



Superintendent Report to the Board of Education
Monday, May 12, 2025

Hello Members of the Board, Staff and Community,

As we approach mid-May our students, teachers and staff, parents and community are focused on a strong finish to this school year; May is a time for both reflection and celebration.

Update on Our Work:

4th Quarter Substitute Fill Rates

We always work to openly share the data representing our daily work to improve in schools and district operations. This year, we have had the goal of improving the rates at which we are able to consistently fill all substitute positions. Tonight I am sharing an update on our 4th quarter substitute fill rates so far.

As you can see, we are averaging a 93% fill rate across the 8 weeks of this 4th quarter so far; we will share an updated version after the wrap up of this quarter.

Preschool Classroom Enrollment at Sunflower and Woodlawn Elementary Schools

In March, we announced the opening of preschool classrooms, in addition to amazing early childhood programming already in place at Kennedy Early Childhood Center.

We are delighted to update that during these early weeks of enrollment, an additional 26 students have enrolled in the Lawrence Public Schools.

Streamlining of the Organization

Over the months since our community conversation, we have discussed our intention and ongoing work to streamline the organization, to reorganize to direct limited resources, as much as possible, to classrooms and into compensation for our employees.

We are determined to streamline, to flatten the organization, and will continue a meticulous review of *every* area of district operations to continue to achieve greater efficiencies; I and the Board and team are committed to this effort.

In this review process, I want to emphasize that these changes are in *no way* a reflection of any individual who has served in these positions; it is rather a step forward to redesign the organization, to ensure we push every resource into classroom support and to employee compensation.

In addition to the Assistant Director, Teaching and Learning position that I shared sometime back, this evening you may notice that this effort also includes the Executive Director, Teaching and Learning, as well as other positions that will be articulated more publicly over the coming weeks.

As a part of this redesign, we will post an Assistant Superintendent, Teaching and Learning position over the coming days, and will transition district design for this position to work directly with a network of active, practicing teacher leaders, deploying a 'teacher leader model' to lead instruction. In doing so, we will leverage an asset we have a great deal of in the district: remarkable, strong teacher leadership. This will amplify the opportunity to lead for teachers, by teachers and to streamline and direct resources to the classroom level.

Conversations with the Class of 2025

I thoroughly enjoyed a conversation last week with 14 of our LPS graduating seniors at Lawrence High. They talked about their areas of involvement in school, profound memory-making moments, appreciation for their teachers, their exciting future plans, and some areas where improvements can be made in our district. I look forward to similar conversations with groups of Free State and LVS seniors this week, and then sharing with the board and community highlights of this valuable and actionable feedback.

Last week we celebrated the graduation of 123 Lawrence Public Schools educators from LETRS training with remarks from Laurie Curtis, the Kansas State Department of Education's Early Literacy and Dyslexia Program Manager. She commended our teachers for their commitment to education, their training in the Science of Reading, and their efforts to improve student reading proficiency and engagement.

Lawrence Parents as Teachers also welcomed a special guest to Wednesday's Playgroup last week. Kansas State Representative Suzanne Wikle visited with our parent educators, met families, and enjoyed a hands-on observation of our littlest learners at play.

Staff Honors

Last week we celebrated Teacher Appreciation Week. A quality teacher makes all the difference in student growth and learning, both for today, during this school year, and across the arc of a child's development and life. Our students benefit tremendously from their quality learning experiences in our classrooms under the guidance of our nearly 900 extraordinary Lawrence Public Schools teachers.

We had the opportunity last week to recognize several outstanding teachers, who will represent their peers across our district.

From building relationships and solving challenges to fostering communication and placing student success above all else, the **Woodlawn Elementary Intervention Team** exemplifies teamwork. I enjoyed presenting our district Teamwork Award to these five educators at Woodlawn. As one of our Master Lawrence Education Achievement Partners, Truity Credit Union sponsors our district staff recognition program and awarded this team \$1,000 to assist with their continued efforts to support students.

It was my pleasure to announce that **Amanda Carlson, Cordley third grade teacher is our Lawrence Elementary Teacher of the Year** and **Connie Merz, Billy Mills Middle School science teacher is our Lawrence Secondary Teacher of the Year**. We received high praise in nominations from their principals, colleagues, parents, and even some of their students. Truity Credit Union presented both teachers with checks for \$1,000. We look forward to nominating this dynamic duo to KSDE's Kansas Teacher of the Year program in the fall.

On Friday, we announced that Jenny Humburg, beloved Deerfield kindergarten teacher, is this year's Lawrence Master Teacher and our nominee next fall to Emporia State University's Kansas Master Teacher program. We appreciate Truity for awarding Mrs. Humburg \$2,500.

Jefferson's Restaurants of Lawrence honored Kathryn Brooks, a science teacher at West Middle School, with its 2025 Jefferson's Lawrence Teacher of the Year. Ms. Brooks will receive a \$500 gift card to Jefferson's. We are truly fortunate to benefit from strong support from businesses and organizations in our community who value and champion the teaching profession.

Student Honors

The state of Kansas will honor 60 students from Lawrence High and Free State with the Seal of Biliteracy this year. This award recognizes students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation.

To achieve the Seal of Biliteracy students must perform at or above the designated level on speaking, writing, reading, and listening exams. This accomplishment recognizes student readiness for college and careers and their engagement as global citizens. Congratulations to these students and all of our world languages teachers who have supported them.

Congratulations to Free State for defending its title to become the six-time KSHSAA 6A State Speech Champions! The team also captured three individual state championships. You may recall from January that the Firebirds also captured the State Debate Championship this year. This is only the 7th time in 43 years that a school has “united the crowns” winning both Debate and Speech titles. Free State is the only school to have done this twice, in 2019 and 2025. Congratulations to these student speech and debate champions and their coaches.

Two of our seniors earned \$2,500 National Merit Scholarships last week. We congratulate them and are excited to see them pursue their chosen fields of study in environmental science and mechanical engineering.

These three LVS teams performed well in the state E-Cybermission competition, placing first and second at the ninth grade level as well as first among sixth graders. Their projects involved AI, solar pathways, and diagnosing Parkinson’s disease.

Two Lawrence High wrestlers competed at the Kansas State Freestyle and Greco tournament in Wichita. Jadin Harrell finished in 2nd place, qualifying for the national tournament in July in Fargo, North Dakota. He also will represent Team Kansas at the Junior Duels in June in Milwaukee.

Twelve of our high school students were given the opportunity to perform with Black Violin, the two-time Grammy nominated group, during its performance at the Lied Center. What an honor for our student musicians.

Nutrition and Wellness Director Julie Henry has announced the winning recipe from Chef Rose Barry’s Culinary 2 class at Lawrence High. Three students learned about food nutrition standards and came up with a Cheesy Chicken Fajita Wrap, which will be served at LHS May 15, and will join the lunch menu at both high schools in the fall. It sounds delicious!

Special Events

Cans for the Community is a special local organization that encourages communitywide recycling of aluminum cans. This group takes that earth-friendly practice a step further by donating the money received from the sale of the aluminum to local nonprofits and worthy causes.

Each April, Cans for the Community issues an Earth Day Challenge to recycle 5,000 lbs. of aluminum cans. Our schools are the annual beneficiary of this challenge. Thanks to all of our neighbors who recycled their cans, Lawrence exceeded that goal, resulting in what would have been \$500 donations to each of our elementary schools. Bo Killough (KILL'-OH) of the 12th and Haskell Recycling Center stepped in and generously matched the donation, so Cans for the Community volunteers visited all of our elementary schools last week to present \$1,000 donations. Next year, our secondary schools will reap the recycling rewards. I want to thank Mr. Killough, Linda Klinker, affectionately known as "The Can Lady;" all the Cans for the Community volunteers, and our community for recycling.

It was my honor on Friday to attend Haskell Indian Nations University's Commencement on Friday, and I especially valued the references of the speakers to the importance of leadership and warriorship.

It was a special delight to witness the graduation of Member Cadue-Blackwood's son; Congratulations to the Haskell Class of 2025!

Speaking of graduations, our Lawrence Public Schools commencement ceremonies are coming up, starting this Thursday morning with recognition of our young adults in the Community Transition and Project SEARCH programs at Community Connections at Pinckney.

As we wrap up this school year next week, we want to extend our deepest appreciation and gratitude to our students, teachers, staff and leaders, our parents and community, for all you have diligently contributed to make this a successful 2024-25 school year. We wish everyone a safe and peaceful summer.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this report, and for the honor of serving the Lawrence Public Schools.

Sincerely,



Jeanice Kerr Swift
Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools