



**Superintendent Report  
Board of Education  
Monday, February 23, 2026**

Hello Members of the Board and Community,

As we wrap up February this week, we are encouraged that at the heart of every Lawrence Public Schools initiative, conversation, and partnership is a strong commitment to ensuring students are supported, challenged, and well-prepared for what lies ahead. In recent weeks, we have seen this commitment reflected in community collaboration, student leadership, and meaningful engagement across our schools.

We understand that many in our Lawrence community are navigating a challenging time and some may be experiencing heightened anxiety following events in our city last week. I want to offer our reassurance that we will continue to work together to ensure that our schools are safe and secure learning environments, and we will also continue to partner with local community organizations in support of our students and their families.

**State of the City**

Last week, district leadership joined community partners for the [Leadership Luncheon: State of the City](#), hosted by Leadership Lawrence and The Lawrence Chamber of Commerce. It was a valuable opportunity to hear updates on city priorities, including economic development, housing initiatives, and infrastructure investments that directly intersect with our students, schools and families.

Strong schools and strong cities are interconnected. As housing, workforce development, and community safety remain priorities across Lawrence, our partnership with city leadership continues to be essential. We are grateful for the collaborative spirit that defines Lawrence and for shared commitments that support children and families across our community.

**Lawrence Schools Foundation: Retreat**

Members of our district leadership team recently participated in a [collaborative retreat with the Lawrence Schools Foundation Board](#). The session focused on strategic alignment, long-term fundraising priorities, and continued partnership opportunities that directly benefit students and staff.

We are grateful for Dena Johnston, and the members of the Foundation Board who remain mission-focused and strategically plans, based on input solicited from members of the district team and community. Board president Gordon-Ross attended to share his insights and perspectives, and multiple representatives from district leadership and building principals were also engaged in various conversations during this valuable day with the Lawrence Schools Foundation board.

Together, we continue to identify innovative ways to invest in classroom resources, educator excellence, student experiences, and district-wide initiatives that move Lawrence Public Schools forward.

**Lawrence Schools Foundation: Snack Packs & Backpack Meal Program Volunteers**

We continue to be deeply grateful to the Lawrence Schools Foundation for its support to our students. Recently, Educational Support Center staff members joined Foundation leaders and dozens of community volunteers for an afternoon supporting both the School Snack Distribution and Backpack Meal Program.

With more than 12 pallets of snacks and meal items delivered, volunteers stepped in to sort, count, and organize supplies to ensure every school is stocked and ready for students who may need a little extra nourishment during the school day. These simple items make a meaningful difference in helping students remain focused, engaged, and ready to learn. Local volunteers and Rotarians will distribute these items to all school locations this week.

In addition, [volunteers assembled 185 backpacks for the grant-funded Backpack Meal Program](#). Each backpack is filled with spaghetti and shelf-stable meatballs, canned vegetables, mac and cheese cups, granola bars, soup, cereal cups, and shelf-stable milk. These meals will provide help for students who need additional nourishment after school and during Spring Break.

This work directly impacts students and families across our district and would not be possible without the generosity, teamwork, and commitment of our Foundation, donors, and volunteers. We are grateful for the contributions of so many, and the continued partnership in meeting immediate needs while building stronger supports for the future.

### **[AVID in Action: Hillcrest Elementary Hosts 3rd Annual Career Day](#)**

On Friday, [Hillcrest Elementary hosted its third annual Career Day](#) as part of its AVID learning strategy. Community professionals representing construction, finance, fashion design, public service, technology, and skilled trades joined classrooms to share their career journeys.

Students took ownership of their learning that day by engaging in career pathway research prior to the event. One fourth-grade student in Kara Parkhurt's class shared, "I didn't even know about some of these jobs before today."

Career Day at Hillcrest directly supports the district's commitment to AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), which focuses on building college, career, and life readiness skills for all students.

I am grateful to the many community members who invested their time and shared their experiences with our students.

### **[Student-Led Advocacy: Community Connections and Free State Students at the Capitol](#)**

#### **[AP Day at the State Capitol](#)**

[Free State High School students participated in AP Day at the Kansas State Capitol](#), joining peers from across the state in highlighting the impact of Advanced Placement programs. Students met with state legislators and shared personal stories about how AP coursework strengthens confidence, critical thinking, and college/career readiness. The experience also offered a hands-on opportunity to observe the legislative process.

