

Our district received some exciting news over the summer. In June, Lakota Local Schools was selected as a member of the Real World Learning Challenge Collaborative through Digital Promise's League of Innovative Schools.

You may recall that our district was selected as a member of the League last fall. We are one of only 93 school districts in the country to be a part of this national coalition of forward-thinking school districts.

Members of the new Challenge Collaborative, which is supported by the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative (CZI), have been charged with determining how schools can bring authentic, life-relevant opportunities to secondary education. Lakota has been selected as one of six Core Districts and I am honored to be one of two superintendents leading the effort. Our role as a Core District is a testament to the focus that we are putting towards improving the student experience in secondary education. Our district leaders have already begun working on a plan that will re-imagine the secondary-student experience, including real-world learning. Participating in the initiative will only help with this process.

Part of real world learning includes expanding our internship program, making it more equitable and creating an experience that will impact every Lakota student. As we continue to expand our class offerings, including advanced placement classes, we must think outside the box and be innovative. In this case, looking beyond the traditional classroom setting to provide an engaging and enriching student experience. Reaching out to more businesses, both in our community and beyond, to make a much more robust internship program for our kids is just one example.

The goal of the Challenge Collaborative is to develop practices to enhance the real-world student experience in secondary education that have been tested in member districts and validated through research. As we continue to work to provide a more engaging student experience that will ultimately lead to one of the three Es after graduation (enrollment in higher education, employment or enlistment in a branch of the military), lessons our district leaders have learned through both the Career Readiness Academy (CRA) and Somos Lakota are helping to provide equitable access to real-world learning for students.

Students enrolled in CRA participate in an alternative school option that combines online classes with classroom instruction. Enrollment in the program doubled last year and CRA is a model school that other districts look to as they create their own programs.

Somos Lakota, started at Lakota West last year and now beginning at East, was created to help our Hispanic students who may struggle with classwork, as English is not their native language. With 54 different languages spoken by our students, we must reach out to everyone who needs extra help due to a language barrier. All of the students at Lakota are our kids and Somos Lakota is helping with this effort.

Last fall, we challenged our teachers and staff to collaborate with one another...not only within their building teams but across the district. This year, I have no doubt that the collaboration will continue and our participation in the Challenge Collaborative will give our teachers more tools to provide real-world opportunities to our kids.

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