



Board of Education

Superintendent Report

Monday, April 13, 2026

Hello Members of the Board and Community,

As we approach mid-April, it's truly a busy time in Lawrence Public Schools. Thank you to our students and team, parents and community for all your work together to ensure a strong 4th quarter of the school year.

Cordley Elementary Welcomes U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor

Last week, **Cordley Elementary School** students and staff had the extraordinary opportunity to welcome **U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor** as a visiting author and guest reader.

Justice Sotomayor spent time with students in grades K–5, reading excerpts from her children's book *Just Shine!* and engaging students in thoughtful conversations about education, perseverance, and the influence of important educational mentors in their lives. She encouraged students to reflect on the educators who have made a difference for them, sharing that her own mother was her most impactful teacher.

In addition to connecting with students, the Justice spent time with staff, expressing her strong support for public education and the important work happening in our schools each day.

This visit was an inspiring experience for students and staff. It reinforced the power of literacy, storytelling, and the lasting impact that education has for everyone. Cordley Elementary has a history of advocacy from its earliest days to the present, and serves a community of diverse students, including English Language Learners, like the Justice herself.

I am deeply honored to have had the opportunity for our district to host this visit. I am especially grateful for the collective efforts and contributions by staff from the Cordley Elementary team led by Principal Reaver, Jake Potter and members of the Communications team, Dr. Englebrick and the Facilities and Operations team members who ensured the building sparkled, as well as additional support provided by the Lawrence Police Department. All of the behind-the-scenes planning provided an memorable experience for our students and a smooth visit for Justice Sotomayor.

State and Federal Leaders Visit LPS Nutrition & Wellness Programs

[Lawrence Public Schools recently welcomed state and federal nutrition leaders](#) for a firsthand look at our Nutrition & Wellness programs and the impact they have on students.

USDA Food and Nutrition Service Deputy Under Secretary Patrick Penn joined Mountain Plains Region Acting Child Nutrition Director Josh McDaniels, and Kansas Department of Education Child Nutrition and Wellness Director Kelly Chanay for a visit to Community Connections at Pinckney and Hillcrest Elementary School. There they experienced both the innovation and care that define our school meal programs.

At Community Connections, visitors toured the district's bakery, where fresh, scratch-made items are prepared daily while also providing hands-on learning opportunities for students. At Hillcrest Elementary, guests joined students for breakfast and connected directly with nutrition staff, recognizing the important role school meals play in supporting student health, learning, and a sense of belonging.

We are grateful to Julie Henry and our Nutrition & Wellness team for their leadership and dedication, and for the opportunity to showcase the meaningful work happening across our schools each day.

Paraprofessional Appreciation Day

The first Wednesday of April was [Paraprofessional Appreciation Day](#), which recognizes the vital role paraeducators play across Lawrence Public Schools.

Our paraprofessionals provide essential instructional and emotional support to students each day, helping meet the diverse needs of every learner while supporting classroom teachers and school teams. Their dedication strengthens our schools and ensures students are supported, engaged, and successful.

We are grateful for the commitment and care that our paraprofessionals bring to their work each day. They truly represent the best of our district. We hope you enjoy this brief highlight video to celebrate paraprofessional contributions in support of our students.

Next Steps: Preschool Enrollment Fall 2026

We are pleased to share that we will be responding this week to all parents who submitted applications for preschool enrollment through March 22nd, approximately 261 applications. We will be confirming that *all* applications are approved for enrollment in the fall.

We are happy to share with our community that all rising preschool students who have applied will have seats reserved for this Fall.

We ask that parents respond to the email this week to confirm their enrollment so that we can reserve their place. We look forward to welcoming the largest fall class of 3 and 4 year olds for early childhood education classrooms at Kennedy Early Childhood Center, Deerfield, New York Montessori, Prairie Park, Sunflower, and Woodlawn.

In addition to such a robust response from parents of preschoolers in enrollment, we are also inspired by a strong response and much enthusiasm from talented teacher candidates for these preschool positions. Stellar teacher candidates who are excited for preschool and a large incoming preschool group: a wonderful match!

In addition, students currently in our preschool programs, our rising kindergartners, school teams are connecting now to communicate, build on the momentum from this year, and ensure strong transitions to kindergarten.

2026 Spring A.C.E. Award Winners

What a delight to join the **Lawrence Schools Foundation** a few weeks ago to surprise two extraordinary members of our Lawrence Public Schools team with the **2026 Spring A.C.E. Award**: [Hillcrest Elementary School paraeducator Nathan Perkins Rock](#) and [district I.T. support specialist James Jarvis](#).

Nathan Perkins Rock was surprised with the award in front of students and staff at Hillcrest Elementary. His impact is felt throughout the school each day, as he greets students with warmth, builds meaningful relationships, and creates a safe and supportive environment where all students feel seen and valued. Nathan is known for his patience, consistency, and ability to connect with students, particularly those who benefit most from strong, caring adult relationships.

James Jarvis was recognized during a district IT team meeting, where colleagues and family members joined in celebrating his contributions. James plays a critical role in supporting the day-to-day operations of our district, from assisting with classroom and staff technology needs to ensuring important events and meetings run smoothly. His professionalism, responsiveness, and positive approach make him a trusted and valued resource for staff across the system, and we appreciate his faithful, cheerful support of our Board in supporting us through Board meetings each month.

Congratulations to both of our Spring ACE Award winners for this well-deserved recognition, and thank you to the Lawrence Schools Foundation for their ongoing support in honoring the exceptional individuals who serve our students and schools.

Scholastic Art Awards Nationals Competition Results

We are proud to share that Lawrence Public Schools students earned four Gold Medals at the national level in the prestigious Scholastic Art Awards, representing an extraordinary accomplishment in visual arts.

Each year, more than 100,000 works of art from students across the United States and Canada advance to the national stage, where panels of professional artists select the top entries. Only the top 1% of submissions are awarded Gold Medals.

Four Lawrence High School student artists earned gold medals in three different categories:

- **Leila Albaugh - Painting**
- **Wren Jay - Painting**
- **Lynorah Roberts - Mixed Media**
- **Rilo Scholz - Jewelry**

National Gold Medal recipients are invited to be honored through a formal awards ceremony at Carnegie Hall in New York City and are featured in a national exhibition and annual publication, highlighting their work among the top student artists in the country.

These recognitions reflect not only individual talent, but also the depth of commitment, creativity, and discipline our students bring to their craft. Our students are creating powerful work, exploring personal themes, building strong portfolios for their futures, and gaining recognition through multiple awards and advanced study opportunities.

We are proud of the sustained strength of the arts in Lawrence Public Schools. Over the past six years, Lawrence High School students have earned more than 250 regional and national Scholastic Art Awards, demonstrating a consistent tradition of excellence in visual arts education.

These students explore their art in the beautiful classrooms of extraordinary art teachers **Todd Poteet, Emily Markoulatos, and Angela Perkins**. We congratulate these students and their teachers for this exceptional accomplishment and celebrate the arts advantage offered in Lawrence Public Schools, and the continued impact of the arts to help students express, connect, and excel.

Free State Students Support Community Through CTE Project

Students in the Geometry in Construction course at Free State High School recently applied their learning through a hands-on project benefiting Douglas County Youth Services.

[Students worked collaboratively to remove an existing greenhouse structure and design, build, and install a new prefabricated greenhouse on site.](#) This project required students to apply skills in construction, mathematics, teamwork, and problem-solving in a real-world setting.

The new greenhouse will support agricultural programming and provide opportunities for students to engage in hands-on learning experiences. It will also contribute to the district's broader Farm to School efforts by supporting plant starts for school gardens across Lawrence Public Schools.

This project reflects the strength of our Career and Technical Education programs and the meaningful ways students are connecting their learning to community impact.

CCAP Job Olympics

Congratulations to our friends from Community Connections at Pinckney (CCAP) for winning as Job Olympics Champions!

Our young adults from [Community Connections took first place at the 2026 Johnson County Community College Job Olympics](#), earning an impressive 48 medals. Competing against more than 500 participants, CCAP students earned medals from career readiness and workplace skill events, including categories such as job application, job interview, product matching, stocking groceries, sorting mail, bag stuffing, and making change.

Congratulations to Community Connections students, teachers, and to Principal Jenna Viscomi!

LVS State Assessments

We are in state assessment season, and I want to honor the work of the Lawrence Virtual School, where state assessments look a bit differently for our virtual students and staff. Principal Zach Harwood reports that:

“LVS staff have the great opportunity to spend the testing season meeting with students in person in Wichita, Topeka, Overland Park, and right here in Lawrence. With two days in Wichita and Topeka, and four days in Lawrence and Overland Park. LVS Students will also have the option to test from their homes in late April and early May after the traditional testing window ends.”

This means that LVS staff have to research, identify, and reserve locations throughout the State of Kansas to facilitate in-person, proctored testing in a secure environment. It also means that during those testing windows when our staff is on the road, that we are making adjustments to maintain ongoing learning opportunities for all Virtual School students.

There is a test-from-home option for families, which is proctored by a third party that KSDE approves. Our staff are involved in that effort as well, and serve as liaisons and help to trouble-shoot any access or technical issues for those students who opt-in to remote testing.

We are extremely proud of the work of our Virtual School staff throughout the year, and we recognize the additional efforts required during state assessments as our program provides services to students from across Kansas.

Choice Campus at Centennial Project Update

The demolition phase is nearing completion, and renovation work has begun onsite at Choice Campus at Centennial. Roof replacement is scheduled to begin this month, marking an important milestone in preparing the building for transformation to the next chapter for the historic Centennial campus.

The facility's adjustments are as intentional as the school and program, creating a space where Lawrence Public Schools can offer high school students a flexible, personalized learning environment designed to customize education around their individual needs.

This historic Centennial building first opened in 1955 and has remained as a part of Lawrence's unique story over generations. We remain committed to thoughtfully repurposing this existing space to meet the evolving needs of our students while maintaining stewardship of district resources, Capital outlay funds. We look forward to sharing continued updates as this project progresses, specifically sharing more about anticipated programming over the coming weeks.

Looking Ahead: Kindergarten Orientation

We are excited to begin welcoming our newest learners and their families during [Kindergarten Orientation on Wednesday, April 22](#).

Families of incoming kindergarten students are encouraged to complete enrollment in advance and are invited to join us at your school to meet school staff, learn about daily routines and curricula, and receive tips in preparing for a successful transition into school.

Kindergarten Orientation is an important opportunity to begin building strong connections between families and schools, setting the foundation for a positive and engaging educational experience.

Looking Ahead: 5th Grade to Middle School Transition

We are also preparing to welcome our incoming 6th grade students and their families as they begin the transition to middle school.

As we have done earlier this semester in welcoming our incoming freshmen to our two high schools, transition events are ongoing currently at each middle school to help equip students and families with important information about schedules, expectations, and the middle school experience. These events are designed to ensure students feel confident, supported, and ready for this next step in their educational journey.

Coming Soon!

1st annual Bloom -n- Zoom Fun Run

With gratitude to a number of sponsors, Lawrence Public Schools is hosting a free non-competitive, two-mile fun run this Saturday, April 18, at 9:00 a.m. The race will kick off at 9:00 a.m. near the Lawrence Sports Pavilion parking area (Rock Chalk Park). The course is a one-mile, out-and-back on sidewalks/paved areas connecting to and on the Lawrence Loop. For this first year, race participation is limited to USD497 employees only.

After the event, attendees are invited to stay for coffee and treats, in addition to prizes and giveaways from participating vendors and sponsors.

Those supporting this event are:

- Blue Cross BlueShield of Kansas
- Holmes Murphy
- Lawrence Schools Foundation
- The Merc Co-Op
- Bluestem Yoga
- Lava Yoga
- Crunch Fitness
- Delta Dental
- Body Specific
- Fleet Feet
- UMB Bank
- McDonalds
- Run Lawrence
- Uplift Coffee Shop
- Yellow Brick Yoga
- Fruitful Acai Bowls
- City of Lawrence Parks and Recreation
- River Rat Print & Skate
- Planet Fitness
- Owens Flower Shop
- Peak Performance Chiropractic and Health Center
- Premier Martial Arts
- Lawrence Acupuncture
- Hershey Salty Snacks
- Crown Toyota of Lawrence
- Ad Astra Running

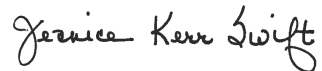
Along with various door prizes, there will be raffles for Best Costume and Best Team Spirit (costumes/outfits). This event is free and non-competitive in celebration of the health and well-being of USD 497 staff.

Update to Board Docs

I appreciate the hard work of members of our team and the support of our Members who have worked to navigate a transition to a new board document tool, [Diligent Community](#). We mention this information publicly because you may notice the interface looks a little different and may take some adjustment as you review the Board agenda or items. Please share any questions or feedback with our Nikki Naumann, Board Clerk, at Deborah.naumann@usd497.org

Thank you for the opportunity to share this Superintendent Report, and for the honor of serving the Lawrence Public Schools.

Sincerely,



Jeanice Kerr Swift
Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools