



Tiger Talk Column

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When community members ask me about what makes Lake City Schools so great, my response is swift and easy...the people! From our curious students, to our caring staff, experienced teachers, thoughtful leaders, and supportive families, Lake City Schools is a special place to learn and work. Within the last few weeks, I have visited 19 classrooms to see first hand the magic happening as students crack the reading code, understand the numbers behind the word problem, discover their own voice while writing an essay, and discuss the details of a statistics problem. We are preparing students for the future they choose!

Last week, we celebrated Paraprofessional Appreciation Week. Our paraprofessionals help personalize learning for students, providing individual help and guidance while also managing the playground and lunchroom. Their impact on student learning and development leaves a powerful imprint and relationships are built that last a lifetime.

Tentative Agreements Reached

Both the teacher and paraprofessional unions have been in negotiations with the district throughout the fall months. As of last week, our teachers and paraprofessionals each reached a tentative agreement with the district, ensuring a fair raise to remain competitive in our region. The negotiations process was positive and collaborative throughout. This is a reflection of the positive culture our staff creates for students and the community every day.

Truth in Taxation and Levy Approval

The Lake City School Board held their annual Truth in Taxation Hearing and approved the annual levy at the December 18th board meeting. Some important points that were shared by Valerie Loppnow, Business Manager, included: 1.) Revenue formulas are set by the state legislature except for voter approved referendums. 2.) The district has no control over individual property assessments. 3.) An increase in local taxes does not necessarily mean an increase in revenues for the school district.

The components of the levy fund were also shared. There are three main parts. The General Fund is based on student enrollment and includes voter approved operating referenda, transportation funding, career and technical education funding, safe schools funding, and facilities funding. The Community Service Fund is based on the adult population of the district and the early childhood component is based on the number of children under the age of five. The Debt Service Fund is based on the levy to pay principal and interest of bonds held by the district and provides for the voter approved building projects such as the recent project at Bluff View Elementary.

Business Manager Loppnow also noted that most constituents are seeing property values rise. This is happening across the state and does not change the amount of revenue a district receives. It can lead to less state aid as the burden of taxation shifts more to the local taxpayer, depending on the property values from school district to school district state-wide. The overall levy certification approved by the board was \$5,396,041.49 which was about a 2% increase from last year.

Setting Goals

Serving students is at the core of why I became an educator and administrator. I wanted to make the biggest impact possible to as many students as possible. As I worked with the school board over the last few months to finalize the superintendent evaluation process and set professional goals, student impact was at the heart.

Goal setting is the first step in accountability for impactful results for students. The goals I set with the board's input included a goal statement as well as a rubric, or detailed levels of measurement connected to each goal. Goals included facilitation of a strategic planning process, fiscal management, and visibility and collaboration within the school and greater community. Successful completion of these goals will support the needs of students, staff and the school community.

Strategic Planning Update

Our district has been engaged in a strategic planning process since October of this year. There have been in person input sessions, a community wide survey, and two board work sessions devoted to seeking input and developing a revised strategic plan that reflects our community and sets a vision for student success into the future. Our district leadership team is working with the school board to develop a draft strategic plan that will be refined before the final plan is adopted. Look for more information in February regarding the launch of the new Lake City Schools strategic plan!

My Ascension Mental Health Event

One area of importance that came out during the strategic planning process was the need for mental health resources for students and families. There are many area agencies that are working together to ensure needs are being met in Lake City. One recent opportunity to engage in learning around mental health was a video viewing and mental health question and answer panel hosted at Lincoln Jr. Sr. High School on January 10th, 2024. This special event was sponsored by Aiden's Light, a Southeastern Minnesota organization started by the Hegge Family when their son, Aiden Hegge lost his life to suicide.

The video, called My Ascension, told the story of Emma Benoit who attempted suicide and was left paralyzed. The response to this event from students and the community has led to multiple discussions regarding how our community can further support mental health needs of youth and adults. There are plans in development with key leaders in the community. As a reminder, if you or someone you know is struggling with mental health call 988 or text 741741 for help.