



## **Superintendent Report**

### **Board of Education**

**Monday, October 20, 2025**

Hello Members of the Board and Community,

We are moving forward together this week into this second quarter of this 2025-26 school year, and remain focused on making every moment count, to achieve a strong second quarter between now and the end of the calendar year.

I want to thank our students and teachers, support staff and families who participated in connecting last week for Parent-Teacher conferences. Fifty years of research reveals the striking benefits of school teams actively partnering with families to improve their children's learning. This effort to partner in support of the success and well-being of our students pays dividends in student engagement and success throughout a child's growth trajectory.

It has been longer than usual since we were last together due to some scheduling adjustments, and I will recognize a number of activities and celebrations that our school community enjoyed during these early weeks of October.

#### **Indigenous Peoples Day**

Indigenous Peoples Day was recognized on Monday, October 13, with a number of cultural awareness and appreciation activities taking place throughout Lawrence Public Schools. One example was a spirited ceremony that visitors from New Zealand and Alaska performed for students and staff at both [Hillcrest and Cordley elementary schools](#) last week to teach students about their tribes' native cultures through language, music, and dance.

#### **Sunrise Project @ Woodlawn Elementary**

**Woodlawn Elementary** recently partnered with the [Sunrise Project](#), to offer cooking classes for our students. This is part of an emphasis on teaching our students the importance of nutrition and healthy eating, and providing hands-on learning opportunities in our classrooms.

The Sunrise Project was founded in Douglas County in 2015 and provides space and opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to build an equitable community through education, good food, and social connection.

#### **Walk & Roll to School Day**

We were gifted with a number of excellent weather days last week, which supported a great turnout of families participating in national [Walk & Roll to School Day](#). At **Prairie Park Elementary**, the entire school got in on the action by taking an outdoor walk around the perimeter of the school building, with a number of students joined by their family members.

### **Safe Routes to School**

Safety continues as our top priority in Lawrence Public Schools; last week, LPS school families received an invitation to provide feedback on the [Safe Routes to School](#) (SRTS) program. Our schools have participated as active partners in this collaborative effort since 2014, along with the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department, the City of Lawrence, and the Lawrence-Douglas County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

The Safe Routes to School initiative focuses on encouragement, education, enforcement, evaluation, and engineering solutions to improve walking & bicycling to school. Regionally, the efforts have expanded to include Eudora and Baldwin City in recent years.

We are encouraging our families to provide feedback between now and November 10. This can either be completed via the link that was shared via ParentSquare last week, or by visiting the City of Lawrence's SRTS page at: <https://lawrenceks.gov/safe-routes> . Responses will help inform the planning team of whether or not any changes or adjustments are being requested to better meet the needs of our community.

### **Katie Logan, A.C.E. Award Winner, Sunflower Elementary School Custodian**

I know everyone will join us in celebrating Katie Logan, custodian at Sunflower Elementary School and newly minted [A.C.E Award Winner!](#) Lawrence Schools Foundation gathered students, colleagues, and family members in the Sunflower gym last Wednesday to surprise Katie with the announcement.

On Wednesday morning, the Lawrence Schools Foundation staff and board members, along with Ms. Logan's family and friends, joined the students and staff of Sunflower Elementary for a surprise all-school assembly honoring her as one of this fall's A.C.E. Award winners.

The gym was filled with flowers, handmade signs, heartfelt cheers, and a sea of smiles from Ms. Logan's biggest fans — a beautiful tribute to her impact on the school community. Congratulations, Katie Logan; thank you for being a hallway hero for our students, staff, and community members!

A staff member wrote of Katie: "Her attitude is infectious, creating an uplifting atmosphere that encourages all of us to be our best. She is a true model colleague who leads by example and makes every day brighter with her unwavering dedication and positivity."

Congratulations, Ms. Logan!

The A.C.E. (Award for Commitment & Excellence) Award honors educational support professionals whose exceptional work positively impacts students, colleagues, and the broader USD 497 community. Recipients receive a \$500 award in recognition of their outstanding contributions.

### **Learning Exchange Debut - October 10**

On Friday, October 10, we appreciated the large turnout among our teachers in attendance for October professional development day - a number of our buildings were filled with LPS team members and learning sessions were both hosted for our staff, and led by staff. I especially valued the opportunity to greet and thank our teachers at the Southwest Middle School front door on Friday morning as they arrived for this great day.

Dr. Amaya and the Teaching and Learning team have worked hard to launch the **Teacher Learning Exchange**, a teacher-led professional development series, focused on maximizing our internal talent among teachers and building capacity from within. "For teachers. By teachers. With teachers. In the service of students," is the descriptor we have used for this Teacher Exchange effort.

I am proud to share extremely positive feedback from staff following the October 10 Learning Exchange sessions. With glowing praise and testimonials, such as:

- *"It was practical. One of the BEST PD's I have ever had, honestly."*
- *"I really appreciated having a choice of what to learn."*
- *"This was the MOST BENEFICIAL PD I think I've ever had. I had an absolute blast, and I am so thankful for the strategies I will be able to immediately implement in my classroom."*

Two remaining Learning Exchanges for 25-26 are coming up on **January 5** and **April 17**; we are just getting started with this critical shift in professional development, and looking forward to continuing to build momentum in this important work.

### **Human Resources - Recruitment and Retention**

Our Human Resources team has been busy this Fall; we are on the look-out for future staff members who share our core values, care for students, and are interested in careers that support students with ensuring a culture of dignity, well-being, and success.

In addition to on-campus recruiting of college students seeking future employment in K-12, they are also holding career fairs and information sessions for non-traditional pathways to education careers. We have a great team that can provide guidance to applicants, and identify ways in which business experience in various industries might translate to classroom placement. Our next [Educator Hiring Fair](#) recruitment event is right here this **Thursday, October 23, from 4 to 6 p.m.**

### **Human Resource and Finance Teams Update - Retroactive Pay for Educational Support Professionals**

We are excited to announce that retroactive pay for Educational Support Professionals will be paid on the October 29, 2025 biweekly paycheck. Human Resources had previously communicated that retro

pay would be available by fall break (week of November 24, 2025), and we are grateful for the work of many on the team to meet the priority of paying as quickly as possible for our ESP team.

### **Fall Sports & Activities**

The fall sports and activities season is now past the halfway point of the regular season; I wanted to call-out the high levels of school spirit that we saw on Lawrence streets in support of Homecoming Parades for both [Free State High School \(September 26\)](#) and [Lawrence High School \(October 1\)](#).

Each of those events were live-streamed on our district Facebook page, and between the two, those posts were viewed by over **27,000** friends, family members, students, alums, and supporters of Lawrence Public Schools.

We are looking forward to a show of community support in the stands at Lawrence High School this Friday night for the **Crosstown Showdown** varsity football game. The Firebirds will be the visitors, as the Chesty Lions host, with gates opening at 6pm, and kickoff at 7pm.

Tickets are available for purchase at gate entry, or online at: [gofan.co](http://gofan.co) . Adult tickets are \$7 and children are \$5, and we are asking that no elementary or middle school student attend the game, unless supervised by an adult.

### **Communications - Show and Tell - featuring the Langston Hughes Goats (October 10)**

While they have been gone for a few weeks now, with their duty completed ahead of schedule, I'd like to point you again in the direction of our Facebook page, this time for a fun and informative summary of the Langston Hughes Goat Experience from this fall.

Just in case you missed it, Andrew Beaven interviewed students, staff, the goat farmers, and even attempted to interview the goats themselves. That [video was posted on October 10](#), and received positive outreach, to the tune of 5,000 views currently.

### **Communications – Parent Square Alert Testing**

Safety continues as our top priority, and integral to safety efforts at school are our real-time updates and alerts for staff, students and parents.

On October 9, the Communications Team distributed a Test Alert using our ParentSquare platform. Keep in mind that even for families who never create a Parent-Square account or opt to download the mobile app, this is the program by which messaging is being sent to our school community, and messages will arrive as an email, if an individual doesn't have the app downloaded. .

We will continue to encourage individuals to let us know in what ways this system is working well, or not so much, or if they need technical assistance. This certainly includes keeping contact information up to date with your child's school.

In addition to testing, we have experienced a number of instances in recent weeks where we have needed to provide instant updates to our community during the course of a school day. Each of these

very different situations have produced learning opportunities for all of us in working effectively when emergencies or unanticipated disruptions present themselves – and keeping our families and staff informed during those events continues as a critical priority of our safety and security procedures at school.

I appreciate our staff, students, and families for their patience as we have experienced these moments together, and taking the time to provide feedback as to how we can continuously improve this work.

If there are any issues with your household receiving this communications, please email us at: [usd497info@usd497.org](mailto:usd497info@usd497.org) so that we can troubleshoot and resolve.

### **Communications Team**

Two members of our communications team attended the statewide fall conference of the [Kansas School Public Relations Association](#) held in Great Bend, October 15-17. KanSPRA was founded in 1973, and is a professional organization dedicated to promoting public schools through effective communications. KanSPRA is composed primarily of public information and communications professionals who serve the public school districts and education organizations of Kansas.

The annual fall conference convenes school communicators from across the state for job-specific professional development and networking. Conference presentations and sessions focused on trust-building with stakeholders, creating and expanding systems for managing school communication priorities, storytelling, and practical strategies for increasing school enrollment and supporting students, families, and school communities.

### **Communications Outreach Data**

In the last four weeks, our district Facebook page has amassed over **4.3 million views**, representing a **41% increase over the last four weeks**. We are also observing a positive trend of longer sustained engagement, meaning that individuals are spending more quality time absorbing our content. In addition, we have gained an additional **+1,215 followers** over the last 4 weeks, an **8.4% increase**. This brings us to a grand total of **15,873 followers**.

### **LPS Foundation Annual Community Breakfast**

It was an unforgettable and inspiring morning on Friday, September 26 at the [Lawrence Schools Foundation's 23rd Annual Community Education Breakfast](#). This year's festivities were held at [KU's Burge Union](#), complete with marching bands from both high schools and cheer squads; the sold-out crowd raised approximately \$142,000 to support Lawrence Public Schools.

The event honored four outstanding seniors from the Class of 2026, seen here in this photo as this year's [Foundation Student Champions](#): **Carlos Gomez Cordova** and **Joshua (Josh) Galbreath** from Lawrence High School, and **Sara Kumar** and **Aiden Murray** from Free State High School.

Featured speaker, **Jerod Nieder**, FSHS Class of 2001, of [Positively Paralyzed](#), advocating for accessibility and inclusion, and sharing a motivational story of positive mindset and perseverance. At the conclusion of his speech, the Foundation introduced the Jerod Nieder Endowment Fund and

Scholarship, launched with a \$10,000 gift from his classmates, friends, and family to ensure his legacy of advocacy continues.

### **Chamber of Commerce InterCity Visit – Des Moines, Iowa**

I am grateful for the tremendous opportunity to join past president Kelly Jones, and elementary director Jayci Roberson, alongside approximately 60 other community leaders for an [Inter City 2025 visit to Des Moines, Iowa](#), last week as part of a civic-minded contingent dedicated to opportunities to strengthen the connection between our elected officials, businesses, organizations, and the school district.

We attended a jam-packed schedule of informational presentations, listening sessions, and community-building opportunities. Innovation, attracting talent and growth, quality of life, community partnerships, preparing workforce, ensuring a sense of community, belonging and planning for the future were all patterns that ran through the many conversations throughout the week, and quality public schools is a thread that runs consistently through all these areas of community considerations and planning.

Many thanks to Bonnie Lowe, President and CEO, and the entire Chamber Team for all their work to convene such a meaningful time of learning, and work in support of beneficial next steps in our Lawrence community.

### **Upcoming Events – College and Career Night**

This week, Lawrence Public Schools is hosting a free **Fall 2025 College and Career Night** on Thursday, October 23, in partnership with the Kansas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. **The event will be held at the Lied Center of Kansas from 6:30–8 p.m., with representatives from more than 50 universities, community colleges, and trade schools available to share educational and scholarship opportunities.**

**High School transition coordinators will also host a 6–7 p.m. panel on Post-Secondary Services for students with IEPs and 504 plans. Families can register now at [app.strivescan.com/students](http://app.strivescan.com/students).**

### **Next Steps: Update on Langston Hughes Project Timeline**

We shared in late September the preliminary plan to add classrooms at Langston Hughes Elementary in order to address ongoing overcrowding at this school location. Since that announcement, we have had the opportunity to hear from members of the Langston Hughes community, meet with members of the City of Lawrence team, and receive additional input from LPS team facilities professionals.

In considering the larger picture of what is needed for thoughtful completion of this project, including the need to address traffic patterns in the area, we will extend the timeline for this project to be completed in summer 2027. This will allow additional time to engage more fully with the staff, students, parents, neighbors, the City of Lawrence, and community, and to plan for informed, integrated updates to the building to address classrooms, infrastructure, and related needs.

We look forward to engaging in conversation with the Langston Hughes and wider community during the upcoming weeks of fall and winter, and will share specific dates as those become available.

### **Preview: Late Fall/Winter Community Engagement Opportunities**

As a preview of coming attractions, and as we plan to do every year, we will soon be sharing fall/winter dates for upcoming community engagement opportunities. We look forward to engaging with students and staff, families and community, in-person and online, to hear feedback on our progress and next steps for our schools.

During these upcoming sessions, we will:

- build on the themes shared from last fall's conversation,
- include updates of our progress in the priority areas our community shared,
- highlight a draft of an updated USD 497 Strategic Plan, and
- hear from our stakeholders as to strengths and areas for growth, how their school experience is going this year.

Quality public schools are a hallmark of engaged, caring communities who value children, their quality education, and our collective future. We are grateful for your partnership in support of students, staff, schools, and our Lawrence community.

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