

When it comes to the work of a volunteer, I've always thought there's no better testament to your service than to hear from those who most directly benefit from it.

That was the thought process behind a unique classroom activity this month that was two-fold in its purpose: 1) Give students a real-life application for the skills they're already learning in class, and 2) Recognize National School Board Appreciation Month through the lens of the Lakota student experience.

At last week's board meeting, Lakota's school board was honored by the presence of five sixth-graders coming from three different Lakota elementary schools. Their writing stood out among their peers who had also submitted letters as part of a class exercise in their language arts classes.

Each class took a slightly different spin on the task. Mrs. Hocter at Hopewell, for example, designed her lesson to be more research-based and focused on business letter writing. Students were asked to research the roles of elected officials and then formulate a formal letter of appreciation, based on what they learned and how it most applied to them. Mrs. Law at Union was just finishing up a unit on argumentative writing and challenged her students to craft a letter of request to the Lakota school board, as they might do for any one of their elected officials. Mrs. Chaney at Adena turned it into a group exercise that combined letter writing, public speaking and even art to express an idea or a feeling.

As you might expect, the letters reflected a mix of appreciation ranging from after-school programs, advanced classes and recess to safety and security and STEAM labs. Ideas for improving the student experience spanned everything from buddy reading programs, lockers and lunch menu choices to new safety measures, longer recess, and more instructional time even.

Each letter had a similar tone as was expressed in one student's writing: "Thank you for thinking of us every time you make a decision. I am very grateful that my education is as important to someone else as it is to me."

Lakota's school board is made up of five individuals who all together, have dedicated more than 30 years to the betterment of the Lakota School District. Their work is far from enviable when you consider the mix of opinions that make up a community as large and diverse as Lakota and then the countless directions in which they could possibly move the district.

But even so, they work relentlessly – and with minimal compensation – to establish policies, hire leaders and help monitor finances, all in the best interest of providing all kids with the best possible chance to succeed beyond their years at Lakota.

So, on behalf of the entire Lakota community, I extend a very heartfelt thank you to Lakota's school board members for the good work they do every day, all year long. It's certainly a big responsibility they carry and as both a parent and staff member, I'm grateful for the thoughtful guidance they provide.

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