

Wrapped up in the New Year is usually talk of fresh starts, resolutions and change. But at Lakota, our conversation actually revolves more around staying the course. With an abundance of good things happening for the good of all students, continuing that momentum into 2017 is our leading objective.

During the last five months, I've spent a lot of time inside our classrooms. We talk a lot about personalized education and our commitment to providing *every single* student an experience that encourages exploration and helps them achieve their personal definition of success. It's been refreshing to see that philosophy in action.

That personalized approach is perhaps most obvious in our data meetings. Our teachers and administrators routinely sit down together, across different departments, to review their class rosters. One by one, they look at what the data tells them about each student's comprehension of the content.

Much of this data is generated from MAP assessments, which gauge student progress in core subject areas at different points throughout the year. To give you some marker of our success mid-year, of the 10,000 students who participated in the most recent round of MAP, 70 percent performed above the national average in reading and 65 percent in math.

We are also very proud of the Momentum Award we earned from the Ohio State Board of Education. By the state's measurements, our teachers are growing our students at tremendous rates – more than six times what the growth component on the report card actually requires for an 'A'. Only 54 of more than 600 school districts statewide earned the distinction.

It's also been exciting to see Lakota's Career Readiness Academy, or alternative high school program, take shape this year. Students land in the program for all different reasons, but with the shared goal of catching up on their credits and graduating from high school with a focused vision for what's next. Students with social, behavioral and even schedule challenges (some because of medical or financial hardship), thrive in a smaller learning environment with the flexibility to work at their own pace. Attendance, behavior and course passage rates are just some of the success indicators so far.

Perhaps most exciting of all is the financial stability underlying all of this work. Under the leadership of Jenni Logan (named Ohio's 2016 "Treasurer of the Year"), Lakota has been operating under a balanced budget since 2011. All along, our diligence toward responsible spending has yielded a rising cash balance that has almost tripled over the last five years. That safety net will help sustain us even beyond the projected point of deficit spending in 2020.

We continue to live within our means, while saving where we can, to improve the student experience while prolonging our need for another levy. It's a balancing act, but we know that is the kind of stewardship our community expects and deserves.

Staying the course implies continued transparency and communication with our community, too. Whether it be through this column or one of my monthly coffee chats, I look forward to sharing more all year long.

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