



USD 497 News Release

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Board Hears Back-to-School Report & Considers Esports Programming for Middle and High School Students

Student Spotlight: Esports Experience

Two Lawrence Virtual School students (one 2025 graduate, and one current 8th grade student), shared their positive experiences with Esports as a competitive outlet while enrolled in the virtual school. They credited their Esports experiences for keeping them engaged academically, as well as gaining the benefits of participating in a team activity.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift highlighted school visits from the first 9 days of the 25-26 academic year, and observed the sense of belonging felt throughout the district. She also informed the board and community of the recent sanctioning of Esports by the Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA), and potential opportunities for Lawrence Public School students.

Additionally, Superintendent Dr. Swift shared the following:

- SMART Pass digital hall pass system being utilized at the middle school level. Staff has shared positive feedback for helping students with high expectations, minimizing disruptions to the teaching and learning environment, and for its safety benefits: its usefulness in a crisis to quickly determine the locations of all students in the school.
- Applications will be solicited from the school community (students, staff, families, community members) in September to serve on an A.I. Advisory Group to guide the district. This effort will include a wide range of voices and perspectives specific to AI access in schools, and provide recommendations of practices and policy considerations to the Lawrence Board of Education.
- Langston Hughes Elementary will be utilizing goats to help clear overgrown vegetation, for approximately one month. This will also represent a unique real-world learning opportunity for students.
- ParentSquare's launch as a school-to-home communications tool is working towards streamlining messaging and announcements for school families, and is being actively used at all educational sites.
- 25-26 Back to School Newsletter, distributed last week, has been viewed 18,737 times with reach to 21 countries.
- Lawrence Police Chief, Rich Lockhart, joined Dr. Swift for a [Back-to-School Safety video](#) with

important safety reminders, including that there are significant consequences for posting (or reposting) of threats to schools. The Chief also encouraged dialing 911 to report any concerns as they emerge.

- Upcoming Dates: Friday, August 29 - Fall Sports Jamboree at Free State High School will host a Hygiene Drive to collect products to be distributed to support basic needs of our students and families; and Monday, September 8 - Lawrence Board of Education Budget Hearing.

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

Esports Interscholastic Activity - Informational Presentation

Dr. Larry Englebrick, Deputy Superintendent, briefed the board on KSHSAA's sanctioning of Esports as an interscholastic activity for middle school and high school students for the 25-26 school year. PlayVS was selected as the state's national competition platform, dedicated to ensuring fair play, privacy, and eligibility standards.

Cost considerations were discussed regarding the purchase of equipment (e.g. headsets, controllers, consoles), coaching stipends, and potential travel expenses. Board approval would be required for Lawrence Public School students to participate in sanctioned competitions. Pre-season competition is tentatively scheduled to begin November 17, with the regular season beginning December 1.

The board requested information to include specific cost estimates and budget implications at a future meeting. No action was taken during the August 25 board meeting.

Back-to-School Report

Superintendent Dr. Swift highlighted the dignity, inclusivity, and tireless dedication visible throughout Lawrence Public Schools during the first two weeks of a strong and safe start to the 25-26 school year. She updated the board on the addition of new preschool classrooms to the district and the launch of the bakery at Community Connections at Pinckney. She also shared contributions from various departments working to register students, train staff, and work collaboratively to ensure educational equity and excellence for all students.

Consent Agenda

On its consent agenda, the board approved a subscription renewal for Webex virtual meeting platform; student license usage reconciliation - Lawrence Virtual School eDynamic Learning (24-25 school year); monthly vouchers; personnel report; and meeting minutes.

Access a link to the [full meeting agenda](#) online.

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