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Dear Big Lake Schools Community:

I am excited to share with you the second edition of our Community Connection Newsletter! In this issue, you'll find highlights of the amazing things happening around our district, including student and staff achievements, updates on our 2021 bond projects, and a special feature of Independence Elementary STEM's Community Partner Program.

Recently, we took time to debrief after the November 2024 referendum. Two of the three ballot questions did not pass, but as we shared during the campaign, the needs outlined in those questions still exist. Through our post-referendum reflections, we've also identified additional priorities that must be addressed.

As a result, I encourage you to share your input by completing our post-referendum survey between February 24 and March 7. Your feedback is crucial as we determine our next steps. The survey only takes a few minutes, but your voice will play a key role in shaping the future of our schools. Look inside for details on how to participate.

Strong schools are built on great partnerships, and we are grateful for the support, insight, and collaboration of our incredible community. We look forward to continuing to work together to ensure the best possible future for our students!



Tim Truebenbach
Superintendent, Big Lake Schools



Vickerman Named Forbes 30 Under 30 Scientist

Brianna Vickerman, BLHS '13, was named to Forbes 2025 30 Under 30 Science List! Brianna coinvented a revolutionary light-controlled drug delivery system, which uses light to deliver therapeutics more precisely at disease sights. The new technology presents the opportunity for safer, more effective drug delivery. What an accomplishment for one of our own!

Said Vickerman: "[Ms. Bowen's college chemistry course] was the beginning of my passion for chemistry and science, and I credit Ms. Bowen and her teaching for being an integral part of that. Being recognized as a Forbes 30 Under 30 Scientist is a testament to the strong educational foundation I received at Big Lake... I am so thankful for Big Lake Schools for providing a supportive and encouraging place to start my academic journey!"



MS Student Council Hosts Record-Breaking Activity Night

This fall's event broke attendance records with over 250 students enjoying an evening full of fun, featuring bingo, dancing, cookie decorating, therapy dogs, and more. The student council raised almost \$2,000, which will go towards a student-chosen school improvement project. Some ideas being considered as investment options include better bathroom mirrors, hospitality room updates, and more cafeteria options.

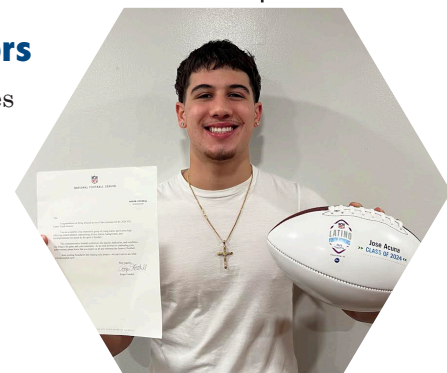
We're so proud of the dedicated student council members who worked so hard to make the event a success!



Acuna Represents Vikings For the 2024 Latino Youth Honors

Jose Acuna was selected by the Minnesota Vikings as their male nominees for the 2024 NFL Latino Youth Honors program! This NFL initiative celebrates high school football players who excel both in the classroom and on the field. Each of the 32 teams is invited to nominated two senior student athletes (one male, one female) to represent them.

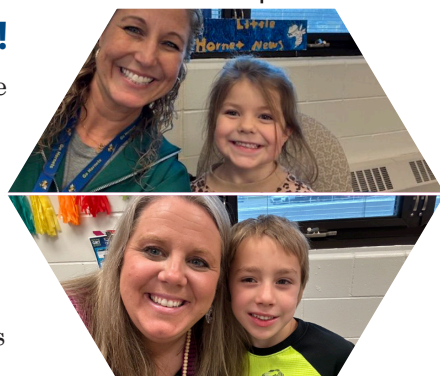
In honor of his recognition, Jose received a commemorative football and letter from none other than NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell!



Phone Calls Home Acknowledge Amazing Liberty Students!

Each month, Principal Smock-Potter and Assistant Principal Young make "positive phone calls" to families of students nominated for their hard work and good behavior. These calls not only reinforce positive behavior but help build strong home-school partnerships by connecting with families to celebrate successes, not just when improvement is needed.

