



## **Superintendent Report to the Board of Education**

**Monday, September 8, 2025**

### **Members of the Board and Community,**

As we begin this fourth full week of the school year, we appreciate all the work of our students, teachers and support staff, our parents and community to achieve such a strong start to the school year.

### **Best of Lawrence - Lawrence Journal World/Sunflower Publishing**

Lawrence Public Schools' presence in the Lawrence Journal World's/Sunflower Publishing's annual Best of Lawrence list is impressive!

You may have noticed the Best of Lawrence 2025 insert publication in yesterday's newspaper.

We are excited to share are our district representatives among the **Top 5 Best of Lawrence** finishers:

#### **Best Place to Work (Large, 100+ Employees)**

1. Cottonwood, Inc.
2. KU
3. LPS

#### **Community Leader, Racial Justice/Equity Issues**

1. Demetrius Kemp, Free State High School
2. Carole Cadue-Blackwood, Member, Board of Education

#### **Principal**

1. Amanda Green, Sunflower Elementary
2. Kady Carson, West Middle School
3. Summer Moeckel, Deerfield Elementary

**Teacher, (K-5)**

- 3. Jaclynn Williams, Langston Hughes**
- 4. Ingrid Yew, Sunset Hill**
- 5. Michelle McLenon, Langston Hughes**

**Teacher (6-8)**

- 1. Blair White, LMCMS**
- 2. Stephanie Jaramillo, LMCMS**
- 3. Jay Deiser, Billy Mills**
- 5. Marisa Scott Pope, Billy Mills**

**Teacher, (9-12) Sweep!**

- 1. Sophia Coen, FSHS**
- 2. Bryce Jones, FSHS**
- 3. Debby Ziegler, FSHS**
- 4. Susan Carey, FSHS**
- 5. Aubrey Trowbridge, LHS**

**Mascot**

- 2. Chesty the Lion, LHS**
- 4. Freddie Firebird, FSHS**
- 5. Warhawk, West Middle School**

We look forward to being out and about in our schools to congratulate these deserved LPS team members!

**Lawrence Public Schools in the Community**

**Back-to-School at Jayhawk Breakfast Rotary**

I appreciated the opportunity to share back-to-school updates to a group of approximately 65 community members at the [Jayhawk Breakfast Rotary Club](#) last Thursday. It was a delight to share progress on the various program enhancements being actively implemented in Lawrence Public Schools, with one of three Lawrence Rotary Clubs, The Jayhawk Breakfast Rotary Club was founded in 1994 with 35 charter members (the one that meets Thursdays at 7:00 am at Maceli's).

I appreciated the warm welcome from President Annas Boyer, and the kind introduction by Julie Boyle. I especially valued meeting members from the community, including a vibrant 1958 graduate of Lawrence High School. The bonus of the morning was a connection with a Hillcrest 1st grader who was in attendance with her father, and who informed me of how much she enjoys school, sharing that math is her favorite subject!

## **DCCCA**

I also appreciated the opportunity to meet last week, alongside Kevin Harrell and Kiley Lockett, with Chrissy Mayer, Chief Community Based Service Officer, and Lori Alvarado, CEO of DCCCA. It was helpful to hear an update of their important work in the community and explore the ways we can leverage connections in our work to better serve students, families and community.

We are engaging and anticipate sharing across a variety of community organization meetings and presentations this fall, including at the **Chamber Government and Community Affairs** luncheon on Wednesday of this week.

## **Lawrence Virtual School (LVS) Achievement Update**

**LVS recently received updated academic comparison data, and we are sharing highlights of this data from the work of Zach Harwood, LVS principal:**

**LVS performs substantially better in Math, ELA, and Science than the state average for virtual programs.**

- In Math, LVS has 21.33% fewer students in Level One and 13.25% more students in Levels Three and Four.
- In ELA, LVS has 14.4% fewer students in Level One and 16.34% more students in Levels Three and Four.
- In Science, LVS has 11.9% fewer students in Level One and 18.022% more students in Levels Three and Four.

While the data here is promising, there are a few important caveats:

- This data does not include the **percentage of students tested** in each virtual school.
- Traditionally, virtual schools have lower testing rates than brick-and-mortar schools, so there may be variation based on the percentage of students who participate in testing.
- Another factor that may impact this data is the enrollment practices of the school.
- **At LVS, we have transitioned from a more selective model to an open enrollment model that aligns more closely with our brick-and-mortar peers.**

We believe that every student deserves the opportunity to learn in the modality they think will work best for them.

Overall, this data supports that Virtual Schools are a viable option when done correctly. Further, our LVS model in Lawrence Public Schools is substantially different from many virtual peers, which is why results are more in line with brick-and-mortar schools than they are with other virtual schools.

## PK-12 Schools Update

**FastBridge Universal Screenings began K-12:** FastBridge is a research-based assessment that measures students' reading and math skills. All students are screened in fall, winter, and spring to identify who is on track, who may need support, and to identify trends.

**The addition of second specials:** Enrichment, Library, and Science, directly addresses long-recognized student needs through engaging science experiences, AVID skill-building, and expanded social-emotional learning. Established specials: Art, Music and P.E. continue to meet important learning, creativity and physical movement developmental needs of our students.

## Teaching and Learning Update

### Professional Development

Planning is in place for the **September 15 districtwide professional development sessions**. Elementary teachers will engage in math/OpenUp and data-informed instruction, while specialists will participate in job-alike collaboration, including Early Childhood and Montessori. Secondary staff will engage in content/level teams.

### The Learning Exchange

***For teachers. By teachers. With teachers. In the service of students.***

The Learning Exchange is a professional development model created by teachers and driven by choice. It gives teachers the opportunity to lead their peers in learning, offering sessions on a variety of topics organized under different "strands:"

1. Building Dignity into School Culture
2. High Quality Instruction
3. Assessing Learning in the Classroom
4. Social Emotional Wellness
5. Systems of Support – Ci3T

### Teacher Networks

Teacher Networks are collaborative groups that tackle system-wide challenges in teaching and learning. By examining research and best practices, these networks work to address common issues in teacher practice.

For example, two new networks are being formed to focus on early childhood technology integration and elementary special team planning during the second plan period.

Each network will be facilitated by teacher leaders and supported by the Teaching and Learning team. Participating teachers will act as early implementers of the decisions and guidelines developed in these groups.

The networks are designed to build teacher capacity and strengthen alignment across the system.

### **Study of Screen Time At Elementary Continues**

This fall, we are continuing our work to ensure that we are thoughtful and research/data informed in our approach to technology integration to ensure a quality developmentally appropriate, whole-child instructional experience across our classrooms.

I want to acknowledge that in retrospect, I would have wanted more thoughtful, in-depth conversations directly with elementary classroom teachers last spring in this important area of practice, and I apologize that we didn't extend those conversations as deeply as needed. We are very eager, however, for the opportunity to convene ongoing conversations with teachers across our district this fall, and to work together to refine and calibrate technology integration practice at the elementary level.

Among our Next Steps: Dr. Amaya and Elementary Director Roberson will convene a group of representative K-1 teachers for ongoing conversation, a thorough review of current research on screen time for young children, and the development of shared expectations for technology use in elementary classrooms.

Research on screen time and developmental appropriateness will continue to be shared as we all explore how to best support our students in quality learning.

### **AVID Day**

[AVID Day](#), this Friday, on September 12th, honors the 45 years of impact of AVID educators, students, schools, and districts across the nation. AVID Day is more than a celebration - it's a collective declaration of our commitment to educational equity and opportunity.

**Several schools across the district will participate in celebrating on the 12th including Sunflower Elementary, Southwest and Billy Mills Middle Schools, and Free State and Lawrence High Schools.**

As we raise our level of play with AVID across the Lawrence Public Schools, anticipating full district implementation in 2026, this is an excellent time to be inspired by the 'why' of this important work to ensure opportunities for our students.

This year, AVID is launching a #MyAVIDWhy social media blitz, and we look forward to joining in from across USD 497 by completing our “Because of AVID, I...” statements. Everyone is encouraged to take a photo with your statement and post it on social media tagging #MyAVIDWhy and AVID accounts.

I would also like to share a quick [video testimonial](#) from 2021 Lawrence High School graduate and current Coe College student, Jelani Ragins, on the benefits of four years of AVID experiences during their high school career.

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/AVIDCenter](https://facebook.com/AVIDCenter)

**LinkedIn:** [linkedin.com/company/AVID4College](https://linkedin.com/company/AVID4College)

**Instagram:** [instagram.com/AVID4College](https://instagram.com/AVID4College)

**X:** [x.com/AVID4College](https://x.com/AVID4College)

### **ParentSquare Updates**

All schools are actively utilizing the ParentSquare platform to keep our school families informed, and the vast majority (99%) of families are connected to receive these messages.

The communications team is currently working to strategize future usage of ParentSquare to include a districtwide Emergency Alert; and we will continue to deepen the implementation of ParentSquare through publishing tips/how-to's to share with staff and families.

- **Heads Up:** We will test the system for district emergency alerts during September to troubleshoot any issues and ensure all systems are a go for all district alerts moving forward, and particularly in advance of the inclement weather season.

### **Langston Hughes Update**

The district's website has featured a combination of strong coverage for the many enhancements to instruction across the district such as a spotlight on preschool expansions and laptop usage for high schoolers, and some fun items including the goats at work onsite at Langston Hughes. **In only 2 weeks, the goats have cleared nearly 50% of their 6-acre workspace.**

### **Social Media Engagement**

The District's Community Connections Bakery coverage is getting fun and positive engagement online. A recent LPS Facebook post has been shared nearly 60 times, gaining more than 40,000 views and 900 interactions. A school district in Pennsylvania reached out in the comments on the post to request recipes. The communications team is working to connect

Director of Nutrition and Wellness Julie Henry with their food services team, sharing baking knowledge across states.

### **Free State High School Performing Arts Recognition**

Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) Executive Director Bill Faflick and Assistant Executive Director of Performing Arts Dr. Megan Hagaman formally presented Free State High School with the Performing Arts School of Excellence Award during the halftime of the school's football game against Gardner Edgerton last Friday.

They are the first school to win the award twice (previously recognized in 2019-20). After the award presentation, all 2024-25 performing arts students were invited to join for a photo with faculty. Several recent graduates, now performers in KU's marching band, returned to celebrate and were present for the photo.

### **Elementary Science – Prairie Park**

With the introduction of Science as a dedicated special rotation at our elementary schools this school year, students across Lawrence Public School are already solving scientific mysteries and adapting to their new learning environments. For example, learners at Prairie Park Elementary School visiting the class of Science Teacher Staci Ahlvers are exploring nature and animals through a variety of hands-on activities. First graders used their knowledge of animal traits to identify the adult versions of baby birds. After receiving an envelope containing a picture of an unknown baby bird, the Bobcats worked together to find and circle any identifiable traits, like their beaks, feet, and eyes, and match them to their bird's adult counterpart. Once everyone was done triple-checking their guesses, each group excitedly shouted out their answers to their classmates.

### **Nutrition & Wellness @ Woodlawn**

We received a photo from Nutrition and Wellness Julie Henry taken by Woodlawn Elementary Principal Brandon Daley of the Riverhawks enjoying fresh, local watermelon from Jirak Family Produce as part of the Fresh Fruit & Veggie Program.

### **Sunflower Elementary - Sunflower 500**

Members of our team were out and about last Friday and caught an impromptu student reward experience. Sunflower Elementary students earn "BEST Bucks" for being safe, showing effort, showing respect, and taking responsibility. Students then place their bucks into a raffle for various prizes and rewards. One of the most popular is "the Sunflower 500," when staff clears the hallways, and a handful of students sprint 2 laps around the school as they are cheered on by their teachers. This Facebook video posting has received over 12,000 likes, and has had 1.2 million views.

### **Board Room Art Display**

We have recently updated the south wall of the board room, which now features photos from throughout our entire district, all taken by Andrew Beaven. We will continue to rotate photos and

student artwork throughout the entire year.

### Upcoming Dates

- Thursday, Sept 11 — Board of Education Policy Committee Meeting, 12:00pm
- Friday, Sept 12 — AVID Day in LPS
- **There will be no school for Grades EC-12 this upcoming Monday, September 15.**

### Upcoming Title I Parent Information Events

- Cordley - Sept 16, 5:30pm
- Deerfield - Sept 9, 5:00pm
- Hillcrest - Sept 16, 6:30pm
- New York - Sept 18, 7:30pm (or 3:30pm by appointment)
- Schwegler - Sept 10, 5pm
- Sunflower - Oct 9, 6:00pm
- Woodlawn - Sept 23, 7:45pm

Contact your school for further information about these events.

We appreciate the engagement and work across our district this fall to ensure a strong start to this school year; many thanks to our students and staff, families and community for all your diligent work to support our 10,000 students and the quality schools we share.

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

Sincerely,



Jeanice Kerr Swift  
Superintendent of Schools  
Lawrence Public Schools