The Eagle Examiner

COMMUNITY EDITION

September 2026

BACK TO SCHOOL!

A look BACK at an amazing year
A look AHEAD to another one

- **Everything you need for a great new year**
- **Celebrating an incredible 2025-26**
- **Big Walnut: By the Numbers**

Message from the Superintendent

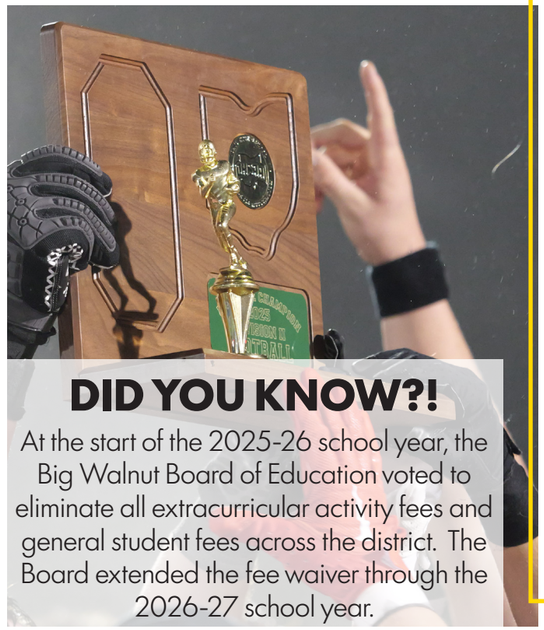
Welcome back to another great school year at Big Walnut!

Ryan McLane

Summer break is nice, but campuses come alive again with 5,000+ students and staff walking through the doors. Thank you for choosing Big Walnut Local Schools.

This is the first of three print editions of the Eagle Examiner we'll mail to every resident in the school district this school year. We heard you. Residents without kids in the district told us they had no way to know what's happening here, and not everyone was on social media. This is that window. You'll find what we've built and what we're working on, from facilities to programs to extracurricular activities.

Turn these pages to see what we are building together as we Inspire and Guide each student to his or her maximum potential.



DID YOU KNOW?!

At the start of the 2025-26 school year, the Big Walnut Board of Education voted to eliminate all extracurricular activity fees and general student fees across the district. The Board extended the fee waiver through the 2026-27 school year.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: EXCEPTIONAL EAGLE

Big Walnut Local Schools is proud to announce Vicky Tyler as the district's second Exceptional Eagle Award recipient.

Vicky was surprised with the honor during this year's Opening Convocation, as staff members from across the district gathered to celebrate the start of a new school year.

A custodian at Prairie Run Elementary, Vicky is also so much more. Her kindness, dedication and willingness to help wherever she is needed make a lasting difference for PRE's students, families and staff. She represents the heart of the Exceptional Eagle Award by quietly and consistently going above and beyond for the Big Walnut community. Congratulations, Miss Vicky, and thank you for everything you do to inspire and guide those around you each day!

Message from the Board of Education

Big Walnut Is Special

There is something special about the beginning of a new school year. Our classrooms are once again filled with curiosity and discovery, our younger students are settling into new routines, and our athletic fields and performance spaces are alive with Eagle pride. Across the district, there is an unmistakable sense of energy and possibility.

We also have much to celebrate. Student growth and achievement continue to improve, and we should be proud of the work our students are doing in classrooms alongside fantastic, caring teachers. Their dedication, combined with the encouragement of our families and community, is helping every student move toward their maximum potential.

Big Walnut also begins this school year in a positive financial position. Our July financial report showed that revenues, operating results, and our cash position were ahead of forecast. This reflects careful planning and responsible stewardship, but we recognize that continued discipline will be essential as costs rise and Ohio's school-funding landscape changes.

Our financial position has allowed us to waive instructional and participation fees for athletics, band, choir, and extracurricular activities—providing meaningful relief to families and expanding opportunities for students. The Board will revisit these waivers each year when approving the five-year forecast, always keeping a close eye on the district's long-term financial health.

Successful students. Strong schools. Caring teachers. Responsible stewardship. A community that shows up for one another.

This is just some of what makes Big Walnut special.

Go Eagles!

BIG WALNUT BY THE NUMBERS

4,512	109	3,000+	8
Students enrolled districtwide as of September 1	Square miles served across eastern Delaware County	Miles traveled daily by our school bus fleet	School buildings serving preschool through grade 12

Planning Big Walnut's Future Together

The Big Walnut Board of Education is excited to share that we are launching a strategic planning process to help guide our direction over the next 3-5 years. This process will help us align our mission, vision, and strategic goals so we can continue to grow, improve, and effectively serve our Big Walnut community.

To support this important work, we've partnered with The Impact Group, a strategic planning and communications firm with extensive experience in helping organizations develop meaningful, actionable strategic plans through collaborative stakeholder engagement.

Your voice is essential. As we build this roadmap for the future, we are committed to gathering input from a broad range of stakeholders, staff, families, parents, and the community, so that the final plan reflects shared priorities and aspirations.

You will have several opportunities to participate, including:

- **Online Survey**
  We will be distributing an online survey to gather your insights. This survey provides a convenient way to share your experiences, priorities, and ideas.
- **Focus Groups**
  In addition to the survey, we will host one-hour focus group sessions. These will offer a space for open conversation about our current strengths, future opportunities, and potential challenges ahead.

The information gathered from the survey, focus groups, interviews, and additional research will help identify themes and inform the development of our draft strategic goals.

Your input is not only welcomed—it's essential. We believe that thoughtful planning begins with listening, and we look forward to your engagement in shaping a clear, focused plan that reflects our collective priorities and commitment to the future.

Big Walnut Local Schools selected Garmann Miller in 2025 to lead the district's facilities master planning effort.

In conjunction with district leadership and stakeholders, we developed a master plan that reflects our goals. This process included a thorough analysis of student enrollment trends and an in-depth review of our facilities, with a focus on current and future repair needs.

Over the past year, our district has addressed several capital projects, including a building backup generator at General Rosecrans Elementary, parking lot repairs and expansions, new security cameras in several buildings, and continued installation of rubberized surfaces at our elementary school playgrounds to make them more accessible for all of our students. Our largest project has been the renovation of the south wing of the vacant school at 105 Baughman Street. That building has served many purposes in Big Walnut history and is now home to the Big Walnut Early Learning Center, which serves our district's preschool students.

These projects were all completed without additional bond money.

Preparing Students for What Comes Next

Enlist. Enroll. Employ.

The goal of Big Walnut Local Schools is to prepare students for success after high school, whether they choose to **Enlist** in the military, **Enroll** in higher education, or become **Employed** in the workforce. To help students achieve their goals, we provide opportunities for career awareness starting in our youngest grades. Students learn about careers and develop an understanding of their interests in the elementary grades. In middle and high school, students have the opportunity to explore and experience classes in areas of interest to continue to refine their skills and plans. At every step of the way, our staff helps students expand their understanding of future options.

In addition to the classes we offer at Big Walnut, we also have a strong partnership with the Delaware Area Career Center. This partnership allows students to take classes at the Career Center and gain experience in a specific field. It also allows Big Walnut to host DACC programs in agriculture and engineering at our schools.

Interested in Volunteering?
Helping with a field trip? Coming in to your child's class for an event in the classroom? Learn how to get involved here.

In alignment with our commitment to help students pursue their passions, for the 2026-27 school year, we are launching the District Business Partnership Team. Made up of representatives from our district and the local business community, this team will evaluate our current offerings and partnerships and help identify next steps in creating authentic career exploration opportunities for students. We look forward to working more closely with our business community. If you represent a local business that is interested in partnering, please reach out to jennifermartingledhill@bwls.net.

Five-Year Forecast: Strong Today, Planning for Tomorrow

Big Walnut Local School District recently adopted its updated Five-Year Forecast through FY2031. The forecast is a planning tool, not a prediction, and helps the District identify financial challenges early and plan responsibly for the future. Big Walnut remains in a strong near-term financial position, with positive operating results projected through FY2028. Beginning in FY2029, expenditures are projected to exceed revenues, gradually reducing cash reserves. Even with this decline, the District projects approximately $21.6 million in unencumbered cash at the end of FY2031. Looking ahead, we are closely monitoring changes to Ohio property tax laws, future state funding, enrollment growth, healthcare costs, and other operating expenses. These factors create uncertainty and reinforce the importance of long-term planning.

Our goal remains simple: maintain strong financial stewardship today while protecting educational opportunities for tomorrow. As conditions change, we will continue updating the forecast and communicating openly with our community.

