



Board of Education

April 28, 2025

Superintendent's Report

We are excited to announce that enrollment is now open to families of three and four year olds for all of our preschool programs. This includes our new Neighborhood Preschool Programs at Sunflower and Woodlawn Elementary Schools, as well as the excellent established programs at Kennedy Early Childhood Center and New York Montessori.

Our Pre-K programs are free to families who meet state eligibility guidelines. We welcome all children, so families who do not meet state eligibility guidelines may enroll for a fee that we have researched is low for preschool and even daycare in our community, \$660/month. Register your preschooler on our website, just as you do any other new K-12 student.

I also want to remind returning families that we sincerely appreciate you completing annual student registration in the next few days. This gives us critical information to use in staffing and planning so we have all of the resources necessary to meet student needs on the first day of school in August.

Our elementary schools proudly welcomed about 523 incoming kindergarten students and their families this month. Each school created a welcoming, engaging, and informative experience that celebrated the transition into kindergarten and began to build strong connections with families.

We want to continue to emphasize our top priority of student and staff safety. I thought it might be helpful to show our community the safety information and resources available on our website.

All of our school websites also include a link to our Safety Tip Line for reporting any safety concerns. We appreciate these reports including as much information as possible to aid our investigation; however, reporting parties can share a tip anonymously.

Safety will always be our top priority; this commitment includes responding immediately when concerns arise. As part of our culture of safety, we continually update policies, programs, and training designed to promote child safety and protect students from threats present in our society.

Our district has the highest standards for our employees, who are entrusted to care for, educate, and support our community's children. When a safety concern is reported, our administrative team immediately investigates, including involving local law enforcement, as appropriate. Based on investigation findings, we take immediate action in accordance with the law and Lawrence Board of Education Policy.

Our district continues its comprehensive review of safety protocols across all schools to enhance safety, security, and visibility. This includes ensuring clear sightlines into all physical spaces where children are served, so these spaces remain open and observable at all times. All student services are to be delivered in clearly visible areas.

Please see separate communication: April 28th Student and Staff Safety Update

Let's highlight some of our students' recent achievements.

I want to congratulate these four students for earning perfect scores on the ACT. The ACT is designed to be challenging, and these four juniors:

- **Katherine Stancil, Free State**
- **Emma Ryan, LVS**
- **Eli Cokelet & James Gassmann, Lawrence High**

didn't miss a single question. Good for them!

Lawrence High returned this weekend from the National High School Journalism Convention in Seattle with the highest honor, **the Pacemaker award, for its Red & Black Yearbook**. Editors of the year were alumni Maya Smith & Maebelle Hamlin, members of the Class of 2024.

Additionally, The Budget student newspaper received 5th place, and the yearbook, 8th place, in "Best of Show" recognition. Lawrence High also celebrated getting to watch Zana Kennedy receive her Kansas Student Journalist of the Year award.

Congratulations to these students and their journalism adviser, Barbara Tholen!

We also congratulate these eight students who have been so successful during the speech and debate season that they have qualified for the **National Speech and Debate Association Tournament**. They have our best wishes for continued success. Special thanks to their coaches Jeff Plinsky at LHS and Parker Hopkins at Free State.

These middle school students from West and Southwest placed second at Kansas History Day in their respective categories and have earned the chance to compete at the National History Day competition. Their teachers are Jessica Miescher-Lerner and Dani Lotton-Barker.

Anders Benson, one of our talented Free State journalists has earned the Kansas Scholastic Press Association's Student Photographer of the Year Award. Congratulations, Anders!.

Additionally, the Free State Free Press and Free Press Online earned All-Kansas Awards recognizing the best in student journalism. Their teacher, Mr. Jared Shuff, won KSPA's Sunflower Award given to the best new journalism adviser. We are so proud of both of our excellent student journalism programs.

I want to thank Director of Nutrition and Wellness Julie Henry for engaging LHS students in a competition to create a new menu item for their school lunches. Chef Rose Barry's Culinary classes learned about federal meal requirements, wrote recipes, and made dishes. A panel of judges and

the student chefs ranked the items. The top dish from each class will face off to win the prize of a spot on the menu for lunch at LHS. *I'm excited to hear what student dish wins and to try it!*

Students from our Career and Technical Education classes demonstrated their work for the community during Lawrence High's annual CTE Innovation Expo. It featured a little bit of everything from art and medical research to engineering prototypes, culinary, and robotics.

