



Superintendent Report

Board of Education

Wednesday, September 24, 2025

Hello Members of the Board and Community,

As we officially begin the fall season this week and are established into the daily routines of school, we are grateful for the continued dedication and energy of our students, teachers, and support staff.

Each school year brings with it excitement, challenges, and new opportunities, and I am always inspired to observe the way our school community comes together to support learning, growth, and each other.

LPS 2026 Horizon Award Finalists

Last Friday, we celebrated two deserving educators that will represent Lawrence Public Schools as our **2026 KSDE Horizon Award finalists**. 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.

Surprise visits were made to **Kyra Jumper**, first grade teacher at Schwegler Elementary and **Brayden Yoder-Mulkey**, Band Director at Liberty Memorial Central Middle School for in-building presentations, which included a \$500 check presentation to each from Truity in collaboration with the Lawrence Schools Foundation.

It is so rewarding to celebrate these well-deserving staff members in their classrooms, and to join their enthusiastic students and colleagues who loved celebrating their teachers honored for their hard work and positive contributions to the district.

We are always inspired by new gifted teachers, and I was especially thrilled to also witness the pure delight and joy of the team members of each awarded teacher.

PreSchool Playground Openings

Last week, we opened playground facilities for student usage at **Sunflower Elementary**, **Woodlawn Elementary**, and **Kennedy Early Childhood Center**. Our students had some excellent weather to enjoy their new outdoor play enhancements.

Here, you can see the joyful moment of preschool playground opening, and our gratitude to our Facilities team for all their work to make these important projects happen.

Farm 2 School: Learning About Corn

To help out with the fifth grade unit on corn, **Pantaleon Florez**, Experiential Learning Specialist and Farm 2 School Coordinator, brought some of his own farm-grown corn to Langston Hughes Elementary School.

It was reported to me that our students ‘were all ears’... as Florez spoke about his Indigenous Mexica farming practices and showed off the corn varieties he grows at Maseualkuali Farms. Along with this colorful collection of cobs, Florez managed to bring an actual corn stalk from his field, standing at just under 11 ft. tall. We love hands-on learning opportunities for our students, and are so proud of Farm 2 School experiences like this one.

School Safety: West Middle School Spotlight

As Chief Lockhart and I noted in our safety video at the beginning of the school year, school safety is a community effort, and tonight I want to spotlight the hard work and dedication among our school community from two of our team members: **School Resource Officer Lindsay Bishop** and her four-legged sidekick, **Officer Rosie**, a mini-GoldenDoodle. They serve several Lawrence schools (**West and Southwest Middle Schools, along with Hillcrest, Sunset Hill, Quail Run, and Sunflower Elementary**). Together, they interact daily with students, lead presentations, and provide support to staff and families.

Officer Bishop shares that Rosie helps “bridge the gap between law enforcement and students,” by offering a calming presence that makes officers more approachable and creates a welcoming school environment. Rosie’s role has been recognized beyond the district as well, **achieving third place in Best of Lawrence’s Working or Service Animal category.**

Research supports Rosie’s incredible impact in our schools. Recent studies show that therapy dogs like Rosie can lower cortisol (a stress hormone), increase dopamine, and help regulate heart rate, contributing to natural de-escalation and stress relief. These effects are especially valuable in school settings, where students benefit from consistent opportunities to manage emotions in safe and supportive ways.

Rosie joins other therapy dogs across Lawrence Public Schools, such as Free State High School therapy dog Wayne, who earned second place in the Best of Lawrence awards, collectively reinforcing the district’s focus on student well-being and positive school climates.

Officers Bishop and Rosie and their dedicated work in our schools will be highlighted on KSHB 41 News in Kansas City coming up this Friday.

AVID Tutor Training

Last week, Dr. Sarah Hochstetler conducted an in-person training for this year’s AVID Tutors, who help to support our middle and high school students with classroom visits and bi-weekly tutoring sessions.

Of the 15 tutors signed up for this semester, half of that number represents tutors that are returning from the prior two school years. The group includes KU students, a recent graduate from Peaslee Tech,

and a small business owner. In total, this represents the range of opportunities for post-secondary success and the many options available to our LPS graduates.

AVID tutor training begins with a three hour in-person session, focused on building relational capacity while learning the AVID-specific model of tutoring. New hires continue learning through interactive online modules. All novice AVID tutors complete six hours of professional preparation before joining experienced tutors and elective teachers in classrooms.

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

Source: <https://avidopenaccess.org/resource/six-tutoring-principles-for-student-success/>

#MyAvidWhy

I wanted to wrap back to our AVID Why, and connect with a brief video - you'll recall we experienced some technical issues that prevented us from playing a video submission from one of our recent graduates at our last board meeting. We wanted to honor **Jelani Ragins, LHS Class of 2021**, who is now enrolled as a student at Coe College, for sharing his "MyAvidWhy" with our school community, and stressing the importance of this program for our students.

Much appreciation to LHS AVID Coordinator Scott Lane for sharing these videos via his [AVID Success Stories website](https://sites.google.com/usd497.org/lhsavidconnection/success-stories). (<https://sites.google.com/usd497.org/lhsavidconnection/success-stories>)

At Lawrence High School, last week's AVID strategy was: **Gallery Walk**, and for this week their featured strategy is: **Foldables**.

And now, Jelani Ragins . . .

Lawrence High School Portfolio Day

Last Friday, 14 colleges & universities:

(Butler County Community College, Johnson County Community College, Maine College of Art & Design, Kansas City Art Institute, Milwaukee College of Art & Design, School of Visual Arts, Washburn University, Rocky Mountain College of Art, School of Visual Arts, Maryland Institute College of Art, University of Kansas Architecture & Design and Minneapolis Institute of Art & Design, Haskell University, University of Kansas Fine Arts and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago)

as well as community partners, The Lawrence Arts Center, VanGo, and Brackers, descended on 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 impressive event comes together with 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.

College representatives were quoted as saying “This is my first time ever attending this event and it is one I have already requested again for next year.” — Maryland Institute College of Art; and “Your students are always the best in the nation and I look forward each year to seeing what new things they have created.” — School of Visual Arts.

Student Honors: Free State High School Recognition

Two Free State High School students that excel within our performing arts program 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. Both students are heavily involved and active in four different groups within their school’s accomplished performing arts program.

Free State: My Jersey, My Impact

It is Homecoming Week for Free State High School this week, and Lawrence High next. Throughout the week, 21 FSHS football seniors have been making visits to schools to honor one educator each, for making a lasting and positive impact on their educational journey.

These *My Jersey, My Impact* 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. This effort has been led and organized by our football parents, in combination with the enthusiasm and appreciation of our student athletes.

Please take note of the highlighted dates and times for the Homecoming Festivities for the remainder of this week for Free State, and next week at Lawrence High.

It is our understanding that 41 Action News will be onsite at Free State for this Friday’s parade, and broadcast remotely as part of their 5:00 and 6:00 newscasts.

Teacher Networks

I want to give a shout out to the many educators we have participating and leading in teacher networks working across the district to enhance our work in *Teaching and Learning*. Dr. Amaya and our team have launched the teacher network approach to development of curricula and implementing the five essentials of quality instruction. The teacher network approach leverages a natural strength in the Lawrence Public Schools, our quality teachers and teams.

I especially appreciate the recent launch of a network group focused on clarifying and aligning **early elementary technology integration**, as well as our **elementary librarian group**, who have convened to clarify the steps to inspire a culture of reading and enhance our elementary libraries across the district.

We will hear more about these teacher groups as we move through this fall, and soon, I will share an invitation for teachers who want to participate in aligning, integrating, and ensuring a robust Native American curricular emphasis and connections across elementary, middle and high school curricula.