#### **[Community Connections at Pinckney Students Advocate for Disability Policy](#)**

A group of [student leaders from Community Connections at Pinckney represented Lawrence at Advocacy Day hosted by the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities](#). These students spoke directly with legislators about the Kentucky Intellectual/Developmental Disability Waiver waitlist and other issues affecting Kansans with disabilities, demonstrating leadership and compassion in representing voices beyond their own.

Each of these experiences are opportunities for our students to not only learn about government and policy, but to also participate in the process, bringing each of their own perspectives in an impactful way.

### **West Middle School Hosts Reality U**

Today at West Middle School, staff and community volunteers helped to facilitate “Reality U @,” which is an interactive program designed to bring a bit of “reality” for students through a 75-minute interactive and engaging personal finance simulation. Students imagine their life as 26-year-olds and complete an online lifestyle survey. This information is used to create a unique and individualized future scenario.

Each scenario includes the student’s monthly income, credit card debt, student loan information, and potential living arrangements. Students are given a checkbook register to track their monthly purchases from the multiple booths staffed by an adult to represent services and/or products that adults typically must purchase or consider each month. The point of the simulation is that the checkbook register can’t fall below zero, meaning that participants have to make choices and prioritize their spending.

This event actively engages students to help them understand the importance of how their performance in school today impacts their future. This simulation was also a great opportunity for community volunteers to participate in a real-world learning experience and have positive interactions with our students.

### **STEAM in Action: Team STEAM Robotics Include Elementary Students in their Creations**

Recently, [Team STEAM Robotics, an after-school high school robotics program of more than 50 Lawrence students, visited fourth graders at Woodlawn Elementary School to inspire the next generation of innovators.](#) The high schoolers shared their process by showcasing their collaboration, design, build and programming skills. Student presenters also gave the fourth-graders a chance to test drive their robots. One Lego-built creation featured a controllable arm capable of dragging small objects, which it demonstrated on some scissors and a rubber band. Another robot was operated wirelessly with a game controller that students each took turns passing around to their classmates.

Team STEAM provides students with opportunities to build, code, and problem-solve while also developing leadership skills through experiences like this one. Events like this enhance mentorship skills for high schoolers and inspire our younger students.

### **Lawrence High School Intertribal Powwow**

Lawrence High School Intertribal Club and Native American Student Services hosted their annual Powwow on Saturday, a powerful celebration of culture, heritage, and community. Students, families, and community members gathered to honor Native traditions through dance, music, and shared storytelling.

A special highlight was to see Lawrence High School student, Louis, as the Head Man Dancer.

We are so grateful to Heidi Woods, Lawrence High School Intertribal Club Sponsor, and to everyone who made it out to the LHS Intertribal Club Powwow. Many thanks to David Farve, Shayla Chickaway and all the NASS community for organizing the event.

Events like this provide meaningful opportunities for cultural learning and respect, and they reflect our commitment to honoring Indigenous voices and histories within our schools. We are proud of the student leaders and staff who worked to organize such a vibrant and educational experience.

### **Free State and Lawrence High School City Showdown (Basketball)**

Last Friday night, the annual City Showdown between basketball teams from Lawrence High School and Free State High was a completely sold out event, resulting in a packed gymnasium to root on the

visiting Chesty Lions squaring off against the Firebirds. The varsity outcomes were hard fought victories by Lawrence High School on the girls side, and by Free State High School on the boys side.

I am also grateful to report a special halftime presentation during the Boys Varsity games of a donation of \$15,000 by **Truity Credit Union**. This money will be split between the two high schools and is earmarked to support sports nutrition stations, called "[The Truity Fuel Zone](#)," helping to provide our student athletes with the fuel they need to perform, recover, and succeed throughout their competitive seasons.

### **Winter Sports Season**

As the Winter Sports season winds down, I would like to note that **Basketball** post-season begins next week with [regional sub-state competition, followed by state quarterfinals, semifinals, and finals played at Wichita State University between March 10-14; the State tournament for Boys and Girls Bowling takes place in Derby, Kansas on March 4; Boys and Girls Wrestling State Tournament takes place this weekend, February 27-28](#) at AdventHealth Sports Park at BluHawk in Overland Park.

Last weekend, the Boys **Swimming and Diving** season concluded with the 6A State Meet held at the Shawnee Mission Aquatic Center. The Free State Firebirds were led by junior **Anderson Bateman**, who earned All-State honors, with a 6th place finish in the 50-yard FreeStyle and a 3rd place finish in the 100-yard Freestyle.

Free State High School finished 12th overall in the Swimming and Diving Championships. Other top 20 finishers for Free State were: **Sam Bauch** placed 6th in the 100 fly; sophomore **Gavin McIntosh** - 6th place in 1-meter diving; **Ewan Campbell** finished 16th in the 100 backstroke; senior **Owen Carnagey** - 18th place in 200-yard freestyle; and 9th place in the 400-yard Freestyle Relay; 10th place in the 200-yard FreeStyle Relay; and 15th place in the 200-Yard Medley Relay.

Lawrence High School finished 19th overall at the State Meet, and were led by senior **Alex Oral**, who placed 9th in the 100-yard BreastStroke and 10th in the 100-yard Butterfly. He was joined by **Cale Ward** as a fellow top-20 finisher, placing 19th in 1-meter diving.

Congratulations to our Boys Swimmers and Divers, and all the best to all of our Winter Sports student athletes as they close out their competitive seasons in the next few weeks.

### **Community Conversations: Join the Conversation**

Our [Winter 2026 Community Conversations](#) continue across the district as we gather feedback to inform planning and continuous improvement.

I have enjoyed important and in-depth conversations at Hillcrest and Woodlawn Elementary Schools where we connected with parents and staff and community members from across Lawrence. Many have highlighted the quick implementation of feedback from engagement sessions last year as a positive. Specifically, streamlining communications across the district through ParentSquare, adding science as a special in our elementary schools, and our preschool expansions.

There have also been important conversations about areas where we can explore improvements including areas of our district website and staff recruitment and retention, among others.

District leaders have also facilitated student conversations at Billy Mills Middle School, and with several student focus groups. In the past two weeks, members of our team have engaged with student groups at Lawrence Virtual School, Lawrence College and Career Academy, Lawrence High School, and West Middle School. We continue our student conversations at schools across the district this week by stopping at Southwest Middle School and Free State High School.

We want to encourage families, staff, students, and community members to participate in these conversations. If you haven't yet, we invite you to share your input online through one of our survey options, available to you now at [www.usd497.org/future](http://www.usd497.org/future). Your voice matters, and your partnership strengthens our work.

### **Upcoming Events** **HR Recruiting Event**

This Wednesday, our Human Resources team is hosting a group of prospective teachers and leaders interested in future positions with Lawrence Public Schools.

As an enhancement to our traditional application and screening process, approximately 40 individuals with interest in working in Lawrence Public Schools will participate in a driving tour of the district, followed by a lunch to connect and meet with district leaders, and ending with same-day interviews with principals and district representatives.

We will also be partnering with the Chamber of Commerce to provide applicants with information about our Lawrence community, and get them excited about the chance to work and live in Lawrence. This is a time of year where we are focused on a strong and successful completion to the 25-26 school year, while also planning ahead for next year. I am proud of our HR team for thinking creatively to innovate practice in educator recruitment, and we look forward to hosting this event on Wednesday.

### **World Cup Announcement: Lawrence to Host Algeria**

We are excited about the recent announcement that the [Algerian National Team has selected Lawrence as its base camp community during the 2026 FIFA World Cup](#). This international spotlight presents a unique opportunity for our students and schools.

In the months ahead, we look forward to exploring educational and cultural connections that celebrate global learning, language, and cross-cultural understanding. Experiences like this reinforce the importance of preparing our students to be graduates who are ready to engage confidently in an interconnected world. More information will be shared as partnerships and student-centered opportunities develop.

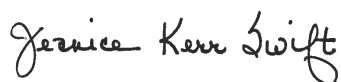
### **Lawrence Public Schools Equity Annual Reports**

In our effort toward communication and transparency, we continue to work to organize information in easily accessible ways for everyone to access. In that effort, I want to highlight where the Equity Annual Reports can be viewed on our website.

Together, we are discovering what is possible when schools and communities move forward together. I am excited about the amazing work underway across our district, and for future planning and partnership with our community.

Thank you for your continued partnership in support of our 10,000 students and the staff who work hard to serve and support them. It is an honor to serve the Lawrence Public Schools and to share this Superintendent Report with you this evening.

Sincerely,



Jeanice Kerr Swift  
Superintendent of Schools  
Lawrence Public Schools