Speaking of showcases, we had lots of guests, including several school district teams, visiting Southwest Middle School and Sunflower Elementary last week to hear about their AVID journey.

I was delighted to welcome them and to hear from AVID Director Dr. Sarah Hochstetler and Principals Dr. Carissa Miles and Amanda Green about their successes teaching college readiness skills, including writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading.

Then, our students took over for the adults and led our visitors on tours and classroom observations. This exciting day ended with a middle school student panel. I'd like to share a few things our students shared about their AVID experiences:

"AVID is very student-led. Your teacher is going to be there for you and you're going to have tutors there for you, but it is really student-led. As a student, if you want to get the most out of it, you have to listen to your peers, you have to interact with them, you have to take their advice, and you also have to collaborate with them."

Another student shared, *"I never really felt out of place in AVID. I felt like I always had a place where I belonged. I felt like everyone was really welcoming. Everyone has to put themselves out there, and everyone is really good about making everyone feel comfortable in that space."*

The panel discussion ended with this student comment: *"AVID is very diverse. There's not going to be just one group of kids. You get students interested in the arts, you get the athletes, you get the people who are really focused on school. You all bond as a family, and then by the end of the year, you are all interacting with each other, listening, and everybody becomes good friends."*

We'll share more about AVID in Lawrence Public Schools later this evening during our report about program enhancements.

Sunflower families enjoyed learning about one another's cultures last week, including by sampling dishes from a variety of nations, during the school's annual International Night.

There are so many school activities going on this spring, it's hard to choose.

We had a tremendous crowd out at the Lawrence Arts Center at the USD 497 Student Art Show - sharing here just a few highlights among many favorite artworks by our USD 497 students. Congratulations to our Lawrence Public Schools artists and art teachers on this extraordinary endeavor and celebration of art in our community.

The Showtime variety show at Lawrence High was truly a one-of-a-kind celebration, representing such a wide spectrum of talent, hard work, and so much fun!

It was a delight for Deputy Superintendent Dr. Englebrick and I to join in at Prairie Park on Saturday afternoon for their RoarFest event. Lots of students and parents and fun all around there; it was a delight to see so much student, parent, and staff engagement, and many thanks to all who made it happen.

There were also several other elementary carnivals and the first Powwow at Hillcrest this weekend.

I hope everyone is able to participate in some of these wonderful school celebrations in the coming weeks.

It was a joy to celebrate 40 years of success with the **Lawrence Schools Foundation** and nearly 200 school champions. Our schools are truly fortunate to benefit from the strong community support, including the donation of funds, in-kind goods, and volunteer services coordinated by the Foundation.

Several individuals and organizations were honored during the celebration for their role in the Foundation's successful history. We thank them for their support of our schools.

Finally, I just wanted to let families know that the Boys and Girls Club is now enrolling for its fall programs in our elementary schools and at the Teen Center. The Club will host a couple of public information sessions in May, so please take advantage of one of those if you are interested in before- or after-school care for your child.



April Student and Staff Safety Update

Superintendent Report

Monday, April 28, 2025

In Lawrence Public Schools, safety will always be our top priority; this commitment includes responding immediately when concerns arise. As part of our culture of safety, we continually update policies, programs, and training designed to promote child safety and protect students from threats present in our society.

While we have shared a student safety update/connection regularly in Superintendent updates and newsletters, as we near the wrap up of this school year, we want to ensure that we highlight our ongoing work throughout this school year.

Student Safety Practices

Steps we are taking to ensure Student and Staff safety while at school include the following:

Visibility and Line of Sight Expectation for All Students and Staff at all Times

To maintain a safe and well-supervised environment for students and staff and for the protection of everyone, school district team members will ensure clear visibility and line of sight to the area where they are working at all times, avoiding situations where a single staff member is alone with a student in an enclosed space.

During recent months, a comprehensive review of each area of service has been conducted alongside building leaders and members of the Special Education and Facilities and Operations teams to ensure that all areas across schools in the district have been addressed.

In order to support this directive, we will ensure that all windows into classrooms and offices remain uncovered to allow clear visibility at all times.

To maintain safe, open, observable, and well-supervised learning environments:

- **Clear visibility and sight lines to staff and students must be maintained at all times during the delivery of services.**

- **Windows into classrooms, offices, and all other learning spaces must remain uncovered, except during an active security lockdown.**
- **Frequent walkthroughs in schools will continue to ensure compliance with these requirements.**

Line of Sight and ALICE Safety Protocols

During recent Kansas ALICE training, clarification of our district's process has been confirmed, that line of sight will be assured at all times, *except in the rare occurrence when the school is in an active lockdown process*, during which the ALICE safety protocols of covering windows and doors, will be in place.

Lawrence Police Department Review

We are leveraging the expertise and experience of our **Lawrence Police Department team**, including our SROs who are on duty in the district, who will work with building principals and members of the district team to review the room-by-room analysis, clarify any questions, and ensure that the district guideline of 'open line of sight' is consistently achieved.

Prompt Response When Concerns Arise

Our district has the highest standards for our employees, who are entrusted to care for, educate, and support our community's children. When a safety concern is reported, our administrative team immediately investigates, including involving local law enforcement, as appropriate. Based on investigation findings, we take immediate action in accordance with the law and Lawrence Board of Education Policy.

Continuous Review of Safety Practices in Schools

Our district continues its comprehensive review of safety protocols across all schools to enhance safety, security, and visibility. This includes ensuring clear sightlines into all physical spaces where children are served, so these spaces remain open and observable at all times. All student services are to be delivered in clearly visible areas.

Required Fingerprinting & Background Checks

Criminal background checks (Kansas Bureau of Investigations, Department of Children and Families) are required for every district team member, prior to beginning duty. Names are checked against the KBI Registered Offenders Registry. This checks for violent, drug, and sex offenders. Fingerprinting and an FBI background check are conducted for staff members who have not lived in the state of Kansas for the past ten consecutive years,

In addition, a Department for Children and Families background check is completed on the Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry for all new employees.

The Kansas Department of Education requires a background check and fingerprinting on all new teacher license applicants. Related-services state licensing agencies also require background checks and/or fingerprinting. License status is reviewed for all certified staff during the application and hiring process.

Mandatory Reporting

All members of our team are mandatory reporters. *Any district employee who has concerns that a child may have experienced harm due to physical, mental, or emotional abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse is required to promptly report the concern to the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) office or, if the DCF office is closed, to local law enforcement (Board Policy GAAD).* To support this responsibility, all school employees receive annual mandatory reporting training with documentation of the training maintained.

Information for Parents

Over the coming days, we will continue to share information and resources with families, including a website resource page to share updated information to support parents in talking with their children about safety.

The [Children's Advocacy Center](#) offers sound and trusted guidance for parents and caregivers across many areas of child safety.

Please continue to report any safety concerns you may have to your child's school and encourage your children to do the same. We have school mental health teams to support student and staff needs. If you think your child or family could benefit from visiting with a counselor, please reach out to your school.

We value our partnership with school families and maintaining open lines of communication between home and school as we continue to work together to ensure the safety and well-being of all students.

News of a child sexual abuse case can open the door for parents and caregivers to talk with their students. The following tips have been adapted from [Darkness to Light](#), a leader in child sexual abuse prevention and advocacy for behavioral impact, education and training, and research.

1) Ask open-ended questions to discover student's knowledge about the event, and any opinions that may have already been formed. These questions will help you determine your child's depth of knowledge on the subject, as well as clear up any misinformation or gaps in understanding.

- What have you heard about this case?
- What do you know about child sexual abuse?

2) Let students lead the discussion. Listen more than you talk and let them know you value their beliefs and opinions. Ask follow-up questions ("And then?") to keep the conversation going.

- What would you do if anyone made you uncomfortable or asked you to keep a secret from me?
- What would you do if a friend tells you someone touched him or her in a way that felt uncomfortable?
- How can kids help other kids who are being bullied or abused?

3) Keep your tone light and conversational to ensure students feel safe to open up. A successful conversation promotes mutual learning and future conversation.

- Do you know of anything like this happening at your school, or anywhere else?
- Is there anything else you want to talk with me about?