

Last week, Lakota Treasurer Jenni Logan received the highest honor an Ohio school treasurer can earn. The Ohio Association of School Business Officials (OASBO) named her “Outstanding Treasurer/CFO of the Year” at the annual Ohio School Boards Association conference in Columbus.

The presentation took place in a massive ballroom at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in front of thousands of school leaders from all across the state. It was a remarkable thing to witness, mainly because of what it represents for our school district and the community that entrusts in us.

The work of our Treasurer’s Department over the last six years, and under Mrs. Logan’s leadership, has truly transformed Lakota’s definition of fiscal sustainability, responsibility and accountability. And for anyone who can remember where we’ve come from, it’s certainly not something to take for granted.

Our financial health today stands in stark comparison to the financial crisis we faced at the time of Mrs. Logan’s arrival. Following \$20 million in reductions from 2011 to 2013 to pull the district out of a state of deficit spending, and the community’s passage of a levy, I cannot help but say with pride that Lakota has been operating on a balanced budget for four consecutive years.

The honor appropriately followed Lakota’s latest five-year financial forecast, which predicts a balanced budget all the way through 2020. Furthermore, our financial stability is cushioned by a cash reserve that has nearly tripled since 2012 from 55 days of operating cash to about 160 days to date. Technically, that rising balance could help offset our anticipated deficit spending another six years.

That kind of financial position doesn’t come easily and without significant creativity in the way we stretch the dollars we have and try to plan for unpredictable state and federal funding levels. It’s progress that has been years in the making and the result of a long list of operational efficiencies and savings.

Those practices are marked by such efforts as regular debt refinancing, which has saved Lakota taxpayers over \$6 million in debt repayments, and substantial energy usage efficiencies. A new approach to employee healthcare benefits has stabilized those costs, too. Even a recently negotiated teacher contract has ensured long-term cost savings and contributed to collective staff wages that despite inflation, are predicted to be \$93.5 million in 2021, as compared to \$96 million in 2010.

That doesn’t mean we aren’t still increasing the value of the Lakota education. In fact, it’s quite the opposite. We’ve been able to redirect some of those savings to programs and services directly impacting our students and the educational experience they get at Lakota – things like reduced extracurricular fees, expanded busing and more career-focused course options. A focus on responsible spending in no way negates our responsibility to provide the best possible education.

Every year, OASBO extends four top leadership awards to recognize operational excellence. In the last five years, Lakota leaders have brought home three of those four awards. What a tremendous testament to the progress we’ve made in recent years.

Robb Vogelmann is the acting superintendent for Lakota Local Schools.