



Superintendent Report to the Board of Education Monday, June 9, 2025

Hello, Members of the Board, Staff and Community,

Welcome to June! Our final commencement ceremony of the school year was a joyous occasion for our Adult Education graduates, their families, and staff. The two graduate speakers – Chase Simpson earning his GED and Joseph Johnson, his high school diploma – shared their personal, and inspiring, stories about the interruptions in their education and obstacles they overcame to reach their goals. Both are employed and looking forward to brighter futures for themselves and their families.

Nineteen graduates participated in the ceremony. In total this year, 29 adults completed their GED and 33 earned high school diplomas, 16 from LHS and 17 from Free State.

Special thanks to Principal Mark Preut and the teachers and staff on our team who assist students in crossing that finish line.

Graduate Class of 2025 Videos

I want to share a brief video clip of some of the reflections shared with us by members of the graduating Class of 2025 at Free State, Lawrence High, and the Lawrence Virtual School. [Link to Video](#)

This next video was prepared by Project SEARCH job coach Janet Moore. It shows our student interns working at KU and LMH Health this year, thanks to those long standing community partnerships. [Link to Video](#)

Special Education Services Information

Lawrence Public Schools **takes seriously our responsibility to serve students** and meet their individual needs. When parent concerns are brought to our attention, **we engage directly with those families** to problem-solve.

Our staff of 1,550 professional educators, support staff, and building and district leaders provides **high-quality special education services in compliance with all state and federal requirements**. We serve approximately 2,430 students eligible for special education and gifted education services.

There may be times when parents disagree with specific details of their student's services. Our staff **values parent feedback, listens, and uses the Individualized Education Program and IEP Team process, which, by law, includes parents, to resolve concerns**.

The IEP is the written plan for the child's special education and related services. The team that decides what to include in that plan is made of school staff and parents, and when developmentally appropriate, the student. **The IEP Team makes decisions about special education services together** based on the unique needs of each child.

If parents have a concern they feel has not been resolved, federal law provides both **informal and formal methods of dispute resolution**, including the formal complaint process and due process. Our special education team uses every complaint, even those determined to be unsubstantiated, as a **learning experience for making systemic improvements**.

A formal complaint was filed this spring that IEPs were not being met. The Kansas State Department of Education's special education investigator determined there were no findings, indicating **students' needs are being met and IEPs are being implemented** in Lawrence Public Schools.

As a community of learners, **Lawrence Public Schools strives for continuous improvement**. Our doors are open. Our staff **welcomes the opportunity to hear from parents** and to discuss with them their children's educational experiences. Please reach out to us with any questions or concerns you may have.

Special education services are complex because they are individualized to each student's needs. Whenever a **few issues are shared in isolation, this fails to provide the context** of all of the steps taken by our staff in partnership with families to address them. It also **fails to represent our district's significant investment in training, staffing, planning, and delivery of high-quality special education services, the service of our dedicated team of professionals** and the countless **positive experiences** of students with exceptionalities who are thriving through successful partnerships among families and our teachers, support staff, and building and district leaders.

You may read the full June 9, 2025, Superintendent Statement [on our website](#).

Student and Staff Activities

We have students and staff continuing to compete in extra- and co-curricular activities even after the school year came to an end. I enjoyed getting to see Free State Baseball win a State Championship at KU. Congratulations to all of the players and coaches, including head coach Mike Hill, for such an exciting conclusion to their season.

Students from both high schools received recognition for their accomplishments in musical theater this year. Starlight's Blue Star Awards honored Lawrence High's production of

“Hadestown: Teen Edition” with its Outstanding Orchestra award and nominations for Outstanding Performer in Supporting and Lead Roles. Free State’s production of “Footloose” earned the Outstanding Performer in a Supporting Role award and the Junior Rising Star Scholarship. We join both Theatre Troupes and the students and staff listed here in celebrating these accomplishments!

Free State also continued its winning ways at the second of three national speech and debate contests this summer. National Extemporaneous Speaking Champion Anwen Williams picked up the National Runner-up Award at this second tournament, the NCFL in Chicago, where 413 schools competed. Other student honors are listed on this slide. Overall, the Firebirds won a Top 5 Sweepstakes Award, scoring among teams with the highest total points across all Debate, Public Speaking, and Acting categories!

Lawrence High’s National Pacemaker Award-winning yearbook, the 2024 Red & Black, picked up another honor. It was named among the Top 1% of yearbooks and featured in the Anthology section of Varsity Yearbook’s Portfolio Volume 30. This is a showcase celebrating the most exceptional yearbooks in the country printed by Varsity Yearbook. This is the third time LHS has received this honor. The co-editors and their journalism adviser are acknowledged here. We know that many other students spent many hours working on the yearbook.

We have some Track and Field accomplishments to celebrate. Pictured here is Free State sophomore Sadie Reynolds and her gold medal. She is the 6A Girls State Discus Champion! She bested competitors by over 20-feet with a winning mark of 151-feet-2-inches. Sadie must have been at full strength that day, because that’s a 13-foot improvement over her personal best. We’re also proud of the other students listed here who placed in the Top 8 at state.

We have watched Nathan Kramer, a photographer with Free State Journalism, snap photos of us during school board meetings. Nathan shared his beautiful photos of fifth and sixth graders trying out woodwind, brass, and string instruments during our summer Novice Instrumental Music Exploration program last week at LHS. Special thanks to our music educators making these opportunities possible for students.

Free meal kits were distributed last week despite the pouring rain and thunder claps at pick-up time. We appreciate our school families for their flexibility and willingness to get a little wet. Our second meal kit pickup of the summer is tomorrow morning, or families may stop by Woodlawn from 11:30-12:30 Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays this month, where their children can enjoy a healthy and delicious lunch at no cost. Our Nutrition and Wellness Director Julie Henry and her team do a great job with the summer meal program.

Underground Railroad tours, a parade, the Kids' Zone, live music, and food vendors are among activities planned for the Lawrence Juneteenth celebration next Saturday, June 14th, in South Park.

We enjoyed a fabulous time at the Lawrence PRIDE on Saturday, and many thanks to Member Franklin for organizing our Board group - how wonderful to see such a strong turnout! We will continue our parade Saturdays as we look forward to marching again this next Saturday in celebration of Juneteenth.

I appreciate President Jones, Past President Kimball, and Member Byers for filing for reelection to the Lawrence Board of Education. You are to be commended for your willingness to continue to serve our community's schools. I also want to sincerely thank candidates ChrisTophier (TOH-fer) Niles Enneking, Matt Lancaster, Pam Shaw, and Molly Starr for their interest in school board service. Seven candidates is a good turnout; however, it does not trigger an August Primary Election. District voters should make a plan to stay engaged and informed and to vote in the November General Election.

We want to take a moment to officially welcome Ms. Nikki Naumann, Board Clerk and Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, this evening for her first official Board meeting. Ms. Naumann has a long history with the Lawrence Public Schools, beginning her career in food and nutrition services; she is the proud parent of a 2025 LHS graduate, and we are delighted to welcome her full-circle back to our LPS team.

Also, we are delighted to share our Congratulations with Dr. Jana Craig-Hare, Executive Director, Curriculum and Instruction, on the announcement of her appointment as the incoming Superintendent of St John-Hudson USD350; Jana's leadership will certainly add value as she moves to this new and exciting district leadership opportunity.

This is another reminder that all district buildings are closed to the public on Fridays during the summer and on the upcoming Juneteenth Holiday, which is June 19.

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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanice Kerr Swift".

Jeanice Kerr Swift
Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools