings" and donated approximately 50 hand-knitted

scarves to the cause. The donated items were sorted and individual bags were created to distribute.

Together with his family, Card, and two friends from West, sophomore **Antonio Alejandro** and senior **Navkiran Bedi** (pictured above), the group was able to not only distribute the items at the homeless shelter, but also volunteer at the breakfast being served. "When you put positive things out, you get them back," Aaron said. Card is very proud of the initiative and dedication Aaron has shown. "This was all him wanting to pay it forward."



COMMUNITY



Lakota Staff Go Casual for Cause

In 2017, about 700 Lakota staff contributed more than \$45,000 to local causes, more than half of which originated through the inaugural "Casual for a Cause" campaign.

At the start of the school year, Superintendent Matthew Miller challenged staff to turn the tradition of casual Fridays into an overwhelming display of their commitment to giving back. Lakota staff were invited to pledge a donation, all of which was divided evenly among these four partners: Butler County United Way, Caring Community Collaborative, Community Foundation of West Chester Liberty and Reach Out Lakota.

"By investing in local causes that serve our students and their families, our staff are literally multiplying the impact they have in our schools every day," Miller said. "Regardless of the amount, the fact that so many staff stepped up to give this year says a lot about their compassion for this community."



Aaron Parker
Lakota West Senior