Communications - 497 Focus

Last week, our Communications Team launched *The 497 Focus* via Parent Square. This is an intentional tool to streamline messaging to our staff, and create a one-stop-shop for district news and announcements, board updates and meeting recaps, save-the-dates and event information, and staff and student celebrations throughout the district. Just like our families, users can customize their settings within ParentSquare to receive the weekly 497 Focus instantly, at the end of the day, and via email, text, or mobile app push notification. This is a continuation of our commitment to utilize ParentSquare as a primary channel of communication to keep our LPS Community informed and engaged.

Communications - September Analytics

Throughout this report, you are seeing some of the images and videos that our Communications team is capturing throughout each school day to lift the story of the Lawrence Public Schools for our community. As is our practice, we will share the metrics from communications outreach as a regular feature of the Superintendent Report. .

In large part due to the viral moment of the Sunflower 500 from Sunflower Elementary earlier this month, but also the excitement around our strong start of the 25-26 school year, you'll see that we are tracking positive activity in the amount of views (over 3 million this month), interactions (over 46,000), and new followers gained (+2,600 in the month of September).

Additionally, we have shared Superintendent Messages to our staff and families, and are tracking that those are reaching an excess of 20,000 total recipients per publication.

We have great things happening each and every day in Lawrence Public Schools, and we are proud to expand that reach beyond the boundaries of our school district as we continue telling the stories of our student and staff success.

Facilities - Evergy Showcase

Recently, Evergy produced a Business Showcase featuring Lawrence Public Schools. We are proud to share a video in which **Board President GR Gordon-Ross** talks about the return on investment that our district has realized through a sustained focus on energy efficiency.

Langston Hughes Elementary - Vegetation Removal Update

It is a little bittersweet for me to report that our visiting goats are down to their last handful of days supporting Lawrence Public Schools. They are just days away from clearing out their assigned 6 acres of vegetation removal at Langston Hughes Elementary. It is anticipated that they will be done by the end of this weekend, if not before.

Lawrence Chamber of Commerce - Outreach

I was delighted to be invited as a panelist to the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce's InterCity visit by delegates from New Braunfels, TX. My fellow panelists were Rob Hulse, Executive Vice-President of

Lawrence Board of Realtors, and Gina Meier-Hummel, Executive Director of O'Connell Children's Shelter. The panel was facilitated by Bonnie Lowe, President/CEO of the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce, and held at The Oread Hotel. The group was extremely engaged and interested in our program enhancements at LPS, and ability to partner effectively with our business community.

Lawrence Schools Foundation - Community Education Breakfast

Excitement is building through this week, and tickets are already sold out for the Lawrence Schools Foundation annual Community Education Breakfast. This year the event is being held at Burge Union on the KU Campus, and features Jerod Nieder as the keynote speaker. We will also have a many students actively involved in the program, which serves to raise funds and support LPS students and staff.

Important Dates - Parent/Teacher Conferences

It's hard to believe, but we will turn the calendar to October next week. This means that we will be nearing the end of first quarter on Thursday, October 9, and break for Parent-Teacher Conferences the following week on Thursday, October 16 and Friday, October 17.

These are important opportunities for our families to check-in on their students' academic progress, and identify ways to partner with our dedicated teachers in support of academic achievement and well-being.

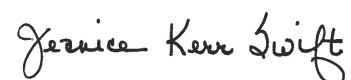
An important date I want to bring to your attention coming up is the **Fall 2025 College and Career Night** on Thursday, October 23. Lawrence Public Schools is hosting this event in partnership with the Kansas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, at the Lied Center of Kansas from 6:30 to 8:00 pm.

Students and families are invited to meet representatives from over 50 universities, community colleges, trade schools, and more about educational and scholarship opportunities after high school.

High School transition coordinators will also be hosting a panel discussion on Post-Secondary Services for students with IEPs and 504 plans from 6 to 7 pm on-site. Students and caregivers are strongly encouraged to register now at app.strivescan.com/students. The event is free and open to all area schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this Superintendent Report, and for the honor of serving the Lawrence Public Schools.

Sincerely,



Jeanice Kerr Swift
Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools