



USD 497 News Release

Jake Potter, Executive Director of Communications
110 McDonald Dr. Lawrence, KS 66044
(785) 832-5000x1662 / jake.potter@usd497.org

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Board Approves Planned Renovations of the Choice Campus at Centennial and Hears Preview of 2026-27 Program Enhancements

Enhancements 2026

Dr. Swift reported on implementation of planned system enhancements for the current school year, and shared a preview of improvements planned for the 2026-27 school year. Improvements are focused on enhancing student access, opportunity, achievement, and postsecondary success.

- Family Engagement Welcome Center
- Early Childhood Learning Vision (continued expansion of preschool classrooms)
- KU Blueprint Expansion to Lawrence Virtual School
- Advanced Placement Enhancement
- CTE Alignment & College and Career Enhancement
- Centennial Choice Campus
- Streamline 2026 (achieve competitive competition for staff)

[Click here for presentation slides containing additional information.](#)

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Swift shared a wide range of updates and highlights from throughout Lawrence Public Schools, including:

- Increased participation rates recorded from last month's Parent-Teacher Conferences. 94.14% attendance at the elementary school level (up .47% from last Spring).
- Last Wednesday, the IPS Class (InterPersonal Skills) 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 participants volunteered to leap into the cold tank in support of this great cause.
- **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. Students were especially impressed by the robotic canine nailing classic dog tricks like sitting, shaking, and laying down.

- **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.
- **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** are actively taking place throughout Winter 2026. 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. These conversations have been insightful, with students sharing feedback on their learning environments, school culture, and opportunities they see for growth. The district is completing this round of student focus groups, with a few more sessions expected, with these final conversations ensuring a broad range of student perspectives are a key component of our engagement process (www.usd497.org/future).

[Read](#) and [watch](#) the full Superintendent's Report online.

Board Reports

Board President Gordon-Ross shared visits with site councils (Southwest Middle School and Woodlawn Elementary), a summary from the first meeting of the district's AI Advisory Group, attendance at a community event honoring first responders (Awards of Valor), overview of a meeting of the Facilities Committee, and listed items and their associated costs from the evening's consent agenda.

A legislative update was provided by Member Kimball, including an overview of proposed special education funding, statewide cell phone ban deliberations (predicted to override local board policy), federal voucher program, and proposed changes to collection of free and reduced meal applications.

Member Byers reported a summary from a meeting of the Equity Council, highlighted by a tour of Community Connections at Pinckney. He also shared that a Negotiations meeting was held last week with district representatives and the Lawrence Education Association.

Member Jones and Member Lancaster provided information and feedback from the Negotiations Committee, including a shared focus on increasing staff compensation.

Consent Agenda

The board approved a consent agenda including approvals for structural engineering and construction administration services at Centennial Campus (\$28,170); roof replacement at Centennial Campus

(\$625,828.50); renovations at Centennial Campus (\$3,503,603); field light replacements at Lawrence High School and Free State High School (\$649,000); extension of contracts for musical instrument cleaning and repair/maintenance for band and orchestra (\$106,700); personnel report; monthly vouchers; donation report; financial reports; and meeting minutes for February 23, 2026. Consent agenda was approved 7-0.

Access a link to the [full meeting agenda](#) online.

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