



USD 497 News Release

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Board Discusses Data & Title IX Compliance, & Approves Free, Public Montessori Option

Data-Informed Decisions

During a work session Monday, the Lawrence Board of Education discussed its strategic plan's focus on data-informed decisions, including district goals and supporting work around student academic and behavioral data and the evaluation of school climate measures.

Executive Director of Data and Technology Dr. Zach Conrad shared District Common Assessments used to examine mastery of English language arts and math standards across the school year or from one school year to the next. Dr. Conrad shared that achievement/opportunity gaps continue to persist for student subgroups identified by race/ethnicity and by socio-economic or free and reduced-price lunch status.

Conrad also shared with the board an overview of student behavioral data from quarters 1, 2, and 3, including out-of-school suspensions. He said that district and building administrators examine the data for trends and disproportionalities among student subgroups identified by race/ethnicity. In addition, he shared that middle and high school staff have been trained to use restorative practices to address student behaviors.

Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis said that some of the ways the district is working to ensure educational equity are by addressing access, making sure students see themselves in the curriculum, including through the use of the district's culturally sustainable resource criteria; and by ensuring students have access to rigorous coursework through Advanced Placement and dual-credit courses.

Recognition of Students/Staff

The school board recognized several student honors. The following teams won the Kansas Scholastic Chess Association Championships: LHS (K-12), first place; LMCMS (K-8), first; and Prairie Park Elementary (K-5), tied for first, and (K-3), second.

Lawrence High student filmmakers Hayden Houts, Arlo Paden, Jackson Yanek, and Asher White will have their film, "The Game's Afoot," screened at this year's International Youth Silent Film Festival. LHS filmmakers Zach Micka, Jackson Martin, and Noah Smith won first place for their news package "LHS Football Star Credits Determination and Hard Work For Success," and Milo Bitters earned second for his animated "A Speaker's Story," at the eImagine Media Festival.

In addition, Free State High graphic design students placed at the eImagine Media Festival: Emma Liu, second, Branding, third, Manipulated Digital Illustration, and Top 5, Print Media; Abbey Hossler, second, Print Media; Ryan Laird, third, Typography; Gus Peters, Top 5, Infographic; Allison Cindrell, Top 5, Print Media.

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Title IX Report

The board received from attorney Greg Goheen with MVP Law Firm in Kansas City, Missouri, a Title IX report about equal opportunity and student participation in athletics. The board had requested the report as part of its consideration of an administrative recommendation to discontinue gymnastics due to safety and space concerns, low participation numbers locally and statewide, and cost avoidance.

Goheen shared in his report that while participation numbers for female student-athletes have increased during the past two years from 428 in 2019-20, to 670 in 2020-2, and to 764 at present, the current number of female participants is down from a pre-pandemic participation rate of 840 in 2018-19. The data reflect reduced participation by female students in sports, such as swimming, track, softball, tennis, and gymnastics over the four-year period reviewed. By comparison, current participation numbers for male student-athletes (1,139) are higher than those in 2018-19 (1,028).

Goheen said that courts have generally stated that a 5% variance between enrollment percentage and duplicated athletic participation is generally considered Title IX compliant. Prior to the pandemic, in 2018-19, the percentage of female high school students enrolled was 48.7% and the unduplicated athletic participation percentage was 45%. This results in a variance of 3.7%, a percentage compliant with Title IX. Even with the elimination of gymnastics, that variance would increase to 4.7%, which would still fall under the 5% generally accepted as compliant.

In 2021-2022, the district's student enrollment is 48% female. The variance of female students participating in sports versus female students enrolled is 7.8%, which is beyond Title IX's safe harbor of 5%. "Ultimately, given the variance numbers, I think that the elimination of the gymnastics program at this time would exacerbate the Title IX compliance issue even though the impact from a numbers standpoint is rather minimal," said Goheen. He noted that if the board eliminated gymnastics it should also take steps to eliminate programs for male student-athletes and/or add programs to meet the interests of female student-athletes to increase female participation.

"It seems like with the number of things we may need to collect information and data on, that the elimination of the program for next year is not feasible. While I think it is likely that COVID has had an impact (on participation), I am personally surprised by the size of the disparities. I would like to hear from the coaches about what factors are affecting participation," said Shannon Kimball, board vice president.

Dr. Lewis said that the high school gymnastics program will remain in place for the fall. The district administration will research safety, equipment, practice space, and low participation concerns with the program.

Free, Public Montessori Option

The board reviewed an administrative proposal to develop a free, public Montessori educational option at New York Elementary School. Phase one of the recommendation calls for offering two Children's Houses to serve children ages 3 and 4 and kindergartners in the fall.

Recently designated as a National Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) training site, Holliday Montessori in Kansas City, Missouri, would partner with the district to train 6-8 Lawrence teachers per year at a cost of \$17,000 per teacher. The Lawrence Schools Foundation Board is discussing supporting teacher training costs. The district also will apply in May for ARPA funding through Douglas County for teacher training.

The district is verifying it can use capital outlay funds to purchase materials for two Children's Houses to serve approximately 40 students. The estimated costs of the materials, and furniture, is \$8,764 per classroom.

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The district will give New York school families priority enrollment in the Montessori program. Other families may apply for a transfer to attend the program on a space-available basis. Priority would also be given to kindergartners and children ages 3 and 4 who are considered “at risk.” If space is available, the district may enroll children ages 3 and 4 who do not meet “at risk” criteria and whose families would pay to attend the program.

All of the students will continue to receive art, music, and physical education. The Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence will continue to offer an after-school program at New York. That program’s licensure begins with kindergartners.

The proposal touched on the Montessori philosophy, classroom methods, curriculum, daily schedule, and research. In addition, feedback was shared from meetings held with New York staff and two dinner discussions involving school families. Among collaborators working with the district on the Montessori option are partners with the KU Center for Montessori Research, National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, Holliday Montessori (Kansas City, Missouri), and Raintree Montessori (Lawrence, Kansas).

The board approved the addition of the Montessori school philosophy and curriculum at New York Elementary beginning with the Children’s House, serving ages 3, 4, and kindergarten, for the 2022-2023 school year. The board further directed district administration to determine the phased addition of other grade levels during subsequent years.

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