Superintendent Report

Board of Education

Monday, November 10, 2025

Hello Members of the Board and Community,

Across our Lawrence Public Schools, we are reflecting on the importance of **gratitude,** our CharacterStrong focus for November. As we convene conversations with our students to explore the concept of Gratitude, defined as 'choosing to appreciate the people and things in our lives,' we learn firsthand the proven benefits of gratitude and how a regular practice of appreciation supports emotional well-being, and serves as an antidote to chronic stress. Our students and staff learn, practice, and celebrate gratitude, a reliable tool of resilience to promote awareness, acceptance, and action.

And we truly have so much to be grateful for in Lawrence Public Schools. I am tremendously grateful for the commitment and care shown across our classrooms, schools and community. Throughout our district, students are showing up ready to learn, educators are inspiring creativity and innovation, and support staff are 'connecting the dots' to keep our schools running smoothly. Families are deeply engaged as partners in our work, and our many business partners are leveraging connections and resources in support of our students and the Lawrence Public Schools community.

Blue Ribbon Distinction for Lawrence Parents as Teachers Program

Parents as Teachers is an organization whose vision is to build parent involvement, understanding the critical link in building strong communities, thriving families, and ensuring children who are healthy, safe, and learning.

We are delighted to report that the **Lawrence Public Schools' Parents as Teachers**' program has recently earned **Blue Ribbon Affiliate status** – the organization's highest recognition of quality and fidelity standards for sites administering Parents as Teachers. Earning Blue Ribbon Affiliate status recognizes the hard work and dedication of our incredible staff and reflects our deep commitment to support children, family engagement, and strong community in Lawrence Public Schools. Congratulations to Stacie Daniels, Coordinator/Parent Educator, Lawrence Parents as Teachers!

Let's LIFT Lawrence

As we have shared widely, we have launched ***Let's LIFT Lawrence,*** a drive to ensure we are stepping up to support our children and their families who are facing food insecurity just now.

We are truly grateful for so many community partners: individuals, organizations, and businesses who have taken action to help address real, emergent needs among our families. With students and families

directly impacted at every school location, each of our school sites have been mobilized as a collection location for shelf-stable items, and a list of the most-needed items can be found on the portion of our web site, linked as: www.usd497.org/lift.

Food pantries are now open in every Lawrence Public Schools location, and we invite everyone to take action now to drop off food, or to make a donation directly to Just Food Lawrence.

As an update, last week, the **Douglas County Pantry Fund** reported that they have received nearly $70,000 in donations, and **Just Food** shares that they continue to have pallets of food arrive on-site daily, and they are standing by to facilitate distribution.

Foundation Update

Additionally, the Lawrence Schools Foundation has initiated an *Adopt a School program*, where they are focused on keeping the food pantries of our schools stocked.

Dena Johnston, Executive Director of the Schools Foundation shares that so far, more than 20 businesses, organizations and private donors have signed up to assist and many schools have been adopted. In addition, they have several generous partners and individuals who are collecting for multiple schools! Our district office collection site is filling up fast, with nearly three large containers already overflowing with donations for our schools—and the contributions keep coming in!

At the same time, Dena reports they've seen a significant increase in requests through ICAN and SEGER funds. The needs in our community are real, urgent, and often heartbreaking. We are deeply grateful for the continued support and compassion of everyone involved. Together, we are making sure no student goes without the essentials they need to thrive.

Highlights of *Let's LIFT Lawrence* School Activities

Every one of our schools have enthusiastically and creatively directed their own energy and passion to this effort. We have "Share the Care" at Deerfield, where each grade level has taken on a different meal theme to collect and assemble. Woodlawn has initiated "From Our Nest to Ours," and they have added toilet paper, paper towels, and laundry items to their list of needed items, directly partnering with the Sunrise Project, the Ballard Center, and Velocity Church.

Principal McAnarney at Lawrence Free State High School shares that while all kinds of clubs and organizations are bringing in food for a friendly competition, their Student Council went above and beyond.

She shares, "With much of their OWN money (not their parents or fundraising money) they purchased approximately $1,000 of groceries to restock the school pantry (The Nest), contribute to LIFT Lawrence, and likely the coolest thing is that they bought groceries to make chili and cornbread that our social workers are currently making in the FSHS kitchen to package and send home for our families who need it." Ironically, students recently were 'noticed' in Dillons for emptying some shelves of everything, so if you hear anything about that, it was for a good cause!

We also want to highlight the work of Julie Henry and our Nutrition and Wellness team. They had the great idea of developing and testing recipes composed totally of ingredients from the Needed Items list. Their focus was on creating tasty, hearty, and family-friendly recipes that took 20 minutes or less to

prepare and cook. Each of 12 recipes is available on our website titled as “Pantry Cookbook,” with a clickable link that says “Try Our Recipes.”

Lawrence, we will need to continue this work to meet the ongoing need. Our building principals report that donations come in throughout the day, and by the end of each day, shelves are emptied.

We will continue to highlight these stories of Gratitude and Dignity, in addition to updating community resources to our www.usd497.org/lift website.

We are grateful that together we can and will continue to work collaboratively to address the needs within our Lawrence Public Schools and the wider Lawrence community.

Communications: Engagement Summary

Last week our Communications team was providing support to our Let’s LIFT efforts, standing up the dedicated section of our 497 web site; designing, printing, and coordinating distribution of flyers and posters, in multiple languages, to each of our school sites, and answering media calls from local reporters helping to increase community awareness of this initiative. They have also been working on the logistics of inner-district mobilization of collected items to our school pantries.

We are tracking the activity of this specific section of our website, and in only 10 days time we are happy to report that we have had over **3,100 visits to this page**, 500 viewers checked-in on the Pantry Cookbook recipes, and over 200 individuals have visited the donation information. We anticipate that these numbers will continue to increase in the days and weeks ahead.

In addition, our last Superintendent Message was delivered via Smore on Friday, November 7, reaching 19,501 recipients and continues to generate strong engagement. The message has received 15,112 total views as of this afternoon, with 9,500 unique opens, and 205 link clicks. Based on the analytic data, we can see that readers primarily clicked on direct links to our *Let’s Lift Lawrence* landing page and food pantry recipe resources.

In just three days since publishing the newsletter, the data on views, opens, and click-throughs are already meeting or exceeding industry benchmarks for districts of our size. These results reflect strong community engagement with our updates and especially interest in content related to *Let’s Lift Lawrence.* (Industry source)

Update: Ad Hoc Generative AI and Evolving Technologies Advisory Group

Invitations are out now throughout our school community to solicit interest and availability to serve on a representative **Ad Hoc Generative AI and Evolving Technologies Advisory.** We are excited to launch this Advisory on such a critical area of our work in the district; this was called for by the board last year.

A link to this committee application was distributed via ParentSquare to our staff, families, high school students, and also made available on our web site. Applications will be accepted through November 14, with hopes of an initial meeting scheduled for early December. We have already received **over 50 applicants**, with a wide range of perspectives and experiences related to generative AI and Evolving

Technologies. We are looking forward to important conversations on this dynamic topic, and the opportunity to bring recommendations to this board for consideration in early 2026.

PK 12 Schools: Dignity in Action

As stated earlier, our **Character Strong word for the Month of November is Gratitude**. Over the past four weeks, elementary classrooms across the district have engaged in this Character Strong unit. Usage data shows approximately **91.5 hours** of instruction, direct social-emotional learning focused on recognizing and expressing gratitude in daily life.

Schools each implement and embed Character Strong in different ways, typically culminating with an end of month school assembly and student and staff recognition. This week, we are looking forward to continuing the many demonstrations of dignity and gratitude: at Quail Run, students will be taking part in activities honoring Ruby Bridges and her courageous role in school integration. As a school, they will reflect on her bravery and the importance of standing up for justice, not just kindness. Students will participate in a schoolwide walk and learning activities celebrating her story and lasting impact.

AVID College Readiness and Family Engagement

Middle and high school AVID students are strengthening connections across campuses through shared learning experiences that support college and career readiness.

At **West Middle School, AVID students recently welcomed Kansas State Treasurer Steve Johnson for a special Financial Literacy and College Savings Night.** While at the event, three scholarships were awarded and students and their parents received valuable insight into the importance of financial planning for postsecondary education.

Similarly, **Free State High School hosted a strong turnout for its annual AVID Family Night.** The evening included student demonstrations of the AVID tutorial process, college research project presentations, and a guest presentation on financial aid from the University of Kansas.

Events like these continue our focus on removing barriers, enhancing opportunities and preparing every student for success beyond graduation.

In addition, **Free State and Liberty Memorial Central Middle School AVID classes** collaborated for a kickball event designed to build teamwork, confidence, communication, and relationships across campuses.

School Security: Officer Lindsay Bishop Recognition

We are proud to report that last week, the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) named Officer Lindsay Bishop as a NASRO practitioner. **The National SRO Practitioner program** was established as a way for NASRO, police agencies, and school districts to recognize officers who have excelled in the area of school-based policing. The program seeks to distinguish those officers who are committed to serving our nation's youth, along with the communities and schools they serve.

To obtain the status of National SRO Practitioner, officers must meet certain requirements including completion of over 220 hours of specialized training, and have a minimum of three years of service as a

School Resource Officer. The National SRO Practitioner Certificate gives credit to those officers who have attended NASRO training, shown a commitment to school-based policing, and have shown leadership in this specialized field of law enforcement.

The National Association of School Resource Officers is dedicated to making schools and children safer by providing the highest quality training to school-based law enforcement officers. They are considered the gold standard in school-based law enforcement training, is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1991 for school-based police, school administrators, and school security and/or safety professionals who work as partners to protect schools and their students, faculty, and staff members.

Congratulations to Officer Bishop, and we also can't forget to shout-out her partner, "Rosie" – we are grateful to have both assigned to multiple schools throughout our district.

Fall Sports Wrap-Up

While not the final outcome any of us had hoped for, I want to wish a *Job Well Done* shout out to our Free State Firebirds on a great football season, which concluded in a hard-fought 38-31 loss to Shawnee Mission Northwest High School last Friday.

As for the Fall Sports season, Unified Bowling will complete their season right here in Lawrence at Royal Crest Lanes tomorrow afternoon. The State Tournament is the following weekend on Tuesday, November 18.

Community Conversations

On Thursday, November 6, several members of our leadership team, and representatives of the Lawrence Schools Foundation attended the annual Chamber of Commerce's Taste of Lawrence event, held this year at the Pavillion at the Douglas County Fairgrounds.

We are grateful that this event has historically offered a reduced price of admission for educators, and provided an opportunity for our staff members to interact with local community members and businesses. Our team distributed information about ways to get involved with Let's LIFT Lawrence information about opportunities to apply for openings and join our team, and an introduction to upcoming Community Conversations to be held later this Fall and through the Winter months, that will assist our efforts to update our district's strategic plan.

LPS Community Conversations will be convened throughout the community, and we are looking forward to joining in at the next **Farmer's Market on Saturday morning, November 22.** Our team will be there bright and early, and it is truly important to us to connect with and hear directly from our community.

Updated: Continued Work on Compensation

I value the Board's support as we have continued the work to streamline our organization, and to dedicate resources to prioritize achieving competitive compensation for our staff. We have significant work ahead of us to achieve our goal.

I appreciate that recently, we shared information directly with paraeducators in specialized classrooms that we have reclassified their positions to better align with the critical duties they carry out in these programs that require such a unique skill set. This change will be paid retroactively to July 1st.

Tonight, I appreciate the Board's consideration of the third of our employee groups, administrators. Following approval of certificated staff increase on July 28th, and the Educational Support Professionals increase on September 24th, tonight, we complete the third area, administrator members of our team.

We recommend a 3% increase to the administrative salary pool for the school year 2025-26. The board support and approval will enable the district to finalize compensation packages for all employee groups for the current school year.

Ongoing work to become and remain competitive in salaries continues as a priority and a focus.

KU Chabad House Opening

Finally, on Sunday, November 2, I was able to attend the grand opening of the **KU Chabad House**, a 10,000-square-foot student center described as the state's first Jewish student building. We celebrate every effort in our city that expands inclusivity and strengthens the sense of community we share. This was a meaningful milestone, and the KU Chabad House is truly a beautiful addition to our KU and Lawrence community.

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

Jeanice Kerr Swift
Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools