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Little Miami Local Schools

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To the Residents of  
Little Miami School District

Annual Report 2021

CONGRATULATIONS SENIOR

Update

LITTLE MIAMI LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

## PANTHERS PERSEVERE IN 2020

It is remarkable to reflect that just 12 short months ago, the terms social distancing, PPE, or Zoom meeting were unknown to most. Yet today, they are elemental to the way Little Miami fulfills its mission to educate the community's children.

The global pandemic has brought about changes in public education never seen before. Early on, against a backdrop of press conferences and bar graphs, Little Miami, like school districts across the country, endeavored to safely remake "school," and faced more questions than answers.

Though so much seemed to be unsettled, keeping the focus centered on the well-being of students and staff helped guide important decisions. Taking in ever-changing information, tearing up old models and finding a way forward was some of the hardest work Little Miami has ever done. But this work was vital for a simple reason: Brick-and-mortar schools are more than just buildings. They are havens of nurturing relationships that many students need.

Now, as the first vaccines become available and experts cautiously speak of an end in sight, it is important to reflect on lessons learned. What will school at Little Miami look like in a post-pandemic world?

In this annual report, we explore that question, and we look ahead to what 2021 will bring.

## IMPORTANT DATES

JAN. 25-FEB. 5

**Preschool Lottery Window**  
Window to complete preschool lottery Google form located at [LittleMiamiSchools.com](http://LittleMiamiSchools.com)

MARCH 15

**Kindergarten Registration Begins**  
Info available at Kindergarten Central on [LittleMiamiSchools.com](http://LittleMiamiSchools.com)

MARCH 29

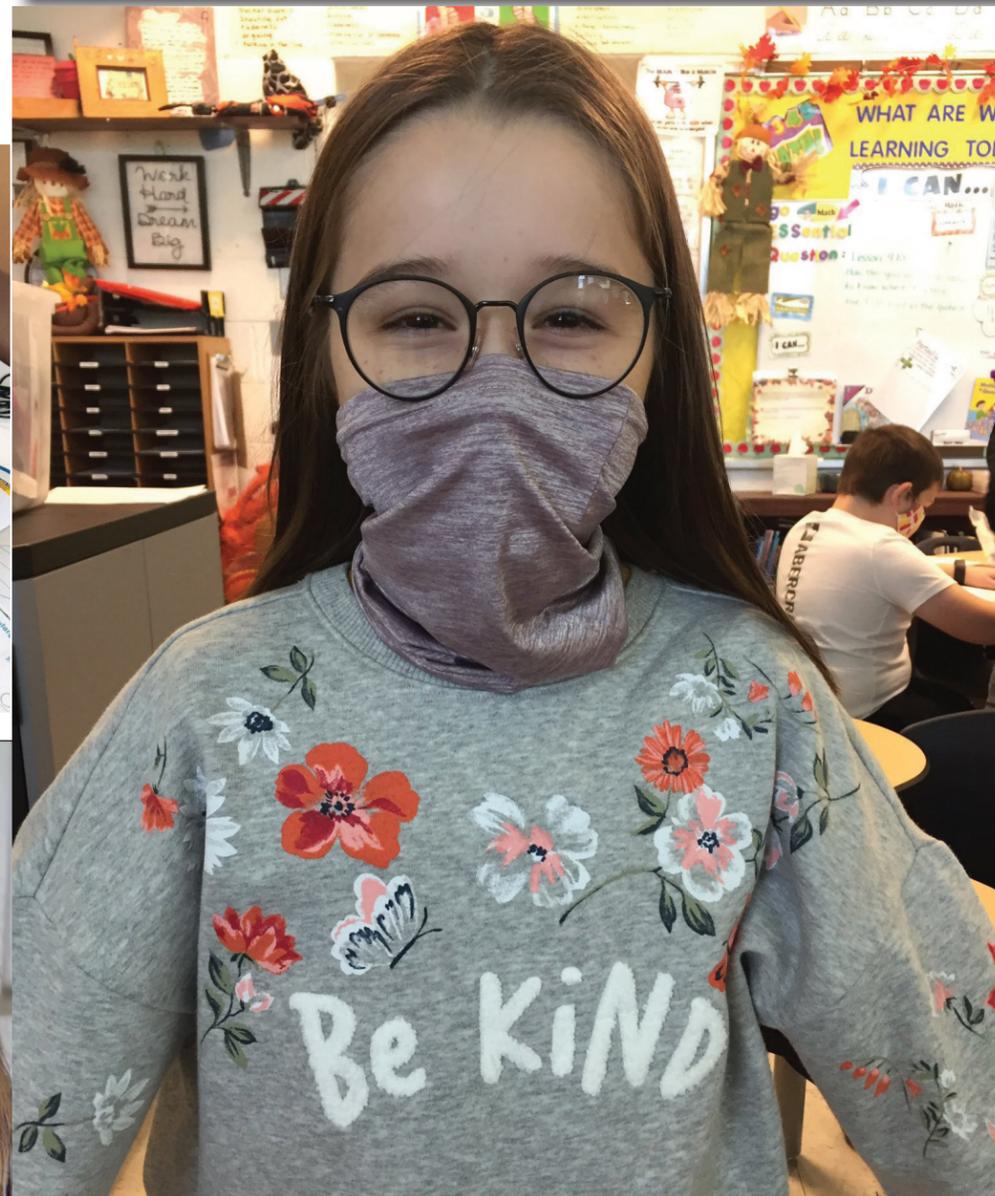
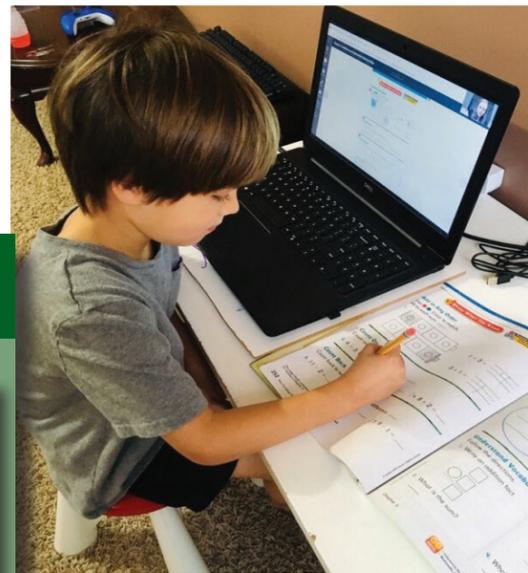
**Spring Break Begins**  
School resumes Tuesday, April 6

MAY 23

**Class of 2021 Graduation (Tentative)**  
6 p.m.  
Nutter Center at Wright State University

MAY 25

**Last Day of School for Students**



# In the Spotlight



## Veterans Day goes virtual

Veterans Day celebrations at Little Miami are a big deal. Breakfast for 400 and lengthy parades are part of the norm. In fact, the district's Veterans Day observations were part of the reason that all six Little Miami buildings received the Ohio Dept. of Education's Purple Star awards for 2020.

But this year, those celebrations had to be re-imagined. Even though students could not play host to their favorite veterans at school, students still made sure to honor them.

At Butlerville, students decorated the halls with photos and stories of veterans who are special to them. And at Salem Twp. and Hamilton-Maineville, students created video greetings to be shared with loved ones.



Greg Power  
Superintendent

### FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

## The impact of COVID-19

It goes without saying that the year 2020 came with challenges that changed the way Americans went about their lives. At Little Miami, we also found ourselves adapting to this new normal to ensure students were still able to receive a high-quality education in a safe environment.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 by instituting cleaning protocols was an integral piece of the Return to Learn plan for the school year. These protocols demanded a number of unplanned expenditures – purchases that were necessary, but that contributed to a large unbudgeted expense to the district during an already challenging financial time.

Examples of items that needed to be purchased to help in the sanitizing effort include backpack electrostatic sprayers, large quantities of disposable sanitizing wipes, free-standing hand sanitizer stations, water refill stations, spray bottles, plexiglass dividers, stickers/signage, N95 respirators, gallons upon gallons hand sanitizer, and additional face masks.

As we have learned, public schools must be agile in order to be responsive to state funding changes or the latest regulation from our elected lawmakers. This agility was put to the test in preparing to bring our students back to our buildings in the fall. We commend our students, teachers, staff and community for their continued support and flexibility during such an unprecedented time.

## LM meals fuel learning at home, school

One of the many lessons learned during 2020 is how Little Miami is often a safety net for young people experiencing food insecurity.

Even before the pandemic, Food Services Director Rachel Tilford and her staff were aware of dozens of students who relied on the schools for the only meals they would receive during the week. The district partnered with the Panther Backpack program to provide the most at-risk students easy-to-prepare meals for the weekends. But when schools closed their doors during the spring lockdown, these at-risk students were left without reliable access to food.

Seeking a solution, Tilford created the "Curbside Cuisine" program, a free daily lunch pick-up that eventually served more than 400 hot meals per day. Tilford used food inventories that may otherwise have gone to waste in the district's shuttered kitchens.

When students returned to either in-person or online learning in the fall, the meal program evolved.

In addition to meals served in school cafeterias, the food services team prepares and distributes between 400-450 pick-up meal packages for online learners. Each child supported by the program receives a chilled produce bag with fruit and juice, a bag of frozen entrees, and a half gallon of their choice of white or chocolate milk.

To aid in the assembly of meal packs, students in the LMJH service learning class help fill produce bags every Tuesday morning, tackling 180 bags in one class period.

All student meals, whether they are in-person school lunches or pick-up meal packs, are free of charge for all recipients through the end of the 2020-2021 year.

The cost for all of these meals is being reimbursed through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The USDA announced in August that it would reimburse for the spring meal program, then in October extended the reimbursement to cover all student meals through the end of the school year.



Rachel Tilford, food services director, visits with a family at meal pickup.

## LM Tech Department: Supporting all of those devices

In a typical school year, the Little Miami Tech Department focuses on the district's network infrastructure, security, hardware procurement and support, technology integration in the classroom and analysis of new technology and how it can enable students to be ready for the future.

2020 was anything but a typical school year and COVID-19 significantly impacted each of these focus areas.

One of the most significant is in the delivery of computer devices to students. The pandemic shut down production of student devices on a global scale, and the inevitable delay had a direct impact on Little Miami students. This delay has required the use of older devices to support remote learners, in addition to the devices needed for LM's "One to One" program for LMJH and LMHS students.

### LM TECH BY THE NUMBERS

**5,100\***  
STUDENT DEVICES

**500**  
STAFF DEVICES

*\*Approx. 500 more than would be in use in a typical year*

In a year of limited devices, the Tech Department is supporting 25 percent more devices than a typical school year.

In regards to security, the Tech Department now spends more time raising awareness around phishing and malware risks. According to the MSFT Threat tracker, 60 percent of all institutional malware incidents reported were detected in the education industry. It only takes one incident to expose staff or student



Eric Troll (foreground) and Rick Schuster of the Little Miami Technology Department work to inventory student devices after they were turned in at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Along with supporting the planned roll-out of a one-to-one device program at the Little Miami Jr. High this fall (below right), the three-man tech department was also tasked with providing devices and support for scores of students who needed computers to complete school work virtually.

data, so the LM Tech Department continues to take protective measures and ensure on-going staff training is available.

The Tech Department experienced a 63 percent increase in support requests within the first quarter of the 2020-2021 school year in comparison to the same time frame in 2019.

One reason for the increase in support tickets is that there are more students with devices, due to the virtual learning option for instruction. The Tech Department troubleshooting workflow now has had to create additional layers that in-school learning rarely needed.

Along with handling support tickets from online learners, Tech Department personnel also offer in person "Tech Bar" hours at both the



high school and junior high to help with minor support requests and repairs.

To further facilitate virtual learning earlier this spring, the Tech Department procured a small amount of wi-fi hotspots to loan to families with no internet service.

No matter the challenge, the Little Miami Tech Department will strive to support the district's mission of preparing students to be college and career ready.

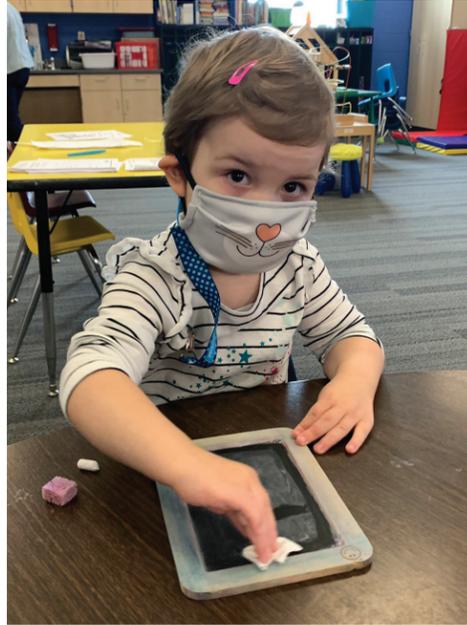
# Lessons learned: Opening school in a pandemic

With a goal to have students learning in-person as long as that was a safe option, Little Miami leaders began planning for reopening immediately after the conclusion of the 2019-2020 school year.

Like all school districts, Little Miami faced numerous challenges in this process, such as:

- Receiving timely guidance from state-level agencies tasked with establishing reopening framework requirements;
- Ordering and acquiring proper personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies to comply with safety requirements;
- Creating different learning options to best suit the needs of all families (In-seat and full remote learning);
- Acquiring additional technology to support implementation of the district Remote Learning Plan.
- Creating a school safety plan for daily school operations during an unprecedented and unpredictable time.

Little Miami continues to collaborate with school districts throughout Warren County to overcome the impact of COVID-19 by attending weekly meetings with area superintendents and representatives of the Warren County Health District. Feedback from families, staff, and students guided the district in the creation of our Remote Learning Plan.



## Lessons Learned from Virtual Learning Academy

Understanding that not all families would desire to send their children back to school in-person, the district realized the need to provide a full-time remote learning option. Based on the recommendation of the Warren County Educational Service Center, Little Miami partnered with the Virtual Learning Academy (VLA) to provide curricular and programming content for remote learning students.

VLA teachers are actual Little Miami classroom teachers and they are required to hold Zoom meetings and office hours

for students who need extra help or enrichment activities. These Zoom meetings look different based on grade level and student need. They may be small “flex groups” where students of similar ability meet at the same time to work on specific needs at their level, or where upper grade support may include help sessions on specific topics. These Zoom sessions are also a way for students to feel a sense of connection while learning in an online environment.

Moving forward, the district anticipates the need to provide a full-time remote learning option for families for the foreseeable future. We also see the need to refine and improve our current programming, which will be a high priority in planning for the 2021-2022 school year.

## Teacher Innovation

With the increased number of quarantines among our students, numerous teachers have gone above and beyond to create access and support for student learning during this challenging time. Some have created video lessons which can be accessed by students through Schoology, others are live-streaming their classes via Zoom so that students on quarantine can gain primary instruction related to their learning without falling behind. Time and again through these unprecedented times, we have seen Little Miami outstanding dedication from our staff members.



## FROM THE TREASURER

# Future of district's finances aided by levy passage

As the Little Miami community continues to grow, more and more students are walking through the doors of our schools. Increasing enrollment contributes to the need for additional funding for our schools.

On behalf of Little Miami, we would like to express our appreciation to our community for their approval of Issue 12, a five-year renewal of an operating levy that will generate \$10.6 million annually.

This renewal represents one-fifth of our total operating budget and is a critical piece of the district's financial health, helping to stabilize funding in unstable times.

Ohio school districts are required by law to twice a year prepare a five-year forecast of projected expenditures and revenues. But no school district could have foreseen the costs of operating during a pandemic. For Little Miami some of these costs were staggering:

- \$396,846: Remote learning
- \$150,505: PPE & cleaning supplies
- \$34,395: Personnel Costs (FMLA/Unemployment)

Not only was Little Miami faced with expensive unplanned bills, the state of Ohio also made a decision

that greatly impacted district funds. On Tuesday, May 5, 2020, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine announced a \$300 million reduction in state foundation payments to K-12 school districts. In Little Miami's case, the district lost \$1.1 million in payments from the state for fiscal year 2020. That was an 8.4 percent reduction in state revenue. The state average was just 3.7 percent. Overall, state dollars account for about 27 percent of Little Miami's total revenue.

Even with voters' approval of Issue 12, Little Miami faces a somber fact: In FY 2021, a revenue shortfall is expected. This means that expenditures are expected to be greater than revenue by \$5,777,903.

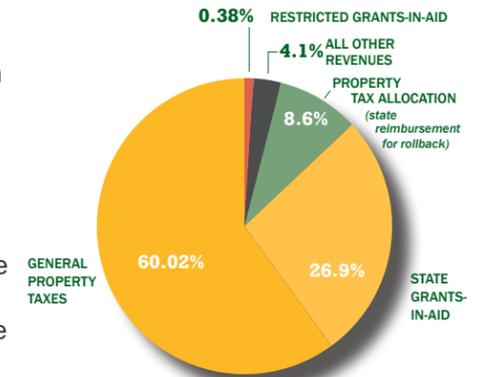
The district currently has a cash balance of approximately \$30 million, but that accounts for only about 210 days of operations. The district's fund balance is being consumed each fiscal year due to constrained revenue growth and the increase in enrollment which is driving the district's expenditures.

A worsening cash balance can erode the district's financial stability over time.

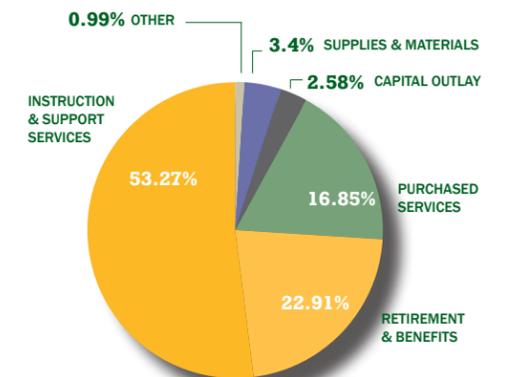
The Board of Education approved a new five-year forecast at its November

## Finances

REVENUE FY20: \$49,337,614



EXPENDITURES FY20: \$51,114,943



2020 meeting. By the last year of that forecast, FY 2025, the district is expected to have a revenue shortfall where expenditures are projected to be greater than revenue by \$11,663,660. The district would need to cut its FY 2025 projected expenses by 18.32% in order to balance its budget without additional revenue.

Little Miami has continued to see new housing developments come online and existing communities open new phases. Although the district's enrollment growth appeared to hit a plateau in the fall of 2020, projections still indicate student numbers will steadily climb for the foreseeable future.

With careful planning and monitoring of the district's ever increasing growth in enrollment, the board and administration will continue to provide the best opportunities available to our students in the most economical ways possible.

# Mental health supports available for students in crisis

Maintaining the well-being and health of students is a top priority for Little Miami. In order to properly serve all students and their mental health needs, a variety of mental health services is required. From college and career planning to intervention and coping skills development, Little Miami is proud to offer a vast array of services to students.

School counselors support the emotional needs of students as they relate to accessing academics. Counselors run support groups, meet with students individually, monitor student 504 accommodation plans, create student

schedules, assist with college and career planning and assist in connecting families with needed resources. LM school counselors act as the 'front line of support' when our students are in crisis.

Counselors are available at each building to serve the needs of students.

LM students also benefit from having access to mental health consultants who assess and determine appropriate services for each student referred by the school counselor. These consultants provide mental health consultation to administration, staff, and families served by the district. They also provides district-

wide crisis intervention services and monitor students in the district with the highest level of needs and severity of symptoms.

These consultants also complete referrals for individual therapy for students that require a treatment plan with our partner agency. The mental health consultant is also available to provide consultation and professional development to staff in order to improve the support and management of students with mental health concerns in the academic environment.

# In the Spotlight



## Athletic upgrades completed ahead of joining ECC

The artificial turf and running track at Little Miami High School's stadium had a new look for fall sports after competition surfaces were replaced during the spring and summer of 2020. With school buildings closed during the spring, crews were able to accelerate the proposed May start date and get to work earlier than expected. The original stadium turf was installed in early 2008; the running track was built with the high school in 2000.

The turf and track replacement were part of several projects that upgraded LM athletic facilities ahead of the district joining the Eastern Cincinnati Conference.

Other projects included milling and resurfacing of the high school tennis courts along with replacement fencing (below), resurfacing of the high school gymnasium floor and new windows and insulation added to the stadium home and visitor pressboxes.



## Building The Future: LM facilities opening in 2021

Thanks to the support of the Little Miami community, students will soon have new and updated spaces in which to learn and grow.

By the start of the 2021-2022 school year, a new early elementary school will open its doors, as will additions and renovations to Little Miami Junior High and High School. These building improvements will help Little Miami manage enrollment growth, and offer current and future students a high-quality and equitable educational experience.

Little Miami High School will be expanded to accommodate 1,500 students, and will feature new classrooms and labs, expansions to administrative and cafeteria space, a new athletic weight room, band room, wrestling room, and locker room. In addition, enhancements will be made to the high school media center.

Little Miami Junior High will transition to a middle school format and will house grades 6-8 moving forward. The expansion to this building will be sized to accommodate 1,500 middle school students or elementary students in the future. Important elements to the junior high project include classroom and lab expansions, additional administration space, and an expansion to the band room.



The plans for the high school expansion are well on their way to fruition.



Concept drawing of new high school academic space.



Little Miami's new PreK/K/1 facility is being built directly behind the existing Salem Twp. Elementary on Welch Road in Morrow, and adjacent to the district's transportation facilities.

A brand new 102,000 square foot PK/K/1 early elementary building will be open in Fall 2021 and will share a campus with Salem Twp. Elementary. This building will be able to accommodate 800 elementary students, with each classroom sized and designed to meet the needs of the district's very youngest learners. The existing Salem Twp. Elementary will transition to serve 4th and 5th grades until additional buildings or additions can be built to accommodate future growth.

These projects are made possible by the passage of a \$64.6 million bond issue in May 2018. They are the first phase of Little Miami's master plan designed to address projected enrollment growth for the next 10 years.

With restructuring of grade levels at all district buildings, Little Miami leadership teams face a busy time of moving staff and equipment into these new spaces.

To permit the most time possible for this, the Board of Education is considering two possible versions of a calendar for the 2020-2021 school year. Both versions would push the first day of school back until after Labor Day, and would have students' last day in late May or early June.



The Jr. High addition will nearly double the available classroom space.

## Little Miami Intermediate School

### From blueprints to backpacks in 10 months

When Little Miami preschoolers walked into their classrooms in the fall of 2020, they were walking on floors and through doorways that did not exist just 10 months earlier.

The classroom addition to Little Miami Intermediate School is the first project paid for by 2018 bond issue dollars to be completed. The project kicked off with a groundbreaking in Oct. 2, 2019, and officially opened to students on Aug. 26, 2020. The 27,000 sq. ft. addition was designed by Emersion Design/Fanning-Howey and built by crews from Skanska/Megen Construction IV. The building trades are considered essential workers and construction was able to continue throughout the spring lockdown.

In the fall of 2021, the Intermediate building will house all Little Miami second and third grades students in space designed to accommodate 1,050 students.



1. Several LMIS fifth and sixth graders (who are now in junior high) help turn the first shovelfuls of soil at the building site in October 2019.

2. Construction proceeded at a steady pace. Parents, students and staff at LMIS became accustomed to co-existing with a building project.

3. The addition nearing completion in the summer of 2020. The project included the classroom wing and a parking expansion in the front of the school.

4. New interior spaces designed for younger learners were installed.

5. While safety considerations prevented a community dedication event, the Little Miami preschool program held a ribbon cutting ceremony to open the new space.