



## USD 497 News Release

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### **Board Approves Purchases; Discusses Legislation, Insurance Costs, Civil Discourse**

The Lawrence Board of Education met for its monthly business meeting Monday, including recessing to two executive sessions to discuss personnel matters.

As part of its consent agenda, the board approved:

- Renovating the current trades warehouse on its Facilities and Operations campus to accommodate additional planning and office space, workstations, and tool storage at a cost of \$164,300.40 from the Capital Outlay fund.
- Purchasing district vehicles for student and staff transportation at a cost of \$374,300 using government fleet pricing and paid from Capital Outlay funds.
- Amending the district's athletic training contract with Lawrence Memorial Hospital to include "summer camps" at a cost not to exceed \$35,488 over a three-year period ending July 31, 2026.
- Purchasing playground equipment and installation services from ABcreative and Miracle Recreation for Deerfield Elementary at a cost not to exceed \$25,000 to be reimbursed by a Deerfield PTO donation.

Past President Shannon Kimball removed the Personnel Report and two Kansas Association of School Boards membership renewals from the consent agenda for discussion under New Business. Declaring a conflict of interest, she left the meeting during the board's discussion of these items.

The board approved the Personnel Report and renewed its annual membership in the Kansas Association of School Boards at a cost of \$14,984.05, including purchasing KASB's season pass for unlimited workshops/webinars for members and district staff at \$1,750.00, for a total cost of \$16,734.05. The board also renewed its membership in KASB's Legal Assistance Fund for 2025-2026 at a cost of \$2,750.

### **President's Report**

President Kelly Jones thanked board members for meeting with prospective board candidates and invited any interested school board candidates to contact current board members with any questions or to discuss board service. Candidates for Lawrence Board of Education must file by Noon June 2 because the June 1 filing deadline falls on Sunday. Three Lawrence school board positions will be on the November election ballot.

### **Public Education and Legislative Updates**

The Kansas Legislature wrapped up its regular session; however, Kimball shared that the School Funding Task Force will continue to meet monthly to discuss its recommendation to the 2026 Legislature regarding the school finance formula. The current funding formula expires in June of 2027.

Lawmakers approved a budget that fully funds BASE state aid and the inflation adjustment. Kimball noted that they did not wait to review the April update from the Consensus Revenue Estimating group. "It's possible they missed the mark, and this could impact whether their appropriations are sufficient," she said. "This legislative session was a big disappointment overall, but it could have been worse."

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Lawmakers approved \$7.5 million in new special education spending, which Kimball noted is not enough to continue making progress on closing the gap between funding and what the law requires. The amount is also substantially less than what KSDE and the Governor proposed.

Kansas Governor Laura Kelly used her line-item veto power on two public education items, and both vetoes were sustained. Kimball said that this stopped an appropriation from the school finance formula from being directed to private schools for the purchase of AEDs and turned away a no-bid contract for an online social studies curriculum.

She added that while there was a \$10 million appropriation over three years to the Kansas Attorney General's Office for a single vendor's gun detection software that school districts did not ask for, public schools' safe and secure, teacher mentor, and professional development grant programs will end with the fiscal year. "They did not fund those for the '26 or '27 fiscal years, which is really unfortunate," Kimball said.

Noting that positives for public schools were that none of the five "voucher bills" made it across the finish line this session, nor did some "bad policy bills," Kimball said, "We have to remain vigilant going into next year, and as we work on our own legislative agenda, because those bad policy bills could be brought up again during the next legislative session."

Jones added that, in general, the district has an earlier picture of the budget this year, rather than having to wait until June. She said that this means certified negotiations may be able to wrap up earlier than years' past.

### **Fringe Benefits Committee Report**

Kimball gave a report from the Fringe Benefits Committee. It recommends the district remain with its current provider, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas. It anticipates a \$1.8 million increase in the cost of providing employee health insurance benefits next year. Looking ahead to the following school year, the committee anticipates an increase of 30% with its current provider.

### **Bullying and Harassment of Public Officials**

Saying that she wanted to make the community aware, Kimball shared that the bullying, harassment, and intimidation attempts the public has seen during board meetings from individuals violating the board's public comment guidelines are continuing outside of the boardroom. She said that she received more than a dozen bullying and harassing emails and voicemails over the last four days, almost exclusively from men, from within our community and beyond our state.

"They use hateful, obscene, and misogynistic language in their voice messages. It's really disturbing," she said. "I refuse, personally, to be silenced by these bullying attempts."

Kimball added that the community needs to know about the joint, collective efforts being made to ensure that civil, safe, inclusive, and civic dialog is preserved and continues in this community.

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