



**Board of Education
Superintendent Report
Monday, May 11, 2026**

“Starting strong is good. Finishing strong is epic.”

- Robin Sharma

Hello Members of the Board and Community,

It’s an exciting time in USD 497 as we move toward mid-May and wrap up this 2025-26 school year. We celebrate so many achievements and milestones during these culminating days of the year, and we celebrate and applaud each child, from preschool through high school graduation, on their progress and growth through this successful school year.

Much gratitude to our teachers and support staff, families and community who have supported our students so beautifully throughout this school year.

I am delighted to share the following May highlights:

Thank You Teachers

In USD 497, we celebrate our amazing teachers *every single day* of the year, and specifically, during Teacher Appreciation Week, we extend our sincere gratitude to educators across Lawrence Public Schools, recognizing the impact they make every day in the lives of students.

Each classroom interaction, moment of encouragement, and act of care helps shape student learning, confidence, and belonging across our schools. Thank you, Teachers.

If you have not had a chance already, as part of Teacher Appreciation Week, I invite you to take a moment to [watch this inspiring video](#) celebrating the connections, commitment, and care educators across Lawrence Public Schools share with students each day.

(Video)

In addition, our Educational Support Center Boardroom gallery has been updated for May to highlight educators in action across our schools. The gallery, titled ***Educators Make an Impact Every Day***, by Andrew Beaven, captures everyday moments that make a lasting difference for students; these photos reflect the care, commitment, and dedication demonstrated by our teachers and staff every day.

Safe Routes to School Survey

Many students participated in [National Bike and Roll to School Day](#) this past week. Events like these help encourage healthy habits, community connection, and safe transportation opportunities for students while also highlighting the importance of safe and accessible routes to and from school.

As part of this ongoing work, the district is partnering with the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department, the City of Lawrence, and the Lawrence-Douglas County Metropolitan Planning Organization to solicit input to inform an update to the community's [Safe Routes to School plan](#). Families and caregivers are encouraged to provide feedback to help improve how students travel safely to and from school.

Community input is valuable, even for our families whose students do not currently walk or bike to school, as the feedback will help guide future transportation, safety, and accessibility planning efforts across Lawrence.

Visit <https://lawrenceks.gov/safe-routes> to view the Safe Routes to School plan and complete the survey. **The Safe Routes to School survey will remain open through May 16.**

Free State High School DECA Students Earn International Recognition

Students from Free State High School DECA recently represented Lawrence Public Schools at the [International Career Development Conference \(ICDC\) in Atlanta](#) after earning top-three finishes at the Kansas DECA State Conference earlier this year. Students are advised by **Kimberly Hawks, business teacher at Free State High School**, who supports leadership and career-readiness opportunities for students through enriching student experiences in this valued program.

The following students qualified for the international competition:

Neel Sabarwal, senior
Grace Mosconi, sophomore
Ruth Yang, sophomore
Allen Shao, sophomore

At the conference, students completed written exams and participated in competitive role-play presentations judged by business and industry professionals. **Grace Mosconi** earned both a Blue Ribbon Medallion and a Top 10 Medal in Principles of Entrepreneurship, while **Ruth Yang** earned a Silver Ribbon Medallion for her written exam performance in Principles of Business Management.

Additional details: DECA is a career and technical student organization that prepares emerging leaders and entrepreneurs in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management. Through classroom integration, competition, and real-world experiences, DECA helps students build leadership, communication, and career-readiness skills while connecting learning to future college and career opportunities.

Free State High School Speech & Debate Wins 7th Consecutive 6A State Championship

The Free State High School Speech and Debate team recently captured its **seventh consecutive Kansas 6A State Speech Championship**, securing the Overall Sweepstakes title with an impressive team performance across multiple competitive events.

The championship was highlighted by standout individual performances, including **Breahna Randall** who earned first-place finishes in both Oration and Poetry.

Additional top performances included:

Dara Adedipe – 2nd Place, Oration
Kimora Potter – 4th Place, Oration
Lena Hasiuk – 2nd Place, United States Extemp
Collette Colvin – 4th Place, United States Extemp
Landry Koester – 3rd Place, Informative and 3rd Place, Prose
Carter Fite – 3rd Place, International Extemp
Laura Turner – 5th Place, Prose
Ben Carter – 3rd Place, Lincoln Douglas
Madeline Turner – 4th Place, Program of Oral Interpretation

Coach Parker Hopkins praised the leadership of senior team members and the commitment demonstrated by the program’s younger competitors throughout the season.

Additional details: Along with earning seven consecutive 6A State Speech Championships, the Free State High School Speech and Debate program has built a sustained tradition of excellence at both the state and national levels. During the 2024-25 school year, the program captured both the Kansas 6A Speech and Debate State Championships, completing a rare sweep of both titles in the same year.

In recent years, the program has also earned national recognition through the National Speech & Debate Association. In 2022, Free State students John Marshall and Serena Rupp won the prestigious Tournament of Champions National Debate Championship, marking the first national debate championship in both Lawrence Public Schools and Kansas history.

Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) 6A Postseason Highlights

As the spring sports season comes to an end, we are proud to celebrate the many student-athletes from both Free State and Lawrence High School completing their seasons and advancing to postseason competition at the regional and state levels.

Students will represent Lawrence Public Schools in upcoming boys tennis and girls swimming and diving competitions, while several additional [spring sports teams are gearing up for substate and regionals](#).

We wish all of our student-athletes and coaches the best as they compete and represent our schools and community

Additional details: The 2026 6A Boys Tennis State Tournament will take place May 15-16 at the Wichita-Riverside Tennis Complex. Free State qualified its entire team for the state tournament after finishing second overall in regional competition and will send six student-athletes to compete in singles and doubles events. Lawrence High also qualified its top doubles team for state competition.

The 2026 6A Girls Swimming & Diving State Meet will be held May 21-23 at the Shawnee Mission School District Aquatic Center. Both Free State and Lawrence High qualified multiple swimmers, divers, and relay teams for state competition. Notably, Free State freshman Ella Marsh broke the Sunflower League Meet record in the 200 individual medley earlier this season.

Additional postseason competition dates include:

Girls Soccer Regionals – May 16
Boys Baseball & Girls Softball Regionals – May 18-21
Boys Golf Sub-State – May 18-19
Boys & Girls Track and Field Regionals – May 22

Community Connections Bakery Grant Expansion

[Community Connections at Pinckney recently received a \\$50,000 grant](#) through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas's Pathways to a Healthy Kansas initiative to support the expansion of the Community Connections Bakery and the launch of the new Empowering Brew Coffee Shop. This bakery and coffee shop is designed to expand hands-on learning opportunities for students while strengthening community connections and workplace readiness skills.

The grant funding will be used to purchase bakery and coffee shop equipment and supplies that will support Community Transition students with additional real-world work and customer service experiences in a public-facing environment planned to open this fall.

Additional details: Pathways to a Healthy Kansas is the largest community grant initiative funded by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas and supports evidence-based strategies that promote healthy living, healthy eating, behavioral health, and tobacco prevention across Kansas communities.

USD 497 Quarterly Newsletter Highlight

You may have seen the spring issue recently - in your mailbox, newspaper, or perhaps at a community location, but in case you missed out, the latest [Spring 2026 issue of the Lawrence Public Schools quarterly newsletter](#) is now available in a digital format that allows you to flip through our content.

Our district newsletters highlight programs, student success stories, and community partnerships that continue to strengthen opportunities for students across Lawrence Public Schools.

This issue also highlights several exciting enhancements and opportunities planned for the 2026-27 school year, including:

- The new Family Engagement Welcome Center
- Expanded early childhood classrooms at Deerfield and Prairie Park Elementary
- Expansion of the Jayhawk Blueprint program to Lawrence Virtual School
- The new Choice Campus at Centennial for students seeking flexible learning options

Looking Ahead: Annual Student Enrollment Coming in July

Lawrence Public Schools will debut [annual student enrollment](#) for the 2026-27 school year from its previous April and May timeline to an exciting new enrollment window beginning in July.

This adjustment debuts alongside an exciting *Back to School* campaign building momentum through the second half of summer, and better aligns district processes so everyone benefits from the most accurate and up-to-date information for and from families prior to the start of the school year.

Moving enrollment closer to August will help improve the accuracy of student contact information, reduce confusion between course selection and annual enrollment, streamline required forms into one coordinated process, and support more efficient and effective enrollment support at the school level.

Additional details, timelines, and resources for families will be shared across all of our communication channels later this week.

Watch for more exciting Back-to-School enrollment updates coming this summer!

Kansas Assessment Program (KAP) Scores Released

[The Kansas Assessment Program](#) (KAP) includes a variety of assessments aligned to the Kansas statewide curriculum standards. The state assessment system is designed to support educators and policymakers, evaluate student learning, and meet the requirements for federal and state accountability.

Kansas Assessment Program (KAP) scores are now available for Lawrence Public Schools students. We understand that individual assessment scores represent only *one* snapshot of a student's progress at one fixed point in time, and we always want to view them within the context of other measures, including formative, day-to-day assessments, and the invaluable direct observation of the professional classroom teacher.

These KAP assessments measure student progress toward Kansas grade-level standards in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science (Grades 5, 8, and 11).

Families can access their student's KAP scores online through the [KSDE Kite Parent Portal](#), and schools will also send home hard copies of the reports in the next week or two.

Facilities and Operations: Summer Projects

Our Facilities and Operations team members continue to coordinate progress on several facility improvement and maintenance projects across the district as preparations begin for summer construction and the 2026-27 school year. Current work includes roofing improvements, athletic facility upgrades, campus renovations, and preparations related to student transportation services.

Additional details:

- Roofing recovery and skylight replacement projects at West Middle School and Billy Mills Middle School are moving through the bid and approval process.
- Historic stained glass window repairs at Liberty Memorial Central Middle School are anticipated for Board approval in May.
- Track reconstruction and stadium lighting upgrades are underway at Free State High School and Lawrence High School, with lighting expected to be completed prior to graduation ceremonies.
- Renovations and roof replacement work at Centennial Elementary School continue in progress.
- Campus accommodations continue as the district prepares to welcome Durham Student Services operations at the Facilities & Operations campus.
- The district recently received donations supporting a garden expansion at the Lawrence College and Career Center and a memorial bench and landscaped sitting area at Woodlawn Elementary School.

Commencement Ceremonies Class of 2026

Excitement is building as we prepare to honor our almost 900 graduates from across Lawrence Public Schools in commencement ceremonies beginning next week. We look forward to the 'handshake' with each of these remarkable students, this is a milestone moment as the Class of 2026 crosses the graduation stage.

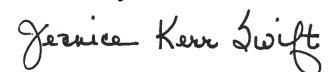
You can follow along with celebrations on our website at <https://www.usd497.org/graduation>. There you will find graduation dates and times, links to the livestreams for several of the ceremonies, and highlights of all our celebrations there.

I'd also like to point out the photo on this slide capturing the tradition of **Senior Grad Walks**, when our graduating seniors visit our elementary schools dressed in their caps and gowns as a way to inspire our younger students, and also to reconnect with some of their former teachers. This photo highlights one of the first Grad Walks for the Class of 2026, that occurred at Deerfield Elementary last week.

As we approach these final days of the 2025-26 school year, I know everyone in our Lawrence community will join together to help us celebrate our deserving students and staff, honoring their growth and learning during this school year.

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