Outgoing Board President Nora Katzenberger's Comments- January 5, 2026

I would like to thank the Lakewood community for the privilege of serving as the President of the Board of Education this past year.

2025 was a year of tremendous focus on public education at the local, state, and national level. We as a Board have done all we can to manage the impact of actions that seek to control our local approach to education, and we will continue to do so. We want to protect what we have here in Lakewood. We have excellent schools, supported by a tight-knit community. We have engaged students who strive for success. We have educators who constantly innovate to help students achieve. We have parents whose participation helps shape the future of our schools.

Over the past year, we as a Board, administration, and community came together to plan the future of our district, beginning with our elementary buildings. This conversation, while difficult at times, helped lead the district forward, culminating with Superintendent Niedzwiecki's recommendation, and the Board's vote, in October to reduce the number of our elementary buildings to six and establish an early childhood center for the district, among other changes. In 2026, we can look forward to productive transition plans for our schools that will create new opportunities while providing the the best, most equitable educational experience for each and every student.

Serving as President of the Board had many high points throughout the year. I had the pleasure of handing out diplomas to Lakewood High School's Class of 2025, including my eldest daughter. I joined administrators and my fellow Board members for the ribbon cutting of the new facilities at Lakewood High School. I sat in Playhouse Square's packed State Theater as Lakewood's Barnstormers won Best Musical. I had the honor of handing out numerous Resilient Ranger awards to deserving students, as well as a number of Distinguished Educator awards to teachers who go above and beyond the call every day for our students. I attended countless concerts, football games, parades, art shows, a math symposium, a music marathon, plays, house sorting ceremonies, a visit from the Governor, academic and sports award ceremonies, and so much more. Throughout this year as President, and my first four years on the Board, I have been constantly amazed by the excellence and enthusiasm demonstrated by the students, educators, administrators, and families in our district.

I am especially grateful to Superintendent Niedzwiecki during this challenging year. Her steady leadership, constant professionalism, and sense of humor have made working closely with her a true pleasure. No one cares more about Lakewood students and their education than Superintendent Niedzwiecki. Lakewood is so fortunate to have her at the helm during such a challenging time in public education, and we look forward to her leadership during the upcoming transition planning and other important initiatives in 2026. I must also thank her administrative team who have set a high bar of excellence, keeping our educators and our district as a whole at the forefront of educational policy and performance.

I'm also glad to have been able to work with Treasurer Zeman this past year. His matchless grasp of the often baffling world of school finance and funding, and his tireless advocacy at the statehouse for Lakewood and public education in general has made him one of the most treasured people — excuse the pun — in our district. As most of you know, Kent is retiring in 2026, and we will miss him terribly. We hired a great new Treasurer, Meghan Rhode, who starts later this month. Treasurer Zeman will stay on in an advisory capacity for a short time to ensure a smooth transition, especially in light of the fact that we will have a levy on the ballot in 2026. We will always be grateful to Treasurer Zeman for his dedication and professionalism.

I feel so lucky to serve with my fellow Board members. I'm especially grateful to Betsy Shaughnessy for her wise counsel gained through her years of experience. Our district will be in good hands in the coming year with Betsy as President once again, and Lisa Dopman as Vice President.

Lastly, I am eternally grateful to my family and friends for their support during this busy and challenging year. Their encouragement gives me the positive outlook and sense of humor necessary for this important work.

I'll close with the words I have said so many times this year — "Thank you."