

Early Planning Ensures Financial Stability, Personalized Educational Experiences

Right about the time our kindergartners are celebrating a momentous occasion in the course of their schooling – their 100th day of school – we begin encouraging our families and staff, alike, to begin thinking about next school year.

It's true. It may only be February, but we've officially entered our crunch time for registration for the 2017-2018 school year. Early planning allows us to not only gauge the interests and needs among our students, but also to staff our schools in a way that meets the demand in a fiscally-responsible manner. It also presents the perfect opportunity to see through our commitment of providing that personalized, one-on-one attention we promise every student.

It begins with our kindergartners. February 27th marks the start of registration for our newest members of the Lakota family. Parents are encouraged to attend one of the four information nights being hosted by our early childhood schools, where they can learn and ask questions about the experience to come. During the five-week registration period, each school has an assigned period for which their families can visit Lakota's Enrollment Center to apply for Lakota's half-day or full-day option.

Through our kindergarten assessment days, we begin to collect data about students' levels of comprehension even before their first day of school. This allows us to create class rosters that best meet the needs of incoming students. With each new class of kindergartners, the range of services and supports will change. Early testing allows us to better forecast the needs for the coming school year so we can set up our staffing in the most cost-efficient and results-oriented manner.

Beginning in seventh grade, registration is a critical time for students to pause and really think about where they are on their path toward graduation. We recognize that no two pathways will ever look the same, which is why we encourage every student to sit down with their counselor and discuss what courses and experiences are going to set them up for their own definition of success.

Those conversations are filled with discussions about new or tweaked options in the annual academic program of study. Next year's program is evidence of the district's commitment to provide students with an increasingly diverse portfolio of courses that support personalized learning, exploration, and an experience that sets them up for college or a career.

The continued buildout of career pathways, for one, lets students dive deeply into a single area or just scratch the surface in lots of different areas if they prefer. With the support of Butler Tech, over the last three years, we've followed through on our levy commitment by introducing, and in some cases completing, three new pathways in engineering, information technology and biomedical sciences. Most of these are supported by relevant internship experiences, too.

Advanced planning is critical to the short-term and long-term financial stability of this school district. Only by maintaining a strong financial foundation will we continue being in a position to enhance the academic programs we currently offer and then give each student the personalized guidance they deserve.

Robb Vogelmann is the acting superintendent of Lakota Local Schools.