Students love being called down to the office for a good reason and can't wait to take a selfie with the administrator to bring home and show off to their families. While parents may initially feel nervous seeing the school's number, they're pleasantly surprised when they learn what it is about!



Our elementary media centers got a makeover this summer! Learn how these new spaces better support learning.

New Liberty Library More Accommodating as Our Youngest Readers Learn a Love of Reading

The fresh new design of the Liberty Library not only looks amazing, but also makes the space more versatile and developmentally appropriate! The shorter, bin-style shelving makes it easier for our youngest students to find their favorite books. The easy-to-move furniture offers more flexibility, allowing the space to be rearranged for monthly themes and adapted for large groups during events like the book fair and visitor days. The redesign also created much-needed areas for small group collaboration, reading & behavior interventions, and more.

Independence Innovation Center Creates New Possibilities For Hands-On Learning

The Independence Innovation Center combines the STEM lab and media center under one new shared footprint. The STEM lab's new location is better set up to support hands-on learning. In the media center, new tables encourage more collaboration and group work, soft furniture provides more cozy places to read, and the presentation center accommodates speakers and other groups. What once was solely a place used to check out books is now a place where lots of learning is done and where students love to be!



Spaces made possible by the 2021 referendum
More about ongoing progress & additional projects:
biglakeschools.org/about/referendums/2021-referendum



Indy STEM Lab



Indy Media Center



Liberty Library

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES



Pictured Above: Students had fun when the Big Lake Police Department joined them for a class activity!

Community Partners Inspire Learning Beyond the Classroom

It can be hard for young students to look beyond their homes and classes to see how school fits into the broader world. That is where Independence Elementary STEM's Community Partner Program comes in.

"The goal is to expose our third- through fifth-graders to the many opportunities out there, and show them that what they learn in school applies to jobs outside of here," said Scott Pierce, assistant principal and program facilitator.

As part of the school's STEM programming, each class is paired with a local organization, engaging with them at least once a trimester. Interactions range from field trips to event partnerships to virtual or in-person visits about career exploration or learning connections to STEM or other curriculum.

For example, realtor Tom Olson led one fifth grade class in a fun house-hunting activity. Some fourth graders watched a folk concert at the Big Lake Public Library, and others toured the Big Lake Vet Hospital. Vet Dr. McAlpin also met with all third graders as a recap to their animal species and human body CKLA units. Two more fourth grade classes teamed up with the student council and Big Lake Community Food Shelf for a "Coin Wars" fundraiser, raising \$1425.

"Students learn about career options and life skills they aren't typically exposed to," said Ms. Schneider, whose fifth grade class partners with Ruff Start Rescue. "My students love learning about animal welfare and how they can help the community!"

"The reality is, we never know what is going to impact them. But maybe, one day, they go to the vet, and that changes their whole trajectory."

While many interactions are STEM-oriented, community partners interact with students in other ways too, like joining them for lunch (as a PBIS incentive), assemblies, or for events like STEM night. They also star in a monthly student news interview segment, which introduces them to the whole student body and gives the student interviewers excellent communication practice.



Each time Ruff Start Rescue visits Ms. Schneider's class, an animal guest, like the hedgehog above, comes with!

"We just want time," Pierce said. "Enriching students in ways we can't even think of."

Beyond academics, the partnerships create extended learning, provide new experiences, introduce students to prevalent faces in the community, connect them with more positive adult role models, and, hopefully, inspire them to give back to the communities in a similar way as they get older, Pierce said.

Our community partners, including Tom Wenner of Horace Mann, also see great value in the program.

"You're helping them develop a deeper understanding and interest in their education," Wenner said. "When students can see the practical side at work in their community, it becomes more relevant and meaningful to them."

Beyond all else, school leaders hope to inspire students as they begin to plan for their futures.

"The reality is, we never know what is going to impact them," Pierce said. "But maybe, one day, they go to the vet, and that changes their whole trajectory."



Interested becoming a community partner?

We'd love to work with your organization! You don't have to be based in Big Lake. Email s.pierce@biglakeschools.org or call 763-262-7259



High School Art Showcase at Ember



Advanced Art was introduced as a new course at BLHS this year, giving students a chance to create artwork based on a central theme while learning the fundamentals of curating their own exhibition.

