



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

Hello Members of the Board and Community,

It's a great day in Lawrence Public Schools as we 'spring forward' today and look ahead to a strong final quarter of the 2025-26 school year. Many thanks to our students and teachers, support staff and leaders, parents and community for all your work to connect, engage and work together to serve students and community.

Elementary Parent / Teacher Conference Participation

Parent/Teacher Spring Conferences were convened across the district February 12-13, and we are delighted to share that elementary conference attendance was 94.14%, a slight increase of .47% from last Spring.

Thank you to all of our teachers for their effort to ensure that these conferences were meaningful, and to our families for their partnership in support of student achievement and well-being.

Lawrence High School IPS Polar Plunge

Last Wednesday, the Lawrence High InterPersonal Skills (IPS) Class held their annual [Polar Plunge](#) fundraiser event. Organized with support from **Susan Mička**, this year's Polar Plunge **raised more than \$17,000 for Special Olympics Kansas and Unified Sports**. Nearly 100 brave plungers volunteered to leap into the cold tank and chill out in the splash zone in support of this great cause.

Thank you to all the generous students, staff, and community members who made this event possible to support more fun, inclusive opportunities for students in the future.

Nutrition and Wellness at West Middle School

Julie Henry, Director of Nutrition and Wellness, [recently met with West Middle School AVID students](#) to give them a behind-the-scenes look at what goes into planning their school meals, and asked for their help in improving the district's newest menu items.

After learning about the complexities of public school menu planning, students reviewed snack options and taste-tested two variations of goulash where they provided feedback on flavor, texture, and overall appeal. Students also shared some suggestions on improving school meals including ideas for warming pastries, and asking the district to consider providing vegan and non-dairy options. Their feedback, along with input gathered from other student groups, will help the Nutrition and Wellness team determine which items could be added or adjusted in next year's menu.

Robot Police Dog Visits New York Elementary

Detective Meghan Bardwell from LKPD, alongside **Douglas County Youth Services Assistant Director Leigh Housman**, visited the New York Elementary last week to introduce our students to [“Chase,” one of the department's robotic police dogs.](#) The 70-pound, remote-controlled quadruped robot, developed by Boston Dynamics, is used by the LKPD and other law enforcement agencies for dangerous inspections, reconnaissance, and negotiations as a support to the police department.

Students watched Chase gallop into the cafeteria like a real dog, and were amazed by all of the movements. Chase comes equipped with tools like a camera, microphone, speaker, and also has stair-climbing capabilities. Our students were especially impressed by the robotic canine nailing classic dog tricks like sitting, shaking, and laying down.

They were even more amazed by new tricks, like watching Chase walk on its hind legs, perform a hand stand, jump, wave, dance, and even trace a heart with its ‘paws,’ drawing excited cheers and plenty of ‘awws’ from the crowd. Students eagerly asked questions while Detective Bardwell demonstrated how the device works and explained how it helps officers stay safe in the field. Afterward, learners waited patiently for their turn to give the high-tech K9 a few gentle pets and head pats.

Thank you to the Lawrence Kansas Police Department and Douglas County Youth Services for sharing this fascinating look at technology and public safety with our students!

Human Resources Recruiting Event

On Wednesday, February 25, [Human Resources team hosted approximately 60 teacher and building administrator applicants](#) interested in future positions with Lawrence Public Schools. Attendees participated in a driving tour of the district onboard a bus, and returned for a meet-and-greet and lunch at the Educational Support Center. The event ended with same-day interviews, supported by our district leaders, HR representatives, and school principals.

We were also joined by representatives of the Lawrence Schools Foundation and Lawrence Chamber of Commerce, to help provide additional information and testimonials as to what makes Lawrence a great place to live and work.

Due to the positive feedback, we are likely to plan similar events in the future to enhance traditional recruiting efforts.

Winter Sports Post-Season Summary

The 2026 State Wrestling Meet was held on February 27-28 at the Advent Health Sports Park in Overland Park, Kansas, with both of our high schools competing.

For Free State High School, **Zane Shaw** earned a state runner-up finish in the 190 lb. weight class. Damian Quick (120 lb) and **Tristen Moore** (132) each placed 6th in their respective weight classes.

For Lawrence High School, **Jadin Harrell** finished in 4th place in the 190 lb. weight class on the boys side; and on the girls side, **Goldy Stephens** placed 5th.

Last week, the **2026 State Bowling Tournament** was held on Wednesday, March 4, at the Wichita Bowlero Northrock.

For the girls, Lawrence High School's **Morgan Christensen** placed 51st in the state, and Free State High School's **Leah Wilson** took 6th place, with a 683 series score.

For the boys, Lawrence High School's **Camden Toews** placed 56th, and Lawrence High's **Graesyn Hoss** placed 9th, with a 695 series.

Community Conversations: Join the Conversation

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

In addition to conversations hosted across Lawrence with parents, staff, and community members, over the past several weeks, district leaders have also prioritized conversations with students. We created space for students to share their experiences, ideas, and perspectives about their schools and the district as a whole. These conversations have been insightful, with students sharing feedback on their learning environments, school culture, and opportunities they see for growth.

We are now wrapping up this round of student focus groups, with a few more sessions expected. These final conversations will help ensure we capture a broad range of student perspectives as part of our engagement process.

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. Your voice matters, and your partnership strengthens our work.

Upcoming Dates: Spring Break

There is no school for students this Friday, March 13, which is a district Teacher Readiness Day. That kicks off **Spring Break (March 16-20)** for Lawrence Public Schools, and we look forward to seeing everyone return safely for the beginning of the 4th quarter on Monday, March 23.

Thank you for your continued partnership in support of our 10,000 students, their families and the talented 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.

Wishing everyone a safe and peaceful spring break.

Sincerely,



Jeanice Kerr Swift
Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools