



**Superintendent Report
Board of Education
Monday, February 9, 2026**

Hello Members of the Board and Community,

Though our calendars say February, we are delighting in the extraordinary weather this week, and during this time, it is also an important time as we focus on dual priorities: both 'staying the course' for a strong third quarter, and work to collaborate and plan for the 2026-27 school year.

School Counseling Week

Last week was **National School Counseling Week**, and I want to highlight the **31 school counselors** in Lawrence Public Schools who work to support students every day. Our counselors help students with social, emotional, and academic needs, and play a critical role in supporting student health and well-being, and post-secondary planning. Thank you to all of our school counselors, for all that they give to support our students.

Sunset Hill Elementary - RAMP Designation

And speaking of school counseling, we are proud to celebrate a special milestone awarded last week. **Sunset Hill Elementary School** is the first school in Kansas to earn the [Recognized ASCA Model Program \(RAMP\) designation from the American School Counselor Association](#), making it the first and only school in the state to hold this designation.

Sunset Hill School Counselor **Amanda Atkins** offered, "This recognition highlights what is possible when principals intentionally advocate for school counseling programs by ensuring counselors have the time, support, and role clarity needed to prioritize direct student services aligned with the ASCA National Model. I am deeply grateful for the consistent support of **Darcy Krause** and **Jeremy Philipp**, whose leadership has allowed our counseling program to thrive. I am thankful to be part of a Sunset Hill staff that consistently shows up for students and creates a school culture where students are loved and valued."

This national recognition honors a schoolwide counseling program that is aligned with the ASCA National Model and focused on improving student outcomes. It reflects intentional leadership, strong systems, and a school culture where students are known, supported, and valued.

Happy Birthday, Langston Hughes!

Last Monday, **Langston Hughes Elementary** threw a [school-wide birthday party](#) with an upbeat soundtrack provided by the Lawrence High School Band drumline in order to celebrate the birthday of famous Lawrencian, poet, playwright, and their school's namesake, Langston Hughes.

Langston students gathered in the gym as the high schoolers performed, with many future musicians tapping and drumming along. The crowd was especially impressed by one band member's ability to play their instrument upside-down. Several staff members and students at the assembly were gifted prizes, given Character Strong awards, and honored for recent achievements.

Leadership Lawrence 2025

President Gordon-Ross and I valued the opportunity to share with members of the Leadership Lawrence 2025 program last Thursday. The energy and interest in local government grew as we visited with 11 different groups of participants, exploring 11 key questions, in 11 rounds of lively conversation over approximately 90 minutes together. We are truly grateful for our connection with Leadership Lawrence, and the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce. What an extraordinary opportunity to raise awareness and cultivate leadership in understanding the challenges and opportunities we face as a community.

Ovation 2026

Lawrence Schools Foundation's 10th Anniversary of the district talent show ***Ovation!*** was held on Sunday, February 1 at the Lied Center. It was an extraordinary celebration of Lawrence Public Schools student talent, creativity, and joy. The evening featured powerful performances, surprise recognitions, and special awards honoring outstanding educators and students. A moving highlight included a signature performance by Ovation! creator and **Lawrence High School graduate Graham Edmonds**, who returned to Lawrence from Los Angeles. Thanks to community generosity, *Ovation!* has now raised more than **\$140,000** to support our students and staff.

A special congratulations to this year's Crystal Apple Award winners, **Catherine Meihaus, art teacher at New York Elementary, and Bryce Jones and Eric Bradshaw, music and theatre educators at Free State High School**. Each was presented with a check for \$1,000 from the Foundation.

I appreciate Kristen Ryan, Assistant Superintendent for representing us for that awesome Ovation event.

LHS Regional Art – Scholastic Art Awards Mid-West Regional Competition

Lawrence High School students earned **57 top awards** in the **Scholastic Art Awards Mid-West Regional competition**, which includes Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois. from more than 4,000 entries Honors included 1 Gold Art Portfolio, 22 Gold Keys, 12 Silver Keys, and 23 Honorable Mentions, selected by professional jurors evaluating originality, skill, and personal voice.

Twenty-two artworks and one portfolio will advance to the **national finals in New York City**, where students may be eligible for scholarships of up to **\$12,500**. Awards span categories such as painting, photography, sculpture, digital art, fashion, and illustration.

We are so proud of our visual arts success, the hard work of our student artists, and specifically honor their instructors for helping to educate, motivate, and support their award-winning entries – **Emily Markoulatos** (ceramics & jewelry), **Angelia Perkins** (photography), and **Todd Poteet** (drawing & painting).

Kansas Teacher of the Year Tour

As part of Lawrence Public Schools' commitment and participation in the Kansas Teacher of the Year program, we were proud to support our reigning district finalist, **Tracy Murray of Lawrence High School** last week. It was her turn to facilitate a tour of our district for her cohort of nine teachers from surrounding districts. The group was treated to planned stops at **Cordley Elementary, Billy Mills Middle School, Lawrence College and Career Academy, and Lawrence High School**. Our guests were extremely positive about their experience and grateful for interactions with our students and staff, and for the opportunity to bring ideas from here back to their respective districts.

BOBS Dinner & Reception

Congratulations to **Gina Carter, Woodlawn Elementary**, the 2025 Excellence in Teaching BOBS Award recipient!

I am deeply grateful to the anonymous BOBS donors and the Lawrence Schools Foundation for their continued investment in our educators and student success.

I had the opportunity to attend the Lawrence Schools Foundation's Annual BOBS Dinner and Reception, an inspiring evening celebrating nearly three decades of excellence in teaching across our district. It was a powerful reminder of the lasting impact our educators have on students, families, and community every day. A special highlight of the evening was the heartfelt thank-you cards and artwork created by **Hannah Hursts's** art students at **Deerfield Elementary School**.

Community Conversations: Join the Conversation!

Our Winter 2026 [Community Conversations](#) are ongoing, with a scheduled stop at **Hillcrest Elementary School** completed last week, and a student focus group held bright and early this morning at **West Middle School**. This week we will be at **Woodlawn Elementary School** on Tuesday, February 10, at 5:30 p.m.

Community feedback is critical to our continuous improvement process, and we encourage all members of our school community to participate in a way that works best for them. Multiple ways are open now to share your thoughts with us via our website at: www.usd497.org/future

Upcoming Dates

We are delighted to welcome all to Parent/Teacher Conferences this week. We know how critically important the home-to-school partnership is for student success, and families are encouraged to take advantage of this important conference opportunity to connect with their child's teachers.

As a reminder, early enrollment for Lawrence Public Schools preschool programs is open now through **March 22nd**. Our preschool programs provide a strong, joyful start for our youngest learners, building foundational skills, curiosity, and a love of learning that lasts well beyond the early years.

Families with preschool-aged children are encouraged to explore opportunities available next school year at **Kennedy Early Childhood Center, New York Montessori, Deerfield, Prairie Park, Sunflower, and Woodlawn Elementary Schools** and take advantage of this early enrollment window. We anticipate acceptance notifications sent to families by **April 1st** based on eligibility and availability.

With six of our elementary sites now offering preschool, we are proud to deliver on our continued commitment to expanding access to quality early learning in neighborhood schools across the district. Additional information and enrollment details are available at www.usd497.org/preschool.

All-City Choir Concert

It was my great honor to attend the **2026 All-City Choir Concert** at the Lied Center of Kansas Performing Arts Center last week, which brought together our district's four middle school choirs and two high school choirs. The **All-City Middle School Choir**, composed of students from **Billy Mills Middle School, Liberty Memorial Central Middle, West Middle, and Southwest Middle** schools, performed under the direction of **Dr. Gabe Lewis-O'Connor**, Associate Director of Choral Studies at the University of Kansas. The All-City High School Choir, with student choral singers from **Lawrence High School and Free State High School**, was guided by three directors: **Joshua East**, Free State's Director of Choirs; **Oliva Henning**, Free State's Associate Director of Choirs; and **Rachel Naughtin**, Lawrence High School Director of Choral Activities.

For your viewing and listening pleasure this evening, "**Čhaŋté Wašté Hokšíla**" (pronounced *Chan-tay wash-tay hok-shee-la*) is a Lakota lullaby that has been passed down through generations. This arrangement, performed by the **Lawrence All-City Middle School Choir**, was written in memory of the victims of the 2022 Robb Elementary School mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas. It is the first time this song has been written down with the words translated and scored. Our LPS middle school students learned the melody before the rest of the song, following Lakota tradition as requested by the composer.

The strength of Lawrence Public Schools is rooted in a connected community that believes in its children, takes action to support their schools, and remains committed to their success. Now, more than ever, a community in partnership and support is key and critical. Thank you for your partnership, your perseverance, and your continued support of our students and staff.

It is an honor to serve the Lawrence Public Schools and thank you for the opportunity to share this Superintendent Report.

Sincerely,



Jeanice Kerr Swift
Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools