



## USD 497 News Release

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### Board Reviews District Needs & Approves Publishing Maximum Budget Authorities

The Lawrence Board of Education reviewed the district needs assessment and our schools' improvement goals and approved for publication its maximum budget authorities and mill levies. The 2024-2025 proposed budget of \$215,698,464 is based on 52.252 mills, an increase of .042 from last year's total mill levy. School districts set maximum budget authorities high to provide flexibility to address district needs and capture as much state aid as possible. Budget maximums do not reflect expected spending. After publishing the proposed budget in the newspaper, the board will host public revenue neutral rate and budget hearings at 6:00 and 6:05 p.m., respectively, on September 9 at 110 McDonald Drive.

The state of Kansas sets a statewide General Fund levy of 20 mills. A mill is approximately \$1 for every \$1,000 of a property's assessed value. The proposed budget also includes the state-maximum allowable Local Option Budget at 33% of the General Fund, or 14.517 mills; 8 mills for Capital Outlay, and 8.301 mills for Bond and Interest payments on debt services. Special Revenue Fund mill levies support Adult Education, .2 mill, and a Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA), 1.234 mills. Our district qualifies for the COLA because the average appraised value of a single-family home in Lawrence is more than 25% higher than the state average.

While the board can choose to lower published local mill levies, it cannot exceed them. "Is it safe to say that our ongoing (financial) commitments require that we follow your (budget) recommendation or we will not be able to keep our commitments to our staff, including salaries that are already not where we want them to be?" asked President Kelly Jones of Executive Director of Finance Cynde Frick. She answered that the recommendation is based on what staff know our expenditures are going to be, including board approved wages and staffing.

Frick outlined changes this year in the budget. These include a 5.7% increase in state Base Aid for Student Excellence (BASE), from \$5,088 to \$5,378 per pupil. Following school finance litigation, the BASE is now calculated on the three-year average of the Consumer Price Index for the midwest region. If increases in BASE funding had kept pace with inflation, it would sit at approx. \$7,600 per student. The BASE is multiplied by a district's full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment. Because our district enrollment is declining, the state will allow us to use the average of two prior years' enrollment, or 9,879, this year only. The district will receive approx. \$2 million more in state special education funding and increased funding for part-time virtual education students.

Board Past President Shannon Kimball noted from the district needs assessment that additional state funding is necessary to overcome barriers to student success identified by our schools.

"The top eight things that our staff said would address the barriers they identified are all things that come from more money from the Kansas Legislature," said Kimball. "When we adopt our budget on September 9, I would like for us to make the finding that without more money for things like special education and teacher salaries, which has to come from Topeka because we are doing everything we can to maximize our resources here, it is unrealistic to expect us to move the deck chairs in our budget in a meaningful way to address those barriers without more help from our legislative leaders."

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