

Reduced Extracurricular Fees

When recalling my own childhood and school years, it's difficult to leave out any reference to my experience on the playing field. Being active, both through organized sports and even just in my driveway, was and continues to be a big part of my life.

It's an interest I've carried with me as a coach to kids of all different ages, and all different sports, and now as a parent to four kids who have come to enjoy a run through the neighborhood or a backyard pick-up game of basketball or baseball. To this day, it's something that is a tremendous source of balance and personal growth.

Through the years, the role of extracurricular activities is something that has remained a constant in education. It's the balance so many of our students, like me, need to maintain their focus and drive. Oftentimes, these activities actually teach our students the life lessons they could never learn as well in the classroom, even under the most rigorous curriculum.

That's precisely the reason the Lakota school board decided a couple weeks ago to reduce by half the junior high and high school fees our students were paying to participate in athletics, marching band and winter/color guard. But that was only the first step in the board's complete analysis of all student opportunity fees. The whole idea is to expand the footprint of this reduction and make Lakota's growing list of extracurricular activities more accessible to more students.

The decision came after a comparative review of athletic fees for all other schools participating in the Greater Miami Conference. What we found was that Lakota students were still paying more than double the closest rate among our GMC competitors.

It's worth noting that even under the old fee structure, the district was already covering 50 percent of a student's real participation costs. To fully cover the combined operational costs of athletics and marching band, a student would have to pay, on average, \$844 per activity. That's absent any support from our Boosters, which do a lot to help offset everyone's financial loads.

By expediting the change to take effect before the winter sports season, and not waiting until *all* the work was complete, we knew we could positively impact a large number of our families. In doing so, we don't yet have the full financial impact of all possible fee reductions. That is why we haven't been able to commit to any potential credits or refunds to fall athletes and marching band students.

As passionate as we are about expanding student opportunity, none of this would have been possible without the results of fiscally-responsible spending. Years of major cost-saving efforts to our daily operations, directed by Lakota Treasurer Jenni Logan, make it possible to redirect just a portion of our savings to increased student opportunity such as this. Debt refinancing and creative cost containment practices are just some of the ways we've secured stability in our budget. With that kind of approach, it's our taxpayers and our students who win.

Robb Vogelmann is the acting superintendent of the Lakota Local School District.

