



USD 497 News Release

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Board Approves Agreement with Education Service Professionals, Considers Capital Outlay Projects for 26/27, and Hears Annual Attendance Equity Report

Student Update: Sister Cities Exchange Program

Two Lawrence High School students (Adelaide Boedeker and Grayson Barker) shared their educational experience and summer travel to Hiratsuka, Japan for 10 days and staying with two Japanese families. Like Lawrence, Hiratsuka is a college town. Sister Cities Lawrence is a not-for-profit cultural educational program open to 7th through 12th grade students, fostering relationships between Lawrence residents and each of its four sister cities: Eutin, Germany; Iniades, Greece; Tocopilla, Chile; and Hiratsuka.

Lawrence Education Association (LEA) - Education Support Professionals Agreement for 25-26

Representatives from LEA, ESP, and the LPS Human Resources Department briefed the board on the ratification of a new contract agreement for Education Support Professionals, supported by a membership vote of 97.76%. The ESP salary pool will increase by 5.97%, totaling approximately \$1,132,000, which includes a \$1.00 increase to base hourly wages, in addition to horizontal movement for years of service. The 25-26 agreement also includes clarifying conditions for union leave for the LEA president; health, dental, vision insurance, and other benefits; and illness leave and catastrophic leave pools (board approved with a 7-0 vote).

Bond Refunding Resolution

David Arteberry, from Stifel, explained refinancing opportunities for the district to consider based on favorable market conditions. The goal of this effort is to identify fiscal savings to benefit the local tax base. The refinancing process can take four to six weeks, and begins with board authority to sell new bonds, followed by obtaining an updated credit rating from Moody's, preparation of necessary legal documents for the sale of bonds, and going to market to sell the bonds.

A resolution was presented to the board for the authorization for the sale of general obligation refunding bonds of USD 497, with a minimum savings target of \$1.5 million. Lower interest rate on new bonds would lower the district's interest expense, and would help to control the mill levy in the school district's bond and interest fund (board approved with a vote of 7-0).

Capital Projects 26/27

Preliminary concepts for two potential capital projects were presented to the board for consideration. These projects would be funded through the capital outlay fund approved within the 25-26 district budget, and tentatively completed in advance of the 26-27 school year. This would not result in any new tax impacts for the school community.

Choice Campus at Centennial

The Choice Campus at Centennial would provide students with equitable access to a flexible, non-traditional high school program, ensuring that every learner has the opportunity to thrive in an environment that best meets their needs. With both day and evening options, the campus would expand student choice for students in grades 8th thru 12th, and create pathways for credit recovery or acceleration.

Expansion of Langston Hughes Elementary Campus

To better serve an increase in the number of students attending Langston Hughes Elementary, and to ensure staff members have the space they need to provide high-quality student support, the board was presented with the option of adding classrooms and common space to the building.

Support for the planning and development of the The Choice Campus at Centennial, and additional classrooms at Langston Hughes Elementary, would be followed-up with informational presentations, site-specific design options and cost estimates for board review (board approved both projects with a vote of 7-0).

Annual Attendance Equity Report (2025)

Tina Mitchell, Director of Equity, Student & Family Engagement; and James Polk, Director of Data & Assessment; provided an [informational presentation](#) specific to Lawrence Public Schools student attendance and trends over the last four years. In general, attendance rates are consistently high for most students, achieving rates across elementary, middle, and high school levels at 90.6%. Attendance disparities were noted amongst various student groups and grade levels, as well as the sharing of ongoing school-based efforts to improve attendance through enhanced communication; family learning and capacity-building; interventions and partnerships; and individualized student specific support. Of note, the rate of frequently absent and approaching frequently absent students is trending down over four years.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Swift shared a wide range of updates and highlights from throughout Lawrence Public Schools, including:

- Surprise visits were made last week to the classrooms of Kyra Jumper, first grade teacher at Schwegler Elementary and Brayden Yoder-Mulkey, Band Director at Liberty Memorial Central Middle School for in-building presentations in recognition of their selections as finalists for the 2026 KSDE Horizon Award. Kansas school districts have the opportunity to select one elementary and one secondary nomination to be considered as one of 32 honorees statewide for successful and distinguished completion of a first year in the teaching profession. The two teachers also received a \$500 check from Truist Credit Union in collaboration with the Lawrence Schools Foundation.
- Playground facilities opened last week at Sunflower Elementary, Woodlawn Elementary, and Kennedy Early Childhood Center.

- Beginning this week, 15 AVID tutors will support just over 400 students through tutorial sessions during AVID class time, twice a week, across all LPS middle school and high school buildings. By the end of the semester, our AVID 7th through 12th grade students will have benefitted from over 8,000 contact hours with AVID tutors focused on academic readiness.

- On Friday, September 19, Lawrence High School hosted Portfolio Day. 14 colleges and universities, as well as community partners, The Lawrence Arts Center, VanGo, and Brackers, were on-site at Lawrence High School to give presentations and to review student art portfolios.

Over 120 students at Lawrence High School spent the day showcasing their talents, and their best art work in the areas of video, jewelry, fashion, photography, ceramics, animation, mixed media, design, digital illustration, drawing and painting and architecture. Other CTE courses also supported the event including architecture, culinary, and journalism.

This event was the result of the dedication of many teachers, classes, and students from every grade level at Lawrence High. Specifically, LHS teachers Emily Markoulatos, Angelia Perkins, Todd Poteet, and Zach Saltz worked for months organizing and planning this signature event.

- Two Free State High School students that excel within the performing arts were recognized as the KSHSAA Cap-Fed True Blue Students of the Week: Congratulations to Seniors from Free State High School, Anders Benson and Landry Koester.

- 21 Free State High School football student athletes from the Class of 2026, are participating in My Jersey, Your Impact during their Homecoming Week. This includes visits to schools to honor one educator each, for making a lasting and positive impact on their educational journey. Awards have come in the form of surprise visits to classrooms, and jersey and certificate presentations - everywhere from Lawrence and Douglas County, and even to communities in other states. Teacher honorees have been invited to take the field in a pre-game ceremony for community recognition prior to Friday's football game.

- Dr. Cole Amaya and the Teaching and Learning team have launched a teacher network approach to development of curricula and implementing the five essentials of quality instruction. This leverages a natural strength in the Lawrence Public Schools, quality teachers and a spirit of collaboration. Examples shared included a network group focused on clarifying and aligning early elementary technology integration, and another is an elementary librarian group. Collaborative efforts of other teacher networks will continue to be shared through this fall, including teachers participating in aligning, integrating, and ensuring a robust Native American curricular emphasis and connections across elementary, middle and high school curricula.

- The Communications team has launched an internal staff communication tool, 497 Focus, as a way to share information and updates with LPS staff members. Analytics were also shared from the last month's social media reach and engagement: over 3 million views of content posted to Facebook and Instagram, with 46,000 interactions, and gain of more than 2,600 new followers. Additionally, the Superintendent's Message distributed via ParentSquare has an audience of over 20,000 recipients.

- Langston Hughes Elementary continues to utilize 34 goats from Cackling Owl Homestead to

help clear overgrown vegetation. The goats are down to their last assigned acre, from a total of six, and expected to be completed by the end of the week.

- Lawrence Schools Foundation hosts their annual community education breakfast on Friday, September 26. This year's event will be held at Burge Union at the University of Kansas, and features Jerod Nieder as a keynote speaker and will showcase a number of student groups from Lawrence Public Schools.
- Upcoming Dates: Free State Homecoming parade and football game (Friday, September 26); Lawrence High School Homecoming parade (Wednesday, October 1) and football game (Friday, October 3); Parent-Teacher Conferences (October 16-17); and College and Career Night at the Lied Center (Thursday, October 23).

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

Consent Agenda

The board approved a consent agenda of the transition from BoardDocs platform to the Diligent Community platform; acceptance of bid recommendations for Lawrence High School chiller replacement; Sunflower Elementary Photovoltaic (solar) energy change order; purchase of Sogolytics for surveys, data collection, and analysis; renewal of employee assistance plan (EAP); first read of new board policy (GAACB); first read of board policy (JH); first read of board policy (JBCD); first read of board policy (IB); first read of board policy (JBC); monthly vouchers; and meeting minutes (consent agenda was approved with a 7-0 vote).

Reports

Reports were also provided by board president, GR Gordon-Ross; and board member and committee reports.

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

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