



**Superintendent Report to the Board of Education**  
**Tuesday, May 27, 2025**

Hello, Members of the Board, Staff and Community,

The graduation of our students across our schools is both the culmination of our school year, and the finale of the PK12 experience. We enjoyed celebrating this milestone with 900+ members of the Class of 2025. We were delighted to join with students, staff, and families in honoring our Community Transition and Project SEARCH program graduates at Pinckney, Lawrence Virtual School graduates, Lawrence High School and Free State High School graduates.

On this Thursday, we look forward to recognizing adults earning their high school diplomas and GEDs this year at a special ceremony at 7:00pm Thursday evening at the Lawrence College and Career Center.

Among many highlights of this graduation season, several of our elementary schools hosted grad walks, inviting graduating high school, and in some cases, also college seniors to walk the halls, so their younger peers could congratulate them and see how important it is to continue doing their best at school so they can also achieve graduation in the future. Teachers and staff also enjoy seeing the fruits of their labor in our amazing, accomplished graduates.

**Lawrence Public Schools Podcast**

I was delighted to meet in conversation with graduating seniors from all of our high schools. You may Listen to highlights of those conversations in the latest episode of our Lawrence Public Schools Podcast.

**Staff Honors**

Lawrence Public Schools joins Morgan Hunter, which recruits and manages substitute teachers for us, in celebrating Dana Tieperman, Lawrence Substitute Teacher of the Year, pictured here with Free State High School administrative assistant Julie Ploharz.

Our sincere thanks to all our substitute teachers for serving a critical role in ensuring students continued to receive essential instruction and support when our teachers were absent from the classroom this year. We honor each of our Substitute Teachers of the Year designated by each school, shown on the slide.

Thank you for your work to support our students.

### **Retirements**

Congratulations to all 19 of our retiring teachers and staff. They have our best wishes for continued good health and happiness.

We have one administrator retiring this year, Executive Director of Communications Julie Boyle after 27-and-a-half years in this role. Julie has added immense value to the organization over her years of service. Her consistent support of students, teachers, staff, and school leaders, and her commitment to diligently and accurately 'tell the story' of our neighborhood public schools has ensured that the stories of our students, teachers, and classrooms shine brightly as a celebration of learning and the excellence of Lawrence Public Schools.

Prior to joining our district, Julie was the education reporter for KLWN/KLZR Radio, where she covered Lawrence Public Schools news. We did some math, and across both of these positions, Julie has worked with approximately 47 school board members and attended more than 748 board meetings, keeping our community informed of board discussions and actions. This includes, in her district role, helping us share information as part of four successful school bond issue elections totaling \$259 million that funded improvements to all our school buildings.

Congratulations, Julie, on your retirement; we are extremely grateful for your exemplary service.

### **Student Honors**

We had so much fun on the last day of school accompanying the Lawrence Schools Foundation in presenting its \$10,000 Excellence in Teaching Award to **Gina Carter**, Woodlawn Elementary learning coach. Colleagues nominated her for her devotion in mastering the science of teaching reading and the meaningful relationships she builds with all students. This is the 28th year for this special award, thanks to the generosity of 'The Bobs,' a group of community members who share the first name Bob.

We again want to thank the Lawrence Schools Foundation, Kindness is Key, a service organization led by Free State staff member Dee Kemp, and the Habitat Restore for helping to make our first year of Geometry in Construction a success. Free State students Amanda Torbett and Laura O'Neill learned by building greenhouses and other structures for grateful clients.

### **Langston Library Project**

Langston Hughes Elementary library media specialist Jenny Williams shares that at the end of last year, staff reorganized and restructured the entire nonfiction section of the school library. This involved changing how every single nonfiction book in the library was cataloged, labeled, and shelved. Ms. Williams ran a report last week and found that this hard work paid off. Student checkouts of nonfiction books increased by 79% this school year. We appreciate the efforts of all our library staff to ensure children continue to read.

### **West MS Service Project**

Look at these beautiful animals at the Lawrence Humane Society enjoying the warm and cozy blankets made by students in the Good Vibe Warhawks Club at West Middle School. We appreciate teachers and staff supporting students in learning about the importance of giving and performing acts of community service.

### **Adaptive P.E. Triathlon**

Students participating in the adaptive P.E. program swam, biked, and ran to much applause and fanfare led by their peers, staff, and families during the 2025 Pat Grzenda Adaptive P.E. Triathlon at Lawrence High. Teachers Tiffany Russell and Rodney Hess organized this annual event supported by our wonderful middle and high school special education staff.

### **National Champion**

Free State High School celebrates Anwen Williams' National Championship in Extemporaneous Speaking, and Breahna Randall, an Octofinalist (Top 60) in Original Oratory, both members of the school's State Champion Speech and Debate Team. Williams also finished as an Octofinalist in Informative Speaking at the National Individual Events Tournament of Champions in Liberty, Missouri. Free State placed 13th in the nation in its division. Congratulations to these students and their coaches.

### **Update: District Employee Exit Data**

As an update, we want to share the current update on the number of employee exits so far during this 2024-25 school year.

The number of exits to date is 73, approximately 50% of the prior 5 year average of 146.4.

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Number of Certified Employees</b>	<b>Total Number Employee Exits</b>
<b>2014-15</b>	<b>1020</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>2015-16</b>	<b>1012</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>2016-17</b>	<b>1012</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>2017-18</b>	<b>994</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>2018-19</b>	<b>1018</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>2019-20</b>	<b>1023</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>2020-21</b>	<b>1024</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>2021-22</b>	<b>1037</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>2022-23</b>	<b>951</b>	<b>177</b>
<b>2023-24</b>	<b>875</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>2024-25 To Date</b>	<b>871</b>	<b>73 (to date)</b>

### **Summer**

This summer our Nutrition and Wellness Team has families covered with FREE summer meals for children and youth ages 1-18.

Families may stop by Woodlawn Elementary from 11:30-12:30 every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in June for lunch. Adults may purchase a meal for \$5.

Families must pre-register for FREE weekly summer meal kits, also for children ages 1-18. Kits contain 5 breakfasts and 5 lunches to prepare at home. After registering, families will drive-through to pick up their meal kits from 6:45-8:45 a.m. on Tuesdays in June through July 22 at the Youth Sports Complex. If there are meal kits that are not picked up, there will be a window between 8:45-9:15 for same-day registration and pick up.

Visit our USD 497 website to register and find menus, meal kit preparation instructions, and more information about FREE summer meals for ALL children and youth.

## **August Primary Election**

The deadline to file as a candidate for school board election is coming up soon on June 2. Additionally, the deadline to register to vote in the August Primary Election is July 15. Make sure your voter registration information is current and make a plan to vote.

## **Juneteenth**

We invite everyone to celebrate **Lawrence Juneteenth Saturday, June 14**, in South Park. This event includes an underground railroad tour at 8 a.m., the parade kickoff at 11 a.m., and a community celebration from noon to 8 p.m. with a kids zone, live music, food, and craft vendors. Kids eat free at the event! You can find more information at [LawrenceJuneteenth.org](http://LawrenceJuneteenth.org).

## **Summer Hours**

Lawrence Public Schools will observe summer hours from June 2 to July 25 with all buildings closed to the public on Fridays. Our 12-month staff should work with their supervisors to confirm their weekly work schedules.

## **Holiday Closures**

Also, all school and district buildings will be closed for the **Juneteenth Holiday on June 19 and Independence Day July 4**.

## **Other News:**

### **Interim Principal, Prairie Park Elementary**

Among our next steps, we are delighted to bring Denise Johnson as Interim Principal forward to the Board and community this evening for Prairie Park Elementary. In selecting Denise Johnson, we have selected a leader who is well known to the Prairie Park community, an individual who is hard working, respected, and a long serving member of the Lawrence Public Schools community. Someone who has built relationships over time, Ms. Johnson will join in to work alongside this strong Prairie Park team, parents and community, keeping students at the center of the work.

I was delighted to recently connect with the Prairie Park staff in conversation, and to hear directly from them their clearly stated consensus and desire for someone who would prioritize relationships, confidence, consistency and trust, someone who would serve as an effective bridge to the next chapter of Prairie Park; all these priorities are all achieved in the naming of Denise Johnson to this interim leadership role. Denise will also partner with well-known leader, Ms. Darcy Kraus, around next steps to ensure trauma-informed leadership moving forward at Prairie Park.

We look forward to working together through a robust principal search, engaging with all members of the Prairie Park staff, parents and community, beginning next fall in order to name an incoming long term leader for Prairie Park.

## Leadership Transitions

Regarding transitions in our Teaching and Learning team, certainly, and certainly, the Board has been thoroughly briefed on this work - just a reminder that our current leaders in Teaching & Learning are on duty here with us for another month, through June 30th. Further, as we indicated at our prior Board meeting two weeks ago, the Assistant Superintendent, Teaching and Learning position is currently posted. In addition, several from across our team will be working to support this critical transition on the Teaching and Learning Team during the coming weeks of this summer.

In other updates, we want to share a very special, public Thank You to **Mrs. Janice Dunn**, Board Clerk and Executive Assistant extraordinaire; Janice has stepped up and pitched in throughout this school year, working tirelessly to support the Board and Superintendent. Janice is a shining star, we are so fortunate that she answered our call last summer, and we will be forever grateful for her support through this year!

We will share more during coming meetings in June; we are delighted to welcome **Ms. Nikki Naumann**, incoming Board Clerk and Executive Assistant to the Superintendent who joins us for her first Board meeting this evening.

We want to extend our deepest appreciation and gratitude to our students, teachers, staff, school and district leaders, board members, school families, and our 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