

Last December, the Lakota Board of Education approved a new strategic plan, which launched in January. One of the pillars of that plan states that WE are fiscally responsible. This is something that I have always taken very seriously as the treasurer/CFO for Lakota Local Schools.

For the fifth year in a row, our district has been recognized at the State level for stellar financial accountability by earning the prestigious Auditor of State Award with Distinction. This is a testament to our commitment to financial responsibility and transparency. In addition to filing a Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) and timely financial reports in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), our district has also received a “clean” audit report for the fifth consecutive year. This is one of the highest financial honors public entities are able to receive.

Over the past several years, we have refinanced our debt to take advantage of lower interest rates, which has resulted in our ability to lower our debt service payments. Our lower debt service payments, combined with increasing values of the residential and business properties in our community, has allowed the amount collected from our residents to be lowered.

The bond millage has been decreased by one (1) mill and your property tax bill(s) you receive this year will reflect this change. This means that our tax payers will pay less to Lakota Local Schools annually.

It is imperative that we ensure the alignment of our resources to the educational priorities of our district. This includes making sure that we are able to pay for programs and implementing a plan to ensure their sustainability as well as the financial stability of the district. Through the reallocation of dollars and smarter spending, we have operated with a balanced budget for six consecutive years.

Our cash balance is very strong and is predicted to remain that way throughout our most recent five-year forecast. With revenue growth predicted to fall below inflation, we are projecting a spending deficit in fiscal year 2023, the fifth year of our forecast. This will require us to dip into our cash balance at that point.

It is not unusual for a school district to show a spending deficit in a five-year forecast. In fact, more than 95% of schools in Ohio are showing a spending deficit in year five or before. A financial forecast is based on assumptions for the present and future. There are always unknowns and this forecast is no exception. We will remain vigilant and have already begun to review Board policy with our finance committee, including policies to address: fiscal budget stabilization reserve (rainy day policy); minimum cash balance; and a structurally balanced budget.

At Lakota, we believe transparency throughout the district, including our finances. If you haven't done so lately, I invite you to visit the finances section of our website for more information. I also

invite you to attend our second annual State of the Schools event at on Wednesday, March 13, 7 p.m. at Lakota East High School. Come early and speak with students about innovative programming happening throughout our district during our School Showcase. Doors open at 6:15.

*Jenni L. Logan is the treasurer/CFO for Lakota Local Schools. Follow her on Twitter @LakotaCFO.*