



USD 497 News Release

Julie Boyle, Exec. Director of Communications
110 McDonald Dr. Lawrence, KS 66044
785-330-1662 / jboyle@usd497.org

May 12, 2025

Board Hears AVID Presentation, Approves More than \$5 Million in Capital Outlay Purchases

During Monday's Lawrence Board of Education meeting, the board heard a report from Sunflower Elementary and Southwest Middle School administrators about their implementation of AVID. The national program, first implemented in both Lawrence high schools in 2012, then in middle schools in 2015, and added at a few elementary schools in 2018, will expand districtwide by 2026. AVID provides academic support, including tutorials, collaborative learning, and motivational activities, with the goal of increasing student achievement and college readiness.

Southwest MS Principal Carissa Miles shared that AVID emphasizes academic rigor and regularly involves students in tutorials with KU student mentors, career days, and college field trips. "It's really important that we address equity and access for students. When we're talking about AVID, no matter what students choose to do after high school...they will have the skills to do it," said Miles.

Sunflower Principal Amanda Green emphasized AVID skill-based strategies, such as students learning focused notetaking, collaboration, and organizational skills. She gave an example of the end of the school day, when Sunflower Eagles "reset the nest," organizing their materials and getting ready for the next day.

Green spoke also to the significance of teachers' consistent use of best practices. "AVID provides a framework that already has high-yield strategies aligned. That is incredibly important," she said.

"I love the leadership development and the student agency that comes along with AVID programming. I really appreciate that we have been able to work on that," added Miles.

Board member Carole Cadue-Blackwood said, "I want to commend you on the work you are doing. It is working!" She referenced seeing the familiar faces of young adults walking across the stage to receive their diplomas at Haskell's Commencement.

AVID Co-Director Sarah Hochstetler said that when the program expands districtwide, AVID will be in all school buildings. She added that several high school graduates will participate in the coming days in "Grad Walks" through elementary and middle schools to inspire younger peers, and staff will take part in AVID training opportunities in July.

Consent Agenda

In addition to policy updates, the board approved \$1,047,015.48 in capital outlay funding for roof repair and replacement projects, including at Schwegler, Woodlawn, New York, Hillcrest, Pinckney, and Lawrence High; a three-year lease agreement for high school student MacBook Air laptops and Apple Care and support at a capital outlay cost of \$4,248,400.00; and an expenditure of \$6,900 from the general fund to complete districtwide coverage of the Centegix wearable alert badges safety system.

MORE

Vice President GR Gordon-Ross said that while repair costs were one of the reasons the board approved last year the switch from MacBooks to iPads for high school students, there are several differences with this year's decision. He explained that the new MacBooks have a sturdier screen less prone to breakage, the lease includes Apple Care Plus for repairs, and the district will consider providing protective cases for the devices.

President's Report

Board President Kelly Jones shared that she called for the formation of an ad hoc committee to discuss AI technologies last year at about this time. Shortly thereafter, the former superintendent resigned to accept another position. Jones said that the board will move forward with this effort with Gordon-Ross and member Anne Costello serving, and a goal of recommending education guidelines, practices, and policies to the board.

Superintendent's Report

In addition to highlighting district updates and student and staff honors, Superintendent Jeanice Kerr Swift shared the following:

- Substitute fill rates for the fourth quarter to date (eight weeks) show an average of 93.4%, an improvement from previous years.
- Twenty-six preschoolers have applied for our new neighborhood Pre-K programs at Sunflower and Woodlawn. These programs are an expansion of Kennedy Early Childhood Center and New York Montessori serving preschoolers.
- Our district continues to streamline the organization with a review of all areas of operation to achieve efficiencies and push limited resources into classrooms, a priority mentioned in community input.

“It is our ability to innovate that will help us to align the organization to get the most opportunities for students, classroom support, and compensation for our employees,” said Dr. Swift. She gave an example of administrative reductions in the Teaching and Learning Department and the upcoming posting of an Assistant Superintendent position with responsibilities to work collaboratively with a network of practicing teacher leaders in the field.

[Read](#) and [watch](#) the full Superintendent's Report online.

First Grade Service Project

Sunflower Elementary first graders in Jessica Brown's class shared with the board that their class voted to make and sell jewelry to benefit Shy 38, Inc., a Lawrence farm animal sanctuary, home to 100+ rescued animals, including cows, pigs, horses, chickens, and turkeys. The students have a goal of raising \$1,000 for this cause. They invited everyone to bid on necklaces and earrings in their AVID Jewelry Auction by May 16 at <https://www.museclaydesigns.com>.