



Superintendent Report to the Board of Education

Monday, August 25, 2025

Hello, Members of the Board, Staff and Community,

Welcome, today we mark day nine of this school year, and many thanks to our teachers, school teams, school and district leaders for all the hard work to ensure a strong opening to this school year. Thank you, also, to our parents and families for all your support to launch a successful start this school year.

This past Tuesday, August 19th, we welcomed preschool students across four school locations: **Kennedy Early Childhood Center, New York Montessori, Sunflower, and Woodlawn** Elementary schools.

It's a great time as all our students, our teams and families continue to settle into the routines of the school year. I have visited many of our schools and will complete the back-to-school tour this week. I am impressed everywhere I go with the warm embrace and sense of belonging we see across our beautiful classrooms.

Esports

Tonight, we look forward to learning from the experiences of two students, and the Board will engage in a preliminary conversation as we prepare for next steps in Kansas high schools offering KSHSAA-sanctioned esports beginning in 2025 through PlayVS, a national competition platform ensuring fair play, privacy, and eligibility standards.

This is an opportunity for all students who may choose to participate beyond traditional athletics and activities to compete, while also acquiring STEM skills. Esports endeavors give students an outlet to work as a team in local and regional competitions, and is a potential pathway to college scholarships as esports expands nationally at both high schools and universities.

A number of LPS students are already active esports participants, though to date their competitions have not been KSHSAA-sanctioned. Potential next steps include registering teams, identifying sponsors/coaches, training staff, and launching league play later in Fall 2025.

SmartPass Update

We've had a few questions, so want to offer an update on the use of SMART Pass, a digital hall pass tool, at our middle schools. Different from 'Hall Pass,' the guest/visitor check-in & credentialing system, SmartPass is used as a digital solution, replacing traditional hand-written passes, to ensure that we know where our students are in the building, specifically when they have been given permission to temporarily leave the classroom.

SmartPass has helped us to sustain high expectations for students, minimize disruptions to the learning environment, and add an additional layer to safety protocols and emergency preparedness, allowing school teams to quickly account for every student during critical situations.

You may view the video, [Digital Hall Pass Overview](#) to learn more about the digital hall pass.

Technology and Instruction: Next Steps

We appreciate all the work we observe across the district to ensure a cell-phone free instructional environment in keeping with significant research and best practices for student focus, learning and achievement, mental health and well-being. Our high school teams state the expectation simply: 'bell to bell, no cell;' we appreciate all the work together so that our students benefit from this enhanced, cell-phone free instructional environment.

As we shared beginning last January, we also look forward to extending our conversation this fall as we work strategically to navigate similar work at the elementary level, prioritizing a play-based childhood versus a tech-based childhood.

We understand there are numerous details to work through, and I appreciate all who have reached out on this topic. Together, we will refine our district approach through continuing conversations with teachers, school leaders and teams, as well as engaging with our parents. We will balance and align our work in support of students to ensure a rich classroom learning environment.

Update on AI Advisory Group

During September, we will share an application process publicly for those students, team members, parents and community members who would have interest in participating this year on an AI Advisory Group.

I have appointed James Polk and Jake Potter to lead this effort, and we look forward to next steps in this process alongside the Board, specifically President GR Gordon-Ross and Member Anne Costello.

The Advisory Group will recommend generative AI education guidelines, practices, and or policies to the Lawrence Board of Education for adoption. Recommendations will account for educational equity and the potential of generative AI and other evolving technologies to enhance and detract from teaching and learning.

Considerations: The district must utilize a balanced approach toward leveraging technological capabilities. The Committee's recommendations aim to enrich the student and district staff experience while keeping student, staff, and district data safe. .

Committee Membership: The Committee shall include 2 BOE members and a representative of classified, certified, and administrative employee groups; 2 community members with content knowledge in education, technology, policy, and or other relevant areas; one representative from both district unions (PAL-CWA and LEA); and if feasible a student(s). (If student membership is not feasible, student groups should be consulted prior to recommendations brought to the board of education.) Outside of board and union representatives, committee members are appointed by the superintendent or superintendent designee. The superintendent or superintendent designee may determine whether membership beyond those listed is advisable.

Timeline: 1 year with the potential to be adopted as a permanent board committee. Goal is for an early Fall 2025 semester start date and December full board check-in. Aim for initial recommendations no later than March 2026, and sooner if possible.

Langston Hughes Update

As a heads up, we want to share next steps to address a need to remove overgrown vegetation on the Langston Hughes school property.

Currently, the district team is installing a fence, and on Thursday of this week, a group of goats will arrive at Langston Hughes; the goats are expected to stay approximately one month to help clear vegetation while being monitored and cared for during this time.

We know our students will be delighted to observe the progress of the goats as they spend September at Langston Hughes.

Communications Updates

ParentSquare Communications

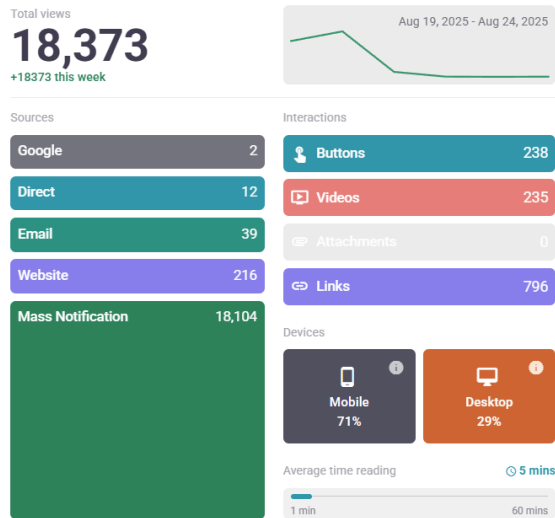
ParentSquare was a result of hearing ongoing requests from our families asking to streamline our school to home communications, and a strong request for 2-way communications for real-time updates. We are excited to report that nearly 100% of our parents are receiving ParentSquare notifications via phone and/or email.

We do want to encourage families to also consider finding and downloading the ParentSquare app for their mobile devices. Currently, approximately 35% of our families are utilizing the app feature, and if push notifications are enabled, this allows for instant delivery of important information being shared from your child's school.

As a district, we are continuing to provide training opportunities for our staff to ensure that we are maximizing this communications tool and remaining engaged with our families.

Back-to-School Superintendent Newsletter

We had 18,315 views on our [Back-to-School Superintendent Newsletter](#), including viewers who read the message from 21 different countries. With an average reading duration of 5 minutes, that makes over 90,000 minutes spent reading our message.



Back-to-School Safety

Lawrence Police Chief Rich Lockhart joined Dr. Swift in a video message (linked below) to students and families featuring important back-to-school safety reminders. I am asking that parents be sure to remind students of the sage advice of Chief Lockhart each fall, that we should all ‘report, don’t repost,’ and a reminder that the consequences of posting or reposting of threats is a crime and penalties can be significant. As the Chief advises, please call 911 with any concerns as they emerge.




Upcoming Dates

This Friday, August 29 at 5:30pm, Free State High School Football and Free State High School Spirit Squad, in partnership with the Lawrence Schools Foundation, will host the Fall Sports Jamboree and Hygiene Drive at the Free State Football Stadium. We encourage members of our community to stop by and drop off their donations of hygiene products. Suggested items include shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, deodorant, soap, brushes/combs, feminine products, laundry detergent, kleenex, etc. Your donations will help meet immediate and basic needs of our students and families, to ensure that their physical, social, and emotional needs do not stand in the way of their success in school.

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