BWMS 2025-26 ATHLETIC HIGHLIGHTS

Big Walnut Middle School student-athletes delivered another outstanding year in 2025-26.

The cross-country and track teams earned multiple invitational championships, while the wrestling team completed an undefeated season by winning every dual meet, tri-meet, and invitational on its schedule. The BWMS cheer squad also brought home the OAC Cheer State Championship.

Big Walnut hosted the Archie Griffin Sportsmanship Award ceremony on June 3, honoring more than 100 student-athletes from across central Ohio. Abby Hershberger and Grant Harris were selected as the deserving recipients from BWMS. Both are multisport athletes who excel in the classroom and demonstrate outstanding leadership.

Thank you to our coaches, families, staff members, volunteers and community supporters who make BWMS Athletics possible. Congratulations to all of our Golden Eagles on an outstanding year!

DID YOU KNOW?!

Senior citizens qualify for a FREE PASS to all Big Walnut High School and Big Walnut Middle School *home* games!

BWHS 2025-26 ATHLETIC HIGHLIGHTS

Big Walnut High School continued its tradition of athletic excellence throughout the 2025-26 school year.

BWHS captured the Ralph Young All-Sports Award for the third consecutive year and fifth time in six years. Eight teams earned OCC championships, including football, girls golf, girls cross country, girls basketball, boys wrestling, boys track and field, girls track and field, and boys tennis.

Both track and field teams won Division II regional championships, while the girls' 4x800-meter relay captured a regional title and set a new regional record. Boys tennis captured its third consecutive OCC title, softball won its first district championship since 2014, and baseball finished as a regional finalist.

Thank you to the coaches, families, staff members, volunteers, boosters and community supporters who helped make another memorable year possible.

A LOOK AHEAD TO MIDDLE SCHOOL SPORTS

The 2026-27 sports season is underway, and we couldn't be more excited at BWMS. Our teams are off to fast starts and are showing once again that Big Walnut athletics rank among the best in central Ohio. That success begins with the student-athletes who fill our hallways and the hard work of our dedicated coaching staff. The following coaches are leading our fall teams:

7th Grade Football is led by Chad Zipfel, who is in his first season at BWMS.

8th Grade Football is led by Adam McCardle, who returns for his second season. He is also an intervention specialist at BWMS.

7th Grade Volleyball welcomes back Kassie Shuster (formerly Bowmar) for her second season as coach.

8th Grade Volleyball is led by Tim Kafka, now in his fifth season.

Girls Tennis is once again led by Kim White, who returns to coach following her retirement from teaching at the end of the 2025-26 school year.

Boys/Girls Cross Country welcomes back Jen White for her eighth season.

Boys Golf welcomes Kelly Robinson, who has worked with the JV team for the past several seasons and also teaches eighth-grade social studies at BWMS.

Girls Golf is led by Victoria Keller, who returns for her second season. She is also an intervention specialist at BWMS.

7th Cheer welcomes back Brianna "Bri" Lawless for her third season. Brianna is also a science teacher at BWMS.

8th Cheer is led by Kaylee Demidovich, now in her sixth season as a BWMS cheer coach.

We also want to thank all of the sponsors who have joined the team at BWMS. If you haven't already, please stop by our stadium to check out the new scoreboard. Thanks to our sponsors' generous donations and the support of BWAB, the entire project was completed without district funds. We truly appreciate their support of BWMS athletics and their partnership!

As always, if you have questions, feel free to call BWMS at 740-965-3006. The best MS athletic secretary in the business, Stephanie Kreager, or Athletic Director Joe Rucker will be happy to assist you.

BIG WALNUT HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

The 2026-27 season brings new teams, new leaders, new challenges, and new opportunities. Our student-athletes have been working, our coaches have been preparing, and our fans, especially the Rage Cage, are ready to bring the energy. From the opening kickoff to the final competition of the school year, we're looking forward to watching our Golden Eagles compete with pride, represent our school and community, and continue the tradition of excellence built by those who came before them.

THANK YOU, GOLDEN EAGLE NATION! Your support of our student-athletes, coaches, and programs is what makes Big Walnut special. We can't wait to see what all of us accomplish together in 2026-27. The expectations are high. The excitement is even higher. Let's get started!

BIG WALNUT LOCAL SCHOOLS | INSPIRE & GUIDE

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