FALL 2026

# LEYDEN

## HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 212

Six Leyden students including Milena Mitka, Romina Lamas Haro, Rayan Allababidi, Samuel Chaidez, Samantha Wahl and Elmer Reyeg participated in the Global Summit and competition, which included travel to Panama and Costa Rica. “Student earns prestigious honor for “Algae Boogers” - Story on Page 4.

Dr. Nick Polyak
Superintendent

# Superintendent's Corner

A question I have been asking myself a lot lately is "What if we could guarantee a parent that their child would graduate from Leyden in four years, and even more, would have their next step planned, be it a career, college or military service?"

I think about all of the resources, programs, and supportive communities we enjoy here at Leyden and how it really does take a village to help ensure success for the next generation of kids. At Leyden, all of our staff are actually Leyden staff - we don't hire out service providers. They all wear the Leyden name, and everyone is treated as one of the family. This is really unique in the education industry, where a lot of districts need to contract out daily services such as transportation, food service, or security. It gives our kids a great opportunity to be welcomed and assisted daily by staff who get to know them, and act directly as one of their support systems.

We are lucky to have teachers, support staff, social workers, counselors, psychologists, multilingual support, special education support, technical and financial experts, maintenance and custodial crews, coaches, sponsors, athletic trainers, clerical staff and as I mentioned, security, food service workers, bus drivers, and more, all who care so deeply about our students.

At Leyden, we have so many options and opportunities for students, including career pathways, technical certifications, dual credit and dual degree programs, honors and advanced placement courses, fine arts, athletics and more than 70 clubs and events that enrich the high school experience.

After I think of all the people and programs we have to support kids, I believe I can confidently tell a parent in our community that yes, in partnership with them and their children, we can make that guarantee. This conversation is the work of our new strategic plan and we are excited to put that plan into action. More information on the strategic plan can be found on our website at www.leyden212.org/flightplan.

We thank you for your continued partnership in our pursuits of supporting the kids of our communities. We couldn't do it without you.

With Leyden Pride,
Nick Polyak, Superintendent

# From student idea to thriving habitat

What began as a vision by freshmen Javier Gomez and Wiktor Mindowicz four years ago has grown into a thriving pocket prairie at West Leyden.

Now, thanks to a fully funded $6,000 Power for Good grant from ComEd and Openlands, the pocket prairie on the West Leyden campus will expand to more than 3,000 square feet.

The project will include new signage, a nesting box and webcams, creating an interactive learning space for students while providing valuable habitat for native wildlife, including monarch butterflies, hummingbirds, bees and migrating birds.

What started with a student idea has blossomed into a hands-on learning experience and a lasting contribution to the West Leyden campus.

# Leyden earns recognition from U.S. accrediting agency

Leyden has been recognized as "Accredited with Merit" from Cognia, an independent consulting firm representing three U.S. regional agencies. This is a highly regarded honor that is recognized throughout the world and bestowed upon school systems that demonstrate high levels of performance and a sustained commitment to continuous improvement. Key defining characteristics of districts who earn this honor include 1. Culture of learning, 2. Leadership of learning, 3. Engagement of Learning, and 4. Growth in Learning.

"This is a celebration of our work over the past five years and sets a clear path for the next five years, in alignment with our new strategic plan," said Assistant Superintendent Dr. Dominic Manola. "We now have the support of two objective reviews of the work we are doing at Leyden, helping to identify our focused efforts for the future."

Cognia's accreditation process includes a comprehensive review of a school district's practices, classroom instruction, governance, and continuous improvement efforts. External evaluators observed learning environments, interviewed stakeholders, and reviewed evidence before recommending accreditation.

"The importance of a third-party recognition is that it affirms, with outside eyes, that what we have been doing at Leyden is impactful, and that we are on the right track moving forward," said Board President Greg Ignoffo. "We are proud of the work of our students and staff, who are constantly giving all of their energy and effort to achieving excellence."

# Strategic plan guides next 3-5 years at Leyden

After seeking input from hundreds of students, families and staff, Leyden has developed four main goal areas as a path to Educate, Enrich and Empower students:

## Focus Area 1:

### Freshmen on Track

Ensure freshmen start their high school educational journey strong

By the end of the 2028-2029 school year, 92% of freshmen will be on track. By "on track" we mean, passing all five core classes: Math, Science, English, Social Studies, and P.E.

*Scan Video QR Code*

## Focus Area 2:

### Family Partnerships

Facilitate purposeful family partnerships that enrich the student experience

Annually, Leyden will approach key family partnership milestones with 100% fidelity.

*Scan Video QR Code*

## Focus Area 3:

### Academic improvement

Help students grow in the areas of English Language Arts (ELA), Math and Science

By the end of the 2028-2029 school year, Leyden will achieve a mean and median student growth percentile of 60%. "Student Growth Potential" = Did a student grow more than their peers across the state?

## Focus Area 4:

### Life After Graduation

Leverage opportunities for post-secondary preparation

By the end of the 2028-2029 school year, at least 90% of seniors will have completed a post-secondary aligned course with a C or better.

Visit the Strategic Plan section of the Leyden site at www.leyden212.org/strategic-plan for updates and additional resources.

# Student earns prestigious honor for...“Algae Boogers?”

West Leyden senior **Milena Mitka’s** project from the International Global Summit, “Algae Boogers,” will be on display this winter at the Nobel Prize Museum in Stockholm, Sweden. Her team, composed of students from across the country - none of whom she knew before this experience - won the competition, the culmination of a trip to Panama and Costa Rica with a focus on environmental issues.

“The first day of brainstorming, we had nothing, no ideas,” said Milena. “We were all getting a little nervous and frustrated, and came back day two not sure how things would go. Somehow, in our absence of ideas, we came up with something we knew was really different - and it was either going to be really, really good…or a total disaster.”

It turned out to be really, really good. Award-winning in fact, as she and her team claimed the overall top honor and will now enjoy the notoriety of a spot in an internationally known museum.

Including Milena, five other Leyden students also participated in the Global Summit and competition: **Rayan Allababidi**, **Samuel Chaidez**, **Romina Lamas Haro**, **Elmer Reyeg** and **Samantha Wahl**.

***To watch the video about this story, please scan the QR Code or subscribe to the Leyden YouTube channel.***

# Board approves two new Advanced Placement (AP) classes

At the meeting on May 14, the Board of Education approved two new Advanced Placement (AP) courses that will be offered starting with the 2027-28 school year. Students at Leyden will have an opportunity to enroll in AP Business With Personal Finance and AP Environmental Science.

"We are really excited to be offering these two new AP courses at Leyden," said Assistant Superintendent Dr. Dominic Manola. "As part of our strategic planning work, we are really focusing on ensuring that we continue pushing students academically and aligning our coursework to career pathways, and both of these courses do just that."

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– Dr. Dominic Manola

## AP Business with Personal Finance

Business is one of the most popular college majors; about 20 percent of all degrees include some component, and this course would help provide the basics at a higher level. The course would include business models, investing, and accounting, and would also meet the consumer education graduation requirement. Daily tasks would include reviewing case studies and completing numerous hands-on projects. The course would follow the business pathway and sophomores, juniors and seniors would be eligible for enrollment.

## AP Environmental Science

Environmental Science ranks as the 12th most popular AP class for high school students, out of the 40 total courses offered nationwide. The course incorporates current topics, improves real-world problem-solving skills, and would serve as a capstone class in the science department. Juniors and seniors who meet the prerequisites of two years of lab science, including Biology and Chemistry/Physical science would be eligible for enrollment. It is recommended that students also take Algebra prior to enrollment.

Both proposed classes are rooted in Leyden's strategic planning goals for academic achievement, career pathways, and post-graduation opportunities.

# Leyden announces appointment of West student Board member

At the meeting on June 18, the Leyden High School Board of Education announced the appointment of West Leyden rising junior **Allizon Lozano** as a student board member. Lozano will serve as one of two student board members, for a two-year term beginning with the 2026-27 school year. She is appointed to the vacancy left by graduating senior Jonathan Guerrero, who served a two-year term, and joins Zuzanna Karyta, who is entering her senior year and the second year of her term.

"Allizon demonstrates a strong work ethic, skill, and determination and is actively involved in extracurricular activities," said West Leyden Principal Dr. Arturo Senteno. "Our faculty spoke extremely highly of her in their recommendations, and I am confident in her ability to represent and elevate the student voice."

Lozano is a highly engaged student, who participates in Peer Mediators, Service Club, and French Club.

"I wish to aid in creating a safe space for students to voice their concerns and to feel heard," said Lozano. "I feel as though I connect with a lot of students through many aspects, some big ones being ethnicity and goals."

Student board members participate in meetings, discussions and represent the Board as the student voice at a variety of events. They do not vote, nor attend closed, confidential sessions of the Board.

"Because of the ever-changing atmosphere our school is set in, it can cause lots of anxiety throughout students," said Lozano. "With this position I strive to focus on all facets of inclusivity to lessen any feelings of unease at school."

Student board members are nominated by staff for their involvement and contributions to the school and take an oath to represent their school's student body in hopes of better communicating student concerns.

*"I feel as though I connect with a lot of students through many aspects, some big ones being ethnicity and goals."*

– Allizon Lozano

To access this newsletter electronically as text-only for easy translation, please scan the QR Code.

Leyden High School District 212 is an equal opportunity institution, committed to compliance with all applicable state and federal laws prohibiting discrimination. This includes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, order of protection status, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, homelessness and marital/parental status, including pregnancy.

As required by S.B. 898, you may go to Leyden's website to view our budget at: www.leyden212.org

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3400 Rose Street
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West Campus
1000 N. Wolf Road
Northlake, IL 60164

## Leyden District 212 Board of Education

**Board of Education meetings are in the East Campus Board Room**

Mr.Gregory T. Ignoffo
President

Mrs. Gloria Murawska
Vice President

Mr. James A. Lima
Secretary

Mr. Joseph Trevino
Member

Mrs. Lisa Anthony
Member

Katy Boehm
Member

Mr. Cesar Garcia
Member

Zuzanna Karyta
Student Member (E)

Allizon Lozano
Student Member (W)