As part of the program, Ember Coffee Company hosted student artwork for a two-week showcase. Additionally, students had the opportunity to complete submission paperwork and exhibit their work alongside professional artists in a local business setting!

“
It was a cool experience showing my art at Ember because I got to put my art out in the public for the first time and show my hard-work and things I enjoy to the community.

—Noah Buennich, BLHS Senior



Community Survey

WE WANT

YOUR

FEEDBACK

Share Your Thoughts: Post-Referendum Survey

Big Lake Schools asked three ballot questions as part of the November 2024 referendum:

Q1: Renew technology levy (passed)

Q2: Increase operating levy (did not pass)

Q3: Build a multipurpose facility (did not pass)

While two of the three questions did not pass, the needs they addressed remain. As we determine next steps, we need your input to help prioritize future plans.

Visit biglakeschools.org/post-ref-survey, scan the QR code with your phone camera, or call 763-262-2536 to complete the survey before **March 7**.

The survey is open to all Big Lake voters and will only take a few minutes, but your feedback will directly shape how we proceed.

Your voice matters. Help us shape the future of Big Lake Schools!



Take the Survey!

Stories in a Snap



The Most Delicious Lesson

In their CKLA unit all about farms, Kindergarteners learned that cows give us milk, and milk makes ice cream! They took this as an opportunity to make their very own homemade version, enjoying it with milk mustaches and all.



XC, Diving Represent at State*

This fall, the boys XC team placed eighth in their fourth straight state appearance (senior Jack Leuer placed fifth individually), while senior diver Torri Ramert placed tenth overall in the state diving championship. Congratulations Hornet athletes!



Stepping Up to the Plate

Several middle school staff members, including Principal Ernst, Mr. Horton, Ms. Patten, Ms. Eisinger, Ms. Johnson, & Ms. Gordy, have stepped in to serve lunch on days the kitchen has been short-handed. We have the best, most supportive staff!

*Please note: This publication went to print prior to the conclusion of winter seasons.



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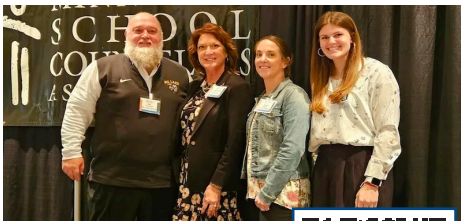
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communications@biglakeschools.org

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In Case You Missed It...

These stories were previously shared on our website. To learn more, scan the QR code or visit biglakeschools.org/about/news for even more news!



Jen Fingarson
Named High School
Counselor of the
Year by MSCA



Independence
Once Again Named
STEM School of
Excellence



March 13: STEM Night

5-7pm, Independence Elementary STEM

March 17: Preschool/Hive Time Child Care School Year Registration Opens

April 3: Community Education Summer Registration Opens

May 1: Kids Club Child Care School Year Registration Opens

May 29: Student Last Day Senior Last Day: May 28

May 30: Graduation

biglakeschools.org/about/calendar



Check Out the Fitness Center!

Membership opportunities open to all. Train by yourself or check out one of our guided classes!

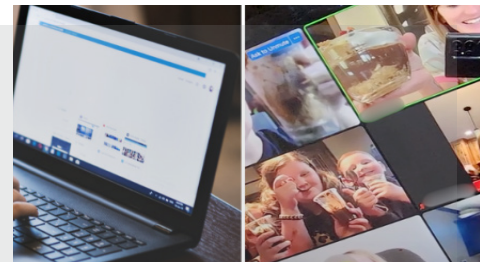
biglakeschools.org/fitness-center



25-26 Kindergarten Enrollment Open!

Secure your child's spot today.
We can't wait to welcome you!

biglakeschools.org/kindergarten



Looking for Online Learning?

Big Lake Online offers flexibility without sacrificing connection! Full-time (K-12) and part-time (6-12) options available.

blo.biglakeschools.org/whyBLO



Stay Connected!



Big Lake Schools



biglakeschools.org

